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Publishing research articles is one of the most important activities that we engage in as academics, but it is also one of the most mysterious and intimidating for novices. In their graduate training, students receive a great deal of guidance about how to collect and analyze data and write up the results, but very few programs offer similar in-depth formal training in the final and most crucial step in the research process: how to publish completed work. Although many faculty members provide informal suggestions to their students in their capacity as advisors and mentors, most graduate students and junior scholars (and even a number of established researchers) lack a clear understanding of the review process and how to successfully navigate it.

For those just embarking on their first submission, recent *In the Profession* columns in this journal provide an invaluable orientation to academic publication, including a discussion of the different tiers of academic journals and an overview of other types of scholarly publications (Curzan & Queen 2007) as well as advice for authors on how to select the appropriate journal for their own work (Johnstone 2009). In this essay I survey the review process itself, drawing on my own experience as an author, a reviewer, a former journal editor, and a current member of the editorial boards of several journals. Although the following discussion is focused on academic journals, much of the discussion applies in a general way to the publication of academic books, edited volumes, and chapters as well.

The Importance of Peer Review

For many researchers, the most daunting aspect of journal publication is the peer review process. In fact, some scholars, both junior and senior, consider the prospect of peer review to be so terrifying that they find other ways to circulate their research or choose to publish only rarely or not at all. This is truly unfortunate since in many cases excellent work—or work that could be made excellent or at least very good with some

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revision—is lost to the wider community of scholars. In addition, these researchers miss out on one of the most fulfilling parts of academic life: the opportunity for one's ideas to be engaged by a wider audience, often in ways that shed new light on the original research. More fundamentally, scholars who opt out of peer review don't get the chance to sharpen and refine their work in response to the critical evaluations of specialist readers, and thus they may not be spurred to produce the best research of which they are capable.

It can be a shock to receive a critical review of a manuscript that was met with high praise as a graduate term paper or a conference presentation. But criticism is an inescapable fact of peer review. When evaluating a manuscript, a reviewer typically does not measure it by the minimum standard of whether it is merely "good enough" to warrant publication but instead holds it to the much stronger standard of what it could and should be as a contribution to knowledge. Published scholarship can endure for decades and more, and it is therefore vital for the work that appears in a journal's pages to be of the highest possible caliber.

If you dread criticism, there is no magical way to overcome your fears; they are widely shared, even by prominent scholars. But there are ways to make your peace with peer review by managing those aspects of the review process that are within your control and understanding the workings of those that are beyond your control. When you become a reviewer yourself, you will gain deeper insight into what it is like on the other side of the peer review relationship, and ideally your experiences as an author will make you a more effective reviewer and vice versa. Finally, you should keep in mind that criticism is designed not to undermine or attack you (although sometimes it may feel that way); rather, it is intended to help you to produce high-quality scholarship. As unpleasant as it may be to have a reviewer criticize your work, remember that the review is a private document designed to protect you from the much more public embarrassment of publishing a flawed or weak manuscript.

Possible Outcomes of Review

There are three basic outcomes of the review process: (1) the manuscript is *accepted* (with or without revision) and the editor is committed to publishing it in the journal, (2) the manuscript is *rejected* and will not be considered further, or (3) the manuscript will be reconsidered for review after extensive revision, a decision usually referred to as *revise and resubmit*. This last outcome is typically the most common. A decision of revise and resubmit is an expression of the editor's interest in the project and confidence that with revision the manuscript can be publishable; it is also an indication of willingness to invest her or his valuable time and energy in your work. It is rare for a submission to be accepted without any revision at all, and even when a manuscript is accepted, major revision may still be required as a precondition of publication. Conversely, rejection is by no means an uncommon outcome; in most cases this decision is based on the reviewers' recommendations, but in some cases the editor may reject the manuscript outright without external review because it does not fit the journal's

mandate or is of poor quality due to writing problems or other obvious weaknesses. When a manuscript is deemed to be of high quality but not suitable for the journal, sometimes the editor or a reviewer will suggest a more appropriate venue for publication. In this case, you might consider asking the editor of the second journal whether the original reviews can be used in the new review process.

The editor's letter to you will state one of these decisions relatively clearly (although the actual word *reject(ion)* is rarely used even when that is the decision). Sometimes reviewers offer conflicting evaluations of the manuscript; in this case, the editor will usually give you some indication as to which review carries more weight. If you are unsure what the official decision is, ask your advisor or another experienced academic author how to interpret the letter or, if necessary, contact the editor for clarification.

If you revise and resubmit your manuscript, the editor may send the revised version to the same reviewers, to different reviewers, or to a combination of both. Sometimes the editor will make a decision on a revised manuscript without sending it out for external review. Rest assured that a reviewer who had an extremely negative view of the original manuscript is unlikely to be asked to review the revision. When the review process is complete, the manuscript may be accepted (perhaps with additional revision), it may be rejected (if the editor feels it cannot meet the journal's standards), or it may receive a second "revise and resubmit" decision.

Sometimes reviewers are provided with the other reviewers' comments and the editor's decision, but more often they do not learn of the outcome until the paper appears in print (or doesn't). Some journals indicate at the end of each article the date of submission of the original and revised versions of the manuscript as well as the date of acceptance, and so it may be possible to determine whether the manuscript was accepted in the first round of review or after revision and resubmission. Once an article is published, however, it stands on equal terms with all other published work, regardless of how much time and effort was necessary to get it into print.

Dealing with Reviews

The editor's decision letter typically states the decision, summarizes the main points of the reviews, and offers her or his own comments. The letter also includes the individual reviews of your manuscript, designated by a number or a letter of the alphabet to preserve the reviewers' anonymity. Regardless of the decision, you should read the reviews carefully since they contain valuable advice on how to improve the manuscript.

Before you can deal with your reviews on the practical level, however, you may need to deal with them on the emotional level. If you're sensitive to criticism, prepare strategies in advance so you're ready to face the reviews when they arrive. Some authors don't read their reviews right away or initially read them in the presence of a supportive friend or colleague, or they may read them quickly and then set them aside for a week or two until they feel able to address the criticism productively. Whatever your preferred coping method, don't let hurt feelings get in the way of publishing

your work. The following suggestions will help you manage both the emotional and the practical aspects of the revision process.

1. *Don't take criticism personally:* Because most manuscripts will require at least some revision, it is extremely likely that you will receive some negative comments on your work. Many reviewers soften their criticism with words of praise or encouragement, but others do not, both because they are usually writing their review in a rush and because the anonymity of blind review allows for greater bluntness than would be socially acceptable in most other contexts. Reviewers may also be concerned that the author may overlook or misinterpret indirect criticism, or they may be grouchy because the manuscript contains extensive or easily corrected problems that require them to spend more time on the review. Even if the tone is sharp, try to look past it to focus on what, specifically, you need to do to fix the problems. (It may help to summarize the reviews into a list of changes that need to be made, so you can focus on the tasks, not the tone.)
2. *Make sure you understand the reviewers' suggestions:* Some reviewers make very specific recommendations about what the manuscript's problems are and how they can be solved, but many simply mention a problem in general terms, or they may characterize it in an indirect or obscure way, so that you're not sure whether the reviewer is identifying a problem at all. It may take several rereadings of the review alongside your manuscript to understand some reviewer comments. It can also be helpful to go over the reviews with your advisor or another published academic author. If after consulting with others you're still not sure exactly what a comment means or how to address it, you should contact the editor for clarification.
3. *Don't assume that you have to address every comment in your revisions:* The editor's letter and the reviews themselves usually make clear which revisions are necessary and which are simply suggestions or idle musings. Beyond the required revisions, you have some latitude to decide which of the remaining suggestions you will address. If you feel that some of the required revisions are tangential to the purpose of the manuscript or that incorporating them would create other problems, you should let the editor know your concerns before you begin the revisions to find out whether they do in fact need to be addressed or how you might resolve the problems you foresee. For more minor suggestions that you choose not to include, simply let the editor know why you decided not to incorporate them into your revisions when you submit the revised manuscript. (See item 8 below.)
4. *Don't resist reasonable suggestions for revision:* Although you may not agree with every suggestion a reviewer makes, you should strive to integrate as many of the recommended revisions as possible into your revised manuscript. Even harsh comments often contain good ideas that will strengthen your paper. Critical reviewers can be your most helpful advisors because if

you're able to win their approval, your published work may be spared a great deal of critique and your ideas may be persuasive to a wider readership. You're also in very good company: even very senior scholars are frequently required to revise their manuscripts extensively in both content and style.

5. *Commit fully to the revisions you make:* If you incorporate a reviewer's recommended changes into your manuscript only grudgingly, your attitude may be evident in your wording. In many cases, readers can easily tell which portions of the text were added in response to reviews because they are perfunctory or defensive in their tone. Treat the revisions with the same care as your original text, and integrate them completely into your discussion. If you absolutely must include a revision that you don't believe in, there are ways of graciously conveying your differences with a reviewer. One way to check that your tone is appropriate is to read the revision from the perspective of the reviewer to see whether she or he would be likely to raise an eyebrow at what you've written.
6. *Don't dismiss conflicting reviews:* In many cases reviewers are largely in agreement, but sometimes they have very different suggestions for revision. It may be tempting to conclude, Goldilocks style, that if the reviewers don't agree then your original version is "just right," but most of the time conflicting suggestions are an indication of a problem in the manuscript that may be solved in different ways. Your task is to decide which solution is best.
7. *Don't make extensive revisions when a small change will solve the problem:* It can be difficult to figure out just how much you need to revise to adequately address reviewers' comments, and you may initially feel that you need to overhaul the entire manuscript or even start from scratch. Unless the reviewers and the editor recommend revisions at this level, you should try to preserve as much of the original manuscript as possible and make the smallest change necessary to solve each problem identified in the reviews. Otherwise, you'll run the risk of inserting a whole new set of problems into the manuscript or removing portions that passed muster with the reviewers. In most cases, reviewers are not looking for a complete rewrite but simply a footnote, a clarifying sentence, a qualification, a reference, or a slight change of wording.
8. *Keep in communication with the editor:* Your correspondence with the editor should always be prompt, polite, and professional. When you receive the editor's decision letter, acknowledge it right away. If your manuscript was rejected, briefly express your appreciation for the reviewers' and editor's comments, and move on. If the letter requests revisions, tell the editor you'll be in touch as soon as you've read through the reviews carefully. Then follow up within a week or so, express your appreciation for the comments, state your willingness to make the revisions, and propose a target date for submitting the revised manuscript. With accepted manuscripts,

editors often need to know when to expect your revisions, but if the decision was revise and resubmit, there may be no set deadline.

When you send the revised manuscript, include a cover letter to the editor, again stating your appreciation of the suggested revisions and then detailing how you addressed each one. For comments you decided not to incorporate, politely explain why.

9. *Submit your revised manuscript promptly:* If you and the editor don't establish a firm deadline, it may be tempting to postpone revising your manuscript, perhaps indefinitely. Resist this urge and get your manuscript back to the editor as quickly as you can; it will not improve with age. This problem is especially common when authors are asked to resubmit their manuscripts for a second round of review. *Revise and resubmit* means precisely that, but a remarkably large number of authors fail to do so. Although there is no guarantee that a resubmitted manuscript will be published, the odds are usually a bit better than for a first-time submission, and it is foolish to abandon a promising project into which you've already put a great deal of work.
10. *Keep trying:* If your manuscript is rejected, don't conclude that you're stupid or that you're not cut out for a research career. Neither should you conclude that the reviewers and editor are stupid and that the review process is rigged against you. Rejection is a reality of academic life; if you're not rejected at least occasionally in your scholarly career, you may not be setting your publishing sights high enough. As soon as you're able, revise the manuscript based on the review comments and send it to another journal. If your research is sound, your writing is solid, and your target journals are well chosen, your work will eventually find a suitable home.

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Bio

Mary Bucholtz is professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara.