Pathways to Publishing

Developing a publication strategy

As soon as you start thinking about publishing your research, you should consider writing a publication strategy. A publication strategy will help you to think about what you want to achieve by publishing your research, focus in on the key criteria for the publication’s format, as well as ensuring all co-authors are in agreement. This detailed guide highlights the key things you should consider in order to develop an effective strategy which supports dissemination of your research outputs.

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# How should I publish my research?

A good publication plan will start with a consideration of how you would like to publish. For example, your research may better suit publication as a stand-alone monograph rather than a series of papers, or vice versa, so it’s important to consider your options and make a decision that will benefit your research and your career.

There are signs that the academic landscape is changing - albeit slowly - from a trend of publishing in quantity, to a greater consideration of the quality of research outputs. One indication of this trend is suggested in changes to how Research England, the UK Government department responsible for research funding, conducts the Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. The REF seeks to assess the quality of research undertaken at Universities in the UK, and in previous REF exercises, a researcher’s publications would follow them if they moved to a different institution. This led to examples of researchers being recruited on the basis of the number of REF-eligible research outputs they could bring to Higher Education Institutions seeking to boost the organizational REF score.

Research England is now changing its rules around non-portability of research outputs. These changes are likely to mean that, in future, outputs can only be submitted for REF by the institution where the research was undertaken. It’s anticipated that this will affect publication practice, removing the emphasis from quantity of publications for employability, to the quality of individual publications.

There are disciplinary differences in publication practices, and the point in your project or career where you will first start thinking about publishing varies between Schools. This may be as early as the first or second year in the Sciences or as part of a PhD awarded by publication. For the Humanities, you might not consider publishing until the third year, or after your viva.

It is important to be aware that your third year will be the most time-pressured, and considering a publication strategy may not seem like a priority at this time. For eThesis submission, you will need to have considered how your research will be disseminated and the access level you will apply to your publication. Therefore, the earlier you begin to think about how and where you hope to publish, the better.

# Where should I publish?

Perhaps the most important facet of your publication strategy will be where you will aim to publish. It may be helpful to consider this from a few different angles to ensure you are happy with your eventual publication route.

## What are your motivations for publishing?

* Which publishers and journals will help you satisfy your project goals?
* This may involve a consideration of your target audience, and how widely you would like to disseminate your research.

## What are the typical approaches and expectations in your discipline?

* Don’t be afraid to talk to your peers, and colleagues in your department and field. They are likely to have a wealth of knowledge about journals that will be suitable for your research. Look into at these journals and publishers and see whether they might be a good fit for your research.
* But remember: you don’t have to agree with the approaches of your peers or colleagues – they may have different motivations for publishing to you, which can affect the journals or publishers you each decide to approach for publication.

## How does your funder want you to publish your research?

* If you’re sponsored or in receipt of project funding, you’re likely to be contractually bound to meeting the requirements of your funder, which can include expectations around publishing. It’s important that you’re aware of these, as there can be serious consequences for failing to comply with funder requirements, including withholding of future or even current grant funding.
* For example, if you are funded by The Wellcome Trust, your research will need to be Open Access on publication (Gold Open Access). Not all journals offer this option, so may limit your choice of publication routes.

## Are there any stakeholder considerations?

* Do your supervisors or co-authors have input into your publication route?
* Does the faculty have a publication strategy that you will need to adhere to?

Once you have considered these questions in your Publication Strategy, it will be easier to understand which route best suits your needs.

# Choosing a journal

If you are submitting to a journal, it’s important to research thoroughly, and make an informed choice. Scopus a great resource for researching journals in specific disciplines – see our Academic publishing toolkit for more information on tools to help choosing a journal.

Once you understand if a journal will satisfy your publications demands, there may be some more nuanced considerations:

* It is probably better to consider submitting to journals that you engage with, as you will have a good understanding of what these journals publish, and if you stand a good chance of having a paper accepted. You’re also likely to be familiar with the style and tone which can help you prepare your manuscript.
* It may be necessary to decide between a higher-ranking journal, or a subject specialist journal. Higher-ranking journals may seem like the best option to an Early Career or Postgraduate Researcher, but these journals also have higher rejection rates. Subject specialist journals may be equally well-respected and still reach the right audience. Weigh-up the advantages and disadvantages of both in relation to your publication dissemination aims.
* Make sure the journal will accept the format of your research before you submit - formats such as opinion pieces and clinical trials may only be accepted by specific journals.
* Are you doing yourself a disservice by opting for a lesser-known or smaller journal, in the belief that you will be published more readily? Female and non-white authors are less likely to submit their research to better-known, widely-respected journals.

# Is it worth considering a smaller publisher or journal?

There may be benefits to considering publication routes beyond journals from big-name publishers. A different option might suit your needs better:

* A University Press will offer a much more personal publishing service; it’s in their interests to ensure your publication is as good as it can be. You will work closely with your Editor, who will advise you throughout the process.
* Smaller academic publishers and University Press are increasingly offering Open Access publication options, often at lower cost than the biggest academic publishers. For example, Ubiquity Press is a UK-based academic publisher, whose sole focus is Open Access publication.
* A society journal may not seem as appealing for an Early Career or Postgraduate Researcher, who may be drawn to big name publishers as they are more recognizable. Society journals often offer very high quality content, and your research will reach the same interested academic audience.

# Alternative ways of publishing

Publishing your research does not always mean you need to have a full journal article or book accepted for publication in order to get your research out into the world. The academic community is beginning to move away from narrow ideas of what constitutes publication and are welcoming non-standard and transparent publication routes which speed up access to research and encourage openness and collaboration within the academic community. Depending on your dissemination requirements, an alternative form of publicationmight be the right route for you.

* Micropublication – this is where you publish only data sets, or a small part of your research that’s ready to be shared. This doesn’t prevent an article from being published as a whole in future. Micropublication may help to garner attention for your research in advance of full form publication.
* Pre-prints – most journals will allow you to share a pre-print of a paper. A pre-print is the version of your paper prior to peer review. You can deposit pre-prints to subject repositories, or your institutional repository~~’s~~ without fear that this will harm your chances of being published. Indeed, journals are increasingly allowing formal citations of preprints, and funders like [The Wellcome Trust](https://wellcome.ac.uk/news/we-now-accept-preprints-grant-applications) are encouraging researchers to include pre-prints in grant applications. However, it is always worth checking with the publisher of a journal you hope to submit to if distributing your pre-print is acceptable. Most major publishers, such as Elsevier and Oxford University Press, have no issue with this.
* Post-publication peer review – elements of the academic community are embracing new forms of publication which avoid the long waits associated with traditional peer-reviewed journal routes. One such example is the F1000 model, where the paper is ‘published’ immediately, with peer review happening in a ‘live’ setting post publication. Invited peer reviewers will submit open reports in response to the publication. The general readership, i.e. colleagues within the academic community, is also allowed to comment on your article. Any revisions based on peer review and comment will be posted alongside the original publication. In this way, the entirety of the peer review process happens openly and transparently, and research is available for consideration more quickly.

# Open Access Publishing

The Open Access movement to increase access to scholarly research has been gaining momentum for over a decade, and it’s essential that researchers today – especially those working in the UK – are aware of Open Access options and requirements of funders, institutions and publishers. You will often have a choice to publish Open Access Publications are accessible to anyone who wishes to read them, without a journal subscription and without a paywall. Open Access publication may afford your research a wider - and potentially more diverse - readership. You can find out more about the benefits of Open Access publishing on our [Open Access webpages](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/open-research/access/).

Although it’s usually possible to share your research Open Access via a subject or institutional repository for no additional charge, regardless of where you publish, opting for immediate Open Access publishing may be associated with a fee called an Article Processing Charge (APC). There may be funding at your University or via your funder which can help to cover this cost. We recommend being sure of any fees charged by a publisher you hope to work with, and if you have access to funds to cover these, before you submit a paper for publication.

Many Open Access journals don’t charge this fee - over 12,000 fully Open Access journals operate without levying an APC, according to the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), so there will almost certainly be an Open Access journal in your area of research.

There are also large, not-for profit publishers such as The Open Library of Humanities, and Public Library of Science (PLoS). These publish only Open Access content, and either don’t charge authors fees to publish at all, or have a tiered payment structure, where authors in lower income countries are not charged a fee.

# A word on ‘predatory’ publishers

Unfortunately there are some corrupt or even fake publishers which seek to exploit researchers for profit. So-called ‘predatory publishers’ may target early career researchers by offering to publish their research for a fee. A predatory publisher will not be concerned with the quality of the research and will have no particular desire to ensure your research is published with academic rigour or made available and discoverable appropriately. The Library has some helpful guidance material to make sure you avoid the pitfalls of predatory publishing. *[TBC – add link when available]*

# Writing to publish

There is a school of thought which holds that researchers should write solely in order to get the work published, i.e. to only begin writing once you’ve chosen a journal, and to ensure that the journal’s approach informs aspects like the structure and tone of your paper.

Even if you don’t subscribe to this particular view, you will certainly need to consider the practicalities and challenges associated with readying your research to a publishable standard. As you’ll see in our Academic publishing toolkit, it’s considered best practice to familiarize yourself with the Instructions for authors for the journal you’ve chosen.

The University offers a wealth of resources and tool that can help researchers with their academic writing skills. Check the details for your Faculty under the ‘Take advantage of training and support’ section of our Academic publishing toolkit.

# Writing for discoverability

Ensure your work is discoverable by the people who want to read it by making sure the content is clearly signposted for harvesting by search engines. This can include:

* Writing an interesting, clear and unique title
* Using identifiers throughout your article
* Adding key words to the metadata describing your work, e.g. when creating a Pure record for your paper

# Writing for reproducibility

Making it clear how your research can be replicated will help increase confidence in your results, and enable others within the community to make best use of your results. You can do this by:

* + Looking for guidance on making research reproducible in your discipline such as [The Turing Way](https://the-turing-way.netlify.com/introduction/introduction) in data science, the [EQUATOR network](http://www.equator-network.org/) in health sciences, or this [‘manifesto’](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-016-0021) from psychological sciences
  + Checking if the journal you are submitting to has signed up to the ‘[Transparency and Openness Promotion’ (TOP) guidelines](https://cos.io/top/) which promote reproducibility through data, material and code sharing, preregistration and data citation.
  + Considering pre-registering your research analysis plans with a service such as the [Centre for Open Science](https://cos.io/prereg/) or as a [Registered Report](https://cos.io/rr/) in a journal

# Promoting your research

The University offers plenty of support when it comes to promoting your research prior to and following publication:

* Sharing a preprint will spark interest in your research prior to publication. See our advice on [sharing your research](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/open-research/access/share/)
* Check out our webpage You’re published! What next?