Pathways to Publishing: Publishing a journal article – the typical journey

There are three main phases you will work through when publishing a journal article, each containing several key steps. This detailed guide explains what happens at each step, including timescales; who you’re likely to interact with at the publishing company; when you’ll be expected to take action, and when you’ll be waiting for others in the process to take action.

This guide forms part of the Library’s Pathways to Publishing service. You can access other information and resources related to this service via the website:

* [Pathways to Publishing](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/)

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## Introduction

The total time from submission to publication of a journal article varies considerably across disciplines and publishers, but this [Scholarly Communications Primer for Sociologists](https://bit.ly/2Rq7uwC) developed by Philip N. Cohen at MIT estimates an average time of 9 months. [Rob Johnson](https://twitter.com/rschrobUK), Director of [Research Consulting](https://www.research-consulting.com/), considers the significant delay between submission and receiving a decision to be the single biggest frustration for authors, especially for Early Career Researchers who are eager to get a number of publications under their belt. If, after a long wait, the decision is a rejection, having to restart the process can feel even more frustrating. You may wish to find out the usual timescales when considering potential journals for your work, so you’re aware of how long it might take from the outset, and can plan accordingly. Some publishing platforms have much faster turnaround times, such as The Wellcome Trust’s [F1000](https://f1000.com/)-based [Wellcome Open Research](https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/), which has a timescale of around 70 days between submission, peer review and publication.

# Phase 1: Submission

## Identify journal

It is important to spend some time investigating journals which are relevant to the focus of your work, and which will be the right fit to ensure you meet the demands of your publication strategy and communication plan. See the following sections of this guide for more detail and suggestions:

* [Developing a publication strategy](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/publication-strategy/)
* [Academic publishing toolkit: Tools to help choose a journal](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/academic-publishing-toolkit/)

If you’re unsure, journal editors are often happy to be contacted by prospective authors to check if their work is likely to be a good fit for the publication.

## Write a draft and refine

You may prefer to write your paper before choosing a journal to submit it to, but there is a school of thought that you should first choose your journal, and then write your first draft of the paper to match the journal’s focus, tone, structure, etc. Ex-journalist and academic writing expert [Olivia Timbs](http://www.timbscomms.com/) recommends this approach, advising that this will maximise your chance of having your paper accepted for publication by your chosen journal.

Familiarising yourself with your chosen journal’s Instructions for Authors is the number one recommendation in our [Academic publishing toolkit](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/academic-publishing-toolkit/), as this can save you a lot of time and effort.

The University offers a great deal of support to help you with your writing, including Faculty- and Library-based academic writing guidance, and Shut Up and Write sessions held throughout the year. Check out the ‘Take advantage of training and support’ section of our [Academic publishing toolkit](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/academic-publishing-toolkit/).

You may find it helpful to write a first draft of your paper as quickly as you can, and then to spend time going over each section in detail to refine, correct, add detail and references. This approach is recommended by [Olivia Timbs](http://www.timbscomms.com/) in her academic writing for publication masterclass.

## Prepare your manuscript

Hopefully you are familiar with your chosen journal’s structure and tone, and have already checked the journal’s Instructions for Authors. You may be aware of your journal’s requirements in advance (such as those related to referencing), and will have written your paper based on these expectations.

If not, be sure to thoroughly read the ‘Instructions for Authors’ now, and use this to prepare your manuscript for submission, including specifications around underlying data and artwork. A major cause of delays and frustration in the academic publishing process is journals rejecting papers because they don’t meet the structural or technical specifications.

From the author’s perspective, it is widely acknowledged that the many idiosyncratic publisher requirements and submission systems cause additional work prior to papers being accepted, and there are [calls for journals to relax their requirements at the submission stage](https://twitter.com/dsquintana/status/1107276591254650880).

## Submit your paper

Once your manuscript is ready, find out how to go about submitting your paper for consideration. Many publishers use online submission systems, which usually require you to register or set up an account. Publisher submission systems can unfortunately be cumbersome and frustrating for authors to use. Smaller publishers may ask you to send your manuscript via email.

# Phase 2: Review

## Initial assessment

Once you’ve submitted your paper, the journal editor is likely to undertake a first appraisal, primarily to check suitability and fit of the content for the publication. There are three possible outcomes from this step.

* the editor may reject the paper outright as not suitable;
* they may recommend a journal transfer, and for you to consider submitting the work to an alternative publication in their publishing portfolio;
* they may initially approve the paper for consideration and initiate the peer review process.

Remember: the editor will be checking that the manuscript meets the technical and formatting specifications set out in the journal’s Instructions for Authors guide, so you can maximise your chances of passing the initial assessment by following these. See our [Academic publishing toolkit](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/academic-publishing-toolkit/) for more information.

## Peer review & your response

The journal editor will send your submitted manuscript out to two or three reviewers for careful, in-depth appraisal. Reviewers are likely to be experts in your field, but may not always have specific subject expertise – it’s notoriously difficult for editors to source reviewers for all the manuscripts they receive. This is because the task of peer review is a considerable undertaking for busy researchers – they do not receive any material reward and is often done in their ‘spare’ time as a duty to the scholarly community.

Reviewers are checking your work for soundness, including methodology and reproducibility; interest to the journal’s readership; novelty or originality (where appropriate); and significance. They will recommend a course of action to the editor based on their assessment: accept for publication or reject. Reviewers are usually asked to provide a review in 4 – 6 weeks.

The editor will collate the reviews and decide on either;

* Rejection
* Further peer review, if there is a significant lack of consensus
* Acceptance with minor corrections
* More significant amendments from the author, often referred to as ‘revise and resubmit’

If revisions are recommended, and you’re happy to follow the reviewers’ recommendations to incorporate these, you’ll want to provide a revised manuscript as soon as you can to proceed with publication of your paper. Find out more about the peer review process via our [My Research Essentials Peer review online resource](https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mre/peer-review/story_html5.html).

## Acceptance

If the journal is happy with the revisions made as a result of peer review, you will receive an ‘acceptance’ email. This is the official offer from the journal that they will publish your paper.

You may receive a ‘provisional acceptance’ or ‘acceptance with minor corrections’ towards the end of the peer review process. This is still a conditional acceptance, meaning that the publisher will accept your paper dependent on a few final changes. The publisher may still reject your paper if the final changes are not made.

Once your paper has been accepted, you will not be allowed to make any further major or substantial changes beyond the minor corrections defined by the peer review process. Any changes to the content after acceptance will need to be passed by the editor of the journal, and may well be denied if the paper has been copyedited and typeset.

# Phase 3: Production

## Paperwork

Following acceptance of your paper, the journal will send you a series of forms to complete. Your author forms may include the following subsections;

**Publishing Agreement**

The publishing agreement is the official transfer of copyright to the publisher. This will detail the rights you have to reuse and share your work. Ensure that you are clear about the limitations on reuse listed in the publishing agreement.

**Contact details of all authors**

If there are multiple contributors to the publication, it is worth gathering this information before acceptance. It might cause a delay to the publishing schedule if you are awaiting this information from your co-authors.

**Funder information**

If your research is funded, you may be asked to provide details of the grant, including the grant code assigned by the funder.

**Payment details**

If you have additional charges to pay, such as page charges, or an open Access fee, you will be asked to provide correct invoicing information at this stage. Make sure that you are aware of any additional fees prior to submission. If you are expecting a fee, ensure that you know how this will be paid, and who to direct the invoice to.

## Open Access considerations

Once your paper has been accepted, you may be given the option to choose whether to publish via the Gold Open Access route, or by the Green Open Access route.

**Gold OA is where the:**

* published work is freely available via the publisher’s website immediately on publication
* published work is normally published under a Creative Commons licence
* publisher may apply an Article Processing Charge (APC)

Our [Open Access funding](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/open-research/access/funding/) page explains the University’s Gold OA funds and eligibility criteria.

**Green OA is where the:**

* published work is freely available via an institutional or discipline-specific repository,
* version of work made available may be pre peer-review (pre-print, draft) or post peer-review (Author Accepted Manuscript or publisher's),
* version deposited may be subject to a publisher's embargo,
* article is made OA without payment of an APC

You can find our detailed guide to Open Access publishing on the Library’s [Open Access pages](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/open-research/access/funding/).

Please be aware,

1. If you acknowledge funding from the UK Research Councils (UKRI), a medical charity covered by the Charity Open Access Fund (COAF) or NIHR, it may be a requirement of your grant award that you publish your paper Open Access within 6 to 18 months. The embargo period required will depend on your funder’s requirements. Make sure the journal’s Open Access options, satisfy your funder’s Open Access policy.
2. A pure Gold Journal is fully open Access, meaning that the journal in its entirety will be Gold Open Access. If you are publishing in a fully Gold Open Access journal you will already be aware that there is a fee associated with publication.

If you have any additional questions or concerns about Open Access, or funder compliance contact the Library’s open Access team; uml.openaccess@manchester.ac.uk

## Copyediting

Most journals will then send your paper to a copyeditor. The copyeditor will check the manuscript for spelling, grammar, punctuation and the tone of your article. The copyeditor will correct any minor errors. They will also check that the manuscript meets the formatting specifications set out in the journal’s ‘Instructions for Authors’ guide, and correct as necessary.

The copyeditor will not make any changes to your paper that alter meaning or content. Any corrections made by the copyeditor will be minor and largely cosmetic.

The paper will then be typeset, meaning the article will be laid out in its final publication format, with justified margins and the correct spacing between sections. Files will be converted to XML or HTML, so that it can be read easily by multiple platforms. Images and figures will be checked to ensure that they are of a high enough resolution for publication, and finally the paper will be paginated.

Be aware that even though your paper has now been accepted, the copyediting and typesetting process can throw up problems that might delay publication. For example, the copyeditor might need to clarify wording or structure, or the editor might ask you to source higher resolution images.

## Proofs

At this point, the journal will then send you a proof version to check. Usually the lead author will take responsibility for checking the proofs for any final errors that may have been missed, or that may have occurred in the copyediting or typesetting process.

* This is your final chance to check for errors, so it is worth giving yourself plenty of time to check your paper closely.
* Some publisher’s now use a web-based proofing programme, so you may need to check and mark-up your paper with any changes through the publisher’s website.
* You will not be allowed to make any changes to the content at this stage. If you wish to make any changes to the data results, or authorship you will need to pass this by the editor of the journal.

## Publication

Congratulations, your paper is now published!

Check to see if your paper is available online, and all is as you expected. You can publicise your latest research with your peers. If you are the lead or corresponding author, be sure to inform all co-authors that the paper has now been published.

## Promotion of your published work

Publishers vary in the level of promotion offered for recently published work. Promotion may take the form of an announcement of publication via social media, and there may be opportunities for more involved promotion such as writing a blogpost for the publisher’s site, or contributing to a live Twitter discussion – ask your publisher what’s offered as standard, and what’s possible.

Whatever promotion is offered by your publisher, you as the author will need to take responsibility for promoting your published work.

The Library offers a range of support to help you increase the dissemination of your research – check out [You’re published! What next?](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/pathways-to-publishing/next-steps/) for details.