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THE SECRETS TO SELECTING A TARGET JOURNAL AND PUBLISH FASTER

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The secrets to selecting a target journal and publish faster

Edited by Ozy Abram
Chief Editor at Uni-edit

"Uni-edit is a leading provider of English editing and translation services to researchers and academics."

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About this ebook

Welcome to an ebook that gives you insight into selecting target journals for publishing your research papers. With thousands of journals to choose from, navigating the publication landscape can be an overwhelming, and sometimes frustrating, process. Targeting the appropriate journal for your paper is an essential element in building your professional acumen because journals vary in their popularity, scope, and outreach. Therefore, selecting the right journal helps expose your research, increase citations and thus your professional profile, and helps position your work within your research field.

In this ebook, we're going to break down the publication process into two parts: the pre-submission process and the post submission phase. Part I will explore the pre-submission process, including outlining the main factors authors ought to consider when choosing a target journal for their research, the kind of journal available to you as an author, such as peer-reviewed versus open access, and journal specific guidelines for formatting your paper. Part II will explore such topics as the common reasons journals reject papers, how to interpret these to maximise your chances of resubmission, the common kinds of rejections from journals, and the impact different journals may ultimately have on your overall research career, including how to increase employability based on target journal submission. Finally, we'll discuss the more general areas of journal submission, including how many papers graduate students are expected to publish, whether your department or university cares which journal you target, and the appropriate strategies for diversifying your research outreach. For each topic, we'll explore general and field specific guidelines, advice, and strategies, covering science, engineering, medicine, and the social sciences.

What are the main factors to consider when choosing a journal?

General considerations

A journal may choose to accept or reject your paper based on either a specific set of criteria stated explicitly on the journal website or on universally accepted standards in academia. Generally, these include its novelty, soundness of research methods, contribution to advancing a particular model, theory, or the overall field, application and usefulness to real world issues and challenges, connection to current state of the art, the narrative of the research problem, and comprehensiveness. Of particular interest is the final point of comprehension: does your research communicate your findings and insights effectively and comprehensively so that readers from any background can read, understand, and apply its content? The above factors all contribute to how journals will assess your work. Therefore, it is important to weight your research against these factors when deciding on which journal to submit your research. Does your research fit these criteria? The below table outlines these factors in more detail.

Criterion	Description	General level of importance based on all possible types of research papers (1–5, with 5 being most important)
Novelty of research	Is your research new and contribute fresh insight to the field? Does your research have novel methods, use a novel approach to an existing problem, and/or offer new results or conclusions?	4
Soundness of research methods	Are your research or experimental methods technically sound? Do they adhere to proper scientific practice and are they analytically robust? Are they appropriate for the type of research questions you aim to answer?	4
Contribution to field	Is your research contributing to advancing knowledge in your field? Does your research seek to solve a problem, challenge a theory, or bring new insight to existing knowledge?	4
Application of research	Does your research have a real-world application? Can your research be applied to systems, processes, or phenomena in a tractable and practical way?	3
Connection to current state of the art	Is your research relevant to the field as a whole? Is your research timely and appropriately framed to address the current or future challenges in your field?	5
Narrative of research problem	Does your research tell a story? How does it appeal to readers? Does it contribute to improving how your field is perceived by its community?	3
Comprehensiveness	Is your research easy to understand, comprehend, and follow? Does it contain easy-to-understand terminology that is accessible to anyone? Is it digestible?	5

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, the above criteria are important factors that journals consider when assessing your research. These are assessed through the peer review system. Therefore, testing whether your research meets these criteria is a good way to self-assess your research and decide which journal is most suitable for your work. For example, if your research is applied work using data to answer a pressing ecological problem of a particular system, you may value the application, research methods, and novelty of the research more highly than the other criteria. Therefore, your target journal is more likely to be a journal that is less focused on theoretical work and more on applied work, such as the *Journal of Applied Ecology* or *Conservation Biology.*

Practical example for Social Science

The criteria above are generally applicable to all social sciences journals, however, there is one major consideration that is particularly applicable to social sciences: whether your research is clinically focused. While there are a variety of generalist journals that publish both clinical and inquiry research, it is often better for clinically-focused researchers to publish in smaller, more specialized journals. That is, researchers who focus on informing clinical practice, such as by conducting clinical interventions to treat specific mental disorders in psychology may aim to submit to a journal like Schizophrenia Bulletin that is directed specifically towards clinicians, over one that is more generalist, like Psychological Science.

Navigating the journal landscape: What type of journal should I target?

General considerations

Targeting a suitable journal for your research increases the probability your paper is read by the right audience in your field, which helps advance your own profile and knowledge in your field by reaching a demographic that is more likely to cite and disseminate your research. However, irrespective of the soundness and novelty of your research, reaching your target audience depends largely on readership accessibility options from the journal. Selecting the appropriate level of accessibility for your paper may seem straightforward, but is generally constrained by whether the journal or publisher offers these options and journal fees.

Firstly, many journals do not always provide open access options. Journals are generally categorised as either paid subscription or open access regarding their readership accessibility. Paid subscription is a membership service to the journal usually covered by the university or research institution that allows readers to access the journal's content via institutional login access. Journals will usually only publish material from paid subscribers. Therefore, as an author, you will need paid subscription via your institution, but this largely depends on the type and outreach of the journal. For your audience, your paper is primarily read within the academic community with paid access to journal content. For example. Wiley, a major publishing company, oversees access to thousands of academic journals. Universities and research institutes, as well as individuals, become paid subscribers to these journals, allowing access to journal content.

Conversely, open access papers are disseminated more widely due to no subscription restrictions for readers. This means papers are publicly available. However, allowing open access does not come without fees. Journals, as publishers, need to pay publishing, administration, and intellectual property and copyright overheads to open their papers freely to the public. The level of accessibility for your paper depends on you as an author or your institution paying the open access fee, e.g. OnlineOpen by Wiley Online Library. This fee, covered by either the individual author/s or the institution, covers the publishing overheads to allow the journal paper to be freely available to the public without the need for a subscription to the journal.

Nowadays, most paid subscription journals also offer open access options for authors should they choose to make their paper publicly available.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, more and more journals are becoming open access. Open access journals are increasingly seen as the modern journal, as they provide publicly available content, overcome financial barriers for readers that would normally require a financial commitment to access content, and reach a larger readership due to improved accessibility. The following link from Elsevier, a major publishing company of academic research papers, outlines their Open Access journals: *https://www.elsevier.com/about/open-science/open-access/open-access-journals.*

How will the journal I publish in affect my academic career?

General considerations

Within academia, publishing journal papers is a currency to estimate individual research output, collaborative power, and diversity of skills and expertise. There are four main factors of the journal influencing the status of your paper that translate to the status of your research profile: impact factor, scope of the journal, accessibility (e.g. open access), and collegiality, such as relationship with members on the journal editorial board.

Factor influencing academic career	Description
Impact factor	Is your paper influential, impactful, or rigorous enough to meet the high scientific standards of publishing in high impact journals? Impact factors are publication and readership metrics that ranks journals within their field of research based on how often papers from that journal are cited per year. Impact factors allow the scientific community to rank the importance and impact of a journal in advancing research in its field. Publishing in high impact factor journals, i.e. top-tier journals, shows your research is scientifically sound, novel, and influential. Therefore, papers associated with these journals improve your research profile and enhance your professional acumen. Examples of top-tier journals include *Nature, Science,* and *Cell.*
Scope of the journal	How suited is your paper to the scope of the journal? Does the message of your paper align with the scope of your target journal? Journals will only consider accepting papers that are suited to their scope and readership. This is an important criterion for both author and journal: for the author, it ensures the author knows the type of audience the paper aims to reach and thus whether the paper will be relevant; for the journal, having a transparent and accessible scope ensures submitted content is relevant and that the journal's audience receives relevant material, which also minimises the administrative costs of processing the large number of submissions.
Accessibility	Is the journal you aim to target subscription or open access? Do you want your research to be publicly available to reach a wider audience? Publishing papers in open access journals not only disseminates scientific knowledge more widely, but the broadens the readership of your paper by allowing unrestricted access. More broadly read papers have a high chance of being cited. Therefore, making your papers more accessible by publishing in open access journals can improve your research profile.
Collegiality	Are you or is your research well-known or well-cited within your research community? Collaborating widely and enhancing your collegiality will further expose your research. Highly collaborative researchers are generally more trusted in the research community and thus can be well-known among members of the Editorial Board for journals. Journal editors that are familiar with well-cited researchers are more likely to trust the soundness of their research and expect reliable results. Therefore, improving your research network and publishing solid research can improve your chances of journal acceptance in later stages of your career.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, publishing in top-tier journals with high impact factors contributes to improving your research profile and enhancing your professional acumen. There are many journal options for authors. Choosing a suitable journal for your research will depend on the soundness of your research, its acceptance by the research community, and the audience you aim to target. Advancing ecology research can be limited by the time required to collect data, i.e. field or lab work. Publishing research papers can depend on these time constraints, together with the time constraints of journal turnaround times. Therefore, aligning the message of your paper with the scope of the journal is important for publishing and thus advancing your research career more efficiently. See the 'How many different journals should I publish in?' section for further discussion on the trade-offs in quality and quantity when publishing research papers.

Practical example for Social Sciences

For the social sciences, the effect that your selection of journal will have on your career depends on whether you are working towards pursuing a clinical career, e.g., as a clinical neuropsychologist, or a research careers e.g., as a cognitive neuroscience researcher. For the former clinically-focussed careers, the focus is often on publishing highly-regarded but smaller (and with an associated smaller impact factor) journals that are aimed towards other clinicians. For the latter research-focussed careers, greater importance is placed on publishing in the highest impact journals possible. This will often require making a judgement call on the quality (and particularly the novelty) of the research and aiming to submit to the highest journal that you believe you have a shot at being published in. For example, for very novel methodologically sound work you may aim to submit to *Current Biology* or *Nature*, whereas for less novel but still methodologically sound work you might select a journal like *Psychological Science* as the first port of call. Often you must work your way down a ranked list of ideal journals in the case of rejection. This can be a time-consuming process as it may involve submitting to three or more journals, and reformatting the publication accordingly, numerous times before the manuscript is eventually accepted.

What are the common types of rejections from journals and what do they mean?

General considerations

The below table outlines the types of decisions journals make when assessing your submitted paper. These decisions are based on the peer review process and the Handling Editor's or Editor In Chief's decision.

Decision on paper	Definition
Accept	Journal publishes your paper in its current state.
Accept with minor revisions	Journal is willing to publish your paper given you/co-authors make minor corrections as suggested by the reviewers and/or Handling Editor*.
Accept with major revisions	Journal is willing to publish your paper given you/co-authors make major corrections as suggested by the reviewers and/or Handing Editor.
Revise and resubmit	Journal rejects your paper in its current state, but is willing to consider publishing it following major revisions and a new peer review cycle.
Reject	Journal will not publish your paper in its current state or any alternative or modified states.

*Handling Editors are editorial board members of journals responsible for the initial handling, assessment, and administration of your research paper following submission to the journal. Handling Editors will allocate your paper within their journal to the appropriate persons depending on the acceptance stage of your paper. For example, after initial submission, the Handling Editor would be responsible for assigning the peer reviewers to the paper. If your paper is accepted, the Handling Editor would then be responsible for overseeing you and your co-authors adhere to the publication standards of the journal, as well as the copyright restrictions of the publishing company. Other roles include liaising with the copy-editor to have your paper proofread to ensure it is error free and publication ready.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Journals within the life sciences all follow the decisions of paper acceptance outlined in the above table.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Journals within the social sciences follow the decisions outlined above with one minor, conditional difference. If you article is rejected for publication by the editor following review and you believe that this decision has been based on a review that is either unfairly biased or reflects a clear misunderstanding of the research presented, you may appeal directly to the editor to reconsider their decision. Such an appeal should only be made in the case that you can provide evidence to support why you believe the reviewer to be unfairly biased or can illustrate to the editor where the misunderstanding has occurred and how you may amend the manuscript to improve clarity and thus warrant publication.

How many papers are graduate students expected to publish?

General considerations

Within the Australian university system, generally, there are no strict rules regarding the number of published papers graduate students ought to have. However, a strong publication record is an integral component of securing future academic positions, so the general rule of thumb is more papers, the better your chances of future employment. Often, government funding bodies and chief investigators of research labs will favour candidates with more first authored papers than co-authored ones, as first authored papers show more independence, better time management, and better research potential.

The number of paper you publish also depends largely on the type and level of supervision and/or mentorship you receive during your graduate studies. Effective advisors and mentors will encourage publication throughout your candidature by using their contacts and expertise, such as fostering collaborative effort among their own colleagues or encouraging conference attendance and workshops to help you build your own networks. These will provide platforms to generate further research ideas and papers, thereby increasing your chance of publishing throughout your graduate candidature.

Practical example for Life Sciences

The number of papers graduates publish will depend on the research field. Within ecology, collecting enough useful data can take at least 2–3 years. As a graduate, this can significantly influence the number of papers generated during your candidature. Writing early and writing often is an effective strategy to increase the number of papers you will have written or published by the time you graduate.

In medical science and human health, clinical data can be difficult to obtain due to many confounding factors, such as patient age, medical history, and type of treatment. Therefore, experimental challenges, such as insufficient data collection and low sample size, can affect results and thus the rate of publication and overall research output.

How many different journals should I publish in?

General considerations

Publishing papers in different journals diversifies your research profile. Diversifying your research is a good strategy for 1) showcasing your research, 2) increasing your employability, and 3) highlighting your breadth of knowledge and expertise. Therefore, publishing in many different journals, including those outside your field of expertise, is generally a positive step. However, there is a trade-off between the quality and quantity of your research. Having lots of papers of low quality research in lower-tier journals may reflect more poorly than having fewer papers that are high quality in higher impact journals. This trade-off is sensitive to your current stage in your career (early career researcher versus tenured professor), but, ideally, the more higher quality papers you have, the better your chances of future employment. Elsevier, a major publishing company, has a comprehensive guide that provides useful and detailed information on publishing research papers: https://www.elsevier.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/91173/Brochure_UPP_April2015.pdf.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, diversifying your research across different journals is a common strategy for enhancing your research acumen. There is a trade-off between the type of paper you publish, i.e. research, review, or technical, and the quality and quantity of research papers you publish throughout your career. Publishing a lot of papers is the best approach, but ensuring these are all high impact papers is difficult. Therefore, as an author, you will need to find a suitable balance between publishing fewer, high impact papers and many, less impactful ones. A mixture of both is most attainable and thus most common among academics in the life sciences. However, the aim is to always publish more high impact papers. Publishing in many, top-tier journals will boost your research profile, employability, and professional status.

Practical example for Social Sciences

In social sciences, the focus is primarily on quality over quantity. While it can certainly boost your CV to have a large number of publications, a competing

candidate with fewer publications in higher-ranked journals will most often be considered to be the preferable candidate. That being said, it is important that you demonstrate your ability to publish across a spectrum of journals is advisable.

Further useful reading:

- http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/more-papers-better-papers-the-curious-correlation-of-quality-and-quantity-in-academic-publishing/
- https://chrissampson.me/2014/01/16/priorities-in-academic-publishing-quality-vs-quantity/

I’ve been rejected by one journal. Should I resubmit to the same journal or try another?

General considerations

Review decisions on papers come in five forms: accept, accept with minor revisions, accept with major revisions, revise and resubmit, or reject. The below table provides further detail on the various forms of review decisions.

Decision on paper	Definition
Accept	Journal publishes your paper in its current state.
Accept with minor revisions	Journal is willing to publish your paper given you or the co-authors make minor corrections as suggested by the reviewers or Handing Editor.
Accept with major revisions	Journal is willing to publish your paper given you or the co-authors make major corrections as suggested by the reviewers and or Handing Editor.
Revise and resubmit	Journal rejects your paper in its current state, but is willing to consider publishing it following major revisions and a new peer review cycle.
Reject	Journal will not publish your paper in its current state or any alternative or modified states.

One of the above decisions on your paper determines its fate for that journal and whether or not you can resubmit to the same journal. Receiving an outright rejection decision on your paper from a journal is usually the final decision at the Handling Editor’s or Editor In Chief’s discretion. Therefore, if rejected, your only option is to submit to another journal. Only in extenuating circumstances can authors contest a paper rejection.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Most journals within the life sciences employ the same paper acceptance criteria listed above. Here is a useful link: https://www.slideshare.net/GRFDavos/elsevier-author-workshop-how-to-write-a-scientific-paper-and-get-it-published

Practical example for Social Sciences

Journals within the social sciences reply on the general criteria outlined above. With the exception of cases whereby you can demonstrate that the reviewer/s are subject to unfair bias or have misunderstood the research. Generally, however, it is ideal to

pursue a new journal following rejection, by submitting to the next highest-impact journal on your list of preferred publications for the research.

I have already published one or two papers. Should I publish my next paper in the same journal?

General considerations

The first step to publishing a paper is determining your audience. This means the journal you target should reflect the type of readership your paper aims to reach. Further, within academia, diversifying your research outreach is a good strategy to improve your research profile. Therefore, it is good practice to publish in different journals to encompass a broader readership. There are no rules against publishing multiple papers in the same journal. However, journals will also be less likely to accept a paper on a similar topic to a previously published paper by the same author(s) because the content or message of the paper is unlikely to share the scope of the former paper. For example, your research project may be exploring the impact of more efficient energy-saving technology on household energy budgets in built-up urban areas. The first paper may be on current energy-saving technology implemented in urban areas and highlighting where new technology is most needed. This paper would most likely be a review paper. The second paper could be on using economic models to project where this technology would be most beneficial to low-income households in urban areas. This could be either a technical or applied paper and thus may not share the scope of the journal that accepted the previous paper. Therefore, the second paper would be better suited to a methods-based or applied journal. Publishing future papers on *different* topics in a journal with which you already have published work is common and acceptable.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, one common exception to publishing sequential papers in the same journal is when the research has multiple, complementary results that warrant splitting the paper into two papers. This is usually when there is too much relevant content for one standard paper. This can also happen following recommendations from peer reviewers. For example, your paper could explore changes in intertidal zone species composition as a result of climate change. The first paper could discuss significant results of species responding to changes in salinity levels, whereas the second paper could discuss responses to oxygen levels.

Under these circumstances, the same journal is interested in publishing both papers and may choose to within the same volume as part of a series.

Practical example for Social Sciences

For those pursuing research-focussed careers it is often advisable to publish in a variety of locations. However, for those whose research covers a very small niche or has a very specific clinical focus, it is acceptable and often advisable to publish in the same journal or a small variety of journals, as this will improve the chances that the research will be read by the intended audience.

Can I publish parts of my dissertation as a journal paper?

General considerations

Submitting your dissertation chapters as published papers is encouraged, and sometimes mandatory, in many institutions. The advantages are that published papers have already been through the peer review process, so are deemed scientifically sound by experts in your field, which minimises the potential error for your examiners when assessing your dissertation. Further, published papers are copy edited by in-house editors at the target journal before being published, so your published chapter will in theory be grammatically sound and error free. Finally, published chapters lessen the workload for you as a student when writing your thesis.

Whether or not you are required to publish your dissertation chapters as papers depends on your university or research institution guidelines. For example, the University of Melbourne in Australia allows published chapters in Master's and Ph.D. theses (see § 4.62–4.67 at https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1321). Searching your own university or research institution's policy on publishing thesis chapters will provide specific information.

Practical example for Life Sciences

The best course of action to determine whether your dissertation can be published as journal papers is to check your university or graduate research policy website, as it varies among institutions. Further, the requirements can change over time, so students from previous years may have followed different rules.

I've never submitted to a journal before. Where do I start?

General considerations

The first time submitting to a journal can be overwhelming, but there are many resources to help you.

Resource	Content
https://www.elsevier.com/authors/journal-authors/submit-your-paper	Six steps to submitting your paper to Elsevier, a major publishing company.
http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2007/04/tips-publishing-scientific-journals	Tips from Science Magazine on maximising your chances of successful paper submission
http://publication-recommender.ieee.org/home;jsessionid=48349197C9E78151A604D8EF23733FC5	The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineer (IEEE) online toolkit to help select a target journal

The first step is identifying a target journal for your paper. This involves targeting a readership audience that covers the relevance of your topic, the paper content, and/or the research methods. You will most likely submit in your field of research or a closely related one. Therefore, this step can be as simple as performing an Internet search on journals in your field. A more common approach, however, is searching the literature on your specific topic and looking for journals to which other authors have submitted. As a starting point, you can also search within the bibliography of your own paper. Your readership audience will vary with every paper you submit as each journal has different foci and types of papers they publish. These include methodological, technical, and applied papers. See the below 'Field-specific examples' section for more information on this topic.

Once you have identified your target audience and thus your journal, you can now submit your written paper. Journals often allow independent submissions at any time. This means, you can simply follow the submission procedures and submit your paper when it is ready. You don't need to follow a particular schedule. However, some journals require an Expression of Interest letter. This letter is a pre-submission step requiring you as the author to ask permission from the journal to accept your paper. The journal will decide after consulting the journal editorial board on whether your paper is a good fit for the scope of the journal. If successful, you will be granted permission to submit your paper. If unsuccessful, you can then target another journal to submit your paper.

A prerequisite for submitting your paper involves meeting the formatting requirements of the journal. The formatting requirements are clearly outlined as a

checklist-style document on the journal's website, usually labelled 'Instructions for authors' or 'Guidelines for authors'. As each journal has a different format and style for their published papers, this step ensures your paper meets the publishing and formatting requirements of the journal. This step is negotiated between journal and publishing company, where the publishing company typically sets the tone for the style and formatting of their published material before publishing and distributing the journal's content. In some cases, the journal itself will set the formatting guidelines, but the final decision will ultimately rest with the publishing company. As an author, your responsibility is to adhere to these guidelines. Journals have the right to return un- or ill-formatted paper to authors if they feel the paper has not met their formatting standards.

After formatting your paper, the final step is identifying peer reviewers to review your paper. This step varies among journals, but journals may entrust the author to provide peer reviewer options. Whether the journal accepts these suggestions is at the journal's discretions. As an author, this step involves providing the contact details of academics within your field that you believe would, as peers, offer an objective and fair review of your paper's merit, scholarly contribution, and academic soundness. If your submission reaches the stage of peer review, the journal editor would contact these individuals and ask them to peer review your paper within a given period. This time period varies among journals, but is generally 3–4 weeks. The peer reviewers will then provide their review of your work to help the journal make and objective and informed decision on the contribution of your work to your field of research. To remain impartial and objective, you as an author and your target journal would normally not nominate reviewers that share a conflict of interest in your work. This can include colleagues within your department, those that have seen previous drafts of your paper, or anyone with some previous level of involvement in your research, such as contributions to field or lab work, statistical analysis, or methodology advice.

Once you have identified your target audience, your target journal, sought permission from the journal (if necessary), formatted your paper to the journal requirements, and identified peer reviewers in your field (if required), you can submit your paper to your targeted journal. Detailed information on these criteria is available in the 'Instructions to authors' sections for individual journals.

Practical example for Life Sciences

The type of research paper you can publish varies among journals and research fields. For example, within ecology, there are specific journals for methodological papers, e.g. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*. These journals have dedicated sections for papers introducing a novel analysis, experimental design, or model. Here's an example. If you were planning on submitting a paper introducing a new statistical analysis package, you may target a journal such as *Ecography* that publishes technical documents, such as software notes. This type of work would be less suitable in a theoretical ecology journal, for example, so already you have taken the first step in identifying your target audience. Further, because software notes as papers are less common, there are fewer journals publishing them, so your choice would also reflect the limited number of avenues for publishing this work. Once you are satisfied *Ecography* is the appropriate journal for your work, you can begin the submission process by following the 'Author Guidelines' section (see http://www.ecography.org/authors/author-guidelines). Software notes are a unique type of research paper and thus require their own set of submission conditions, which is publicly available (see http://www.ecography.org/sites/ecography.org/files/files/software_note_guidelines_final.pdf). Once you have satisfied the conditions for writing, formatting, and styling your paper to the standards expected of *Ecography,* you can begin finalising the submission process by creating an account in the Author Centre (see https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ecogra). In the Author Centre, you supply the necessary information to submit your paper, including author(s) names and affiliations, paper abstract, word count, number of figures, acceptance of copyright policy, open access option (if available), nomination of peer reviewers, including their contact details, and uploading your manuscript, tables, figures, and appendices.

Practical example for mathematics

An excellent resource is your supervisor or professors in your field, who may know of appropriate and active journals for you to target. Before you submit a paper to a journal, read at least a few of their articles to get an idea of their preferred style and focus. There are enough mathematics and related journals that you may be able to target journals in your specific sub-field. This gives it a better chance of being

accepted, but also of being used and appreciated by the journal's audience since it will be directly relevant to their interests. If you are in a hurry to get published, you should consider checking the backlog information of the journal, if it's available. If a journal has a large backlog, there will likely be delays in responding to your paper.

Another thing to consider is that it's not unusual for mathematicians to publish work on a personal website or on preprint servers, such as arXiv. This gives your work exposure since it can be found by someone browsing or searching in their field of interest.

https://www.math.lsu.edu/gradfiles/PaperSubmission.pdf

https://terrytao.wordpress.com/advice-on-writing-papers/submit-to-an-appropriate-journal/

https://terrytao.wordpress.com/career-advice/make-your-work-available/

How are journals ranked?

General considerations

Academic journals are ranked according to a metric called the Impact Factor. This metric is a measure of the annual citations for that journal versus the number of papers in the journal. Specifically, for any given year, by the number of citations a journal received for the preceding two years is divided by the number of published papers for those two preceding years. Therefore, the more citations a journal receives relative to the number of papers it publishes, the higher the Impact Factor. Within science, for example, the journals *Nature* and *Science* have the highest Impact Factors of 38.138 and 34.661, respectively, for 2015. For more information on Impact Factors, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor.

Throughout academia, journals adopt the Impact Factor as a way of ranking the 'importance' of a journal and thus the research it publishes. Impact factors are exclusive to the field of research. That is, Impact Factors of ecology journals are separate to mechanical engineering ones. However, they are comparable within sub-fields and complementary fields due to the scope of work a journal publishes. For example, research on spatial ecosystem modelling and modelling isotope pathways in freshwater food webs could theoretically to published in a similar journal, e.g. *Ecological Modelling*, and thus share the same Impact Factor. The Impact Factor remains a controversial issue due to its subjective nature. However, it currently offers a practical means of maintaining the high quality and integrity of academic publishing: authors are incentivised to publish in high Impact Factor journals because these journals have stringent acceptance policies and thus present a valuable resource sink, that is both highly read and cited by academics and non-academics alike. Alternative ways of ranking journals are becoming more common, such as the methods used by CiteScore (https://www.elsevier.com/authors-update/story/impact-metrics/citescore-a-new-metric-to-help-you-choose-the-right-journal; see the 'Can a professional service help me choose a journal to target?' section) and Google Scholar Journal Metrics (https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en). Google Scholar Journal Metrics ranks journals the top 20 journals according to sub-

disciplines using the h5-index, a measure of the number of citations within that journal for the last 5 years.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, publishing companies of academic journals list up-to-date information of available journals according to sub-discipline on their websites, e.g. Springer (http://www.springer.com/gp/impact-factor-2015/if-life-sciences) and Elsevier (https://www.elsevier.com/physical-sciences/environmental-science/environmental-science-and-ecology-journals). Within each sub-discipline, authors can follow links to individual journal home pages, where they can browse for information on journal scope, the editorial board, and instructions for authors.

Practical example for mathematics

One way of measuring impact is the 'mathematics citation quotient' of a journal. You can use the search engine http://www.ams.org/mathscinet/citations.html (look at Journal Citations) to check the citation factor of a specific journal. Note that this engine requires a subscription, which you might be able to access through your university. Some journals may also list their result on their website.

http://ams.math.uni-bielefeld.de/mathscinet/help/citation_database_help_full.html

https://www.math.lsu.edu/gradfiles/PaperSubmission.pdf

What are SSCI, SCI, and other journal indices?

General considerations

The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Science Citation Index (SCI) are digital databases for indexing academic journals in the social sciences and sciences, respectively. Journal titles are collated and stored in these databases as a means of comparing journal information within and among research disciplines. As an author, you can search the database to find information on journal titles when deciding what journal may be most suitable for your research (http://ip-science.thomsonreuters.com/cgi-bin/jrnlst/jloptions.cgi?PC=K). The indexing system is operated by the data analytics company Thomson-Reuters and, using citation metrics such as Impact Factor, selects and archives information on the most highly-cited and thus most impactful journals within each discipline (http://ip-science.thomsonreuters.com/mjl/publist_sciex.pdf). As a result, not all academic journals are available on these databases. However, using the universally-recognised metrics of Impact Factors to rank journals ensures the journal selection criteria is robust and uniform.

While the specific SSCI and SCI links can be useful for viewing journal titles under one banner, other journal indexing databases, such as Web of Science (https://apps.webofknowledge.com/WOS_GeneralSearch_input.do?product=WOS&search_mode=GeneralSearch&SID=Q1i4pUrMbqPqJK7Leg5&preferencesSaved=) and PubMed (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) offer more comprehensive information, such as journal rankings, paper titles, abstracts, and citation rates, and links to journal sites. See the section ‘What is indexing? How do I use that when choosing a journal?’ for detailed information on using these databases.

Some universities require authors to publish in journals that have been indexed and thus listed on digital databases, such as SCI and Web of Science. By selecting journals based on universal ranking metrics, SSCI and SCI journals have passed quality control measures that ensure they are established platforms for disseminating high quality research. Therefore, to a certain extent, universities can assume content published in these journals is reliable, has a wide outreach, and is part of a scholarly environment. However, with open access options becoming more common in

academia, ranking metrics such as Impact Factors are gradually becoming less significant when determining the impact and popularity of academic journals.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed are common and useful tools for gathering, comparing, and tracking detailed information on journals, journal papers, and citation rates that incorporate the SCI.

Practical example for Social Sciences

The SSCI and SCI links are the main journal indexing databases used in the social sciences.

What’s the difference between a local journal and an international journal?

General considerations

Local journals are usually journals publishing content specific to a localised area, such as a country or region, or originates and/or publishes content from an academic society or professional organisation. An example is the *British Journal of Haematology* from the *British Society for Haematology*. In contrast, international journals have a global reach and cover a broader spectrum of research topics and problems. As a result, international journals are more desirable for authors to publish in owing to their broader readership and higher citation rates. Local journals typically have limited outreach owing to their narrower scope and readership. As a result, local journals typically have lower rejection rates of papers and thus can be an easier target journal. Local journals are usually recognised by the name of the country in the title, e.g. *The Brazilian Journal of Microbiology*. There are exceptions, such as *The American Naturalist,* which is a highly cited and thus considered an international journal.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, examples of local journals include *Acta Biológica Colombiana*, which specialises in biology in the Neotropics, and the *African Journal of Ecology,* which focuses on ecology and conservation in Africa. International journals include *Nature*, *Functional Ecology*, and *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Within the social sciences, journals published by European-based organisations are quite highly regarded, such as *The European Journal of Social Psychology*.

Does my department or university care which journal I publish in?

General considerations

Universities, departments, and research labs generate annual, end of year reports that highlight the achievements and milestones for the year, such as grants awarded and publications. Publications are items affiliated with the university or research lab and will typically include peer review papers, book chapters and books, and conference proceedings. These form metrics that contribute to departmental and university reputation and research output, which are then weighted against other research institutions to determine institutional standing within the academic sector. Therefore, research labs, departments, and universities as a whole will encourage publishing in international, high impact, and highly cited journals. These metrics reflect the research performance of the university, which can indirectly influence performance of individual academics by improving the reputation and outreach of the university as a workplace. So, yes, they do care.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Life Sciences departments at universities most likely share similar objectives and thus generate similar metrics to departments in other fields, as universities will use these criteria to generate their annual publication metrics and research output. For example, the University of Melbourne publishes an annual ‘Research Review’ highlighting outstanding research achievements from departments within the university (http://publications.unimelb.edu.au/docs/2013-Research-Review.pdf). These reports showcase the academic output and international impact of research from the university to the academic and higher education community, as well as the public. Therefore, as an author, publishing in high impact, international journals is encouraged because it improves the status of the department and university as a whole.

How long does it take to get published?

General considations

Publishing research papers can be time and resource consuming for authors. The journey from inception of the research idea to printed research paper can be as long as 3 years. For the publication process itself, from submitting a paper to the journal to responding to reviewer comments to the journal accepting your paper, varies among fields and across journals, but takes on average 6 months. A lot of this time is spent responding to reviewer comments, as this step requires individual responses to each comment from multiple reviewers. Journal administration is another time-consuming part of publication, where a significant amount of time is spent on general responsiveness from the editorial board and finding peer reviewers. Publication turnaround times also depend on the quality of the research paper as written by the author: better quality papers.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, the average turnaround time tends to be around 3 months. Journals will rarely accept papers on the first submission attempt. Therefore, the turnaround time for publishing your paper must almost always consider the time spent responding to reviewer comments. This depends on the responsiveness and efficiency of you as an author when not only revising the paper in response to the peer review, but also providing a detailed document of all changes you have made and how they address the reviewer's concerns.

Practical example for Social Sciences

The time taken for publication can vary anywhere from 3 to 12 months (and sometimes longer) depending on the journal submitted to, the time taken by reviewers, and the number and extent of revisions required. Major revisions will generally take the longest as you are required to address each reviewer concern, and it is often up to the reviewer to assess whether you have achieved this when it is sent back to them. Thus, it is in your best interest to address the reviewer concerns as thoroughly as possible to minimise and need for further revision and avoid getting your paper rejected.

How will the journal I publish in affect my chance of graduation?

General considations

Within the Australian university system, universities do not require students to publish research papers to meet graduation requirements. In other countries, however, many degrees, especially doctorates, have strict requirements on the number of papers and types of journals you are required to publish, e.g. Taiwanese university system. This also varies among schools within universities. Therefore, you should discuss with your supervisor about the publication criteria you must meet to graduate from your degree.

Publishing research papers from your Ph.D., including throughout your candidature, will boost your research profile and increase your chances of employment post Ph.D. Publishing research papers requires a balance between aiming to reach a wide and diverse readership and publishing high quality research in top tier journals. This implies the balance between the quality and quantity of research papers you publish will affect your research profile, especially as an early career researcher looking to remain or thrive in academia.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Journals in the life sciences are receptive to and encourage early career researchers, including graduate students, to publish papers. Journals have no bias toward the stage of your career when considering your paper for publication. Therefore, publishing paper during your graduate studies is an effective strategy for boosting your research profile at its early stages.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Your publication track-record is one of the primary metrics used to judge your Ph.D. success but future employers in the research domain. Similarly, for those aiming to pursue a clinically-focussed career, publications in clinical journals can improve employability because they provide peer-reviewed evidence of the applicant’s research acumen.

Should I target the same journal that my professor published in?

General considations

Targeting the same journals in which your professor or academic advisor publishes is an effective strategy when developing your research profile, as it not only provides a good starting point for your research output, but also ties your research to other relevant work. Further, your advisor will have experience publishing in the journal you target and can provide useful estimates of expected time frames and other administration.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Early in my career, my professor had published several papers in a local ecological journal. My research was closely related to his work, so it painted a realistic picture of the trajectory of my future research papers and their scope. This also allowed me to tailor my papers in the early writing stages to the expected style of that journal.

Practical example for Social Sciences

The journals that your supervisor publishes in will often be ideal candidates because your research is generally strongly related to your supervisor's work. To begin with, I aimed to publish in journals that my supervisors had previously published in because they were able to provide me with detailed guidance in the preparation, submission, and revision processes for those journals.

How about publishing a comment piece instead of a full paper?

General considations

There are many types of research papers you can write (see the ‘Does the type of paper I aim to publish matter?’ section). Comment pieces are one type of paper that delivers a punchy and topical message in response to a current challenge, trend, theory, finding, or phenomena. These usually aim to open dialogue around a topic and stimulate discussion from multiple perspectives. Controversial or debatable issues provide particularly interesting comment pieces. Therefore, comment pieces can result in a back-and-forth discussion spread across a series of papers published within one journal. As a reader, they provide easily digestible content around a topical issue. As an author, they can present an opportunity to contribute with specific and timely insight into the chosen topic should you be able to contribute to the discussion. In order to maintain a coherent and concise discussion around any one topic, comment pieces are typically invited contributions by the journal or authors would need to write to the journal requesting they contribute. Information on whether any particular journal publishes comment pieces is available in the ‘Instructions for authors’ guidelines for the journal.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, journals will sometimes publish forum or comment pieces between groups of authors debating a particularly pertinent topic. These papers are usually short response pieces towards a recent paper that have been initially requested by the authors, followed by further response pieces from the original and other invited authors. For example, in 2004, the journal *Ecology* published a research paper entitled ‘Toward a Metabolic Theory of Ecology’. The paper sparked some intense debate within the metabolic ecology community, with authors criticising its application and novelty and the original authors subsequently defending its rigour. *Ecology* published the exchange as a series of forum papers, including the original paper, numerous commentaries on the original, and response pieces by the original authors (see Ecology 2004, Volume 85, Issue 7, http://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/issue/10.1002/ecy.2004.85.issue-7/).

Invited contributions from journals to authors to comment on a recent paper can provide a ripe opportunity to publish a comment piece 1) on a topic of interest in a journal that is familiar to either you or your advisor or 2) if your work is relevant and similar enough to provide useful commentary on a debatable issue.

How about a cross disciplinary journal?

General considations

Diversifying your research by encompassing a broader range of fields strengthens your research profile and increases your chances of future employment by showing you can collaborate and think laterally. Therefore, publishing in a cross disciplinary journal is an effective strategy. One way to achieve this is working on projects that span complementary fields. This exposes you as a researcher to different outlets for your research. Another approach is applying for research funding that focuses on connecting research and industry, such as the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant program. These awards fund research with applied industry context, thereby exposing academics to collaborators outside of academia and improving the potential outreach of the research.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, it is common for researchers to borrow ideas and methods from interdisciplinary fields. Ecology, for example, is closely linked to statistics, mathematics, physics, genetics, hydrology, engineering, geography, and psychology. While much of this work can target similar scientific journals, each field has its own subset of journals in which to publish. Therefore, working with academics in these fields exposes you to further publishing opportunities. For example, if your research is on understanding how bioaccumulation of toxic compounds in waterways affects species diversity within food webs, an interdisciplinary approach may be to apply a foundation of ecology with chemistry, mathematics, geography, and statistics. Therefore, your immediate research network could potentially incorporate academics from these fields, each of which have their own target journals that exposes your research to more diverse research outlets.

Can I publish in one journal only, or two or three?

General considations

Diversifying your research output is an effective strategy to improve your research profile and outreach. Publishing in one journal usually limits the type of research you will produce, as every journal has its own unique aims and scope. Further, journals differ in the type of papers they publish, such as standard research papers, review papers, and technical papers. The advantage of publishing different types of research papers is being able to communicate to different audiences, from theorists to technically-minded to quantitative or qualitative ones. Therefore, publishing in multiple journals will ensure you cover a wider breadth of research topics and research paper formats. This shows you can tackle a wider range of problems, synthesise material into different stories, and convey your ideas to a wider audience. As a result, academics are encouraged by research institutes to publish in multiple, high-ranking journals. Limiting yourself to publishing in fewer journals may also show you are less capable of communicating to a wide range of audiences, which can affect how others see your research potential and collaborative effort.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, publishing in multiple journals is a common strategy for improving your research profile and communicating your ideas and results to a wider audience. It also serves as good practice for writing different types of articles. For example, the *Journal of Experimental Biology* mainly focuses on lab- and field-based research papers of comparative physiology, whereas *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* publishes essay review articles. Being able to write both types of articles, for example, is not only a useful skill in itself, but also an effective means of communicating different messages to diverse readerships.

Practical example for Social Sciences

It is generally optimal to publish across a variety of journals in the social sciences to show that you are capable of writing a variety of article types. In particular, it is common within the social sciences for researchers to write a review article summarising the state of the research in their particular niche. This review article can

then form the introduction to the Ph.D. thesis, with the added advantage of having been peer reviewed. Subsequent research and technical papers can then form the body of the thesis, and it is advisable that these be published in more than one journal as well.

My paper is published already in my language locally. Can I publish again internationally in English?

General considations

Journals will not accept papers that have been published elsewhere in any publishable format in any other journal, irrespective of whether the language used differs between the two papers. This is mainly due to copyright restrictions from publishing companies that publish journal content. Once accepted, your paper is under copyright laws for that publisher. Therefore, publishing the same material elsewhere is considered a breach of these laws. The second reason is due to academic ethics, where publishing the same content twice is considered unethical research practice as it only seeks to improve the author's bibliography and increase their citations.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Journals within the life sciences are bounded by copyright laws from publishing companies. Therefore, they will not accept papers or results that have been published or that are being considered for publication elsewhere. For example, in the ecology journal *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* under 'Author Guidelines', § 2.2. Article Submission states that, as an author, you are required to agree to an Author's Declaration stating you acknowledge your work has not been published elsewhere:

http://www.methodsinecologyandevolution.org/view/0/authorGuidelines.html#submission

> 'The work as submitted has not been published or accepted for publication, nor is being considered for publication elsewhere, either in whole or substantial part'.

Authors are required to check the box stating they agree to the Author's Declaration in their Author Centre before submitting their final manuscript.

Can I contact the journal to ask questions before submitting?

General considations

Journals will always accept incoming queries about publishing your paper in their journal. These can include questions about whether the journal will think your paper is suitable to turnaround times on submissions. A lot of the information needed to publish your paper is already available on the website of the journal you wish to target, usually under the ‘Instructions for authors’ section.

Some journals require a pre-submission enquiry before submitting your paper, where the journal editorial board will assess the merit of your paper and make a decision on whether your paper fits the scope and readership of their journal. See the ‘Do journals require pre-submission enquiries before considering publication?’ section of this chapter for more information on pre-submission enquiries.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, journals are usually very receptive to questions from authors about publishing within their journal or other administrative queries. For example, journals state the aims and scope on their journal on their website. Sometimes, however, these may be too vague or ambiguous. Therefore, as an author, you might contact the journal to specify what their scope encompasses. Here, you may include the title and abstract of your proposed paper to give the journal an opportunity to provide brief, pre-submission feedback on whether your paper sits within their scope.

Practical example for mathematics

As in most fields, always start by checking the journal’s website because your question might be answered there. It can also be worth asking for insights from your supervisor or someone who you know has been published in that journal. Once you have done these, it is generally fine to contact the journal to ask specific questions. Be very clear on what you want to ask and why you are asking it. There is no benefit in asking questions just so that your name will be remembered when your paper is reviewed (probably by someone other than the person answering your questions!) In fact, asking many pointless questions can be counterproductive if the journal starts

to get the impression that you are not doing enough thinking before contacting them. Are journals in the US better than in the UK or other countries?

General considations

The quality of academic journals does not tend to be geographically biased. However, major publishing companies that publish the majority of academic journal content are usually located in the US or in the UK. Therefore, top tier journals with high impact factors and wide readership will more often originate from either of these regions. Other journals that are not-for-profit and hence not associated with a major publishing company could be located anywhere. These journals may still target a wide, international audience. Therefore, the quality of these journals is no less than that tied to major publishing companies.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, many international, top-tier journals are based in the US or UK. Sometimes, a particular theory or discovery does not have its full potential realized by the scientific community at the time of publication. This can result in influential papers in the field being published in mid-tier rather than top-tier journals where one might expect them to be published. As a result, influential papers can be published in local, non-US or non-UK journals, rather than international journals. Therefore, depending on the significance of the paper and its acceptance in the scientific community at the time of publication, journals from countries other than the US or UK where majority of journals originate can make a significant impact on science. These papers are typically 20–30 years old, as they need the time to gain acceptance and grow in their impact.

Practical example for mathematics

Mathematics journals from many countries, including the US, the UK, France, Sweden, Germany and Switzerland, are of high quality and impact. There are many proposed rankings of mathematics journals, and you can search these on the internet. However, for highly specific mathematical papers, it is more important to reach your target audience than to reach a larger, but more general, audience. As

such, don’t let the country of the journal determine whether it’s the right journal for your paper.I’ve written a conference paper. Can I publish it as a journal paper now?

General considations

Conference proceedings are typically short papers discussing preliminary findings or research in progress. Journals may choose to gather the ideas and results of conference proceedings in a special journal issue following the conference. When this happens, conference delegates are typically invited prior to the conference by the steering committee to submit their results to the special journal issue. Under these circumstances, your paper will automatically be published journal content and thus cannot be published elsewhere due to copyright restrictions from that journal.

Transitioning your work from a conference proceeding format to a journal paper format involves further research to complete the proposed findings, then rewriting the research to align with the type of research paper you wish to submit, i.e. standard article, review, forum, followed by formatting the paper to meet the specific guidelines for your target journal. Due to copyright laws, journals typically will not publish work that has previously been published elsewhere in any other format (see the ‘My paper is published already in my language in a local journal. Can I publish again internationally in English?’ section). Therefore, deciding whether your research idea should be presented as preliminary findings in a conference proceeding or as complete results as a journal article will determine the outlet for your research. Complete research journal papers are more common, more highly read and cited, and carry more weight than conference proceedings, so academics will more often choose to publish their work as a research paper.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, academic, not-for-profit societies are sometimes associated with local journals and thus will administer special journal issues following the annual conference for their society. This allows conference delegates to publish their presented results in a special issue of a journal. This work has been pre-screened by the conference steering committee that determine which authors will present at the conference and thus which work will appear in the journal special issue. The advantage for authors is the publication process is often expedited, as the pre-

screening is a preliminary peer review and the journal will expect tight turnaround times to have the issue ready for publication. An example of these circumstances is seen for the International Society for Ecological Modelling, which commissioned a journal special issue for *Ecological Modelling* entitled 'Ecological Modelling Global Conference 2016: 20th Biennial International Society for Ecological Modelling Conference, 8–12 May 2016, Towson, Maryland, USA (https://www.journals.elsevier.com/ecological-modelling/call-for-papers/call-for-papers-for-special-issueecological-modelling-global). The journal specifies all the necessary styling and formatting guidelines for authors and the expected publication timeline for submitted papers.

Can a professional service help me choose a journal to target?

General considations

There are several professional services geared toward helping authors select a target journal. Uni-edit offers such a service.

Modern professional services are increasingly becoming less service-oriented and more digital toolkits, providing more comprehensive, efficient, and autonomous ways to help you make decisions. Online toolkits such as Elsevier's CiteScore (https://www.elsevier.com/authors-update/story/impact-metrics/citescore-a-new-metric-to-help-you-choose-the-right-journal) offers a professional, collaborative initiative built on journal publishing data that helps authors make more objective decisions when targeting a journal. Instead of relying on Impact Factors to rank journals, CiteScore uses more comprehensive journal metrics, such as document type, a more realistic scoring system for ranking journals, and general metrics across different fields. Authors can use the CiteScore system here: https://journalmetrics.scopus.com/.

What are the most common errors young researchers make when targeting a journal?

General considations

There can be many pitfalls when publishing research papers, but most are preventable if you have good mentorship to help you navigate the journal landscape and a solid working knowledge of the publication process. It is common for young researchers to underestimate the time budget for publishing a research paper. Therefore, they can often spend a lot of unnecessary time targeting journals that are top tier and popular, but in reality, are unsuited for their work. This can depend on a number of factors, mainly a mismatch between the message of the paper and the scope of the journal, the content or length of the paper and the type of research articles the journal prints, or simply the paper does not meet the high scientific standards of publication. To avoid these pitfalls, young researchers should seek appropriate advice, either from mentors or the journal itself, and make realistic estimates of time commitment to the publication process. Further, journals are people-powered enterprises. Therefore, common human errors can often occur, including misplacing submitted articles. Young researchers should feel comfortable contacting journals to report on the status of the submitted paper when the journal fails to deliver on their own estimates of turnaround times.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, lengthy decision times on submitted papers can deter young researchers from submitting to certain journals. Familiarising yourself with standard publication practice and talking to colleagues about their own experiences, particularly more experienced colleagues that can reflect on their earlier research years, can provide useful insight into the type of pitfalls to avoid, how to make smarter and more efficient decisions when choosing a target journal, and building resilience to the negative aspects of the publication process. Some useful advice is to make conservative estimates of expected publication dates for your papers and be realistic about these estimates being twice as long as initially anticipated. Planning and writing early during your graduate candidature is a good strategy to ensure you can feasibly meet deadlines.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Aiming too low for fear of rejection is a common error made by young researchers in the social sciences. Due to the publish-or-perish nature of academia, young researchers often feel the pressure to optimise their publication count at the expense of publishing in higher-tiered journals i.e., “playing it safe”. Generally, this is where one should rely on the judgement of more experienced mentors and supervisors, as they will often be the driving force behind motivating researchers to publish novel findings in higher impact journals when younger researchers may not have the confidence to aim for these at the outset. Similarly, younger researcher often have thinner skins when it comes to the review and rejection processes associated with publication. Support and commiseration from more experienced peers and mentors can be instrumental in developing the resilience needed to persist in such a high critical feedback environment, and to be able to discern the important information need to improve the work based on the critiques provided.

How often will my submission be rejected?

General considations

The publication process can be fickle, arduous, and time consuming. Journals have their own objectives, administration, and expectations on the quality of science they aim to publish. Therefore, publication standards and expectation vary among journals. This means the competition for publication can be fierce and it is not uncommon to expect a low acceptance rates for submitted papers. Top tier journals, such as *Nature* and *Science* claim to have a 3% acceptance rate. Therefore, submitting to a good quality journal can result in rejections from multiple journals before final acceptance. The key to tackling this problem is building resilience to rejection and accepting rejection as common practice. Knowing that initial paper acceptance is a rare event and all academics experience rejection on all submitted papers will help you create effective strategies to more publish more efficiently, including making effective use of time, knowing the journals within your field that are best suited to your work, and using available publishing resources.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, the acceptance rate can be, on average, 25% per paper submission. That is, for every four fresh submissions to a different journal, on average only one will end up finally being published, even after possible multiple rounds of revision. This is an indicator of the journal initially considering your paper, which excludes the time spent responding to reviewer comments. Therefore, submitting your paper will require multiple attempts to different journals before one journal makes a decision to accept your paper.

Practical example for Social Sciences

The frequency of rejection in the social sciences will depend primarily on three things: the level of the journal the manuscript has been submitted to, the methodological soundness of the research, and the novelty of the research findings. In all cases, methodological soundness is a critical factor for acceptance and thus researchers should focus on establishing it in their work. Novelty of research findings

is often the second most important factor in insuring publication, however, it still cannot ensure that your research will be accepted.

I have to publish 2 journals before I can get my PhD. What is the easiest way?

General considations

Publishing papers during your PhD candidature requires some foresight and effective planning. The simplest way to start publishing papers is to ask your advisor and colleagues about what type of papers would be most suitable to publish in the early stages of your career. A useful starting point is writing a review paper that reviews the current state of knowledge of your research topic, identifies the gaps in the literature, and fills these gaps with novel approaches from your own research. This not only writes a lot of the necessary content needed for a literature review within your thesis, but also helps builds a knowledge foundation on your research topic from which to articulate and generate new ideas.

To take this idea and publish as a paper requires knowing what journals are best suited for the message of your paper. See the ‘How can I get information about a journal?’ section for detailed information on this. A useful resource is Scopus (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus), a citation database that provides details on many academic journals, including links to their individual websites. Another useful resource is the bibliography of common or popular research papers on your research topic. This indicates what journals will accept the type of questions, methods, and results within your field and thus of your own research.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, using the current state of knowledge on ecological processes, patterns, methods, and challenges provide useful starting points to build a first paper on your specific field. Addressing long-standing ecological challenges, such as predicting the impact of human-induced climate change on biodiversity, requires highly cross-disciplinary approaches, a diverse suite of methods, and many data. This creates opportunities to collaborate broadly, which can inspire new approaches to instigate the initial papers you wish to publish.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Within the social sciences the easiest way to gain two publications is to aim for lower-tier journals, however, this may not stand you in good stead on the job market. The most ideal method in terms of time utilisation and optimising the likelihood of publication is to ensure you have a strong theoretical and methodological basis for your research then aim to submit your work to mid-level journals that still have a decent impact factor, such as *PLOS ONE*.

I am the main author. Do I decide which journal or should my co-authors decide? What if we disagree?

General considations

As the primary author, you are typically also the corresponding author. This means you should be publicly responsible for the research content and able to address any of the paper's queries, concerns, and criticisms. As primary author, you are also the first point of call when liaising with journals. This includes writing the cover letter to the journal, communicating with the Managing Editor or the Handling Editor, fielding responses from the journal and relaying these to your co-authors, setting the direction for addressing reviewer comments, and making the final decision on the fate of the paper. Therefore, your decision on choosing a target journal should reflect your willingness to be publicly responsible for the research findings and handle the responsibilities of liaising with the journal editorial board. As an author, the writing, literature synthesis, executing the methods and analysis of the paper, and general commitment to the research topic causes a significant level of investment in the paper. That is, primary authors will tend to naturally feel responsible for the fate of the paper and thus voluntarily make the publication decisions, including selecting the target journal. Primary authors should also encourage co-authors to recommend target journals, as co-authors can often be knowledgeable in the field, have more publishing experience, or have a different perspective on the research.

In the event that co-authors disagree when deciding on a target journal, the best course of action is to re-evaluate the message of the paper, decide whether this message is suited to the scope and readership of the journal, and determine whether the type of paper you plan to write is suitable for that journal. Agreeing among co-authors on a shortlist of potential target journals before submitting your paper can help identify the type of readership your paper aims to target, thereby reducing any potential disagreements. Another strategy for mediating potential disagreements is creating a shortlist of peer reviewers you plan to recommend to the journal for reviewing your paper. When choosing your peer review candidates, you are subjecting the message of your paper to the scrutiny of current experts in your field, thereby helping place your research in a broader research context. Therefore, the

exercise of shortlisting candidates among your co-authors will help clarify the type of readership and thus target journal to which your research is best suited.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, the primary author is responsible for the main decisions of the paper, including correspondence with the journal and setting the direction for responding to reviewer comments. The primary author will also often confer with co-authors on selecting a target journal.

Practical example for Social Sciences

While the primary author has the final say on journal selection, the decision is most often come to through discussion with the co-authors. Many social science journals require the stated consent of all authors to submit to the journal so it is important that a consensus is reached between co-authors.

What is indexing? How do I use that when choosing a journal?

General considations

Indexing is a system that journals use to associate and distribute their content with an online database for public viewing. It improves accessibility for readers, allowing journals to reach a wider audience. Examples of databases are Scopus (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus), Web of Science (https://apps.webofknowledge.com/WOS_GeneralSearch_input.do?product=WOS&search_mode=GeneralSearch&SID=S2mfyg51skkmwcdDFqs&preferencesSaved), and PubMed (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed). These databases allow authors to search the literature based on search terms and criteria, such as Publication Name, Author, Title, and Document Type, to name a few. Most databases will index journal papers as citations, providing all the necessary information to source a paper from the journal or publisher website, such as the journal name and volume and issue number, as well as author and affiliation information. Some databases will also provide the abstract along with the citation, while others will provide the full text for the paper.

Authors can use indexing databases as search engines for discovering journals, as all the necessary journal information is available within one location. Using PubMed, for example, authors can click the link for the journal title to search the contents of that journal within the PubMed database, starting with the most recent volume. This saves users switching between journal websites and maintains a centralised framework for sourcing and citing literature.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, PubMed, Web of Science, and Scopus are major indexing databases that allow authors to source, collate, and cite ecological literature. Using the search terms and criteria effectively allows authors to easily source journal volume and paper information, usually for the entire backlog of the journal's history.

Can I publish in a top tier journal?

General considations

As an author, you are encouraged to publish your novel research in top-tier journals. While the acceptance threshold is much lower than low- or mid-tier journals, the opportunity to publish your work in a top-tier journal is a milestone for any academic, as it shows your research is novel, exciting, and robust. Publishing in top-tier journals significantly increases the readership breadth and citation rate of your paper, as these journals are more sought after, more widely read, and usually more frequently cited. Publishing in top tier journals early in your academic career shows to potential employers you are capable of producing independent, high quality research. However, top-tier journals typically have higher rejection rates, which as an author can cost you time and energy, as well as potentially discourage you from future paper submissions. Knowing if your work is appropriate for a top-tier journal depends on whether it can easily satisfy the criteria for strong research, namely its novelty, soundness of research methods, contribution to advancing a particular model, theory, or the overall field, application and usefulness to real world issues and challenges, connection to current state of the art, the narrative of the research problem, and comprehensiveness (See the section ‘What are the main factors to consider when choosing a journal?’ for detailed descriptions of these criteria). If you work can meet these criteria with little compromise, then it may be suited for a top-tier journal. Therefore, compared to low- and mid-tier journals, targeting top-tier journals involves a greater trade-off between placing your work in appropriate context and the likelihood of its acceptance.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, publishing in top tier journals is highly encouraged. These papers typically focus on novel, topical, and applied research that is well communicated, timely, and scientifically robust. Publishing in top tier journals within ecology is most often a collaborative effort from many authors (sometimes as many as 20+ authors on one paper), as producing high quality research is often a cross-disciplinary endeavour spanning a suite of expertise and many networks. Therefore,

publishing in top tier journals usually shows you are highly collaborative and capable of producing strong research, which is particularly important in early career stages.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Publishing in top-tier journals is strongly encouraged but requires that the research be novel, sound, and of interest to a more general audience. In many cases, successful top-tier articles are the result of unexpected but surprising findings and a substantial amount of follow-up work to investigate the cause. Although it is difficult to ensure novel findings, pursuing research in a topical area can help ensure the general appeal of the research.

What are some useful statistics to know before choosing a target journal?

General considations

It is generally good practice to have some understanding of the publication process, such as how journals determine their Impact Factors (see ‘How are journals ranked?’). These metrics provide valuable information on publication success for authors, including acceptance rates of papers and decision times for reviewing and accepting papers. Because turnaround times on making a decision on your submitted paper can be quite lengthy (up to 3 months), this information can influence whether or how often you as an author choose to submit to certain journals. Another useful statistic to help you choose a target journal is knowing the most highly cited papers within your field for any given year. This tells you which journals are performing well in terms of citation rates and what type of research papers are more commonly cited.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, knowing the acceptance rate and decision times for accepting papers is valuable information to help you not only choose the right journal for your work, but also budget your time to become more efficient at writing and publishing papers. For example, knowing which journals have notoriously long turnaround times can help you project your intended research output. This is important when your work is particularly topical and you wish to publish it as quickly as possible to keep up with current trends in the field. Journals attempt to retain consistent and quick turnaround times (typically 6 weeks). However, this isn’t always possible and delays are often common, sometimes reaching 6 months. Therefore, using existing knowledge on turnaround times comes down to personal and colleague experience. The type of paper you submit is linked to turnaround times. For example, reviews are longer and more intensive papers than commentary pieces. Therefore, it’s reasonable to assume the review paper will take longer to peer review. Turnaround times also vary with the time of year, with end of year holiday periods naturally linked to slightly longer decision times. Top tier journals, such as *Nature* and *Science*, receive the bulk of paper submissions. Therefore, they

claim to have a quick turnaround times on papers, especially with outright rejections (only 3% of papers are accepted). The best course of action in projecting your expected turnaround time is conferring with mentors and colleagues on journals that have treated their previous papers favourably and who can provide personal insight on potential journals to target and avoid.

My story of how I published my first paper

Name: Matt

Field: Ecology

I published my first paper during my Ph.D., but the work came from my Honours research. I had already written the research in a thesis format, but was firmly occupied with my Ph.D., so hadn't yet written the work in a research paper format. Once written as a paper, I submitted to an international ecology journal. Due to a number of unforeseen circumstances, including difficulties in finding an appropriate second peer reviewer in the field, it took the journal three months to return with a reject decision on the paper. This was slightly discouraging, as it painted academia and the publication industry in a negative and frustrating light. However, using the comments from this review, I re-wrote parts of the paper to improve them before submitting to another international journal. This journal also rejected the paper within one month, this time without sending it out for peer review. I then submitted to another international journal; the paper was peer reviewed and rejected within five weeks, but I received many useful comments and criticisms. By this stage, I was more satisfied with the timeliness and rigour of the peer review process than at the time of my first submission attempt. The peer reviews instilled confidence my work was of a worthy standard, just not suitable for that particular journal. I also received advice and internal reviews of the paper from current and previous colleagues at various stages of this process. As a result, I grew more confident in the standard of the paper with each new revision. My colleagues and mentors also advised me to build a healthy resilience to journal paper rejection and treat feedback as constructively as possible, as paper rejection is commonplace in academia. Finally, after incorporating many of the comments from various, combined peer reviews, I submitted the paper to an ecology journal called Austral Ecology. It was first rejected with the opportunity to re-submit following major revision. After responding to the helpful peer review comments, I re-submitted to the same journal. After 2–3 rounds of responding to reviewer comments and re-submissions, the paper was finally accepted for publication. From new submission to accepted paper, the process took approximately 5.5 months.

Paper: Malishev, M. & Sanson G. D. (2015) Leaf mechanics and herbivory defence: how tough tissue along the leaf body deters growing insect herbivores. *Austral Ecology*, 40(3): 300–308. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/aec.12214/full

Practical example for Social Sciences

I published my first paper, based on a study I conducted as part of my Ph.D. The collaborative writing process, together with two of my supervisors took a

total of around four months, during which time I was also compiling two other publications and writing my Ph.D. thesis. Following initial submission there was a six-month period during which the manuscript was sent for review. Within this time period I submitted, defended, and was granted my Ph.D. I finally received the reviews back, which requested major revisions, including a change to the data analysis methods which I ultimately believe strengthened the final conclusions of the paper. These revisions took around two months to complete and resubmit. Following the second round of reviews, I was required to make a few further minor revisions before the paper was eventually accepted. In total, from the initial submission to acceptance the process took more than 12 months: a timeframe that is considered long for my field and was certainly longer than my subsequent experiences.

Paper: Colman, H., Remington, R., & Kritikos, A. (2017). Grasping remaps the distribution of visuospatial attention and enhances competing action activation. *Q J Exp Psychol A*, 70(9): 1892-1908.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2016.1214974

How much will it cost to publish and who will pay?

General considations

Journals are generally divided into two domains: subscription and independent. Subscription-based journals are affiliated with major publishing companies that handle distribution, printing, and maintenance overheads. Accessing these papers for reading requires a yearly subscription to the journal that covers these costs. Therefore, publishing in these journals will be without a publishing fee. Subscription-based journals also often have an open access option tied with a fee should authors wish to make their paper publicly available.

In contrast, independent journals are independent, not-for-profit entities that handle their own overheads and publish their content as open access to the public. As a result, publishing open access papers in independent journals comes with a publishing fee. For example, for journals under the Wiley Online Library umbrella, the publishing fee can be up to US$3000 per paper. Typically, the university or research institute will cover publication fees from the research project budget or from miscellaneous funds. Once your paper is accepted by a journal, the journal will provide options on how to cover these costs.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, open access is becoming increasingly popular due to demands for reproducible research, transparent data and results, and more accessibly knowledge transfer. Most journals will offer an open access option for authors. Independent journals that are strictly open access are also becoming more common and popular. These journals are typically specialised journals on a subfield of research. For example, the independent journal *Movement Ecology* publishes papers on experimental and theoretical approaches to the movement of organisms; publishing fees for this journal are US$2145. Independent journals will sometimes also waive publishing fees for authors originating in low-income countries.

Does the length of my paper matter?

General considations

The length of your research paper will depend on two factors: (1) the type of paper you intend to write, i.e. research paper, review paper, method paper, technical note, essay, forum piece, commentary, or short communication, and (2) the page or word limit requirements of the journal for that type of paper. These limits can also influence the type of paper you write, especially following a peer review, where the reviewer may suggest shortening the paper to something more manageable or concise. The first step in writing a research paper is determining your audience (see 'I've never submitted to a journal before. Where do I start?'), which will define the type of paper you will write and thus its length. As an author, you can source more specific guidelines for paper length, including page and figure limits, from the journal website under their own 'Instructions for authors' sections.

The general rule of thumb is the shorter the better: more concise papers are more interesting, usually less technical, and are easier to digest.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, typical research papers must not exceed 7,000 words. Sometimes there are also limits on the number of possible figures. Shorter pieces, such as commentary, forum, and technical papers, are usually <3000 words.

Practical example for Social Sciences

The length of the research paper is almost entirely determined by the journal that you aim to submit to. For example, some publications have strict work limits (e.g. <3000 words) and others have a general upper limit that allows for greater freedom e.g. not exceed 30 double-spaced, 12pt pages excluding references. One can opt for a short report or full research article, although short reports are often reserved for research that reports novel techniques or ground-breaking results.

Does the type of paper I aim to publish matter?

General considations

Publishing papers relies on being able to effectively communicate a story. Journals offer different types of papers for authors to communicate their story, such as standard research paper, review paper, method paper, technical note, essay, forum piece, commentary, and short communication. This delineates journal volumes into tailored content to improve access and readability. Publishing your work as different types of papers will expose your work to broader audiences, as some paper types are easier to read than others. Further, readers will sometimes prefer one type to another. Therefore, by choosing to write a paper in a specific form, you can tailor your message to target different audiences.

Journals will not always permit all paper types. Therefore, choosing the type of paper you want to publish can influence the type of journal you wish to target. It is a good idea to write papers in different forms to encompass a wider audience, which also helps you diversify the journals you publish in.

Practical example for Life Sciences

The most common types of papers within the life sciences are standard research, review or synthesis, Forum or Commentary or Opinions (sometimes called Spotlight or Notes), reports, and technical notes. While standard research papers are most common and likely to be more often cited, the other types of papers can be effective ways of communicating a particular idea, theory, or finding. For example, the journal *Global Change Biology* solicits research papers, technical advances, reviews, opinions, and reports, all of which is found under the 'Author Guidelines' section of the journal (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1365-2486/homepage/ForAuthors.html).

Practical example for Social Sciences

Within the social sciences there are opportunities to publish many of the reports outlined above; however, the most common types of reports are standard research papers, reviews, and short communications.

Further, because technical notes, forum pieces, commentaries, and short communications are generally shorter papers, they can also be less involved, include fewer co-authors, and quicker to write, thus potentially expediting the submission and publication process. The format of the paper, its message, and the audience you wish to reach are important trade-offs to consider when targeting a journal.

Does the format of my paper matter?

General considations

Published papers need to be styled and formatted in specific ways to meet the strict formatting guidelines of journals. These guidelines can be broken down into two parts: presentation and style. Presentation guidelines refer to the way the paper is presented to the reader, including line spacing, line and page numbering, font size, and margins. Style guidelines refer to the stylistic aesthetic of the journal and include the format of the abstract, i.e. numbered paragraphs or single paragraph, figure and table layout and caption placement, figure size and quality, and referencing style. Combined, these guidelines help the editorial team of the journal maintain a consistent formatting style throughout their journal, present peer reviewers with readable products, and simplify the proof-reading and copy-editing stages once papers become accepted.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, formatting guidelines vary among journals: some journals require continuous line numbering, while others prohibit the use of footnotes. Typically, formatting guidelines are endemic to the publishing company. For example, British Ecological Society journals (http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/publications/journals/) promote their own style and presentation that is consistent across their journals. Other publishing companies and journals will use their preferred formatting guidelines and styles. The most varied aspect of formatting among journals is the in-text referencing style. Journals adhere to their chosen referencing style, e.g. APA, Harvard, and have specific guidelines on the presentation of cited works. For example, *Functional Ecology* has quite detailed referencing guidelines (see 'Manuscript specifications' at http://www.functionalecology.org/view/0/authorGuideline.html). In contrast, the ecology journal *Oikos* is less strict about in-text style and only provides brief details (see http://www.oikosjournal.org/authors/author-guidelines). When the journal states no specific guidelines, as long as authors choose a consistent style, they can use their best judgement and discretion.

Practical example for Social Sciences

Within the social sciences, there tend to be strict style guidelines that are adhered to by journals. For example, Psychology and Social Work journals typically use APA style, the guidelines for which are outlined by the APA Style Manual 6th Edition (see http://www.apastyle.org/ for an online overview). Other popular styles are AMA, Harvard, and Vancouver. While APA is most common, it is advisable to check the guidelines for the individual journal to check for style specifications, and some journals have specific, individual formatting requirements.

How can I get information about a journal?

General considations

Information on journals are available on the journal's own website or through the society that administrates the journal. For example, the journal *The American Naturalist* is administered by University of Chicago Press, so its website is hosted on the University of Chicago Press journal site (http://www.journals.uchicago.edu). Other journal hosting sites are specifically built as journal repositories, such as JSTOR (https://www.jstor.org/), a major digital academic library. Searching the website using the JSTOR search engine will provide information on journal volumes and issues for all journals from JSTOR. Another example is Scopus (https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus), a citation database that provides details on journal metrics and ranking, such as Impact Factors (see 'How are journals ranked?'). Using journal metrics, authors can determine which journals may be best suited for their work and follow the links on the database to the specific journal's website.

Another major source of journal information are online university libraries. Universities are paid subscribers to journals and thus have subscription access to journal content, including volumes and individual papers. Searching the online library of your university will give you unrestricted access to journal content, where you can browse the journal website to find tailored information.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, information on journals can be found on the journal website, the publisher's website, i.e. Wiley Online Library, and citation databases, such as Scopus.

Practical example for mathematics

Information on journals can be found on the journal website. In particular, look at the 'guidelines for authors' and 'frequently asked questions' sections. There may also be information on the publisher's website and review websites/search engines such as the American Mathematical Society website.

Do journals require pre-submission enquiries before considering publication?

General considations

Some journals require a pre-submission enquiry from authors requesting to publish papers in their journal. The conditions of this enquiry depend on the type of paper you as an author wish to publish. For example, for the international ecology journal *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, authors wishing to submit a Review or Opinion paper must submit a 500–600 word summary of the paper, including co-author information and up to 20 references primarily from the last 2–4 years (http://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/presubmission). The Editorial Board of the journal will then deliberate on whether your paper is deemed novel enough, is appropriate for the journal readership, and if it falls within the scope of forthcoming journal volumes. From submission of the enquiry letter to decision typically takes 2–3 weeks.

Authors can find information on pre-submission enquiries on individual journal websites and are encouraged to discover as a first step whether a pre-submission enquiry is required for the intended journal.

Practical example for Life Sciences

Within the life sciences, journals that require pre-submission enquires are a minority. The best practice when submitting your paper is to first define its message, shortlist a list of potential journals, then check the website for each journal to see whether they indeed require a pre-submission letter. As this letter usually requires a succinct summary of the relevance and novelty of your work in the context of the broader field, you would consider writing this letter once you have written your paper and are confident with its direction and intended message. In some circumstances, it is possible to write to a journal with an idea for a paper without having written the paper itself. This is usually applicable when you intend to write a short comment piece in response to a recently published and topical paper.

Practical example for Social Sciences

It is a growing trend to ‘preregister’ a study plan with a journal by providing a summary of the study aim, hypotheses, planned method, and expected findings prior to commencing data collection (for example, *PLOS ONE* and *Cortex*). By pre-registering publications can opt to commit to publish the results, irrespective of the novelty of findings, based on a strong methodology and theoretical basis as part of the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/). Yet, this it almost impossible to find a journal that requires this for publication, and it is still fairly uncommon for journals to require a pre-submission enquiry.

Need a professional English Editing service for your paper? We recommend Uni-edit and Golden.