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Namibia and United States

Publish, Don't Perish: Ten Tips

Going public with our research is an important part of the research process. Besides the intrinsic value of sharing our experience and our insights with a community of peers, in higher education, publishing is vital for job security and promotion. Despite these forces encouraging us to publish, few academics actually do.

Reports from all over the world reveal that the publication rate among scholars is low. Academics in South Africa and Australia, for example, publish an average of 0.4 articles per year (Gevers 2006; McGrail, Rickard, and Jones 2006). The importance of publication compared to the relatively small numbers of teachers and scholars who publish, however, is an issue not only for tenure-track professors at universities; kindergarten through twelfth-grade (K–12) teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), EFL administrators, and TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) professionals have experience and ideas that could be more broadly shared in outlets from newsletters to academic research journals.

Researchers have identified a number of explanations for why publication rates are so low, including time constraints, inadequate skills, and lack of institutional support. Among academics for whom English is an additional language, the challenges of writing for publication are even more complex (Benfield and Feak 2006; Uzuner 2008). English as an additional language (EAL) students and academics face difficulties because of unfamiliarity with genre patterns and the structure of articles in English journals that are generated in cultural contexts different from their own (Hyland 2003). EAL scholars must learn the unwritten

"rules of the [publishing] game" as it is played in academic journals of the English-speaking world (Gosden 1992, 136).

The purpose of this article is to provide an introduction to identifying the hidden rules and explicating the sometimes intimidating world of publishing. It focuses on the journal article genre, but the insights and advice are useful for teachers and scholars both inside and outside the university. For example, K–12 teachers who wish to share lessons from their classroom experience or EFL administrators who want to publish their observations and practical solutions will find helpful suggestions. The article presents a tool for teaching about publishing in a way that can benefit teachers and scholars who are interested in getting their ideas into print. It will assist younger academics who have never published before and will serve as a refresher course for senior academics who have already published. The article begins with an overview of the literature on obstacles to writing that academics face. We then offer ten practical tips for overcoming these barriers in order to get articles published.

WHAT GETS IN OUR WAY?

Many obstacles to writing and publishing have been identified, including the difficulty of scheduling time for writing within a busy schedule, internal critics, and perfectionism

(Kwan 2008; McGrail, Rickard, and Jones 2006). Most research finds that additional responsibilities of teaching and administration are the most formidable barriers to writing (McInnis 1999; Milem, Berger, and Dey 2000). Boice (1990) is one of those who found that lack of time due to these responsibilities gets in the way of writing; however, Boice also discovered that nearly all academics, even those with heavy teaching loads, have a 15- to 60-minute block of time available per day for writing. But how many of these time slots have we all spent on other time-devouring tasks such as posting on Facebook, checking email, or reading the news instead of writing (Narcisse 2014)? Boice (1990) found that most academics do not write in these smaller blocks of time because they believe that writing can be accomplished only in large chunks of two hours or so. Boice argues that this belief is not valid and that if we wish to increase our writing, we must understand that even busy weeks in the semester contain short periods of time that when added together can produce a significant amount of writing. Identifying these small blocks of time and using them to write rather than spending them on less critical activities is our challenge.

Internal critics and fear of failure also erect barriers that prevent writing (Lee and Boud 2003). Negative thoughts about our writing capability can block our confidence. Our internal editors can prematurely shut down thinking, resulting in staring at a blank page, unable to begin. Perfectionism is a related factor. Perfectionists want to be seen as brilliant writers churning out solid papers without any mistakes. Perfection may be our goal, but it is not a hallmark of the process of writing that gets us to that goal (Boice 1990).

FROM THE PERIPHERY

People for whom English is a second language face all the barriers to writing articles for publication mentioned above, but their experience is further complicated by a number of additional factors. Not only are many academics in the periphery writing in a second language, they also face other serious issues such as lack of resources and difficulties accessing scholarly networks.

Studies from Sri Lanka, Mexico, and South Africa have described the challenges experienced by scholars from countries of the Global South (Canagarajah 2003; Hanauer and Englander 2011; Kapp, Albertyn, and Frick 2011). Canagarajah (2003) provides a particularly vivid description of the hurdles he encountered when trying to conduct and publish his research on education from Sri Lanka. Foremost, he could not interview his students as he had planned because his university abruptly closed due to internal fighting between rebel groups. Canagarajah also describes the difficulties he faced in trying to engage with his disciplinary community, which he believed had little interest in publishing. He asserts that his isolation caused him to be unable to learn the unwritten rules of academic publishing, such as the importance of targeting particular journals depending on one's research. In addition, he outlines the hidden rules in the process of submitting and revising articles for journals and being cognizant of the character of the current discourse within the journal and among its readers.

Besides feeling isolated and lacking a writing and publishing community, Canagarajah (2003) had few material resources at his disposal. Having access to only a handful of journals meant he could not compose a well-informed introduction or literature review. Canagarajah was therefore unable to follow a fundamental step specified by Swales and Feak (1994)—establish a research territory that shows knowledge of the latest scholarship and indicate a potential gap that the work addresses.

Based on reading reflections by scholars such as Canagarajah, our interactions with lecturers in Namibia who were seeking to boost their publishing records, and our own successes and mistakes in publishing, we developed ideas about how to identify barriers to publication

and how to address them. Eventually we created a list of our top ten steps for writing and publishing. The strategies draw on semester-long writing workshops that the first author facilitated for academics in Namibia in 2013 and 2014 as well as the literature on publishing journal articles (Belcher 2009; Boice 1990; Goodson 2013). Much has been written about various barriers and solutions to publishing. This article consolidates those insights and advice in a presentation that is useful for those who are teaching others how to write and publish. For you and those you teach, the objective of these ten steps is for you to send your article off and get published or for you to help others get their work published.

STEP 1: MAKE DAILY TIME FOR WRITING AND RECORD IT ON A WRITING CALENDAR.

Since procrastination is a common obstacle in writing, we suggest that you start by writing regularly, in small amounts. Strive to spend 20 minutes a day writing, five days a week. Once you have made it into a daily habit, you can increase the time to 30 or 40 minutes per session. It is also helpful to set realistic and specific deadlines to accomplish your writing goals (Morss and Murray 2001). For example, "By the end of this week, I will draft a detailed outline of the paper." "By the third week, I will read and summarize five articles." "By the sixth week, I will _____."

In addition to making daily time for writing, record your writing sessions on a calendar—a grid that lists the days of the week above seven columns and lists the hours of the day to the left of those columns, with one row for each hour of the day from the hour you get up until the hour you go to bed. On the grid, put an X during the times that you will be sleeping, teaching, going to work, taking your children to school, and other times when you cannot write. Plan for the times during the week when you *can* write. At the end of each writing session, record what you accomplished and how much time you spent writing (Belcher 2009; Goodson 2013).

Now you have a writing plan; however, sometimes the best plans do not materialize. If you can predict those things that get in the way of your writing, you can meet them head-on. Consider the following three common obstacles and some possible strategies to overcome them (Belcher 2009):

- *Preparing for classes takes up all my time.* Juggling the teaching of classes, conducting research, and providing service to your school or university is a difficult balancing act. In addition, many first- and second-year teachers or faculty members tend to overprepare for lessons and lectures— rewriting and rethinking the presentation in ways that do not add much to the final product but use up a lot of time. One solution might be to restrict the amount of time that you spend preparing for lectures. In addition, plan to have your writing session *before* your teaching preparation time. Write for 30 minutes and afterwards organize your lesson. Then you will be able to get some writing in during a busy day of classes (Belcher 2009).

- *I will write just as soon as I _____.* Do you ever hear yourself saying, "I will get to my writing just as soon as the semester has ended, when I finish grading these tests, when summer vacation begins"? A year passes, and you notice no writing has taken place. We have experienced this procrastination ourselves! One strategy to prevent procrastination is to start small. Make your 20-minute writing session a habit, like flossing your teeth. Before long, the writing session will become a natural part of your daily work routine. Remember, we do not need a large chunk of time of two hours to write. We need to write a little bit every day (Belcher 2009).

- *I have to read just one more book.* Many of us get caught up with online scavenger hunts for the perfect article and then read for months without completing any writing. Doctoral candidates, for example, have

been found to spend a large amount of time reading while delaying the writing for the last stage of their dissertation (Kwan 2008). One solution to this problem is to read and write at the same time. Read an article and then write a one-paragraph summary. Then read a second article and write a one-paragraph summary. When you read, look for the article's argument. The argument is the article's single significant idea. Start your summary with, "This article argues that … " (Belcher 2009). Reading and writing together in this way helps to synthesize the work, and it produces a written product that can be transferred to those blank pages when you begin to write a draft of the article.

STEP 2: MAKE YOUR WRITING SOCIAL.

From the beginning to the end of the research process, talk with colleagues, advisors, or friends about why you are conducting the research and what you are learning. Their comments and questions may help you develop your ideas. We should aim to think of writing as social—sharing it with others in order to receive additional ideas and better direction. Perhaps ask a senior or more experienced colleague to co-write an article with you. Find a writing partner and meet weekly to share successes and challenges and to get feedback on your topic and written drafts. Regular meetings act as motivators, and receiving and using feedback is a critical step in becoming a good writer (Belcher 2009; Goodson 2013).

The value and necessity of building a community in which to do our writing was the main discovery we made in our research of semester-long writing workshops in Namibia. When we asked participants what they found most helpful about the 12-week workshops, they described the building of a community of scholars at their institution and the camaraderie they gained from the experience as essential to continuing their work as teachers, researchers, and writers.

Talking through the difficulties of writing with our partner can help us overcome some of the problems associated with procrastination and perfectionism. Remember, even the best writers in the world do not write a perfect paper the first (or often even the tenth) time. Even the best writers in the world at times experience procrastination and anxiety, and even they need to edit and revise numerous times before they have a paper ready to submit for publication. Maintaining the energy and motivation to do this work is greatly enhanced by interaction with others who share the experience.

Now you have a plan to write, you have scheduled your sessions on your daily calendar, and you are meeting weekly with your writing partner. How do you write an academic article and get it published? This brings us to Step 3.

STEP 3: CONDUCT A GENRE ANALYSIS OF WELL-WRITTEN ARTICLES IN YOUR FIELD.

Genre analysis of texts focuses on the way language is used to create meaning (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). In the journal article genre, scholarly language is used to create meaning, particularly in the Introduction section (see Step 6). One technique used to guide academic writing is "rhetorical consciousness raising" (Hyland 2007, 154)—directing learners to discover genre characteristics and patterns of texts and using this understanding in writing their own texts (Kuteeva 2013). In other words, carefully examine how academic articles are put together. Study and discuss the structure, language use, and specific sections including abstracts, introductions, and conclusions (Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Samraj 2002). Then look to see where you can make revisions to your article (Cargill and O'Connor 2006).

The following advice is focused on one genre, that of academic journals. The principle of identifying the genre of the publication for which you want to write, however, is true for any genre. Before you

write, think about what you have read in the newsletter or magazine to which you plan to submit your article. What articles did you find interesting? What kind of language did they use? What sorts of examples did they provide? What audience was implied by the way each article was written?

STEP 4: CHOOSE THE RIGHT JOURNAL AND THOROUGHLY UNDERSTAND THAT JOURNAL.

Choosing the right journal for submission is one of the most important decisions throughout the writing and publication process (Belcher 2009). Some successful academics do not begin writing an article until they have chosen a journal for submission. Only after they have observed what kinds of topics, evidence, and perspectives are currently part of the journal's offerings do they begin to frame their own work for submission (Silverman and Collins 1975).

Once you select a journal, try to gain a thorough understanding of the type of articles the journal tends to publish, especially the articles that are currently being published. After all, journals are not just random collections of papers. They reflect the views and interests of the current editors and their audience. Your article should not only fit within the journal's framework, it should also describe how it fits in the context of articles previously published in that journal relating to your topic (Belcher 2009). For example, *English Teaching Forum* is a journal that publishes articles on

> principles and methods of language teaching; activities and techniques for teaching the language skills and subskills; classroom-based studies and action research; needs analysis, curriculum and syllabus design; assessment, testing, and evaluation; teacher training and development; materials writing; and English for Specific Purposes. (americanenglish. state.gov/submission-guidelines)

English Teaching Forum emphasizes practicality and seeks articles that can be clearly implemented in the English language classroom. In addition, articles submitted to *English Teaching Forum* should be applicable to readers worldwide, rather than presenting an issue that is country specific. In order to decide whether to submit to *English Teaching Forum*, you would need to consider how well your article fits the focus of the journal. Even the most eloquent and creative manuscript will not be accepted if it is outside the parameters of the journal you have chosen.

STEP 5: STATE YOUR ARGUMENT EARLY AND CLEARLY.

Create a clear, coherent argument and include it early in the paper. In a quick survey of *TESOL Quarterly*, for example, we found that authors typically present their argument in the first page or two; see, for example, Lam (2015) and Nelson and Appleby (2015). *TESOL Quarterly* authors announce, in the beginning, where they will take the reader with the article. *TESOL Quarterly* is not unique in this regard (see also *ELT Journal* and *TESOL Journal*). All publications have limited space, and most readers have limited time. Authors must be quick to make their point in order to fit into these constraints.

STEP 6: ACKNOWLEDGE AND ENTER THE CONVERSATION.

Writing and publishing journal articles resembles an ongoing conversation about significant issues in a field. Before joining the conversation, authors must acknowledge those teachers and academics who are already participating in the conversation. When we fail to acknowledge the scholarly conversation regarding relevant literature, the editor may conclude we have not been reading the latest scholarship, a faux pas in research and writing (Belcher 2009; Worsham 2008). Consider this analogy:

> If you imagine your article as entering into a conversation, it makes perfect sense

that you wouldn't just walk into a room and start talking about your own ideas. If there were people already in the room, you would listen to them for a while first. If you decided to speak, you would do so because you agreed or disagreed with something someone else said. If the conversation went on for a long time without addressing some topic dear to you, you might say, 'I notice that we haven't talked about such and such yet.' In all cases, you would acknowledge the conversation and then make your point. (Belcher 2009, 150–151)

We enter the conversation by informing our readers where the article is situated in previous literature on the topic. In practical terms, include three "language moves" in your Introduction, as presented by Swales (1990). (See also Miller and Parker 2012.) These moves can take the form of a few sentences or a few paragraphs.

Move 1: Establish a research territory.
- What is the broad topic? What is the problem or the issue?

- Review and acknowledge the work of others (mention what has been done before in relation to your topic).

- An example of a statement that establishes the research territory is, "Much has been written about _____" (Miller and Parker 2012, 21).

- You might also say, "Several studies have explored the issue of _____" (and cite those studies).

Move 2: Establish a niche.
Here is where we indicate a gap in the relevant literature.

- Sample statements: "No studies have looked at _____." "Over the past ten years, several studies have focused on _____ (and cite those studies) while neglecting the issue of _____."

- Instead of indicating a gap in the literature, you may want to raise a need: "Further investigations are needed to confirm _____" (Swales 1990).

- Alternatively, you might address a contradiction in the relevant literature, question a policy or practice, or extend previous research (Belcher 2009).

Move 3: Occupy the niche.
Explain how you will fill that gap or need and state the purpose of your research. Tell the reader exactly what you are going to do, as in the following examples:

- "The article begins with _____. It continues with _____. And it concludes with _____" (Chinnery 2014, 2).

- "Our intent in writing this article is to _____" (Salas et al. 2013, 13).

Additional information to include in the Introduction is the "what," "where," "why," "who," and "how" regarding your academic research or classroom action research. Describe the context, place, and/or population that was studied. The Introduction should start with general information on the broad topic and then become more specific as it relates to your case study. Start with an attention-grabbing first sentence or a thought-provoking question. Consider these strong starter sentences in articles recently published in *TESOL Quarterly*:

- "Over the past decade, military spending worldwide has more than doubled, to an astounding US$1.75 trillion in 2012 … " (Nelson and Appleby 2015, 309).

- "Over the last two decades the redirection of migration flows has caused Latino population growth of unprecedented proportions to new immigrant communities in the United States" (Colomer 2015, 393).

See also articles in *ELT Journal* and *TESOL Journal* for examples of strong starter statements.

STEP 7: ARTICULATE ORIGINALITY.

"Tell me something I don't know so I can understand better what I do know" (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 1995, 18). It is a fundamental rule that articles submitted to academic journals must contribute something new to the field. But all publications seek new ideas and new ways of thinking about old ideas. Tell the reader what is unique about your perspective, principles, methods, or techniques. What is different about your work? What will readers find out that they did not already know, or how will it make them think differently about something with which they are familiar? How does the article contribute in important ways to our knowledge? If you are unsure of the uniqueness of your ideas, ask colleagues or advisors what they think is new about your article.

STEP 8: MAKE YOUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CLEAR.

The theoretical framework is the theory or theories you apply to discuss your topic. A theoretical framework is important in most peer-reviewed journals, but theory is not necessarily *required* for all publications. Be sure you know whether this is an essential factor for the journal to which you are submitting your work. If the journal requires or emphasizes the importance of the theoretical analysis, you will need to articulate which approach you are using and why. For example, Samuels (2013) presents humanistic theory in his article; Zhang and Gao (2014) discuss input hypothesis in second language acquisition as their framework; and MacDuff, AlHayki, and Linse (2010) apply scaffolding theory and constructivist theory of proximal development to promote learner confidence in writing. Other major theories in English language teaching include linguistic theory; critical literacy theory; cultural studies; critical pedagogy; developmental psychology; cognitive learning theory; theory of multiple intelligences; and Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains. Ask your advisor or a colleague for advice on your theoretical approach. In your article, briefly explain how the theory you chose relates to your topic (Goodson 2013).

STEP 9: DO SOME HOMEWORK ON THE PUBLICATION TO WHICH YOU ARE SUBMITTING YOUR ARTICLE.

Before sending your article to an editor, consult the journal's website and review its submission guidelines. Does the journal have length limits for articles? Does the journal use a particular style manual? What is the average time between submission and the editor's decision? Will you receive the editor's decision in three, six, or twelve months? The answers to these questions may affect your decision about which journal to choose. An important caveat to remember is that you can submit to only one journal at a time. No academic journal will consider a manuscript that is submitted to another journal at the same time. When you submit your article, tell the editor that you are not submitting your article to another journal.

STEP 10: HAVE PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE!

Submitting an article for publication and receiving a rejection go hand in hand. The authors of this article have received many rejections, although we have also had many acceptances and publications. The most famous writers in the world received *harsh* rejections—such authors include Judy Blume, William Golding, Jack Kerouac, James Joyce, J. D. Salinger, D. H. Lawrence, and J. K. Rowling (Vincent 2012). If your article is rejected, you will typically receive about four sets of comments: one from the editor and three or four from reviewers. The purpose of these comments and suggestions is to explain why your article is not a fit for that journal and to improve your article. Based on the comments, revise your manuscript and send it to another journal that you think is a good fit for your article. Keep submitting the article to different journals, one at a time, until you find a journal that will accept it.

Alternatively, you may receive a "revise and resubmit" decision with specific recommendations on ways you must revise. It may seem overwhelming to be instructed to revise your article for the one hundredth time, but a revise and resubmit decision is a great response. The paper has not been rejected, and in fact it is nearly unheard of for a journal to publish an article "as is." A revise and resubmit decision gives you one more chance to revise and improve your article. Try to follow as many of the suggestions as you can and then submit to the editor when it is ready. In your cover letter accompanying your revised article, outline the changes you have made and the changes you chose not to make with an explanation of your rationale for rejecting any suggestions. When you change the article based on the reviewers' suggestions and resubmit, there is a good chance that it will get published.

CONCLUSION

For teachers and administrators in the field of English language teaching, getting published is not easy, but it is possible. One starting place can be your local TESOL association newsletter. Develop your ideas with your colleagues and attend workshops to gain knowledge. As you read more and become more familiar with TESOL journals, consider submitting your piece to an academic journal. The first author of this article, for example, was first published in a local women's magazine in 1998. She wrote about her experience as a tourist in Nepal. Ten years later, she had published a book and journal articles.

Getting published in a TESOL association newsletter or in an academic journal is personally and professionally rewarding. The knowledge that you gain about your topic through the writing and publishing process can be shared and developed with aspiring writers in staff meetings, teaching/learning workshops, and even TESOL conferences. This collaborative and supportive approach is essential in the sometimes intimidating world of publishing. Now, let's get back to our writing!

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