

Transcript: What to think about before you start to write a journal article

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When planning to write an article it's very important to bear in mind the four A's: Aims, Audience, Awareness of existing work, and to be able to Articulate your ideas clearly.

Publication of articles is crucial in terms of self-advancement for career purposes as well as self-satisfaction, for the reputation, status and perhaps funding of researchers own institutions, and globally it's very important because publication of research results is how knowledge and understanding gets disseminated. It can then be used, tested, and turned into policy by people well beyond the normal communications range of the individual.

Having decided what it is you wish to communicate, the next crucial decision is to whom: fellow professionals, policy makers, general audiences of non-professionals, each of which has to be addressed in very different ways. That in turn translates into the question where do I publish the article? There are numerous journals which are specialised in scope, either within a particular discipline or a particular community of practice, or perhaps focusing on a particular geographical region.

It is vital when writing an article that you don't simply cover your own work, but that you contextualise it in relation to the existing literatures, political debates or current policy issues, which you can use to anchor or frame your arguments. Referencing the work of others when you cite them, or quote them directly is very important. Plagiarising or self-plagiarising can lead to damage to your own reputation, or indeed the reputation of the journal if they have to withdraw something.

It is important to think clearly about the structure. You have to have logical development across the sections of your article, and think carefully about the relative length of each of them. Specific journals have clear requirements and obviously you need to follow those if provided. A good tip would be to leave both the introduction and the conclusion to the end. By the time you have written the main part of the paper you will know what it is you are introducing and what the key messages are that you are wrapping together in the conclusion.

You can find help from a variety of sources while writing your paper. One would be through peer review among your fellow students or early career researchers or perhaps get a second opinion from a more senior colleague or mentor. Conferences or workshops would be another, online resources or editorial forums (which some journals provide) another.

The sense of pride that one does get upon receiving your article as published is incredible, which makes all the struggles to get over that finished line well worth it.

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