

15 minutes to develop your research career

Podcast Transcript

Episode 5: Getting published for the first time

Claire Doffegnies: And that concludes my research which will change the world, full stop. But what next, how do I get my research published? This is the [Taylor & Francis Vitae](#) podcast on developing your research career. I'm Claire Doffegnies from Taylor & Francis.

Marie Thouaille: And I'm Marie Thouaille from Vitae.

Claire Doffegnies: And in this episode, we're going to explore getting published for the first time.

Claire Doffegnies: How should you approach writing your first research article?

David Bogle: It's easier to write the work first. It tends to make you reflect then on what's missing and absolutely, definitely the abstract last.

Claire Doffegnies: Once you press submit, what happens next?

Catherine Harper: The next thing that will happen is, an email pings up for me to indicate that there's a new submission in the system.

Claire Doffegnies: Why is impact of such a heavily discussed topic today? And what does that actually mean?

Diana Layton: In terms of academic impact, it's driven by attention. The attention that outputs gain.

Claire Doffegnies: And what practical steps can you take to maximize the impact of your research?

Claire Doffegnies: We're at a Vitae conference in London, and we're going to start by asking people, here their thoughts on getting published for the first time.

Speaker 6: I was published for the first time, gosh, about, I don't know 10 years ago. And I think it just, I don't know, it made me feel famous. It made me feel famous. It made me feel important. It made me feel like I was doing a good job and good work. It made me feel like I was getting somewhere. So it was just really important. It was kind of like a bit of a milestone.

Marie Thouaille: What do you think is the best thing about getting your work published for the first time?

Speaker 7: I think it's recognition of the research that you've done. It's a great thing to go on your CV. So when you're looking to apply for your first academic role, then the interview panel is going to be looking at what you've published, where you've published it. Any citations that you've heard from that article or book.

Speaker 8: Being published for the first time was good because it gave me a form of recognition that wouldn't necessarily have had in previous sort of careers. It obviously came with a bit of a buzz seeing your name in print, but also there was a degree of rigor that it added to the work you were doing that was different from say a conference paper or an article that you'd written for other publications.

David Bogle: So I'm David Bogle, I'm pro-vice provost of the doctoral school at [UCL](#). I oversee the doctoral education at UCL. We have about five and a half, 6,000 doctoral candidates. I think back to my own time and what was, what was special about it was seeing it, seeing that something you said was being put in the public domain and being read by other people, but then seeing it actually seeing that first publication was really very special. And then seeing it cited was even, possibly even more special in the end.

Marie Thouaille: What do you think should be in every researcher's toolkit when they're publishing for the first time?

David Bogle: Having reviewed other people's first. That is something that I think everybody should do. That first paper I wrote took a little while it came back a couple of times because I wasn't clear enough in what I was saying. I was trying to document work rather than report an idea and a result. I always get my own students now, I give them things to referee and because it makes them focus on what the point of the paper is. A paper is about saying an idea, it only needs to be one. It needs to be a sizeable idea with the evidence and background and all that sort of stuff. The thesis needs to have the documentation of all the work, but the paper needs to be, tends to be, need to be sharper. So I think refereeing before you ever write your papers is probably most important. Then the art of writing a good abstract. So that's an attractive abstract that says what the idea is, why it's important and what the main conclusion is because most people read the abstract and if it's not enticing, they won't go any further.

Marie Thouaille: So what advice would you give to a researcher who's finally putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard for the first time as they write their first article?

David Bogle: It's easier to write the work first. So you document what you've done and getting that clear. So in other words it needs to be a staged approach. You document what you've done, then you, it tends to make you reflect then on what's missing. And "so what?" Somebody probably needs to prompt you the "so what?" argument about conclusions and then you can write the sort of introduction thing to cast it. Absolutely, definitely the abstract last.

Claire Doffegnies: Getting your research published for the first time. It's a recently a really proud moment for any researcher. Now we're going to talk to Professor Claire Holness, Dean for postgraduate research studies about the steps for going about this.

Marie Thouaille: How can publishing help researchers professional development?

Prof Claire Holness: Oh, I think publishing is really key in helping researchers professional development, whether they're going to be academics or not. So obviously for those people who are

going to go on to be academics or who are going to go onto to a postdoctoral position in a university, the fact that they have that visibility that they have published or that they are in the process of publishing is really important in terms of that professional visibility within their own subject. But even for those people who are not going to go on to work in academia, the skills that you get from publishing, the way in which you present your work to a broader audience than just that very specialist, supervisor and examiner audience is really important. The fact that you have to be able to write clearly to reference absolutely accurately and the way in which you present yourself as an authority, even if it's at a fairly early stage, but as an authority in your area. I think that that provides lots of skills.

Marie Thouaille: It sounds like it's an incredibly valuable process, both if you're trying to develop an academic career and both, if you're thinking about your transferable skills. But it's also something that's quite intimidating. So suppose I'm a first-time author. Are there any places that you would recommend researchers get support?

Prof Claire Holness: I would always suggest start in your own institutions, start with your supervisor. I think it's quite important that if supervisors are not very active in helping people to write better from the very beginning that actually researchers ask for that, that they say, please, please critique my writing as well as the content. And I think the other thing is I would always say, get your work read by somebody who is not your supervisor, who is not familiar with your research, even if they're not able to critique the content. I always ask people to read things that I've written and say, "does this make sense? Is this a decent sounding sentence?" And I think it's really important to ask people that.

Marie Thouaille: Going through peer review and receiving feedback, whether that's good or bad feedback is a normal part of the publishing process that researchers all have to go through. Do you have any advice on responding to reviewer comments for example?

Prof Claire Holness: First of all, always take a deep breath and don't respond straight away. I think if the feedback is negative. So if a piece has been rejected, I think it's important to understand that that's normal, that that happens to people. It happens to very senior people as well as to people at the beginning of their career. It's not, it doesn't mean that you are a failure or that your work is not interesting. It may be that you need to try a different place, a different journal, a different set of editors. It may be that you need to rethink the way that you're presenting your research. It may be that you need to formulate it in a different way in terms of the research question. So using the same research, but actually asking the questions in a different way in order to bring out the originality or to make it clearer, what it is that you're trying to say. You know, even a rejection is not a failure, but it's normal. It happens to all of us.

Marie Thouaille: So finally, what would your top tip for researchers looking to get published for the first time be?

Prof Claire Holness: I think if you want your work to be accepted, present it nicely. I know that sounds, it sounds like kind of window dressing, but it's not editors don't want to have to go through every single footnote moving your comments around. So look at the style guidelines, look at the

advice to authors and try to follow them. You'll get your editors on your side and they will be more happy to help you with the things where you might need help. If you're trying to present your work in the way that they want to see it.

Claire Doffegnies: So you've written your article and pressed submit but what actually happens on the other side as your paper goes through peer review? We're going to talk to Catherine Harper editor of textiles about this next stage in the publishing process.

Catherine Harper: So if you've taken that step and you've come through the electronic system and submitted your paper, the next thing that will happen is an email pings up for me to indicate that there's a new submission in the system. And in fact that happened just yesterday. So I'm just in the process of reading a new submission. And that's the first evaluation really, which is checking that the work itself is of reasonable standard, that there wouldn't be a sense that it isn't suitable for the journal. And in which case at that point, I would respond to the author and say, you know, thank you very much for your submission. This isn't quite suitable for our journal. Perhaps you should have a look at this one or that one, if I have some ideas about where, where I might redirect them. If the journal paper is perhaps not of a sufficiently developed standard, I would actually write back to the author at that point and either say, you know, have a really serious think about resubmission with these pointers or most usually I might say this isn't quite suitable for our journal at the moment.

After that first process has, has been kind of gone through the next part is to take the paper to peer review. Generally, what we look for is two different types of peer reviewers. We're looking for somebody who has subject specialism, so who has a real kind of knowledge base that's appropriate to the paper. And then also, and I think it's quite important. This distinction to have a generalist textile culture reviewer, is also important because of course we have a generalist audience.

There are a range of decisions that can happen. The range of decisions range from absolutely super published immediately without any alteration. That's fairly atypical because generally there's something to just adjust story. You know, even if it's very, very minor. The bottom level response of that spectrum is of course, no, this is not fit for publication in this journal. You know, this peer reviewer believes this paper is not, shouldn't be published. And then in between those two, two positions are, are minor amends. So those might be, you know, typographical, or the bibliographical, or some tiny adjustments around phraseology or checking on facts that just need to be verified or backed up with a reference. And we send both of those peer reviews anonymously back to the author, with the opportunity for the author then to decide whether he or she wants to go forward on revising the paper. And then we wait, so this is the next stage of the peer review process.

What we do is expect the author to take on board the response, to work through diligently on those. And the author then returns the finished version of the paper to one or other of the two editors. And we then make that final decision on publication. I think the best bit, and I can speak to this not only as an editor but as an author, the best bit is when you actually see it tangibly in front of you and that actually can mean online and downloadable as a PDF, as much as in the hard copy journal.

Claire Doffegnies: So you've written your research got it published, but what do people actually think of your paper and how are they responding to it? Here's Diana Layton from Liverpool [John Moores University](#) and we're going to talk to her about impact.

Marie Thouaille: So how important is it for researchers to get published in the context of the ref?

Diana Layton: Obviously for ref yes, it is highly important, but you know, researchers have a duty, a responsibility to be sharing the outcomes, the outputs of their research, per se, regardless of whether there's a ref or not.

Marie Thouaille: So impact is discussed a lot in academia at the moment, and there's a lot of discussion around citations, impact factors and alt metrics. So could you briefly explain what impact means to you in a broad sense?

Diana Layton: Yes. In terms of academic impact, it's driven by attention, the attention that outputs gain from the academic community and from the more wider public community and other organizations too. Researchers cannot ignore the indicators of the attention that their work receive.

Marie Thouaille: So what would be your advice in terms of maximizing the impact of publications? What can researchers do?

Diana Layton: Researchers can speak to staff in the library services department. They have a wealth of knowledge about bibliometrics as a starting point.

Marie Thouaille: So do you think it's important for researchers to be tracking the impact of their work as they publish for example?

Diana Layton: Oh, yes. Yes, definitely. And certainly it's all part of building a CV, being able to communicate and even within the context of an interview, it'll help show a level of awareness around being a good researcher and communicating the findings, as well as understanding some of the hot topics, bibliometrics responsible metrics and I think that will only stand a researcher in good stead in an interview situation.

Marie Thouaille: And finally, at what top tip would you give to researchers looking to maximize the impact of their publications?

Diana Layton: Write in a compelling way. So I think there's a lot in the writing and to think very carefully about how work is presented is my top tip.

Claire Doffegnies: Now let's summarize what we've learned today.

Marie, what tips do you have for writing your first journal article?

Marie Thouaille: Tip number one. Clarity is key, so make you work accessible by using clear language. Number two. Stick to the point. The strongest papers usually have a point to make and

they make that point powerfully, back it up with evidence and locate it within the fields. And finally, tip number three. Be original. You may be building on a concept already in existence, but you still need to have something new to say. Make sure you say convincingly and fully understand and reference what has gone before.

Claire Doffegnies: Thanks for listening to this podcast today. We'll see you here next time.