

Publish Without Perishing, Part 2: More Suggestions for Students and New Faculty

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In the previous article in this series (Taylor, McKay, Abramowitz, Asmundson, & Stewart, 2006) we examined the relative importance of scholarly publishing in relation to other academic endeavors, in terms of hiring and promotion. Promising approaches and pitfalls in the publishing process were discussed, along with suggested guidelines for maximizing one's success in publishing. In the present article we examine issues in selecting journals and issues concerning the relative importance of journal articles, book chapters, and books. Although students are often more concerned about whether their work is published, new faculty are more often concerned about whether *and* where their work is published. Accordingly, the present article is intended more for new faculty, although it should also be relevant to graduate students aspiring toward an academic career. As we mentioned in the first article in this series, there is no single recipe for success in academia. We offer here our perspectives and hope this stimulates discussion from other readers.

What Defines the Status of a Journal?

What makes a "good" journal? There are all kinds of considerations, some of which concern the status of the journal in comparison to other journals. The major standardized indices of journal performance were developed by the Institute for Science (ISI; Garfield, 1972, 1994); these indices appear on their Web of Science Web site (<http://isiwebofknowledge.com/>) and in the Social Science Citation Index. Despite some debate, the ISI citation indices are the leading objective measures of journal importance. These indices influence the decisions of committees responsible for hiring, promotion, and assigning faculty salary increments, and also shape the decisions of committees allocating research grants.

The ISI provides data, for many journals, on three main citation indices of journal performance. For a given journal, these are com-

puted and interpreted as follows (Amin & Mabe, 2000; Garfield, 1994):

- *Impact factor*: This is derived by computing the number of citations in the literature during a given year (e.g., 2003) for articles published in the journal in the past 2 years (e.g., 2001-2002), and then dividing this number by the total number of articles published by the journal during that 2-year period. The impact factor represents the average number of citations the average article perceives per annum in the 2 years after the publication year.

- *Immediacy index*: This is computed by the number of citations a journal receives in a given year divided by the number of articles the journal publishes that year. This index is a measure of how quickly articles in a given journal, once published, get cited in the literature.

- *Cited half-life*: This is the estimate, for a given year, of number of years required for the number of citations of articles in the journal to decline to 50% of its initial value. In other words, it is an estimate of how long articles in a journal continue to be cited after publication.

Of the three citation indices, the impact factor is the most widely used as an index of the prestige of a journal (Amin & Mabe, 2000; Garfield, 1994). The values of all three indices, for a sample of 30 psychology journals, appear in Table 1. These journals were selected because they publish articles on cognitive-behavioral topics and therefore are of relevance to readers of *the Behavior Therapist*. The journals listed in the table were selected in order to represent a range of impact factors, including low-, middle-, and high-ranking journals. For a given index (e.g., the impact factor), the journals in the table were ranked from highest to lowest. On a given index, the 10 journals with the highest ranking have their indices in boldface, and the 10 journals of lowest ranking have their indices underscored.

This was done to facilitate the comparison among indices. As suggested by the table, journals with high impact factors tended also to have high immediacy indices. Conversely, journals with low impact factors tended to have low immediacy indices. Citation half-life is only loosely related to these other two indices; although high impact journals tended to have high citation half-lives, some low-impact journals also had high half-lives. The table also shows that the journals that publish mainly review articles (e.g., *Psychological Bulletin*) tend to have higher citation indices than journals that publish mainly empirical studies. This reflects the finding that review articles tend to be more widely cited than empirical papers (Amin & Mabe, 2000; Garfield, 1994).

The table lists only psychology journals because journal citation indices vary across disciplines. Medical journals tend to have higher citation indices than psychological journals because the former have more authors per article, and therefore more self-citations per article (i.e., authors in a given article citing their own previous work). This inflates the impact indices (Amin & Mabe, 2000).

The value of citation indices such as those cited in Table 1 is that students and new faculty can use objective indices for assessing the status of the journals to which they choose to contribute their work, rather than relying on subjective impressions about the status of a given journal. Committees responsible for hiring, promotion, and grant reviews may similarly use such indices as part of their evaluation. Of course, such indices are not universally used or valued. This underscores the importance of local conditions, as described in our previous article.

Other Considerations in Selecting a Journal

Journal citation indices are only one set of factors for selecting a journal for your work. You also need to consider the goodness-of-fit

between your paper and the journal, guided in part by the information for contributors supplied by the journal. If your manuscript describes a groundbreaking piece of research, for example, it may be suitable for a high-ranking journal. On the other hand, if your manuscript describes research that is methodologically sound, but simply replicates other research studies, then the chances are that your study will not be accepted by a leading journal; a lower-ranking journal is more likely to be the home for such a study.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether to submit to a higher- or lower-ranking journal. Submission to a high-ranking journal can lead to rejection, therefore delaying your article's eventual publication in a respectable but lower-ranking journal. But then again, you've got nothing to lose (but time itself) by aiming reasonably high. If in doubt about whether to submit your work to a high or lesser ranking journal, then we suggest two things. First, set your paper aside for a couple of weeks, and then reread your paper and a couple of comparable articles from the journal in which you are planning to submit. Ask yourself how your paper compares to the published articles. Second, ask some colleagues or mentors for their frank advice, preferably colleagues who have published in the journal that you are considering. If in doubt, do what they do in archery competitions: aim high, but don't shoot for the moon.

There are several other considerations in selecting an appropriate journal. You should take into account the sorts of articles published by a given journal, guided in part by the information for contributors supplied by the journal. You can also take a look at recent issues of the journals that you are considering. There are considerable—and important—variations among journals with similar citation indices. Some journals (depending on the editors) prefer creative papers that contain novel ideas. Others, with similar citation indices, prefer methodologically rigorous papers containing a minimum of speculation. Some journals are known for being very efficient (i.e., being quick to review and publish articles), whereas others (with similar citation indices) are known for being slow to review and slow to publish. If you are planning to publish an article in a mid-level journal, such as the journals in the middle of the middle ranges in Table 1, then we recommend that you talk to your colleagues to decide which journal is best for you. You may wish, for example, to submit to the efficient journals and avoid the tardy ones. After all, if you are applying for a job or for a promotion, a paper that is “in press” carries more weight than one that is simply “in submission.”

When Should You Aim Low?

Some researchers refuse to read or cite articles from low-impact journals, because they assume that the papers must be inferior. Despite this, some psychologists intentionally publish their work in low-ranking journals. This seems to be for one of two main reasons: either the researcher was unable to get his or her work published in a better journal, or the researcher is at a career point where it doesn't matter where he or she publishes. To illustrate the latter, Hans Eysenck and Paul Meehl, who are among the most widely cited psychologists in the world, have published many articles in *Psychological Reports* (e.g., Eysenck, 1982, 1995; Eysenck & Barrett, 1993; Meehl, 1990, 1993, 2002), which is among the lowest journals in Table 1 in terms of impact factor and immediacy index. Leading investigators may publish in such journals because such periodicals are generally easier than other journals to get into, and because leading researchers are not so dependent on the status of the journal in which they publish. Investigators such as Eysenck and Meehl have established themselves as important scholars, and so their work will be sought out and read regardless of where it is published. The rest of us, and especially new faculty, do not have the privilege of such name recognition. So, if you're a student or new faculty, avoid publishing in a low-ranking journal if you can help it. But also remember that at the early stages of one's career, a publication in a low-ranking journal is better than no publication at all.

Journals of Uncertain Standing

What about journals for which no impact statistics are currently available? There are a number of journals that are not listed on the ISI Web of Science (e.g., *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, and the *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*). Their omission reflects the limited coverage of the ISI database rather than being a statement about the quality of the journals. In fact, many fine articles have been published in these journals. Nevertheless, we recommend that students and new faculty not limit their publications to such journals; it is important to have at least some publications in other journals that have high scores on the indices listed in Table 1.

The same advice applies to electronic journals published only on the Internet (as contrasted with most regular psychology journals, which are published in hard copy and also available in electronic versions). The status and survival of journals only available on the Internet currently remains uncertain. Two e-journals—*Prevention and Treatment* (published by the American Psychological Association) and the *Journal of Behavior*

Analysis and Therapy—enjoyed only limited success, and both are now defunct. The status of e-journals may improve in the future as libraries and academics move toward electronic rather than paper formats of journals in general.

Book Chapters and Books

How important is it to your academic career to publish book chapters? The answer depends on a range of factors, including the local conditions of your academic institution and the stage of your career. Some departments place little value on book chapters when evaluating a person's publication record for the purposes of hiring, promotion, or salary bonuses. In those departments book chapters are often regarded as the icing on the cake. They are nice to have on one's CV because they may demonstrate that other scholars have thought sufficiently highly of you and your work to invite you to submit a chapter. But book chapters are widely regarded as being less important to one's CV than journal articles. This is because chapters often do not have to meet the standards for scholarship required for journal articles (e.g., chapters may require little or no peer review prior to acceptance for publication). Also, book chapters, unlike empirical journal articles, may make less of a contribution of new knowledge to the field. So, if you had to decide between spending your time on a journal article or a book chapter, we would vote for the former.

The value placed on scholarly books also varies across departments and across the stages of one's career. Some departments place little emphasis on books—especially edited books—in comparison to journal articles. In some departments, authored books are seen as something important for senior faculty, such as for promotion to full professor. Authored books can be an indication of the maturity of one's research program and expertise. That is, you've done enough work in the area to provide an expert discussion of the big picture. Books enable one to synthesize the research literature, including one's own research, to provide, for example, a perspective on the current status and future directions of a given field. Although we know some highly successful senior colleagues who published books when they were junior faculty, these people are exceptions. We would recommend to most junior faculty that you devote your energy to publishing articles rather than undertaking the time-consuming process of writing a book. You might decide to edit a book, although edited books carry much less weight as a scholarly product than authored books. If you are embarking on a career at a research-oriented university, edited books are no substitute for having a string of empirical journal articles.

Conclusion

As implied by the title of our two articles—publish without perishing—an important goal of publishing, at least in our view, is to have a stimulating, productive academic career without burning out in the process. Some of the most productive psychologists we have encountered in academia are the ones who get the most enjoyment out of what they do. There is a widely circulated anecdote about Hans Eysenck, who is still probably one of the most widely cited psychologists in the world. Despite his voluminous publication record, including papers in high-ranking journals, Eysenck would be delighted each time one of his articles had been accepted for publication, even if the paper had been accepted in a low-tier journal such as *Psychological Reports*. Eysenck was driven by curiosity and was an expert at the game of publishing, and evidently enjoyed celebrating his many wins.

If you want to play the game of publishing, you should ask yourself, “Why am I doing what I do?” There are many different reasons for doing research and publishing scholarly work. A sense of curiosity, meaningfulness, and enjoyment at tackling the various intellectual “little problems” that one encounters (to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes) can lead to a stimulating, fulfilling publishing career. Indeed, social psychological research shows that a sense of being optimally challenged and absorbed in one’s work (also known as a state of

“flow”) is an important element of occupational satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Painters who experience this state of flow describe working with complete absorption on a given painting, only to stack it with their other works against the wall when it is done, and commence a new absorbing project (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Similarly, psychologists experiencing flow are absorbed in conducting their research and writing up their work. Once a paper has been accepted for publication it goes in the drawer along with the others, and a new research project is pursued. Although academia emphasizes *products* (publications), it’s the *process* that really counts—the process of doing personally meaningful work—if you want to have a fulfilling, productive career in publishing scholarly works. That probably explains why the group of us has devoted our time to writing these two articles, instead of doing other things.

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