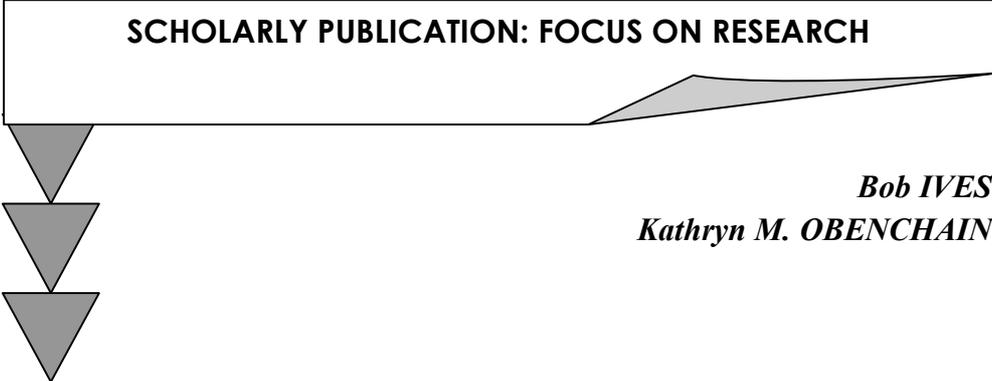


Academic Research
and Scholarly Publication



SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION: FOCUS ON RESEARCH

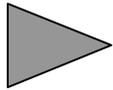
Bob IVES

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Abstract

Expectations for Romanian scholars to publish their work in Western journals have risen in recent years. Meeting these expectations can be a challenging process because of language differences and differences in publication traditions. In this article, we describe the typical publication process for Western journals, including the peer review process and how articles and journals are evaluated for quality. We also indicate some of the challenges to being successful with this process, and offer a few suggestions that may help all scholars, including Romanian scholars, publish their work in these journals.

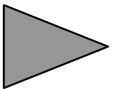
Keywords: empirical research, publication, writing, peer-review, ISI journals



Scholarly Publication: Focus on Research

Since 1989, the Romanian government has debated, and implemented a variety of reforms in all areas of Romanian life. In Romanian higher education, the Bologna Accord and membership in the European Union have driven these reforms, while also putting more pressure on educators to build resources and systems to implement them. One of these pressures on higher education is the expectation for university faculty to publish their work in internationally respected journals from the United States (U.S.) and Western Europe. This article describes some of the expectations and processes that are typical of publications in these journals.

Before we address this topic directly, we would like to disclose two biases. One bias is that we both work in the field of education. We conduct research in education, and we also train future teachers. Because we are educators, our discussion of scholarly publication will address experiences, expectations, and practices in education and the social sciences, such as anthropology, psychology, economics, and sociology. These expectations may be different for other fields such as mathematics and the physical sciences. Our second bias is that the large majority of our publication experience is with journals published in the U.S. It is true that the large majority of scholarly journals in most fields are published in the U.S., but it may also be true that journals based outside the U.S. have some different policies.

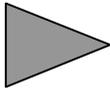


Types of publications

Scholarly journals publish a variety of different kinds of articles. Some articles are review articles. Typically, review articles attempt to synthesize the evidence from a variety of credible sources with a focus on one specific topic. The goal of a review article is to identify patterns in the findings of these sources in order to demonstrate the best current findings on the topic. Another type of article is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice. These articles may be referred to as practitioner pieces. Practitioner pieces do not review the evidence as thoroughly as a review article. Instead, a practitioner piece is designed to provide guidance to people who work in the field. For example, a practitioner piece in education is usually directed at teachers and gives them an explanation and guidance for implementing a particular teaching practice in their classrooms. A third type of

article that often appears in scholarly journals is a theory piece. Theory pieces will review the existing theory related to a topic, and offer a new variation or extension on that theory. Hopefully, these articles will interest researchers who may be interested in testing the theory.

While it is certainly true that scholarly journals regularly publish review articles, practitioner pieces, and theory pieces, it is also true that published research articles earn more respect than these other types of articles. By research article, we are referring to articles that report the methods and findings of an empirical research study. Authors of these articles have collected data through observation, measurement, and experience. They have analyzed these data, and they have reported on their findings. The publication of research articles carries more weight in the U.S. than publication of other types of articles when professors are being reviewed for promotion and tenure as well as for annual reviews. In addition, graduate students are expected to emphasize research articles in their citations and references for many course assignments and other scholarly work.



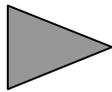
Quality of publications

Some universities are more prestigious than others. More prestigious universities will have higher standards for judging the quality of the articles that their professors are publishing. Whether or not articles go through a peer-review process prior to publication is an absolute minimum criterion for judging the quality of articles that are published. Articles that are not peer-reviewed can be included as additional publications on an annual review, but will not be given a high level of credit. We will describe the peer-review process in a separate section below.

As noted above, one more specific criterion for judging the quality of published articles is the fact that research articles are more highly valued than other types of articles. A top-ranked university might not promote a professor who has a large number of publications but few research articles, while less competitive universities would be less critical of the type of publication. In addition, these same top-ranked universities may also consider the quality of the journals where articles are being published. Journal quality is most often measured based on two criteria – competitiveness, and influence.

Competitiveness is indicated by how difficult it is to have an article published in a particular journal. Competitiveness is usually measured according to the journal's acceptance rate. A journal's acceptance rate is the percent of submissions that are actually published in the journal. Some highly competitive journals may accept less than 10% of the articles that are submitted. A professor who can successfully publish an article in one of these highly competitive journals would earn greater credit for this article than if the same article is published in a less competitive journal. Less competitive journals may have acceptance rates of over 50%.

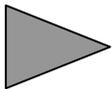
Influence is another characteristic of journals that can be important in judging the quality of the publication. It is a discouraging fact of scholarly life that the majority of articles that are published are never cited by another author in a later publication. However, a small number of articles may be cited by many subsequent authors because the first article is seen as important. Similarly, some journals are seen as more important than others. As a result, articles from these journals are cited more often than articles that appear in less respected journals. The influence of a journal is measured in terms of how often the articles in that journal are cited by in later articles. There are several ways to estimate this influence. For example, influence might be reported as the average number of times per article that all articles from this journal have been cited in the last two years. Another approach is to only look at articles that are two years old and report the average number of times that those articles have been cited during the intervening two years. Regardless of the specific formula, the goal is to estimate how important the journal is to other scholars in that field.



Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Journals

Several universities in Romania have recently begun to encourage their professors to publish in ISI journals. There are over 8,500 ISI journals that span 250 different fields. They include over 1.3 million articles each year, and those articles are cited more than 30 million times each year. All ISI journals must meet the minimum requirement that they are peer-reviewed journals. More about that later. We would like to note here that U.S. universities do not generally emphasize ISI membership when judging the quality of journals. Rather they look at whether the journal is peer-reviewed, and then look at the competitiveness and influence of the journal.

Journals may apply to join the list of ISI journals. These applications are reviewed, and decisions are made, based on a balance of many criteria. Not all peer-reviewed journals are accepted to the list. For example, ISI journals must have a history of publishing on a regular schedule. This means that new journals and journals that have had publication delays will not be accepted. ISI journals must meet international editing standards. These standards include requiring that all articles have informative titles, descriptive abstracts, complete bibliographic information, and author contact information. The ISI journal review will look at how often the authors in the journal are cited in other publications, and how often the articles in the journal are cited in other publications. Articles in ISI journals usually have full text in English, and are required to at least have bibliographic information in English. ISI will consider whether the journal's authors, editors and reviewers are internationally diverse, and whether the journal will contribute new content to the ISI journal list. Journals do not necessarily have to meet all of these criteria to be accepted to the ISI journal list, but these are the kinds of criteria that are considered. They are a mixture of professional practices (e.g. editing policies and timely publication) and judgments of quality (e.g. peer-review and frequency of citation).



The peer-review process

Peer-review refers to the anonymous review of a journal submission by other experts in the field. This is also sometimes referred to as blind review, because the authors of the article do not know who the reviewers are, and the reviewers do not know who the authors are. Once you have written an article and formatted according to the submission requirements of the journal, you will send this article to the editor of the journal. Most journals now accept electronic submissions, such as Microsoft Word documents, but some still require paper copies. The process is not exactly the same for every journal, but the description here is typical.

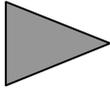
The editor will remove author names from the paper and send the paper to 2-4 other experts in the same field. These experts will review the article and make recommendations to the editor. The editor will consider the recommendations from the reviewers in making a decision about your article submission. This process may take 2-4 months. At the end of that time you will receive the editor's decision. Hopefully you will also receive some detailed and helpful feedback from the reviewers.

Broadly speaking the editor can make one of three decisions. The editor can reject the article. Articles can certainly be rejected for poor quality, but they may be rejected for other reasons. For example, an article may be rejected because the editor feels it is not appropriate for this particular journal. In this case, the reviewers or editor may suggest a different journal for submitting your article.

The second decision the editor can make is to ask you to make revisions to the article and resubmit it to the same journal. This does not guarantee that your article will be accepted if you make those revisions. In some cases the editor will also specify a due date for the revisions. However, it does indicate that the journal is interested in your article. If you receive a revise and resubmit decision you can decide to make all of the suggested revisions, or send back an explanation for why you feel that some of the suggestions should not be made. Remember that this is a “peer review” process. That means that your judgment may be just as valid as the reviewers’ or editor’s judgment when you disagree. At the same time, the reviewers and editor have the power to decide whether your article is published in their journal or not. If you return the revisions in a timely manner, the editor will send your revised article to the same reviewers who have already seen your article. Again you’ll have to wait 2-4 months for feedback from the editor. You could also decide to consider the feedback you get from reviewers and the editor, but submit the revised article to a different journal. Of course, this will start the process over with a new editor and new reviewers.

The third decision the editor can make is extremely rare. This is the decision to accept the article. The editor will likely ask for some minor revisions, but has already agreed to publish the article if you make those revisions. Some professors may go through their entire careers without having an article accepted on the first submission. Because this decision is very rare, professors generally hope for a revise and resubmit decision with the goal of responding to those recommendations to get the article accepted later.

Because the publication cycle is long (many months, sometimes years), professors typically work on multiple articles at the same time. Some will be in the early draft stage, some will be submitted, and some will be in revision. In addition, research articles often take even longer to complete. The study has to be designed, permission to conduct the study must be granted if it involves research on people or animals, data have to be collected, and the data have to be analyzed. These steps mean the time from designing a study until it gets published can easily be a few years.



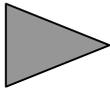
Suggestions

We would like to make three suggestions that might help Romanian scholars to successfully publish in ISI journals. The first of these suggestions relates to the English language requirement. We cannot imagine trying to write scholarly articles in a foreign language, and feel fortunate that we are not faced with this challenge. If you have some doubts about your fluency in scholarly English writing, we would suggest that you find a collaborator or co-author who has some experience with this. Even if this person only helps with revising the writing at the end of the project, it would be appropriate to add this person as an author on your paper. Generally, authors are listed in order based on the significance of their contribution to the paper. Professors of higher rank are not listed first unless they also made the greatest contribution to the project. Collaborators who shared the work equally may decide to add an author's note to the article to explain this. Alternatively, they may decide to alternate the order of their names on different papers. It is always wise to decide on responsibilities and the order of authorship at the beginning of a project. This agreement can always be renegotiated later if responsibilities change or the number of authors changes.

Our second suggestion is that you decide which journal you would like to have publish your work before you start writing. Read through a few issues of the journal to get some feeling for the writing style and the types of articles in the journal. Review the author guidelines for the journal to see what they expect for formatting, and other submission procedures. The author guidelines will often also describe the kinds of articles they are looking for.

The third suggestion is specific to research articles. It is important to stay current in the field of research methods and research reporting. Research methods and reporting expectations continue to become more rigorous with every passing year. If your methods and reporting are not current, your chances of getting published are reduced. For example, journals that publish quantitative research are increasingly requiring that authors report effect size measures with all significance testing. If an author fails to report any effect sizes when submitting to these journals, the article will be returned without being reviewed. As another quantitative example, the most common critique that reviewers report for quantitative articles is a failure to provide evidence of the reliability and validity of the measures being used or the results being reported. Qualitative research has

more recently been widely accepted in educational research, although it has a much longer history in other fields such as anthropology. Qualitative research designs continue to evolve, and the formats for reporting results have sometimes been quite creative. At the same time, it is still true that qualitative studies that follow more traditional designs, and are written in more traditional formats, are more likely to get published. It may be helpful to work with a collaborator who has had already some success with publishing research articles. If you decide to do this, you should include the collaborator as early as possible in the process. Many articles are rejected because of concerns about the research methods. Obviously these concerns cannot be corrected after the study is already completed. An experienced collaborator can make recommendations about the design of your study that could improve your chances of getting published.



Conclusion

Producing scholarly articles for publication can take a lot work and a lot of time. Producing scholarly articles for publication can also be a rewarding experience once you have some success. Your chances of success are higher if you plan in advance, include others in your work, stay informed about current expectations, and persevere. Good luck.

The authors

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