How to choose the right journal for your high impact article

By Dr Madeleine Hatfield (e-mail), founding director of Yellowback, UK

Publishing research outputs in high-quality journals is the gold standard of research dissemination for academics at all stages of their careers, from early-career researchers to established professors. Despite this, authors rarely receive training in how to get their research published in journals. Choosing the right journal is the first step in the process, which should begin even before the writing.

Every journal has its focus and format. Writing your article specifically for a journal will improve the likelihood of it being sent out for peer review and hopefully being published at the end of the process. Editors often screen submitted articles for fit with the journal before even sending them out for review to avoid wasting reviewers' time by asking them to review out-of-scope submissions. Although many journals make these decisions quickly, you will also be wasting your time if you submit to the wrong journal and wait for the journal

editors to tell you this.

Funding and assessment

There may be restrictions on where you can publish, so it is important to understand any funding or institutional requirements from the start. Your funding body might require that you publish your article open access and green open access (archiving your article in a repository) is not always enough, especially if there are embargo times between publication and when you can deposit your article in a repository. If you have funding for gold open-access publishing (when an article is made openly available directly on the journal website), you need to make sure that the journal you choose is eligible for that funding. For example, because the journal has a relationship with your funder and/or meets the funder's requirements around cost, embargo times and open access licencing types.

National or institutional assessment criteria are relevant too. Some countries have lists of journals approved for assessment levels in different subject areas; while in other cases institutions may expect researchers to publish in journals considered high quality based on Web of Science's Journal Impact Factor or Scopus's citation rankings, which are used internationally. Journals are increasingly making their metrics easily available online so you can check their citation scores as well as information about their acceptance rates and turnaround times. If you are not sure if a journal meets any funding or assessment criteria you need to meet, you can ask a librarian at your university or someone in your department for advice.

Scope and readers

Not all authors or articles can be published in the journals ranked at the top of international or national scales. It is also important to find the right journal for the kind of article you want to write – and who you want to read it. Targeting the right journal in terms of topic can mean a more successful and positive publishing experience because your article is more likely to be accepted for publication. You are also more likely to receive constructive feedback that helps you to develop your manuscript for publication. Even if the outcome is negative, engaged editor and reviewer comments may help you publish the article in another journal once you have made revisions based on their feedback.

Publishing in the right journal also means your article is more likely to be read by

the readers you want to reach, increasing its impact. You can support this by disseminating your published article through your networks and social media. Open access publishing can help with this too because it makes the article open to all readers, rather than just subscribers. All of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) journals have open access options, like many high quality journals.

Researching journals

Once you have narrowed down a list of potential journals according to any funding or assessment restrictions, consider the journals that you read and cite in your own research – these are probably the ones in which you research will best fit. Then, look at the aims and scope and recent articles published in the journal, especially editorials written by the editors about the kind of content they are looking for.

Do the topics overlap with your own? Does the journal publish the kind of article you want to write (e.g., full-length research articles or shorter reports)? If you are an early career researcher, does it have a special mentored section like RSA journal *Regional Studies, Regional Science*? How are articles usually structured? What themes and literature do they reference? Do you recognise the names on the editorial board?

Talking to peers and mentors is another great way to get advice and feedback on different journals. If you know someone on the editorial board, even better. If you are unsure about a journal's reputation or have received an email inviting you to submit to a journal you have not heard of before, do your research before proceeding.

Write for the right journal

Once you have decided on the right journal for your research, make sure you then write your manuscript for that journal. Keep in mind the journal's criteria for published articles, including the aims and scope, formatting requirements, and the usual structure of articles published in the journal. All good journals are looking for new and original contributions to research in the fields under their domain so be sure to link your article to key literature in the field and ongoing debates in that journal. Sharing a first draft with peers and mentors can provide valuable feedback, even more so if you know someone on the editorial board who you can approach to check that your manuscript seems appropriate for the

journal.

Publishing a journal article requires substantial time and commitment to the writing, submission and revising process – but often this will be less than the time and commitment that has gone into the research you are writing about. Planning ahead and taking the extra time needed to choose – and write for – the right journal will smooth the path to publication and mean that your research has the best possible impact once it reaches readers.

About the author

Dr Madeleine Hatfield (e-mail) is the founding director of Yellowback, an editing and publishing services company that works with authors, editors, learned societies and publishers, including the Regional Studies Association.

RSA Professional Development Webinar Series

How to choose the right journal for your high impact article has previously been featured as part of the RSA's Professional Development Webinar Series and a short video on the content can be accessed at Video clip: Publishing – How to choose the right journal (Maddy Hatfield)

The Professional Development Webinar Series presents short and to the point sessions on knowledge, skills and professional development on a variety of topics. These webinars are free to join live, and recordings can be accessed by RSA members via the RSA Lounge.

Previous webinars covered topics such as: academic research, writing and publishing; career development; engaging with policymakers; applying for grants and funding; presentation skills; and networking skills.

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