From Pitch to Publication: What editor/peer reviewers seek in an academic article

Helen Fallon
Deputy Librarian
Maynooth University
@helenFallon
Understanding the Requirements of an Academic Journal

Planning

• Identify a topic you would like to write about
• Consider what data you have - literature review, library statistics, Survey Results, Feedback/evaluation forms, quotes, photographs, reflective journal, thesis, other
• Establish who your audience is
• Establish the purpose of the article
• Decide whether your article is best suited to an academic or a professional journal

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Professional Journal

- Title
- Introduction
- Background/Context
- Case Study (what happened)
- Outcome/Result/Reflection
- Conclusion
- Possibly some references or further reading
- Typically 1,000 to 2,000 words

- Who, What, When, Where, How
- Best suited to evidence-based articles
- Great way to share practice
- Great way of starting out in publishing
- Editor makes decision
- Lead in time often quite short – a few months

- www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
• Dublin Business School Library: Supporting research and scholarly activity
  Alexander Kouker and Jane Buggle

• Embedding information literacy through critical skills, collaboration and a new curriculum
  Lorna Dodd, Maynooth University

• Development of an Academic Integrity LibGuide
  Experiences at University College Dublin
  Maolsheachlann O’Ceallaigh, Jenny Collery, Nessa Collinge, University College Dublin Library

• The ANLTC Library Assistant Award: A competitive opportunity for personal development
  Kathryn Smith, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

• It’s all about me! A self-directed achievement scheme in the library at Ulster University
  Janet Peden, Ulster University, Marion Khorshidian, Ulster University

• Ten years of a Future Leaders Programme reflective journal
  John Cox, National University of Ireland
  Using a blog to showcase the library
  The Maynooth University Library Quality Review
  Bernadette Gardiner, Emma Boyce, Maynooth University
Peer-reviewed journal article

- Title and Keywords
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Background/Context
- Literature review
- Method/Approach
- Results/Analysis
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- References

- Typically 5,000 words
- Research based
- Double blind peer review
- Lead in time can be a few months to a year
- Can have a case study but must be grounded in literature
- Hybrid journals - Some peer-reviewed content

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Before Writing

• Once you have established the type of article you are writing identify a potential journal
  – brief literature review to see where this topic has been covered. Do you have a new angle?
  – Check AcademicWritingLibrarian.blogspot.ie for calls for papers
• Study guidelines for the journal
• Check Sherpa for journal guidelines on depositing in an institutional repository www.sherpa.ac.uk
• Send query e-mail to editor

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Submission

• Date and save drafts
• When finished put aside for a period then reread
• Spell check
• Date and File preprint
• Let Go when you are 80% satisfied
• If you have already sent a query e-mail to the editor refer to that in your submission

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Why Peer Review?

• Quality Measure
  …appropriate scrutiny of manuscripts submitted to academic journals, to determine their worth, quality, methodological rigour, utility and publishability… (Ali, P.A. & Watson, R., p. 193)


www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Peer-review criteria

- Title
- Abstract
- Language
- Bibliography/literature review
- Style
- Overall impressions

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Title

• Is the title informative and does it reflect the content of the paper?

• Avoid titles that are meaningless, even though they may seem witty

• Think of your audience; if international think of your terminology

• Think of indexing; Good title will increase visibility and downloads Can showcase institution

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Abstract & Language

• Is the abstract the required length (often 200 words max.)
• Does it outline the main findings?
• Does it conform to the abstract style of the journal
  – Informative abstracts
  – Structured abstracts
• English clear and of an acceptable standard
  Clarity of writing with sound grammar

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Bibliography & Literature Review

• Bibliography – Is there an up-to-date bibliography conforming to reference style
• The literature review needs to demonstrate a knowledge of what is going on in field
• It needs to be selective, not exhaustive

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Style of Paper

- Clarity of objectives in paper
- Methods clearly described
- Results presented in a straightforward manner
- Data well presented by means of tables and graphs
- Discussion links theory and practice

The biggest mistake that authors make is to assume that people reading their study know exactly what they did. The purpose of the methods section is to describe your process in a way that someone reading your paper could duplicate the process exactly (Wolf, L., 2016) The Peer Review Process, 42 (5): pp. 454-456

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Overall Impressions

• Paper provides something new
• Ideas in paper are of interest and relevance to the academic community
• How can the paper be improved?
• Decision
  – Minor revision, major revision, reject
• Comments to author
• Confidential comments to editor
Editor’s Decision

• Two reports
• Sometimes conflicting reviews
• Editor makes final decision in case of conflicting reviews
• Editor decides whether to submit full reports with response decision
• Editor gives a date for resubmission – can be quite short e.g. one month
Using Peer Feedback to Improve Your Article

• Do not despair! The purpose of the peer review is to strengthen your paper
• Few papers are published without some revision
• Peer Review can give additional perspectives and help you create a stronger manuscript
• Read the peer review reports
• Take time to digest the feedback
• Does feedback relate to content, presentation, methodology etc?
• Are there common concerns across both reviews?
Responding to Peer Review

• Acknowledge receipt and ask editor if you need clarification on any points
• Go systematically through suggested changes
• Make changes where feasible/appropriate
• Reread complete article
• Resubmit explaining changes you have made and explaining why you have not acted on certain suggestions
• Editor likely to send to one or both of the initial reviewers/Editor makes final decision
• Uploading and typesetting
Rejection

• Has a flaw e.g. not enough participants in a survey; asked an ambiguous question; findings unsupported by data
• Nothing new
• Review your article
• Start the journal selection process again

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Open issue or themed issue?

• Themed issues usually have a call for papers
• May be on a topic of particular interest to you
• Themed issue – 500 word abstract
• Possibly higher chance of acceptance in open issue
Abstracts by country – themed issue of NRAL

- USA (17)
- UK (11)
- IRELAND (5)
- CANADA (2)
- INDIA (2)
- SWEDEN (2)
- CROATIA (1)
- GHANA (1)
- NIGERIA (1)
- UAE (1)

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Librarian as Communicator – themed issue 2016

• 43 abstract submissions - 11 countries four continents
• Need for geographic and theme spread
• 25 abstracts were selected 16 articles (5,000 words) & 9 case studies (3,000)

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Abstracts for themed issue of NRAL

Scoring based on 4 criteria

• Relevance to scholarly communication and academic libraries internationally
• Clarity, coherence and organisation of writing
• Likelihood that final product will be of high quality
• Originality and innovation of the work
• Scoring 1-10
  – 10 (excellent), 5 (average), 1 (poor)

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Types of Abstracts

- Case study very popular – “How we did it” - Need for a research base – evidence, data, impact
- Topics sometimes routine and extensively covered elsewhere
- Study group sometimes too small
- Research planned but not yet carried out
- Communication a peripheral issue in some abstracts
- Relevance to audience of NRAL
- English language issue
- Need to have a broad scope of themes and geographic representation
Final volume (double issue)

- 18 papers made the final volume (-7)
- Importance of AMO (Accepted Manuscript Online)
- Importance of 50 free downloads
- Publicising the issue
- Social media
- Twitter and blog posts
- Different levels of engagement

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Developing as an academic author

- Set goals and devote time to writing
- Write from your practice
- Write (Describe, reflect and evaluate)
- Talk/collaborate
- Read (angle?)
- Collect potentially useful data
- Give and look for peer support
- Keep writing
- Check calls for papers etc at http://academicwritinglibrarian.blogspot.ie/
- @helenfallon

www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library
Top Tips from Published Authors

I’ve asked a number of people who have published in library and information-related areas to share their top tips. If you have a top tip and want to share it please e-mail me

Antony Brewerton

My Top Tips for Writing