Publishing in Academic Journals: Pro Tips from *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*

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Below is a pragmatic how-to guide for navigating the journal publishing process, from submission to publication, what to expect and when, and who does what. I focus on how to publish journal articles, rather than how to write them. I offer advice and “pro tips” based on what I have learned and the questions I have been asked during my six years as the editor-in-chief of the *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* (2016–2022), when I reviewed and edited hundreds of manuscripts and prepared more than eighty-five articles for publication. Additionally, I share my own experiences in publishing books, articles, and translations for broad readerships of students, scholars, teachers, and interested non-specialists.

My suggestions draw from the humanities and qualitative social sciences, and I hope they will be useful to scholars in other fields. My examples are based on American publishing. European publishing can entail different processes (i.e., open-access policies), and Japanese publishing is generally faster than American publishing but with less peer review and, therefore, generally less stringent quality control. Publishing articles is a multistep process, involving many people. This guide is not claiming to be comprehensive or exhaustive; instead, I hope it provides practical advice and a behind-the-scenes look at journal publishing process from the perspective of an editor and author.

Two Kinds of Journals: “Peer Reviewed” and “Non-Peer Reviewed”

Peer-Reviewed:

- **What is a peer-reviewed publication?:** Also called “refereed,” peer review entails submitting a manuscript for “review” by “peers,” often senior scholars with experience in publishing and mentoring colleagues. Reviewers assess if a manuscript comprises sound research and presents it well, if it is ready for publication, and if will make an original academic contribution. Examples of peer-reviewed publications include, but are not limited to, articles in refereed journals, books published by academic presses, chapters for some edited volumes, and literary translations that have been evaluated by experts for readability and accuracy. Peer-reviewed journals are usually published at set intervals (i.e., once or twice a year) and accept manuscripts on a rolling basis.

- **Kinds of peer review:** Conventionally, peer-reviewed journals use either “single blind” or “double-blind” peer reviews. “Single blind” means that the reviewer knows the author’s identity, but the author does not know the reviewer’s identity. “Double blind” means that neither the author nor the reviewer knows the other’s identity.

- **Who staffs a peer-reviewed journal?:** It takes a team of specialists to publish a peer-reviewed journal. The journal staff can include:
  - **Journal editor**, usually a seasoned scholar with experience in publishing and knowledge of the academic field, works closely with the author on all stages of publication and answers post-publication questions.
  - **Managing editor** assists the editor with administrative tasks, business matters, and helps oversee the peer-review process.
• **Editorial board**, a team of specialists assembled by the journal editor, provides advice about how to manage and sustain the journal and, upon occasion, writes reviews and helps decide if manuscripts should be accepted for publication.

• **Copyeditor and proofreader** work with the author to turn the manuscript into an accessible, high-quality publication free of language mistakes. (Their work is described below.)

• **Production manager**, who works for the publisher, receives the completed manuscripts from the editor and shepherds them through typesetting, proofs, and print and digital publication. The production manager is a liaison between the journal, publisher, and databases like Project Muse.

• Other essential staff, hired by the publisher, include journal managers, subscription and advertising managers, website managers, and typesetters.

• **Advantages to peer review** include ensuring quality control and providing feedback, endorsements, and traceable rankings, including citations and “impact factor” (measure of how often a journal article has been cited). These can be useful beyond the publishing process, for example as evidence of quality research for tenure and promotion reviews.

• **Disadvantages** include the length of time from submission to publication. The process requires collaborative work between authors, editors, and reviewers. For example, authors may need to revise their manuscripts according to advice provided by reviewers with input from the editor.

• **Pro tip**: It can take three months to more than a year to publish a peer-reviewed article, from submission to typesetting and uploading on databases. Peer-review takes time but results in high-quality publications that have been assessed by specialists.

**Non Peer-Reviewed:**

• **What is a non-peer-reviewed publication?**: Also called non-refereed, generally speaking, non-peer-reviewed manuscripts are not formally assessed by specialists before publication. Examples include, but are not limited to, book reviews, blog posts, conference proceedings, and some encyclopedia entries. Please note that the above categories can include peer-reviewed work depending on where and how they are published.

• **Advantages** include less time needed from submission to publication.

• **Disadvantages** include lack of quality control, feedback, and scholarly endorsements. Non-reviewed publications are generally regarded less favorably for hiring, tenure, and promotion in academic careers than peer-reviewed publications. Non-peer-reviewed forums might be not able to provide accurate information about citations and scholarly impact.

• **Pro tip**: Peer-review and non-peer-reviewed journals have different uses in any given field. Peer review can carry more weight for academic careers. Non-peer review can be a way to reach general audiences.

**How to Choose the Right Journal for Your Article**

• **Read the journal’s website**: To know if a publication is peer-reviewed or not, read the journal’s website or ask the publisher or editor. Websites list the journal’s mission
Common Components of Academic Articles

• **Articles are usually 6,000–10,000 words and include the following components:**
  
  • **Introduction** should start with a “hook” that gets readers’ attention and then explains your topic and its significance, introduces key concepts, briefly reviews previous related publications, and clearly states the **main argument** of your article. At the end of the introduction, include a few sentences that outline the article sections and how they come together to support the main argument.
  
  • **Pro tip:** Engage with previous publications but do not attack them. Read widely in your field to know what has been published about your topic.
• **Pro tip:** Introductions are important guides. Give readers the foundational information needed to understand your article and tell them why they should read about your research. How will your article change their view on a topic or encourage academic discussion about it?

• **Pro tip:** A two-to-three paragraph introduction is usually sufficient for a 6,000 to 10,000-word article.

• **Main argument** (or thesis statement) is the main idea or the primary lesson an article teaches. The argument statement is the backbone that holds an article together. The argument should be written in the introduction of your article. Some authors emphasize the sentence by beginning “I argue that…”

  • **Pro tip:** The argument statement should include the keywords of your analysis. If your article closely reads a text, be sure to include the title and author’s name.

  • **Pro tip:** Get to your main argument as soon as you can, even on page 1. Do not wait too long to make a point.

• **4-6 titled subsections:** For the sake of length and coherence, articles usually have an introduction, two to four body sections, and a conclusion.

  • **Pro tip:** Use sections titles that include the keywords of your analysis. Doing so is a way to scaffold your article and remind readers of your main concepts.

• **Conclusions** should be more than one paragraph. In your conclusion, you can reiterate your argument, without repeating the same sentence from your introduction, and then explain what the reader has learned from you and takeaway lessons going forward.

• **In-text citations and works cited:** To save time in the publication process, cite sources properly according to the journal’s style sheet.

• **Endnotes should be used sparingly** to stay focused on your main text.

• **Images, permissions, and captions:** Images (including graphs and tables) should support your analysis, not be mere decorations. Permissions are needed from image owners (i.e., artists, publishers, or archives). For example, you cannot take a photo of a book cover with your phone or download someone’s original artwork and publish it without permission; you need a written statement from the book publisher, artist, or art collection that it is okay to publish the image. Authors are responsible for getting rights to images. Include short image captions (usually no longer than one sentence) and acknowledge the rights holder.

  • **Pro tip:** Read copyright guidelines to know which images are under copyright, “fair use,” or available in the public domain. Just because an image is published on a library or museum website or on Wikimedia Commons does not mean it is in the public domain. And copyright laws differ according to country. For example, the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC) posts helpful guidelines and example emails for requesting image rights from rights holders in Japan.

• **Article abstracts** and **keywords** are useful tools for alerting readers of main arguments and methodologies and for making articles searchable on databases and indexes.

• **Author bio** is generally around 100 to 200 words. The convention is to list publications rather than works in progress.

• **Pro tip:** Journal articles have different structures and audiences than dissertation chapters. In general, dissertation chapters are components of a larger project, are written primarily for the author’s professors, and help the author establish themself as a rising
What Happens After You Submit a Manuscript to a Peer-Reviewed Journal

- **How does the review process work?** Case study of *U.S.–Women’s Journal*: A manuscript is reviewed by the journal editor who decides expeditiously (ideally, within a week) if it is ready for peer review. They might consult the editorial board. If a manuscript is ready, the author’s name and any markers of their identity are removed. The anonymized manuscript is sent to at least two reviewers for their assessment. Reviewers are given around six weeks to two months write their reports on a form provided by *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* and to decide whether the manuscript should be published as is, with minor revisions, with major revisions, or not at all. The journal editor collects the reviews and writes a letter to the author explaining the decision and suggesting ways to proceed. A good decision letter summarizes important changes. If the manuscript is not ready for review, the editor will gently give reasons and, if appropriate, offer suggestions for the next steps. Upon occasion, the editor might suggest that an author revise and resubmit their manuscript for further review.

- **Some example questions for reviewers:** Reviewers submit reports detailing their decisions about whether a manuscript should be published and how much revision it needs. Reviewers consider questions such as:
  - How well does the manuscript support the journal’s mission statement?
  - How clear are the aims of the manuscript? Does the author achieve these aims?
  - Is the scholarship sound?
  - Have proper sources been used responsibly and cited properly?
  - Does the manuscript make a significant contribution to the field (i.e., by adding new research findings or encouraging scholarly debate)?
  - How well is the manuscript written and organized?
  - In sum, reviewers take into account issues related to the accuracy, completeness, and originality of an academic work. Reviewers also notify the journal editor if they believe that any part of a manuscript under review overlaps with any preexisting publication.
  - Reviewers provide reasons for their answers and advice about revisions.

- **Conflict of interest:** Reviewers should not be collaborators, advisors, or other people with close relationships to authors and their work. Reviewers treat manuscripts confidentially and do not discuss or cite them without permission from the author.

- **Editor’s decision:** The abovementioned editor’s decision letter summarizes the reviewers’ reports and offers additional feedback. To assist authors, the editor might provide a summary list of suggested revisions, indicating which are the most important.

- **What if the two reviewers make different decisions?** This happens often! I have seen many cases in which one reviewer recommends accepting a manuscript as is, while another suggests rejecting it. In this case, the editor might decide to ask a third reviewer to assess the manuscript or consult the editorial board. The editor will determine if the reviews have been fair.

- **What happens after the review?** Authors are given a set time, a few weeks to a few months depending on the publication date, to revise their manuscript according to the
reviewers’ advice. After receiving the revised draft, the journal editor checks it to assess if it is ready for copyediting or if it needs another peer review. The copyedited manuscript is sent back to the author to check. Sometimes more than one round of revisions and copyedits are needed. The final draft is proofread, preferably by a professional proofreader who has not read previous drafts and can approach the manuscript with “fresh eyes.” Authors are asked to approve changes made by the proofreader. Then the manuscript is ready to be typeset into “proofs,” which show what the article will look like when published. Authors check the proofs to make sure there are no errors. The article is then ready for publication. At the proofreading stage, authors should correct errors but refrain from making other changes.

• **Publishing agreement form** is signed by the author and submitted to the publisher. The author guarantees that the manuscript is original work and has not been published elsewhere and agrees to the journal’s terms of publication. The form gives the author a record of the submission and can be helpful for reprint requests.

• **Pro tip:** During the editing process, it is best to track changes to ensure that everyone is using the same version and no work is lost. When returning your manuscript, make sure the day’s date appears in the subject line; this helps ensure version control.

• **Pro tip:** Authors should carefully check their manuscripts before the proof stage. It can be expensive and time-consuming to revise page proofs.

• **Pro tip:** If an author disagrees with a suggestion by a reviewer, editor, or proofreader, it is best to discuss it with the journal editor and explain the reasons why. Editing can be a negotiation process.

### Additional Issues to Keep in Mind

• **Submit your best and most polished work:** Submit a complete manuscript, replete with citations and any images you would like to include, written in accurate, eloquent prose, and formatted according to the journal style sheet. How manuscripts are written matters. You may wish to ask someone to check your draft for language use, flow, and accessibility. There will be time to revise, but you will get better advice about content when reviewers and editors do not need to focus on proofreading.

• **Write for your target audience:** In the case for a journal like *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* with an interdisciplinary readership, it is best to write for a broad, educated audience. Think of your readers as intelligent, supportive, and interested in your work. Write positively, explaining major concepts and theories, without using jargon, sounding defensive, and overexplaining things most educated people know. Give English translations of foreign titles; doing so makes your article more accessible. Journal style sheets give advice about their preferred translation conventions.

• **Use the journal’s style sheet to cite sources and write a bibliography:** Be sure to properly cite your sources and include a complete list of works cited. Refer to the style sheet for both author guidelines and formatting advice.

• **Editing and proofreading are different essential processes:**
  - **Editing:** Simply stated, editing makes a text more readable. Editors help authors to convey content clearly and accurately in a well-organized manner, with proper citations. Editing requires critical thinking, knowledge of the topic, judgement about what and how much to revise, writing ability, familiarity with style rules,
and interpersonal communication, among other skills. As aptly stated by journalist David Carr, “Editors create fine stories by typing on a keyboard composed of human beings. Knowing which key to hit when and how hard to press is both an art and craft. The greats manage to be both collegial and decisive.”

- **Proofreading:** Usually done after editing, proofreading fixes surface errors, like spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes, and ensures that the text is properly formatted.
- **Pro tip:** Manuscripts can require several rounds of editing and proofreading.
- **Pro tip:** Edit soon after writing your submission draft. Proofread with some distance. Sometimes it helps to change the format of your document; for example, saving Word doc as a PDF can make it easier to catch errors.

- **Special characters:** Most journals discourage use of special characters like Japanese kana and kanji, unless they are essential to your argument. Reasons include typesetting difficulties and reducing the possibility of character distortion (*mojibake*) in the print and digital publications. To assist the typesetter, the editor will create a “manifest” listing any special characters.
- **Republishing your own work:** You cannot publish the same article in two different journals, even if one is peer-reviewed and the other is not. Articles can be published in books after they are published in journals but not the other way around. If you would like to include a version of your published article in your book, please email the journal editor to ask for reprint rights from the journal. Often publishers have a permissions form for authors to complete and journal editors to sign.
- **Transparency and ethics:** Journal staff, reviewers, and authors are expected to act respectfully and according to codes of ethics. For a helpful list of journal editor’s responsibilities and expectations, see “COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors” published by the Committee on Publication Ethics.
- **Paying for publication:** Authors do not usually pay to publish in U.S.-based academic journals. Authors do not receive payments for their articles.
- **Circulating own articles:** Please do not post your published journal articles on personal websites. This ensures correct citations and copyright protection and helps academic journals get accurate reader counts, which can be used to decide if a journal should continue publication. If readers want to read an article but cannot find it online or through a library, they can email the journal staff.
- **Getting started with your first article:** As you read journals that seem to be a good fit for your research, choose a few articles to use as models. How do they state and develop their arguments, cite sources, and frame their conclusions? Consider developing a conference paper, dissertation chapter, graduate seminar paper, or another work that you have presented or submitted to peers and experts for feedback into an article.

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on the Rails and Road (Stanford University Press, 2010); an annotated translation of Kawabata Yasunari’s The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa (University of California Press, 2005); and coedited volumes on Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan (Stanford University Press, 2013) and Introducing Japanese Popular Culture (Routledge, 2018). She has published widely on Japanese modernism, Tokyo studies, youth culture, gender, television, humor as social critique, teaching pedagogies, and intersections of print and digital media, along with publishing translations of Japanese literature. Alisa has been nationally recognized for excellence in mentoring.

2 This publishing guide is based on presentations for the Japan Foundation Winter Institute (2019) and the Japanese Historians Workshop (2021). I would like to thank the organizers and participants of these groups and Jan Bardsley for their helpful suggestions.


