



## **Council of Editors of Learned Journals**

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### **GETTING YOUR ARTICLES PUBLISHED: A COMPENDIUM OF TIPS FROM CELJ MEMBER EDITORS (NOVEMBER 2006)**

~ *Developing and writing the essay:*

As the project develops, ask yourself these questions:

1. To what ongoing scholarly conversation does my essay contribute?
2. What is the nature and purpose of my contribution? If other scholars attend to my argument, then how will the conversation change? In other words, do I have a good answer to the "so what" question?
3. Can I express the gist of my contribution and its purpose in no more than a few sentences? (If not, then perhaps I haven't fully mastered it.)
4. Early in the essay do I efficiently situate myself in the relevant conversation and succinctly express the gist of my contribution and purpose?

Junior scholars often suffer from varieties of dissertation tunnel vision. Either they are so close to the material that they fail to introduce the paper in a way that answers the question, Why should we care about this argument?—OR, they vastly overstate the importance of the fairly minor point they are about to make. Opposite ends of the telescope, perhaps . . .

Within the first page or so, the editor/reader should know your topic and your claim about your topic (thesis).

Does the article have a self-contained and clear argument? Have you simply described an event? Another brick in the wall of knowledge: one main reason for sending back to author.

Write an abstract so you can briefly elucidate your main argument. Then make sure that the argument is clear, tight, well referenced, and attentive to context as well as ideas.

Polish your introduction with particular care. Make sure your argument is clear, cogent, and placed within an ongoing scholarly discussion. Most editors will make decisions based on the first few pages of your manuscript, and by looking at the research you have done. Most editors do not want to wait until page five for a dazzling thesis.

In an ideal world, you think about where you are going to place the article before you write it. Is the article appropriate to the journal? Have you framed the introduction, for example, in terms that

readers of the journal might expect? Have you considered the style, level of language, and length current in the publication?

Would someone familiar with the field think you had covered the relevant historiography? A typical objection from aspiring authors: "I thought referees would do that." A common reason for sending back to author: no historiographical context.

### ~ *Revising:*

If you are submitting an unrevised student paper, DON'T.

Also, do not submit a conference paper. These are easy to spot because they have not been revised. No editor wants to read an unrevised conference paper, however well received it might have been.

Get feedback and advice from a writer you respect.

Scrutinize your own work objectively before submission and ask yourself: Is it too long, too short? Does it provide context for its textual readings and ideas? Does it follow a logical, carefully elucidated argument? Does it have an introduction, middle, and conclusion. Is it accessible to the reader?

If the essay was not originally aimed at the chosen journal, have you revised it so that it is? Have you revised it at all?

Portions of dissertations should be substantially revised to conform to the style and other conventions of the journal. If the essay began life as a chapter, much of the framing may have happened earlier (e.g. "In the next chapter...").

Proofread.

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Sloppy manuscripts are often turned down automatically.

### ~ *Researching possible venues:*

For one-stop shopping, see the list of member journals (many linked) at [www.celj.org](http://www.celj.org).

Consult an issue of the journal you're considering to develop a sense of its audience and expectations regarding essays. Or, if that is logistically impossible (as it might be for underfunded scholars at institutions with small libraries, who are submitting to journals not on electronic databases), look at the website for scope descriptions and submission instructions.

Know the audience you wish to address, and what publications those people read. Whilst many rejections are due to bad writing, or bad ideas, even more, I suspect, are due to a bad match. An article sent to the wrong journal won't get in.

On preliminary inquiries, one editor says: "Do not send e-mails asking about your possible submission. Submit your essay instead." Another says, "It is wise to contact the editor via email to float a

trial balloon, to ensure that the topic and length are suitable (the journal might have already accepted a similar article not yet published).” [Compiler’s note: check submission guidelines; some journals explicitly invite and others discourage inquiries.]

Register for CELJ’s “Chat with an Editor” service, offered every year in the exhibit hall at MLA (sign up in advance).

~ *Preparing the manuscript for submission:*

Read the submission instructions.  
Re-read the submission instructions.  
Re-re-read the submission instructions.

Follow the guidelines for submission. Sometimes you have to be a member of the sponsoring society to submit. Many journals require that you send postage. Don't submit electronically unless you know that the journal accepts such submissions.

Don't leave any identifying marks on your manuscript or digital file. If the reader recognizes your name, s/he will have to recuse herself.

Don't bother "name dropping" in your cover letter. It doesn't matter who you know, who liked your essay, or what group you belong to. Your essay has to stand on its own merit in the review process.

On the importance of conforming to a journal’s citation format at the submission stage, editors differ. Several representative comments:

Have you made some effort to match the expected editorial citation format of the journal? This not always a crucial issue, but it sometimes leads editors to suspect an inattention to audience.

If the journal requires a particular format (e.g. MLA), use that format, and do not include footnotes at the bottom of the page. It is not necessary to follow every ingredient of house style for the initial submission (though more scrupulous editors may feel differently!), but the fundamental issue of whether to use MLA, Chicago, or another system makes a huge difference in how articles present themselves, not only procedurally but sometimes even structurally.

We never let the citation style used impede our consideration of a submitted article. We follow Chicago Manual in our journal, but we welcome the submission of articles currently in MLA, ASA, or whatever: it seems unnecessary to set up that level of gatekeeping at the start.

Either Chicago or MLA is fine at the submission stage, but I expect to see either one carefully and correctly done. I've noticed that sloppy documentation almost always signals sloppy reasoning! The submission stage is an excellent time to double-check all one's sources and quotations, too.

Make sure your citational apparatus is squeaky clean so as to not give editors preemptive reasons to reject your work out of hand.

~ *When the review process is complete:*

For our journal, at least, "Revise/Resubmit" means that we want to work with the author to move the essay toward publication. Ninety percent of the essays eventually published here start out as Revise/Resubmit, so writers should not be discouraged that the essay didn't get an immediate "Yes."

Once your essay has been accepted, please do not send revised copies, one after the other, in a constant stream of e-mail attachments, before the copyediting process begins. The editors will be in touch with you regarding changes to the manuscript.

~ *General advice:*

Read two books by Beth Luey: *Handbook for Academic Authors* (Cambridge UP) and *Revising Your Dissertation: Advice from Leading Editors* (U California Press). Beth seems to have said about all there is to be said on the general subject.

Realize that this is a professional transaction, and try to follow professional protocol.

~ *Placing work on American women writers:*

Regarding women writers that have not been fully accepted into the American canon, the following approach may be helpful if a scholar is toward the beginning of the composition process. Rather than focus the article exclusively on the woman writer, try to develop the thesis in a way that yokes her work to that of a canonical writer, making sure that both writers are treated fully and equally in the analysis. Editorial boards are sometimes more willing to recommend publication on a little-known subject if another part of the argument is rooted in something they already feel comfortable with. For instance, a colleague here published part of her dissertation that links Mary Seacole and Charles Dickens. These two are obviously not American, but I presume that the principle would work if someone tried to link, for example, William Dean Howells and Alice French (known literarily as Octave Thanet).

An alternative view: editors at the conference of the Society for the Study of Women Writers (for which these tips were gathered) suggest that in many circumstances the strategy above is no longer necessary; the prevailing principle, again, is that you'll have the greatest chance of success if you research the preferences and practices of the particular journals you're considering.

Editors are interested in women who have avocations that supplement writing. For instance, I am a rancher and publisher, which seems to interest some magazines. [Compiler's note: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* is such a journal.]

~ *Placing interdisciplinary work:*

Our interdisciplinary journal asks expert readers to address two questions. First, is the essay good of its kind—that is, would it be a substantial contribution to the field it comes from (African American Studies, Middle Eastern Political Science, Visual Culture, or whatever)? But second, is it good for us: is it actually interdisciplinary in that it demonstrate an informed understanding of its own field AND current critical and theoretical work in the field of life writing? Writers should not assume

that "interdisciplinary" means "this journal publishes anything." A look at how specific journals define interdisciplinarity would be time well spent.

Be certain that your work will be of interest to scholars in other fields and that the article is written in language accessible to those working in other areas.