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Academic publishing

Forms, benefits, priorities & processes



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THE FORMS & BENEFITS OF PUBLISHING

The mere number of different forms of academic publishing can be overwhelming and sometimes tricky to navigate, especially for early career researchers (ECRs). There are books, book chapters, journal articles, blog posts, reviews, research-informed articles in the public domain, and the increasingly popular medium of podcasts. Not only are there many forms, but each one is different in terms of the style of academic expression, processes of production, editing, publishing and outreach.

I have been fortunate enough to 'try out' most of these in my career so far, and feel that they have each contributed to the construction of my academic identity in specific ways. They have helped me to position myself as an academic, narrowing (and at times widening) my research focus and enhancing the impact of my voice and work on society. More importantly, I think publishing in each medium has been instrumental in embedding my work in the community of (academic) practice (see Wenger, 2010).

A helpful starting point for navigating the world of academic publishing would be to try and map its landscape in *your* particular field. This would include investigating the publishing platforms popular among peers and colleagues in your department, school, faculty and university and using your findings to guide your own publication plans – ensuring that you try to create a balanced and diverse profile. For example, alongside publishing a couple of research articles, maybe consider writing a book chapter, a research-informed article, a book review and/or a review essay.

Having a diverse publication profile allows you to showcase and demonstrate your potential and ability to meaningfully and impactfully engage within and beyond academia. This is usually one of the 'essential' (or at least 'desirable') criteria for securing a postdoctoral fellowship, research associate role, research fellowship or lectureship. It helps a university to assess whether the person they are hiring is resourceful in conducting research independently and thus will be able to sustain a strong research profile in their new role.

PRIORITIES & PROCESSES

As an ECR, it is essential to recognise that publishing your work as a peer-reviewed journal article and/or a book is non-negotiable. Both are established and valued forms of academic publishing; I have always been advised to prioritise these. Writing and publishing a peer-reviewed journal article can be very time-consuming and require much effort. It is therefore best to start thinking about and planning for these as early as possible – not just in the final year of your doctoral studies.

When thinking about the reasons for publishing, we often find that we are simply *expected* to – either formally (perhaps as part of a degree requirement) or informally (by supervisors or peers). For me, however, I also really *liked* the idea of conversing with people in my field. My approach to publication has always been about prioritising my role as an interventionist. Before writing any article, I generally think about what contributions I am making to:

- what we, as a community of scholars, know
- how we, as a group, think
- questioning why something we did not think about previously is worth paying attention to now.

These multilayered questions help me think about the purpose of my piece – which, of course, is crucial in terms of identifying the body of knowledge I should engage with as well as the most appropriate publication form/outlet.

Publishing from your doctoral work should also be a key priority for those who are thinking about pursuing an academic career. My aim has always been to turn a part of my doctoral research into an academic article in its own right – it cannot just be a thesis chapter! To accomplish this goal, I tend to: resituate the key arguments in the literature; enhance – rather than reproduce – my arguments; and clearly define the contribution of that piece to the ongoing discussion within my field. Publishing from my doctoral research has proven to be a valuable opportunity to strengthen various arguments and an avenue to create new ones.

TOP TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

1. Start out slowly but steadily

I always took my assignments seriously – I found this was the most effective way to learn about academic writing. Also, I started by writing and publishing reviews and blog posts, which helped develop my skills around forming clear arguments and substantiating them with evidence. Then I wrote book chapters, which offered me a guided and focused structure to follow – with editorial feedback – before I began writing journal articles.

2. Enjoy your work and reflect on the process

I think it is crucial that we enjoy what we do. I find it useful to take some time out to *reflect* on my relationship to my work and how this impacts on my work-life balance – especially in relation to the time I allocate to the things and people that matter to me. Doing so has made me aware of my wellbeing at work and at home, and this mindfulness has also improved my relationship to writing – I simply enjoy the process more. Relatedly, I do not consider writing as completely separate from reading, editing and thinking – this helps me to make sense of my ‘productivity’ slightly differently, which, in turn, facilitates the process of maintaining a healthy relationship to writing for publication purposes.

3. Network and seek out opportunities for self-development

Networking can be very useful for navigating an academic career and should not be underrated. One of the reasons for presenting at academic events is to make yourself known as an emerging scholar in the field; the people who listen to you may direct you to the right job, want to collaborate with you and provide constructive feedback. It is also always beneficial to assess your own skills and identify gaps (in experience, ability, knowledge and competence). You can then approach the right person – and/or locate appropriate resources – to help you to improve yourself.

I believe that publishing *as a process* in itself offers enormous scope for learning and growing. I hope that at least some of what I have mentioned here is useful to your journey towards establishing yourself as a published author.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to be invited to speak on this topic in June as part of the BERA-CERA Academic Publishing Webinar Series 2021 (see bera.ac.uk/gupta-webinar). BERA offers a myriad of resources to support publishing, especially for emerging scholars, and I hope this article and accompanying webinar is a valuable addition.

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REFERENCE

Wenger, E. (2010). Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept. In C. Blackmore (Ed.), *Social learning systems and communities of practice* (pp. 179–198). Springer.