How to Get Published in LIS Journals: A Practical Guide

Guest Editors

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Dear Library and Information Science Colleagues,

Research and publishing in our profession are quite interesting phenomena. Research in library and information science (LIS) appears to be uneven, fragmentary, and non-cumulative, and is becoming more oriented toward current practices. Due to heavier work loads, practicing librarians have less time to engage in reflection, research, and publishing; consequently, they are writing more “how we did it good in our library” pieces. These best-practices articles and books are displacing publications based on research and intellectual inquiry. How will this change impact the theoretical foundation of the profession?

Most LIS research falls into one of two different types: basic or action/applied. Furthermore, quantitative research is more popular than qualitative research. It is regrettable that LIS research does not contain more qualitative measures. We tend to be mesmerized by measuring everything with numbers, and place too little emphasis on the meanings of words and feelings provided via qualitative research.

Why should we conduct research in LIS? The reasons for doing so include contributing to the profession; gaining a better understanding of the research process, thus, enabling librarians to assist researchers; discovering new knowledge; and personal growth.

With fewer LIS schools teaching courses in basic research methods, librarians generally do not understand the research process. Research begins with a problem: no problem, no research! One common reason reviewers give a manuscript a negative assessment is that the author failed to clearly identify the problem of the research.

After the research is completed, the next step is to find a home for its findings. The author should first find a journal that is a good match for the contents of the manuscript; one should not write the manuscript, then try to find a journal to carry it. Such a decision could result in a large amount of work for naught. Normally, a research journal article should include the following components: 1. introduction, 2. statement of the problem, 3. justification of the study, 4. review of the literature, 5. methodology (research techniques), 6. collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, and 7. conclusion.

Academic librarians and LIS faculty are the two major contributors to LIS literature. Academic librarians who are on a tenure track publish more than those who are not. Thus, it can be assumed that much of the publishing in research publications is the result of tenure and promotion pressures. Unfortunately, librarians working in public, school, and special libraries contribute less to the literature. Though some of the best minds in the profession work in these types of libraries, their librarians are not encouraged to conduct research and publish.

Librarians, especially librarians with fewer than 10 years of experience, are rather anxious about learning more about the research process and how to get their findings published. Many opportunities exist for research and publishing in LIS. These vary from publishing in refereed journals (both paper and electronic formats) to publishing current practices online. If one has not had prior experience in writing and publishing, one could “test the water” by submitting an article to a state library association journal. Writing and publishing a book chapter is another avenue to see if what you have to share with others is publishable.

Getting one’s work published depends on various factors and can take different routes. As this booklet demonstrates, seasoned advice differs regarding how to get one’s article or research findings published. There is no one correct or right or foolproof way.

Conducting research and writing about it constitute one of the purest forms of creativity in LIS. Appropriate incentives, support, and rewards must be provided for this very important function, especially if we want LIS to continue with a solid theoretical foundation of understanding.

Regards,

Dr. Donald E. Riggs, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian, Nova Southeastern University

Donald E. Riggs has served as president of three state library associations — in Arizona, Colorado, and West Virginia, and as president of LAMA (The Library Administration and Management Association). Riggs’ publishing record includes eight books, 43 book chapters, and 92 journal articles. He has been editor of College & Research Libraries, founding editor of Library Administration & Management, and editor of Library Hi Tech. In 1991, Riggs received the Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial Award for his leadership and risk taking in library technology.
Seeking to Publish? Prepare for Success!

By Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, Editor, Research Strategies, and Coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction and Associate Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Jennifer Dorner, Editor, Research Strategies, and Social Sciences and Humanities Librarian and Assistant Professor at Portland State University

Preparing a manuscript for publication is a multi-faceted and, sometimes, anxiety-ridden task. Tips presented here should help you keep track of issues you need to think about and complete your work successfully.

At each stage of your writing, there are elements to have in place as you plan to submit your manuscript to a journal. For simplicity’s sake, we have grouped the elements into three categories: developing your project, manuscript organization and components, and technical preparation.

Developing Your Project

Thinking about your final manuscript begins when you start thinking about your project — whether it is a pure research project or a new library service you are developing. Setting the stage is an important element in writing a successful manuscript.

“Thinking about your final manuscript begins when you start thinking about your project...”

Almost any project in a library will reasonably begin with a literature search to learn what others have done on the topic. From this review flows your thinking about your own project, its publishable elements, and the context for your findings. Where does your article fit in with the literature of the field? Rarely is a research project or program idea so unique that it is without supporting literature in the discipline. If you describe your project without placing it in the context of other work that has been done, your audience might take this as ignorance of the field or, worse, hubris. Searching the literature in related fields, such as education or computer science, may also be helpful if your project is interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary in scope. Putting your research or program in the context of other work already done will assure your audience of your understanding of the issues and your expertise on the topic.

In addition to the general literature review, it is important to think carefully about your topic and its relevance. Will what you say be of use to the audience of the journal? Are you sharing your experience or your research in a way that is meaningful to others? For example, how could research conducted in the library of a small private liberal arts college be of interest to librarians at a mid-sized urban public university? To make an article meaningful to librarians whose institutions do not mirror your own in size and user population, the manuscript must describe how the environmental context did or did not contribute to the success of the project or influence your research findings.

Thinking early on about the audience for which you are writing will shape the development of your thinking and the project.

Manuscript Organization and Components

Different types of manuscripts are organized in different ways and contain different components. Though one does not have to follow a rigid outline, following generally accepted and expected practices can help the reader understand what you are saying.

In their book Research and Writing in the Disciplines (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), Donald Zimmerman and Dawn Rodrigues have a helpful chapter titled “A Look at Research Reports in Different Disciplines.” The chapter outlines the elements and organization of research reports in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering. Though all contain similar components, the order and relationships of the components vary. MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing and the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association also provide useful advice on manuscript organization.

Because of the interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches used in many areas of library and information science, the particular organizational structure and components you use will depend on your research methods and your intended audience. You can get some sense of what is commonly used by browsing past issues of the journal to which you plan to submit your manuscript and by examining the structure of articles identified in your literature review.

Technical Preparation

Technical preparation of the manuscript is perhaps the easiest and the most tedious stage of the process. Obvious advice here includes careful proofreading for typographical errors and adherence to standard grammar and style. The most important document to reference in this stage of manuscript preparation is the Guide to Authors for the particular journal to which you are submitting your manuscript. Author guidelines often include directions about the submission process; title page; tables, figures, and illustrations; and references/bibliography. Follow this guide very carefully. It is best understood as a set of rules rather than guidelines!

In addition to preparing the manuscript itself, you will need to write a cover letter to the editor to accompany your submission. In the letter you should indicate that the enclosure is a submission, provide a succinct summary of the work and its relationship to literature on the topic, and provide your mail, email, phone, and fax contact information. If you will soon be out of contact for a lengthy period of time, indicate that as well — as a heads-up in case the editor needs to contact you.

Having prepared your manuscript — submit it! Your attention to detail in the preparation stage of publication will serve you well as your manuscript makes its way through the reviewing, revising, and publication processes.

Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe (left), Editor, Research Strategies, discussing how to publish in LIS journals with attendees at ACRL’s 2003 conference in NC, and Daviess Menefee, Elsevier’s Director of Library Relations, Americas. Photo by Nancy Stevenson.
Questions to Ask When Selecting a Journal

By Susan E. Searing, Library & Information Science Librarian and Associate Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

You have a finished draft of your article. Now you’re wondering which journal to send it to. First, do your homework. Examine recent journal issues (or their tables of contents on the web) to identify those that cover the subject of your article. Then ask five questions about each journal you’re considering.

- **Is this journal peer-reviewed?**

  If you’re an academic librarian who must produce quality scholarship for promotion and tenure, publishing in peer-reviewed journals is critical. Look at the journal’s front matter or author submission guidelines to determine if it’s peer-reviewed, or consult a standard guide like Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory. Many online indexes now indicate whether journals are peer-reviewed, too.

- **Is this a prestigious journal?**

  Everyone wants to publish in a journal with a good reputation, but opinion varies. Research shows, for example, that practicing librarians and LIS faculty rank journals differently. Ask your colleagues and mentors which journals they value most. Information on rejection rates, when available, may be a clue. (The theory runs that the more prestigious a journal is, the choosier it can be.) Another clue is the journal’s impact factor, as measured by ISI’s Journal Citation Reports. Remember that some tenure committees still look down their noses at upstart electronic-only journals.

- **Who is this journal’s audience?**

  Some journals are aimed at specialists; others reach a broader audience. Some are regional, others national, and still others international. Is your article of interest primarily to readers with pre-existing expertise — in cataloging, say, or archives — or do you seek wide exposure for your ideas and research findings? Journals published by professional organizations often reach more readers than commercial journals.

- **How long will it take to see your article in print?**

  There are two critical time periods: the time it takes from submission to acceptance or rejection; and the time it takes from acceptance to publication. Journals vary widely in both regards, but solid information about turn-around time is hard to come by. A few LIS journals have begun to print this information along with each article, while other journals note typical time frames in their author guidelines. And remember, the time to publication will be much longer if your first choice rejects you, and you start the submission cycle over.

- **What role has this journal played in improving scholarly communication?**

  Librarians bemoan rising journal prices and the proliferation of new, narrowly specialized titles. As you consider which journal to submit your work to, ask yourself: Has this publisher dealt fairly with librarians? Is it committed to working on issues that matter to libraries, like long-term access to electronic content? What options will you have to retain intellectual property rights?

Want to know more? See “Publishing in LIS: A Few Useful Sources” at http://www.library.uiuc.edu/lsx/lispubguide.html

Start Small — Think Big

By Jeff Slagell, Assistant Director of Library Services, Delta State University

It can be a daunting task to try to publish when you’re new to any profession and I think this is especially true for newly-minted librarians. Typically, LIS programs don’t emphasize research and writing as much as other fields. The simplest advice that I can pass along to you is to start small and think big.

Your first published article doesn’t have to be an earth-shattering research study in a refereed publication. Another common misconception is that you need a finished product in hand before you contact an editor. In actuality, most of my publications were the result of submitting a brief abstract or contacting the editor directly with only an idea. I would go even further to say that there are many editors that would actually prefer that you contact them early in the writing process. This allows them to make comments and ensure your article and style are appropriate for their publication.

“One article somehow magically leads to the next.”

I have consistently seen the publishing “domino effect” take place with myself and a number of my colleagues. One article somehow magically leads to the next. Perhaps your library or institution has a regular newsletter. A brief report could lead to an article in a state/regional library association publication, eventually leading to national and refereed titles. Yes, there are a few core refereed titles that are quite competitive, but it’s important to keep in mind that there are many editors constantly trolling librarian waters for new talent and ideas.

Once you have your foot in the door, it’s essential that you follow through with the publication’s established guidelines. Think of this as the “mechanics” of the process. Be mindful of their writing style, your draft deadlines, and appropriate citation methods. Nothing will annoy an editor more than if you miss deadlines and create extra work during an already tight publication schedule. However, you can also use the above considerations to your advantage. I have received invitations to write simply based on the fact that I was easy to work with and turned everything in on time.

“Ultimately, the key is to just start.”

After you think you have a finished product, always pass it along to a trusted colleague for proofreading before you submit it. Regardless of the article type, it’s always possible to become too close to the material and miss typographical mistakes and other errors. Your proofreader could be one of your peers or a mentor with significant writing experience. You might also want to take this process a step further and collaborate with one or more people in creating an article. It splits up the workload and allows for different perspectives on your topic.

Ultimately, the key is to just start. I have witnessed several colleagues with great ideas that never reached fruition because they were afraid to take that first step. I think you’ll find that, once you have that initial article under your belt, you’ll gain confidence and create networking opportunities that will prove invaluable in the future. The library science publishing environment is wide open. Write about what you know or what you have a passion for and watch your small ideas evolve into something big.
Lessons Learned as Author and Editor

By Connie Foster, Editor, Serials Review

Writing and editing are dynamic, creative processes. At some point both author and editor must release the finished product and submit to the production process (more copyediting, proofing and queries). To offer the best manuscript possible, keep in mind the following points.

1. **Surround yourself with current, concise reference resources.** A good dictionary, style manual, thesaurus and, for occasional moments of inspiration, a book on effective writing, such as William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well* or Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*. Select topics which interest you. Seek ideas from discussions on electronic lists, in-house studies that can be placed in a broad context with a literature review, or hot topics at conferences.

2. **Organize, organize, organize. Revise, revise, revise.** The process of revision is more important than the initial writing. How many revisions? While strictly up to you, I suspect that even the best of authors probably average five, six, or ten revisions, minimum!

3. **Know the finer points of grammar that drive editors crazy:** Where to place punctuation when using quotation marks, how to use quotations appropriately, and avoiding first person narrative and passive voice.

4. **Read the instructions to authors before you begin so that you can establish font, type, and spacing.** Refer to the recommended style manual for endnotes or footnotes, citation of electronic resources, spelling conventions, and formats for graphs, figures, tables, and charts.

5. **Avoid co-authoring.** Why? Only the lead author gets proofs, only one author gets first citation, and only very dedicated personalities working alike can carry equal responsibilities in the process and emerge still speaking to each other.

6. **Have a colleague or someone not in the profession read your manuscript.** Although this process bares your professional soul and seems awkward, it is one way of soliciting valuable criticism.

7. **Submit accurate figures, tabulations, and consistencies between text and figures.** Triple check these! Document pages, volumes, issues, and dates of sources correctly the first time, so that you do not have to backtrack later.

An editor’s delight is receiving a carefully prepared manuscript. If you are uncertain whether your manuscript fits the scope of the journal, discuss your thesis with the editor.

Guidelines for the submission process not covered above are the following.

- **Only submit your article to one journal at a time.** Never play off one journal against the other. Peer review and editorial comments require significant time and analysis.

- **Contact the editor if you have not had a response within a reasonable time.** Usually an editor will inform you of the status (being peer reviewed, ready to return with comments, etc.). If you feel the delay is unworkable, talk to the editor!

- **Learn from rejections. Learn from acceptances.** I have never had anyone refuse to revise, even more than once. While your ego may be temporarily deflated, taking a deep breath and pounding the keyboard is well worth producing a strong, quality article.

Writing is a challenge and a satisfaction. The more you write the more comfortable you will become in creating a niche in the information universe and sharing research and experiences with a community of scholars and industry professionals.

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“Our years, I’ve found that these four publishing tips work. First, select your desired readers. Choosing a seldom-targeted audience, such as trustees, upped the interest in my article ‘Advocacy ABCs for Trustees’ (American Libraries, September 2001). Second, have something important to share, whether it’s avoiding lawsuits or getting more funding. Third, mix theory with practical case histories and quotes; readers love to hear from real people. Finally, be ready to rewrite often so your publication is engaging, informative and memorable.”

— Ellen G. Miller, founding president of the Kansas Library Trustee Association, and president of Ellen Miller Group, in Lenexa, Kansas

(For further information, check out [http://www.ellenmillergroup.com](http://www.ellenmillergroup.com))
Peer Review

By Peter Hernon, Co-editor, Library & Information Science Research

Scholarship and research in library and information studies most often appear in journals, monographs, annual reviews, and conference proceedings. Those journals, especially the ones operating at the national and international levels, tend to be subject to editorial peer review — prepublication review.

The concept of a refereeing system can be traced back more than 300 years to the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, when some members of the Society Council reviewed papers for publication. The purpose of this system of review was (and remains) to ensure a certain level of quality to published works, with those knowledgeable about the issue or problem being analyzed or studied judging the work on its merits and making a recommendation (favorable or not) to the editor. Peer reviewing means that one’s “peers” shape the editorial decision and that the editor operates within that context; if this situation is altered and the editor disregards reviewer recommendations, peer reviewing becomes compromised.

“The concept of a refereeing system can be traced back more than 300 years…”

For many journals their editorial boards serve as the reviewers. However, journals may invite others to review and, when they do so, these journals likely acknowledge these supplementary reviewers in the final issue of a volume. Editors ascertain the areas of reviewer expertise so that those individuals passing judgment have the necessary background and knowledge of the literature to make valid judgments. Some journals use “double blind” peer reviewing, meaning that the reviewers do not know the names, affiliations, or positions of the authors of the manuscripts they are judging, and the authors do not know who reviewed their work. Editors might even remove some references from papers if those references might reveal an author’s identity. The purpose of such an action is to ensure that a name or affiliation does not influence the judgment and that any contact between author and reviewer goes through the editor.

How the Process Works

Someone — not necessarily within the profession — might write a paper that reflects either scholarship (analytical) or research. Here research is defined as an investigation that applies the components of the inquiry process: reflective inquiry, procedures (research design and methodology), reliability and validity, and presentation. That paper would be submitted to the editor, who selects the reviewers (most typically two or three). Those reviewers judge the paper on its merits. The problem statement must explain the value of the research or scholarship and demonstrate that the paper does not deal with an insignificant issue or problem. The literature review must demonstrate a command of relevant readings, regardless of discipline and nationality of authors. (Fortunately, today, publishers have the means to ensure that published papers appear in databases such as ScienceDirect that bring together works of different disciplines and fields of study for easy retrieval and use.)

“Peer reviewing means that one’s ‘peers’ shape the editorial decision and that the editor operates within that context…”

The reviewers make a recommendation and call for: 1. acceptance without any changes or with minor changes, 2. outright rejection, or 3. revision. Upon completion of revision the paper should be accepted. Otherwise, needed revision might be so extensive that the reviewers recommend additional review by themselves or others. Sometimes the reviewers make the same recommendation and other times they do not. If they do not, some editors call on different reviewers to break any tie in vote, others might cast a vote themselves, and others might return the manuscript to the author, sharing the differences of opinion and asking the author to revise the paper to address the concerns raised. In such instances, the paper should be resubmitted for formal review.

In the case of the journals that I have edited, I copyedit all manuscripts and review all references for consistency with the editorial style manual — before the manuscripts go to peer review. Once the review decision has been rendered, that decision, together with the copyedited manuscript, is returned to the author. If the review outcome was favorable, the author is encouraged to make the changes quickly and to return the paper so that it can be scheduled for an upcoming issue. The final paper should be accompanied with a disk containing the paper and any tables/figures.

Prior to submission of the paper, it is best to review a recent issue of the journal, the author instructions, and any material at the journal’s Web site. The peer review process itself might be handled electronically. It might be completed within a short time (a couple of weeks), a month, or longer depending on the editorial practice. Library & Information Science Research does the reviewing and copyediting within three weeks, and the other journals I have edited did these within one month.

Conclusion

The prestige of a journal is associated with the quality of its contents. Evidence of that quality comprises the journal’s impact factor (the extent of distribution of citations and “downloading” to all the articles appearing in the journal), rejection rate (the assumption is that a healthy rejection rate demonstrates that the journal separates “the wheat from the chaff”), the number of subscriptions, the extent of downloading of articles, and, most importantly, whether or not the journal is peer reviewed.

I know of numerous cases in which faculty members only gained institutional recognition for works that appeared in peer reviewed journals. Note that within peer reviewed journals, an institute or department may recognize a hierarchy of journals. I am fortunate to have always been associated with the higher tier of those journals. Clearly, prestige is associated with editorial peer review and the quality of those reviewers and their judgments.
Writing from Presentations

By Scott Walter, Washington State University

The most difficult part of getting published is finding an idea about which you and your colleagues are concerned, and presenting it in a way that makes your thoughts on the subject clear, cogent, and persuasive. If you have already written something up for presentation, you may be well on your way to publication in a professional or scholarly journal. That said, there are some points to remember to help make your journey to publication a smooth one.

First, remember that conferences, like peer-reviewed journals, have an acceptance rate. At a national conference such as the biennial meeting of the Association of College & Research Libraries, the acceptance rate for papers may be as low as 30%. If you have had a paper or poster session accepted for presentation at a professional conference, you have already:

■ effectively articulated a topic of interest to your colleagues;
■ demonstrated that you can organize your thoughts on this topic in a meaningful way; and,
■ conducted some measure of research that informs your conclusions on the topic.

In other words, you have just outlined your future article.

Second, remember that journal editors are always surveying conference programs and poster session descriptions for ideas. My first LIS article (Walter, 2000) started out as a 3-slide poster session that caught the eye of a journal editor. Choose your presentation topic carefully and treat its completion seriously, and you will almost certainly find a potential patron who can help you bring your idea to press. If not, remember that it is appropriate to make contact with an editor in order to gauge her interest in your study. Knowing that most editors are always keen to locate solid work, you should feel free to alert selected colleagues to the fact that you have recently made a successful presentation and ask if an article on your topic would be of interest to readers of their journals. Just remember not to promise the same article to more than one journal!

Finally, remember that not all presentations are appropriate for all publications. Ask yourself the following questions as you move from presentation to publication.

■ Is there is enough substance to your project to turn it into an article?
■ Will you have to engage in further research to flesh it out (e.g., if your presentation was in the form of a panel discussion, are you ready to do the extra work necessary for the write-up)?
■ Have you prepared a literature review that places your work in the context of past research and practice (and, if so, does your piece still stand as a valuable contribution to the literature)?
■ Have you prepared a conclusion that summarizes what was learned in your research project, and points the way toward further research on this topic?
■ Can your PowerPoint presentation (or poster slides) serve as an effective outline, or do you need more?
■ If your presentation was a simple report of a successful initiative in your library, are there journals that are more likely to publish a purely descriptive piece, as opposed to a research-based piece?

The answer to that final question is “Yes!,” but, even so, there are few conference presentations — posters, panel discussions, or even papers — that are immediately ready for publication. What almost all presentations will do is provide you with an opportunity to lay the groundwork for publication: articulating a significant question for research or practice; proposing an answer to that question; finding an audience interested in hearing your answer; and, effectively outlining your argument. From there, the trip to the printer is relatively short.


LIS Publications from Elsevier

Journals on ScienceDirect at http://www.sciencedirect.com

Government Information Quarterly
Information Processing & Management
Information & Organization
International Information & Library Review
International Journal of Information Management
Journal of Academic Librarianship
Journal of Government Information
Journal of Strategic Information Systems
Library and Information Science Research
Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services
Research Strategies
Serials Review
World Patent Information

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For Library and Information Sciences
www.elseviersocialsciences.com/libraryscience
**BOOKS:**


**ARTICLES:**


**ONLINE RESOURCES:**
*Newsletter of Library and Information Science Journals Section* From International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

*Journals for LIS Research*
From Library and Information Science Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
http://www.library.uiuc.edu/lsx/Serial.html

*NMRTWriter*
ALA’s electronic discussion list for librarians seeking to write and publish.
To subscribe, send a message saying “subscribe NMRTWRITER Firstname Lastname” to:
listproc@ala1.ala.org

*The Informed Librarian Online*
Monthly compilation of the most recent tables of contents from over 250 library and information-related online and print journals, magazines, and newsletters published in the US and other countries.
ByInfosources Publishing

*BUBL LINK/5:15 Catalogue of Internet Resources: Publishing Studies*
By Centre for Digital Library Research, Strathclyde University
http://www.bubl.ac.uk/link/p/publishingstudies.htm

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