**Disseminating Your Academic Writing**

These details link to David Hyatt’s Chapter 7 in Opie and Brown (2019) and express gratitude is made to his colleague, Dr Sabine Little, for many of the ideas for dissemination that appear below.

## Introduction

For many new writers, the first attempt at publication comes from converting a piece of work completed for assessment purposes and then adjusting this to turn it into an

academically publishable piece of work. This can be quite a job of work. Usually this will involve condensing a longer piece of work (e.g. a dissertation of around 12–20,000 words) to something closer to the average length of an article (around 7,000 words). Even a Masters or a doctoral assignment of around that length would need crafting to fit the requirements of a journal. It will involve having to omit parts of the original work and only including parts that fully merit inclusion – every word will have to fight for its place. Depending on where you wish to publish your work, different levels of crafting and editing will be required. Here are some of the possible options, and their implications, to consider.

## Dissemination via more Formal and Traditional Modes of Writing

### Journals

This may seem beyond the scope of undergraduate and M-levelwork, but I have examples of where both have produced material which has gone on for publication in journals (see also the next section). International peer reviewed research-based journal articles are currently the most highly prized of forms of dissemination for academics. This is largely due to their prized status in university research assessment exercises, and as such competition for publishing in these is fierce. It’s crucial to choose the right journal for your article and so you need to make yourself familiar with the aims and scope of the journal. The editorial board membership can be a good guide to the kinds of work that are likely to be published. My PhD supervisor, the editor of a prestigious journal, once told me he rejected articles that did not include reference to other articles published in the journal. This, he said, was necessary to show awareness of the scope, history and context of the journal and may be a piece of advice worth bearing in mind when preparing your article.

Remember that the editorial and peer review process can take a long time – it may be up to a year from submitting your article to its publication in print, though these days e-versions do appear in advance of paper versions of journals. Typically, the editor of a journal will briefly look at a submission to check that it fits the remit of the journal. It will then go to two, or even three, peer reviewers, who will comment on fit with the journal, academic rigour, clarity, structure etc. They will each produce a report on the submitted article, which the editor collates and shares with the author. This can result in an outright rejection, or a request for major, or minor amendments, together with a timeline for a response, which it is very necessary to stick to. Re-submissions are reconsidered by the reviewers to see if they feel the amendments they required have been made appropriately and the article deserves inclusion in the journal. Sometimes, the author is given the opportunity to also submit a ‘response’ to the reviewers’ comments, which gives you a chance to explain where and how you have addressed any issues (or to argue your case if you haven’t). It is important to take the opportunity to do this if you can as it can significantly increase your chances of success. Golden-Biddle and Locke’s highly recommended (2006) book *Composing Qualitative Research* gives examples of such responses and great advice on how to prepare them.

Being invited to submit an amended version does not necessarily mean your article will be accepted in the end, and it is extremely rare, and the cause for great celebration, for an article to be accepted without any changes required. Be prepared to have a thick skin when reading reviewers’ comments or if articles are rejected. This happens even to the most prestigious of academics, as the articles are reviewed anonymously so reputation and ‘being a name’ count for little. Try to view the reviewers’ comments as formative feedback rather than negative criticism.

### **Journals focusing on student publications**

There are a number of academic journals specifically aimed at students, including several aimed at undergraduates. A good plan is to conduct an on-line search for ‘academic student journals’ together with the topic of your article or the field/discipline area you wish to publish in and try to find one that publishes research in your field. One example is the Inquiries Journal (http://www.inquiriesjournal.com), which accepts submissions from multiple disciplines across the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities. They state that 60% of their submissions are from undergraduates, and 40% from postgraduates and academics working in undergraduate education. The Journal of Student Research (<http://www.jofsr.com/index.php/path>) is another example, and there are many more.

### **Call for chapters/papers**

Sometimes, specific calls for papers or book chapters are published. This typically occurs when somebody is planning a book with a variety of contributors, or a special edition of a journal. It is worth searching ‘call for chapters’ or ‘call for papers’ plus a search term that describes your research area. If you are on Twitter, then it is a good idea to run a search seeking such calls, or follow the hashtags #callforpapers and #callforchapters. If you know more senior colleagues or academics who work in an area that you are hoping to publish in, let them know you’d be keen to submit work for consideration – this sometimes bears fruit one or two years down the line when they, or someone they know, are inviting contributions.

## Dissemination through Informal Modes of Writing

This section is differentiated it from the previous section of ‘formal’ writing, and includes all kinds of media, not just the written word, for example blogging, filming, tweeting, posters, all of which can be useful ways to disseminate your work.

These days, social media are a very useful way of disseminating your work. More closed online venues like Facebook tend not to be the most efficient way to get your work noticed by a wider audience, though there can be a slow snowballing effect as friends working in your research context share your posts to others in the field. Some people even pragmatically ‘friend’ those working in similar areas to facilitate this type of dissemination.

There may well be Facebook groups that are related to your research topic. However, in such cases you would well be advised to contact the administrator of any group requesting to be part of it and to allow you to post comments in relation to your research.

Many academics use blogging in various forms to promote and disseminate their research. It can be productive to again search for relevant blogs and offer the administrator a contribution. This has the advantage of accessing an already existing audience of ‘fellow travellers’. It’s also something you can add to your CV, particularly if you get invited to contribute in this way and particularly if the blog is of high status in your field. Good examples of blogs of this type that you might which to follow as examples for the excellent advice they offer and content they provide include: Thompson's (<https://patthomson.net/>) blog on doctoral writing; Mewburn’s excellent The Thesis Whisperer (<https://thesiswhisperer.com/> ); and Guccione’s wonderful set of research projects investigating the behaviours that are important in creating ‘quality’ doctoral supervision relationship (http://predoctorbility.co.uk) and her contributions to the ThinkAhead blog (https://thinkaheadsheffield.wordpress.com/category/kay-guccione/).

If you have the time and are keen to establish yourself in your particular field, then why not consider launching your own professional blog or vlog. As with journal articles, reporting research carried out for assessment purposes can be a good way to start this. Whilst maintaining a blog can be a lot of work, you are able to control the frequency of your contributions. It can be a great way to establish a regular audience and provide excellent networking opportunities. If you have your own blog, you might blog about more than just one single research project to maintain a following.

Beyond the written form of blogging, video formats are growing in popularity as mechanisms for sharing your research online with others. Platforms such as Vimeo and YouTube allow you to access very wide audience, though they are not available in all countries. Some universities also have institutional versions of these platforms which you can disseminate on if you are connected to them, and these have the advantage of the institutional marketing machine helping to get your message out there.

Twitter is very widely used in conferences and seminars with specific event hashtags to follow and retweet. Twitter, whilst limited to 140 or 280 characters can allow you to reach a huge audience through retweets and you can add hyperlinks to fuller versions of your work where it may appear online. The following link (Ortega, 2017) takes you to a blog post which argues that ‘although the relationship between tweets and citations is poor, actively participating on Twitter is a powerful way of promoting and disseminating academic outputs, potentially indirectly influencing the scholarly impact and improving prospects of increased citations.’

To maximise your reach and to help people find your work among the plethora of internet content, tagging your contribution strategically is one way of maximising traffic. Think about the kind of search terms people seeking work similar to yours are likely to enter into search engines and include these in your on-line available work, specifically titles if possible. Remember links to online theses are also growing rapidly and institutional repositories are frequently encountered in research searches.

Once your work is online, work on getting the link ‘out there’ - think about with whom you could share it with, post it on appropriate social media groups, tweet it and so on. Be aware, however, that these tactics take time and commitment and you will need to regularly update blogs to keep the audience interested. If you do start a blog, you can of course mitigate the personal effort by inviting the contributions of people you’d like to associate your work with.

Offline opportunities also are worth considering. Is there the possibility of displaying your research findings as a poster or producing a short booklet or brochure describing your work in an appealing and engaging manner, considering the power of graphics and images to help with the allure of the document? In-house departmental conferences often invite students to disseminate their work. Also, you could seek out opportunities to participate in public engagement events, to disseminate your work to a wider audience. These types of events are more and more common, for example, the Festival of Social Sciences. The ESRC’s guide to public engagement offers a comprehensive consideration of the issues and potential of such public activities (ESRC, 2017).

## References

ESRC [Economic and Social Research Council] (2017) ‘Guide to Public Engagement’. http://www.esrc.ac.uk/public-engagement/public-engagement-guidance/guide-to-public-engagement/ [accessed November 22, 2018].

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