



Council of Editors of Learned Journals www.celj.org

December 2007

Guidelines for Contributors

The following "tips" are offered as guidelines for those wanting to publish articles in scholarly journals devoted to humanities and social science subjects. They are *only* guidelines, setting forth things that many editors believe to be good advice for contributors. Suggestions for additions or changes are always welcome: send them to the current president of CELJ [for contact information, see <http://www.celj.org/contactus.php>].

1. CONSIDER YOUR ESSAY.

- An article should state clearly how it contributes to the subject, field, or methodology it addresses. It should define its parameters and stick to them. Is it about one title, or an author's works, or a way of reading applicable to many books or subjects? Does it address particular ideological, theoretical, political, social, or aesthetic issues? It is often useful to position an essay in relation to contemporary criticism, to show how it relates to and differs from what others have been writing. In sum, the ambition, focus, and evidence of the article should be firmly identified.
- Papers that originated in seminars or for conferences sometimes rely on an implicit context supplied by the initiating occasion. The framing issues need to be made explicit in an essay submitted for publication in anything other than "conference proceedings." In addition, critical apparatus (notes and bibliography) not provided in the conference paper will usually be required.
- Contributors may benefit from seasoned colleagues' advice about the content, strategies, argument, and prose style of a manuscript, as well as suggestions about where it might be sent. Those attempting a language in which they do not have full written fluency may find it especially helpful to solicit advice on idiom and usage from a colleague who is at home in that language or from a professional editor or service that supports scholars seeking to publish across language boundaries. It is usual even for experienced writers to submit prospective work to others for their comments. Such advance critical vetting often results in significant

improvements to the text and frequently supplies the author with indications of how the material will be received and understood.

- An article needs to find its optimal length. Seminar and conference papers may need to be amplified, whereas a thesis or book chapter may need to have the theoretical material from earlier sections summarized and the exposition and examples cut. A journal article falls within a very different rhetorical genre from a seminar paper, conference presentation, or thesis chapter. To convert any of these versions into a publishable article usually requires major changes in style, voice, argument, and evidence. Sometimes an idea needs a lot of development and context; sometimes a point can be made very economically. Not all articles should be stretched or squeezed into 20-25 pages. Since different journals take articles of different length, decisions about length will be affected by, and reflexively affect, decisions about what journals are targeted.

2 CONSIDER THE JOURNAL.

- What journals are most appropriate for the article in its present form? A prospective contributor should read issues of several journals to determine their suitability. Which journals print articles similar in subject matter, theory, methodological approaches, length, use of pictorial materials, assumed audience, and so on?
- Does the journal receive "open" submissions, or must contributors belong to an organization or have presented the paper at a particular conference?
- What is the audience for the journal? The *MLA Directory of Periodicals* provides (for thousands of journals) addresses, editorial policies, instructions for submitting essays, length of time to decision, time elapsed between decision and publication, and circulation statistics. How frequently articles in the journal are cited can be ascertained by consulting the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index* in print or on CD-ROM. Contributors might consider which journals they regularly read, and which ones often publish in the area of their submission. Asking colleagues which journals they use can yield useful information about journals' reputation and availability.
- What is the journal's style? The tone of the periodical, whether it publishes annotated articles, whether it prints literature as well as critical pieces and reviews, all may influence decisions about what is appropriate to publish therein.
- What is the journal's reputation? In addition to colleagues' opinions, contributors might also check out the acknowledgment pages of major recent books in the field. Were any of the contents previously published in any of the periodicals under consideration?

- How much of any issue is devoted to open submissions? Usually the journal's guidelines to contributors, printed in the front or back matter, will indicate its policies. Is most of each issue taken up with articles, or with special topics, forums, position papers, notes, reviews, and information about forthcoming events, most of which result from invited rather than open submissions?
 - Contributors should seek out calls for papers for special journal issues on predetermined topics. Such publications usually come out much faster and more reliably than books composed of commissioned essays. And periodicals are usually thoroughly indexed by major services.
 - Contributors should weigh their options carefully before committing their work to volumes of commissioned essays, especially if the volume has not yet been accepted by a press. Sometimes these proposed collections never get into print or get reliably indexed.
 - Will the publication be available in a variety of formats—paper copies, online, on disk, in electronic abstracts, etc.—and will its contents be accessible through indexing and other reference services? This information is printed somewhere in each issue of most journals.
 - Contributors should ascertain whether their own institutions provide guidelines about the relative advantages of publishing in print as opposed to electronic journals. Currently, print publications have more status in some quarters than electronic journals, but the relative status of the two mediums is constantly changing, and in some fields online publication is more significant than print. (See CELJ's "Criteria for Evaluating Online Periodicals.")
3. FOLLOW THE PROCEDURES FOR SUBMISSION.
- Each journal specifies how it prefers essays to be submitted. Such specifications may include length, format, and topics for regular or forthcoming special issues; number of copies of an essay to be sent; kind of copies (original ribbon copy, photocopies, email attachments, diskettes, etc.); return postage coupons or SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) if the author wants copies returned; style protocols; length of time required for processing submissions; and other matters. Contributors should be careful to follow the procedures for each journal.
 - It is advisable to provide a cover letter that includes whatever the journal specifies. In this letter summarize very briefly the argument of the essay and mention anything that makes the submission particularly appropriate (e.g., it responds to a recent article on the same topic published by that journal).
 - Contributors should determine whether the journal accepts anonymous submissions. Some believe that anonymous submissions hedge against discrimination; others prefer to affix their name to their contributions,

especially if they are known for a body of work with which this submission is associated. Some are concerned that evaluators may be biased by the author's institutional affiliation (or nonaffiliation) or level of seniority. Some reviewers will not read anonymous submissions; most will. Most reviewers prefer to remain anonymous themselves, especially until an article has been accepted; others give permission for their identity to be communicated to the author. If the journal requires anonymous submission, contributors should make sure to erase all traces of authorial identity—including those automatically inserted by a word processor's "Track Changes" function or embedded in "Properties" information (which can be accessed and removed by selecting "Properties" under the "File," then "Summary" menu in Microsoft Word).

- Most journals will not review submissions that are concurrently under review elsewhere; many also have stated policies regarding publishing an essay that has already been accepted as part of a book. Given the personal time editors and other referees invest in the vetting process, secretly submitting the same manuscript to different journals is a breach of professional ethics.

4. WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SUBMISSION.

- Many publications will notify the contributor by mail, email, or other means when the essay is received, and may indicate the approximate amount of time the decision will take. If contributors have not heard within three weeks, they may call to find out whether the mailing arrived.
- Most professional publications referee their contents. Submissions invited by guest editors or regular editors for special or regular issues may or may not be counted as refereed articles; contributors should check with their home campus about such policies.
- Many publications review submissions inhouse, then consult others before arriving at a decision. Finding the right consultants, and finding them available, takes time, especially during holidays, vacations, and the early weeks of a new academic year. It is usually in the contributor's best interest to allow a reputable journal time to make an informed judgment.
- Decisions can often be reached within three to four months of submission, except perhaps during summer vacation. Some journals, such as *PMLA*, have a two-tiered review procedure; in such cases a final verdict will take longer to reach. If no response is forthcoming after four months, contributors may inquire about the status of their essays.
- Should the editor be unable to commit to a satisfactory timetable after four months, a contributor may notify the editor that the article is being submitted elsewhere.

5. WHAT JOURNAL RESPONSES INVOLVE.

- A decision is usually one of four kinds:
 - + reject, with or without readers' reports
 - + invitation to revise, usually with suggestions for substantial revision
 - + provisional acceptance, usually pending minor revisions
 - + acceptance, often accompanied by instructions for perfecting the typescript to conform to the journal's standards and by some information about transfer of copyright and publication schedule.
 - Readers' reports usually provide significant indication of how another professional understands the article and its contribution. Editors choose readers with care, and many such readers have a long track record with a journal and lots of experience advising prospective authors about revising to improve the submission. Authors should consider these reports as dispassionately as possible. Those changes that seem reasonable, that appear to strengthen the article's argument and to extend its implications, and that deepen and broaden the context, should be attempted. Those that seem to the author to misread the purpose of the article or to require a kind of research or revision that would turn the essay into something quite different may not be worth attempting. Authors have a choice about whether to revise in accordance with the editor's and readers' reports and resubmit to the same journal; or, if the proposed revisions seem wrong, to withdraw the piece from the first journal—informing the editor of that decision—and to submit it elsewhere.
 - Many journals consider an invitation to revise to be an agreement to work further with the author in seeking ways to render an essay publishable. When a revision is submitted, the author should make clear in a cover letter how previous readers' suggestions have been handled. Revised texts usually are considered in the context of the original response; if possible, a favorable verdict will be reached. But any response short of a contract is *not* a contract; there are cases where the revisions make the submission less publishable, and despite the best efforts of all concerned the article has to be rejected after revisions.
6. WHAT TO DO WHEN A MANUSCRIPT IS ACCEPTED.
- Editors make up the contents of their publications in different ways. Some will fix the date of issue at the time of acceptance; others put copy into proof far in advance and make up particular numbers according to considerations of space, topic, timeliness, and balance. In most cases it would be reasonable to expect that an essay for a periodical published two to four times a year would be published within 24 months of acceptance. Special circumstances may, however, advance or retard publication.
 - Authors should keep the journal informed at all times about how to reach them. Moreover, authors are expected to reply to all inquiries quickly; journals operate on very tight deadlines and any delays can be costly.

- Authors are expected to present accurate copytexts, with all quotations correctly transcribed and all text perfected for grammar, spelling, and orthography. Authors warrant to publishers that the material is original or that the sources are duly acknowledged. Authors are usually responsible for accurately translating foreign quotations if required; for obtaining copyright permissions; for producing tables, charts, and graphs; for providing photographs suitable to reproduce; and for supplying captions. Authors may also be asked to provide a brief identification for a list of contributors.
- Many journals want both hard copy and a disk of the author's final version and specify the allowable software programs for word processing.
- In agreeing to have a journal publish an essay, an author cedes authority over most matters of house-style and referencing protocols to that journal. For example, many American presses do not capitalize words such as "Queen" and "Parliament" that are still capitalized by many British presses. Normally the customary press practice will prevail over an author's preference for a different practice.
- Copy editors will conform the typescript to the journal's specifications for such matters as nature and location of references, indexes, running heads and subdivisions, and so forth. Such changes are usually not referred to the author. Other alterations, including corrections of grammar, transcriptions, references, and facts, may also be imposed by copy editors. Authors are usually consulted, before proof, about any substantive changes. An author may question a copy editor's decision, and many do object and often prevail with regard to some local matters. But major protocols (how footnotes are presented, for instance) are usually not negotiable; moreover, copyediting is undertaken in part to ensure accuracy and consistency, so local deviations may be troublesome to introduce.
- No changes other than corrections making proof conform to copytext can be made at proof stage. Sometimes authors receive proof to check, but not always.
- Authors usually have an opportunity to purchase offprints or copies of the issue in which their essay appears.
- Copyright in the essay as it appears in the periodical usually belongs to the periodical; journals and presses make various kinds of arrangements about assigning copyright to other forms of publication.

7. WHAT TO DO WHEN A SERIOUS DISPUTE OCCURS BETWEEN AUTHOR AND JOURNAL.

- If the journal belongs to the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, author or editor may appeal to the mediation board of that society for assistance in resolving the disputed matters.

8. FOR MORE INFORMATION on the preparation of manuscripts for publication, consult the *MLA Style Manual* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.