

Publish, Don't Perish: Experienced Authors Share Ideas

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In the past, many Extension agents and specialists didn't think much about "publish or perish." But with everchanging university administrators and policies, Extension workers now recognize the importance of publishing in refereed journals. Because of this, communication specialists are increasingly writing journal articles and also are being asked to help subject-matter specialists and field agents prepare articles for publishing.

Information gleaned from five Oregon State University faculty shows the importance of writing only about what interests you, getting to know others in your field, deciding where to market your work, seeking constructive criticism, and developing long-range strategies for publishing.

Publish or perish. The dictum isn't new (Suppa and Zirkel, 1983), but Extension faculty in Oregon sense with new urgency that it applies to them as well as to researchers. As a result, they are asking communication specialists for help in publishing journal articles. With these requests in mind, we sought suggestions from five OSU faculty who have achieved success in that area. Among them they have published more than nine books and 65 journal articles, plus numerous monographs and Extension and Experiment Station publications.

Journal of Applied Communications readers who want to increase their publishing or who find themselves helping other Extension faculty prepare journal articles for publication may find some helpful information among the things we learned.

The five agree that the actual writing is not the first step. Nor is it the last step. It comes someplace in the middle. Deciding what to write about comes first.

If your college degree is new, Mary Lee Nolan, professor of geography, says a logical place to start is the masters' thesis, doctoral disser-

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tation, or even a term paper because it is important to your career to get published early. But if you wrote those papers a long time ago, Susan Hanna, assistant professor of agricultural and resource economics, suggests the need to develop the habit of continually asking yourself if what you're doing is publishable.

Don't overlook the possibility of co-authorship. Lisa Ede, associate professor of English, notes that co-authorship has helped her increase her productivity. She has co-authored one book, co-edited one book, and co-authored eight journal articles (one on collaborative writing). Mary Powelson, associate professor of botany and plant pathology, points out that co-authoring with researchers is a good way for Extension workers to publish.

Write Only About What Interests You

Decide to write only about things that really interest you, stresses Sandra Spanier, associate professor of English. "If the topic isn't one you enjoy, writing about it will become drudgery," she says.

Be sure to start small. Not everything you write needs to be the definitive work on a subject, Spanier points out. Unless you're writing a book, write several short articles rather than one long one. She thinks you actually may be more likely to get an article published if you're reporting marginal changes in a body of knowledge than if you're reporting wide departures. Hanna agrees that you needn't wait to become an expert to publish a paper on a subject.

Get To Know Others in Your Field

In the first stage, it's important for you to get to know people working in the area you're working in—the

area you want to write about. Spanier and Ede suggest a couple of ways to do this:

Read journals with articles on the general topic you're working on. Write to authors whose work you admire. Compliment them. Make a comment, ask a question.

Volunteer to present a paper at the regional level, then the national level. Nolan, for one, gives evidence of following this practice: She presented 28 papers between 1971 and 1988. Presenting papers at conferences forces you to meet a deadline and also allows you to get feedback on the topic *before* you submit the paper to a journal for publication. Conferences also provide networking opportunities. To take full advantage of these opportunities, introduce yourself to others who are interested in the topic that interests you. Make sure they can match your name and face, and will remember you and the interests you have in common with them.

Nolan contends that it's worth paying your own expenses to conferences if necessary. She adds, "You even may have to fund some of your own research at first so you can demonstrate what you have done in order to get major grants."

It's easier than you may think to develop a national reputation. By defining yourself as a researcher you become part of the research community, Ede says.

Decide Where To Market Your Work

After you've narrowed your topic and recognized others in the field, you're almost ready to write. But not quite. You should first decide where you want to publish the article you want to write. To do this, you need to read all the journals you can that seem appropriate. These include:

- Journals that publish articles similar in subject matter and scope to the article you plan to write.
- Journals that your colleagues recognize as acceptable and valuable.

When you decide which journal you want to send your article to, Nolan recommends writing a query letter to the editor. Write "This is what I'm working on, would you be interested?" If they are, you're almost ready to start writing. If they're not, you've saved yourself the trouble of tailoring your article to that journal.

That last thought is important: tailoring your article. Articles written with a specific journal and a specific audience in mind stand the best chance of getting published. For example, Hanna, who has published in a German-based publication, says if the readers are international, include citations from international work.

Powelson points out one more step to take before you start writing: Study the journal guidelines carefully. (Some journals print them in every issue. Some print them once a year). Also look at articles in the journal for specifics regarding footnotes, capitalization, table formats, length of most articles, and general writing style, i.e. formal or informal.

Seek Constructive Criticism

Before you mail your article to the journal you've selected, Powelson emphasizes that you should have several people read it and provide feedback:

- One will be someone with language skills, perhaps your secretary, to review it for correct grammar or punctuation.
- Another will be a respected col-

league in your department. Spanier advises against asking a friend. That's because you want a critical review, and friends usually are too kind. Offer to review this person's papers if he or she will review yours. Not only is this a fair trade, but it also helps you keep aware of what your colleagues are working on.

- If it is possible to learn who the external reviewers of the publication are, you might send it to one of them. Powelson says she is able to do this because there are only a few people in the world who have the background to evaluate papers in her specialty. But be sure to act on their comments. Expect to wait at least six weeks to hear from reviewers at other institutions.
- You may want to send your paper to someone in the field whose work you admire, Ede suggests. Or to someone you met at a conference. But it doesn't have to be someone you have met. Simply write the person a letter complimenting their work and asking for constructive criticism on yours.
- If you're teaching the topic, you may want to ask your students for their reactions to the article.

Powelson emphasizes the importance of thanking everyone who reviews the paper for you. Oral "thanks" are adequate for those who comment orally, but she recommends sending written notes to those who write their comments.

Don't send so many copies of your manuscript out for review that you get bogged down incorporating others' suggestions. In evaluating comments of your reviewers, consider which are ego comments and which are constructive comments,

Hanna cautions. You needn't use every idea offered, but you should consider them all.

Once you've rewritten the paper to your satisfaction, you're ready to write a cover letter to the journal editor telling what contribution your paper makes to the field. For example, we think this article can help ACE members increase their own publishing productivity. And it will give them tools to help Extension specialists and agents who ask them for assistance in publishing in refereed journals.

Develop Long-Range Strategies

Now you're ready to mail your paper. But while you're waiting to hear if it is accepted or rejected, begin another paper. Hanna recommends that you keep several going all the time—some in the planning stage, some in the writing stage, some in the review stage. That way, it won't be long before you have several in the "accepted for publication" stage and, finally, some published.

Sometimes the editor accepts a paper "as is." Sometimes he or she sends it back, asking you to revise it based on additional reviewers' suggestions. And, of course, sometimes the paper is rejected. Don't be discouraged and don't take criticism and rejection personally. Numerical odds are against any one paper being published, Spanier points out. Among education journals, for example, some four-fifths of all manuscripts are rejected (Henson, 1984). The odds are even greater against an unsolicited book manuscript being accepted—one in a hundred (Powell, 1985).

If your paper is rejected, examine the comments to see why. Rejection may not mean it's a poor paper. Be aware of the criticism, but also be aware that the reviewer may not understand your point, she notes. If the editors say it's all right, there's nothing wrong with revising the paper and re-submitting it to the *same* journal.

If your paper is accepted and you receive galley proofs to read and correct, it's a good idea to read them aloud to someone else who follows along with your manuscript. That way you'll catch any omissions or inaccuracies that may have occurred during typesetting.

After the paper is published, remember to send copies of the printed article to colleagues who will be interested in it, but who may not read the journal it is published in.

About now, you may be thinking that all this takes a lot of time. You're right. But if publishing is as important to the careers of Extension faculty members as it is to other university faculty members (Soderberg, 1985), it is important to protect enough time to write **and** to do it well.

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