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## Reflection Paper

# Reflections on Trying to Publish for the First Time

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The workshop session “Advice for Authors: Raising Your Chances of Getting Published” was presented by Melodie Cook at the 2018 College and University Educator Special Interest Group Conference. This workshop offered English language teaching professionals a chance to review their knowledge on the requirements of publishing an article. It also gave those professionals who have not yet published an insight into the process and the dos and don’ts on trying to get published. The presentation specifically focused on getting published with *JALT Journal* where Cook has a role on the editorial board. Few authors are accepted for publication in *JALT Journal* with editors expecting articles of the highest quality. The presentation gave sound advice to session attendees on how the publication process should be carried out correctly to raise their chances of being one of those few authors who do get their article accepted with the journal.

Cook’s presentation opened with the question “Why did you choose to attend this workshop?” This question allowed the participants to discuss with each other why they were attending and to reflect over their current teaching and/or research contexts. My reason to attend was that I had recently finished a master’s degree in TESOL a few months before this workshop, and I was looking to start publishing soon. My master’s program did not include any writing for publication instruction; thus, the presentation looked to be able to provide me with useful advice to start the process.

“What to do” and “what not to do” to publish a paper were then presented. Cook highly recommended participants to follow the submission guidelines

involving word limits and prerequisites before sending the article.

Further advice which I found interesting was the careful consideration and selection of the journal one should choose to submit a paper. The research area of the submitted paper should be in line with a journal's key submission topics, so a paper will then relate and appeal to the readers of the journal. For example; *JALT Journal* includes key topics such as cross-cultural studies, classroom-based research, and language learning and acquisition. After further deliberation on this, I wanted to compare the quality of my MA dissertation with *JALT Journal* articles that relate to the topic that I focused on. I feel that all JALT publications use a much higher standard of academic writing, and I have noticed that authors of those articles seem more experienced in writing for publication because they have built up their skills over time. Maybe these authors do not work alone when writing and perhaps have mentors or collaborators to proofread and advise. I myself do not have much guidance, but if I did, I feel it would likely increase my opportunity to write articles of higher quality. With that said, I find myself with increased determination to seek out further support to improve my chances to publish with the journal in the future.

“Scattergun” and “salami-slicing” were terms that Cook included in the presentation of approaches that writers should avoid when trying to get published. I had not previously come across these points and agreed that both these approaches should be avoided, and I will briefly explain them now. The scattergun approach, to submit a paper to many different journals, would likely cause a writer to become unnecessarily overworked due to journals having different kinds of prerequisites for a publication. From a journal editors' perspective, it is unprofessional if a writer submits the same paper to other journals. Salami-slicing is dividing a larger study into smaller articles, and such submissions face a likely rejection due to insufficient detail and quality. I believe the detail is seemingly a quick fix with comments from the editor on what is lacking, but I think the quality is a key issue of which the author should be aware, salami type or not. I was not familiar with the term salami-slicing, but I have experienced advice from people saying that I should divide my MA dissertation into smaller articles, re-work them, and then submit for publication. The concern

is exactly what I previously stated: I believe my articles may get rejected due to insufficient length and/or quality. I have a clearer perspective on the issues that I would face if I were to submit parts of my dissertation, but collaborating with experienced authors could be one solution to help combat the challenges.

Cook then presented the characteristics of inadequate articles. We saw an example of a poorly designed fictitious article, and after evaluating it and from the points presented by Cook, it was obvious an article must be clear, give supportive information, and provide up-to-date references. One point that Cook highlighted that related to my academic writing experience in the MA TESOL program was the habit of making strong assertions instead of hedging if there is no evidence to back up those assertions. After the conference, I decided to reread all my MA assignments. I found a strong assertion in one paper that should have been hedged, and in another assignment I found some new information in the conclusion. I also found that language that I used within the papers was fairly simplistic compared to a *JALT Journal* article, where more variation of academic vocabulary was used. I was pleased with the outcome of both papers; however, if I would have considered points raised by Cook, I believe I may have written better papers with more clarity. This workshop could have therefore made a positive impact towards my masters.

When Cook presented the qualities of a *good* article next, they seemed to be obvious things perhaps most researchers would include in articles anyway. For example, the abstract should be brief but have a clear explanation of the purpose, methodology, and outcomes – things I learnt in my MA, but some authors may forget to incorporate. One further point that particularly struck me was that the writer must persuade readers for a need for the paper.

Cook also mentioned that American Psychological Association (APA) style is key when writing articles for *JALT Journal*. I do not own an APA manual and feel uncertain on various points such as the switch from Harvard to APA referencing. My master's program and education courses before that did not follow APA style, but all followed a Harvard referencing style which I feel has been ingrained in me.

The presentation moved on to the process of getting published. Cook

described how long and how potentially challenging the entire publishing process can be. Authors who have submitted a paper to journals are anxious as they await a response, and every journal has its own publishing timeframe. The publishing process for *JALT Journal* can take around nine months to finalise, hence it is important for writers to think carefully about this time frame. One point Cook expressed was one should not wait for editors or reviewers to get back to them with feedback; they should move on to other research. Authors do not have control over the publishing process and, if their article is rejected, they can consider submitting elsewhere.

Another key aspect in manuscript preparation that Cook mentioned was that the first draft is not necessarily the draft that an author will send to the publisher. From writing my MA program papers, much work still had to be done after the first draft, such as proofreading, receiving feedback from my tutor, then further research, editing, and proofreading. It was not a “write once and done” process. Much time must go into refining the article to meet the requirements of a journal. I believe receiving a second opinion of one’s article is instructive. From my experience in getting my articles polished, it was beneficial to have another person proofread a paper with feedback, as we may not always see all errors ourselves. Although, after deeper thought, it may have been beneficial to have gotten further opinions on my past academic papers to check on certain areas that I still find challenging, namely clarity and punctuation, as they may have improved the final grade.

After attending the workshop, I wrote a list of key considerations to remember when writing papers which may give me a better chance of getting accepted for publication. Since the workshop, I have also shared these points with students in my academic writing classes to increase their awareness of the key elements in order to foster their own academic writing skills. They took to these positively with proofreading being the most interesting. I created an activity where learners proofread their partner’s pre-made academic article using pre-taught error correction codes, so learners could later improve the paper. It proved a very enjoyable task for them to understand the importance of proofreading.

## **Author bio**

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