

## How to get your first academic paper published

Kevin O'Gorman offers 10 tips on securing your first academic publication

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Getting your first academic paper published can be a challenge. Kevin O'Gorman, professor of management and business history at [Heriot-Watt University](#), offers his top tips on breaking into the world of journals [or publishing from your thesis or dissertation work].

### **It is too long**

Really, it's far too long. You have slaved over your thesis for three years and you know and love every word in it – they all matter to you and that is perfectly understandable. However, it's now far too long!

Your thesis could be anywhere from 80,000 to 100,000 words and you are writing a journal paper (depending on the discipline) of normally between 6,000 and 12,000 words.

Think of the paper as a new work in its own right, not just a cut-down version of your thesis.

### **Don't be offended**

Develop a thick skin for criticism and try not to take anything personally. Yes, I know that is a lot easier said than done, and criticism will be painful; but forewarned is forearmed.

### **Other people know more than you**

You may have grown to either love or hate your supervisors during the PhD process; that is normal. However, ask them for help with publishing, as they have been in the same boat.

Depending on how your viva went, examiners are also good people to approach for advice. They certainly now know your work and they are normally experts in the field.

Finally, academics in your department/faculty/school/college are often willing to help too; you do not have to do this alone.

### **Agree the order of authorship**

This can be an awkward conversation to have at the start of any collaborative paper, however, just imagine how difficult it would be if you left it to the end and you were all tired, fed up and at the point of submission to the journal.

Normally, in business and management, if it is your PhD you should go first. But that might vary in the other disciplines; be guided by norms and convention.

There is a rather famous paper from 1973 where a footnote states that the author order was determined by a 25-game croquet tournament. If all else fails, rock, paper, scissors is as good a method as any.

### **Clearly articulate your contribution**

If you want to hit a top-ranked journal, then you need a clearly articulated theoretical gap, whatever the subject of your research.

It's not your thing, it is your theory what matters! You should also be thinking about why these abstract academic chatterings should be of significant applied interest to the relevant industry professionals.

Research that ultimately offers practical suggestions for managers distinguishes itself from the rest by demonstrating the critical self-awareness that most claim but few enact.

### **Be disciplined and clear in your method**

Your method needs to be very clear. You should clearly articulate and justify your philosophical underpinnings, data collection and analysis techniques in a manner that allows your study to be replicated in the future.

### **Know the journal and editor**

Journals are not just waiting for your paper, nor do they just publish whatever comes their way, regardless of quality.

For example, the highly ranked and cited business management journals can have up to a 98 per cent rejection rate, so you need to be on top of your game.

The journal is normally seen as a conversation; you need to embed your work within it. Make sure that you have read any editorials on the nature and scope of the journal. Often editors when taking over a journal wish to take it in a particular direction; make sure your paper fits within that plan. If in doubt, a short, courteous email to the editor never hurts.

### **Consider the reviewers**

If you get a revise and resubmit, welcome it, and get on with it.

The reviewers do not have some predestined malefactors here to frustrate you and your desire to publish. They are (normally) all unpaid volunteers who are there at the service of the academic community at large, and, if your paper is published you will be joining their ranks.

They are all published in your area and in that journal; honestly, they want you to publish the best paper possible.

### **Watch for the deadlines**

Everyone is under time pressure: the editor, the reviewer, not just you. If you undertake the "revise and resubmit", reply to the editor and get on with it. Good things do not, normally, come to those who wait.

You are not a first-year undergraduate; don't leave it so late that you need to ask for an extension.

### **A rejection is often the first step to an acceptance**

I know that might sound silly, however, it is true...there are (many) other journals out there.

Read, reflect and act on feedback from the reviewers and editors, use it to write a better version of the paper, and submit it to another journal: begin the process all over again.

**Kevin O’Gorman is professor of management and business history at [Heriot-Watt University](#). This is an edited version of a post that originally appeared on [It’s Not you, It’s Your Data](#), a collaborative blog on the PhD journey.**