

Writing an Article in 12 Weeks

IN HER BOOK *WRITING YOUR JOURNAL ARTICLE in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*, Wendy Laura Belcher breaks down the writing process into manageable tasks to help anyone prepare an article for publication in just 12 weeks.

Week 1. Design your plan for writing

Instead of starting from scratch, think about what you've already written. Texts that received praise from faculty or that you still think back on with pleasure, research findings, a paper you presented at a research conference, or a senior or master's thesis project are all examples of texts you can revise for publication. According to Belcher, revising is the key to publication, so it helps to rework an existing text.

In addition to identifying a text for revision, decide when and where you will write. Draft a daily schedule with set writing times of one to four hours, then stick to the schedule. The more consistently you write, the easier it will be to write. Choosing a writing site is part of developing a productive writing habit. Find one or two locations where you can write without getting distracted.

Week 2. Start your article

In the second week, determine the purpose of your article and your argument. Publishable articles tell something new about something old. The "new" idea doesn't have to be an original idea, but it should bring new knowledge to the topic. Writing an abstract will help solidify your argument and provide a guide as you work through your revisions.

Week 3. Advance your argument

Because journal articles set out to persuade readers, it's necessary to formulate a solid argument. Start by stating your argument simply, and then write a short list of evidence to support it. Make sure your argument is stated in your abstract and revise your abstract if necessary. Next, make sure your argument is present in your article. Spend the rest of week 3 revising your article around your argument.

Week 4. Select a journal

Finding the right journal for your article is essential. Your adviser and colleagues can provide suggestions of journals that may be appropriate for your article. Send them your abstract to help them better understand the type of article you're writing. You also can find potential journals by reviewing your citations and bibliographies and checking out electronic databases. After identifying your short list, evaluate each journal to determine which is the best fit.

Week 5. Review related literature

According to Belcher, journal articles are typically published for three reasons: 1) to fill a gap in existing research, 2) to extend existing research or 3) to correct unsound research. If you assert that few other or no other researchers have addressed your topic, make sure you've reviewed enough literature to confidently make that statement. Additionally, when published, your article will continue the conversation about your topic. This makes understanding where your ideas and findings fit with the current literature an important part of publication

Week 6. Strengthen your structure

Your structure provides a natural flow that will lead readers through the article. In addition to aiding your readers, an organized structure will help you connect your ideas. Belcher recommends outlining an existing article before starting on your own. Use what you learned in your model outline exercise to create an outline for your article and revise your article based on the outline.

Week 7. Present your evidence

Print out your article and use the old-fashioned paper and pen method to mark instances where you used evidence to back up your argument. Determine if your evidence is used clearly and logically. Then reread your article to determine if your evidence moves your argument forward, and revise your article based on your notes.

Week 8. Open and conclude your article

First, Belcher advises revising your title. The title of your article will have a life of its own long after your article is published. It will appear on your CV and in electronic searches. It needs to be a clear invitation to your discussion and should be easily found in an online search. Belcher suggests avoiding broad titles, naming subjects and identifying your argument.

Make sure your opening states your argument, introduces your topic and provides statements about your topic, such as general history, statistics or background information. Your introduction should also provide a road map for the rest of your article. The conclusion is an opportunity to sum up your argument and bring it together with the evidence. This also is a place to discuss how research can move your topic forward, solutions to a problem or your personal reactions.

Week 9. Give, get and use others' feedback.

Send out your article to your adviser and colleagues with a request for feedback. Be sure to let your readers know what kind of feedback you need – for example, you may just need someone to help find typos and errors, or you may want a reviewer to tell you whether the article comes together at the end.

Week 10. Edit your sentences

Up to this point, the bulk of your writing has been revising the content of your article. Now it's time to edit. In addition to her own editing advice, Belcher recommends these books to aid the

editing process.

Common Mistakes in English by T.J. Fitikides

Dictionary of English Usage by Merriam-Webster

Edit Your self: A Manual for Everyone Who Works with Words by Bruce Ross-Larson

Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White

Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace by Joseph M William

See “The Graduate Student Writer” on page 8 of this newsletter for some revising and editing strategies.

Week 11. Wrap up your article

Belcher recommends rereading your article twice during week 11. As you read through it the first time, make notes about which sections need to be improved, paying extra attention to the flow of your argument. During the second reading, look for overall cohesiveness of your writing. Revise your text based on your notes.

Week 12. Send your article

Now that your article is finished, it’s time to begin the submission process. Write a cover letter that introduces your article and provides context for the editor. Be sure to include the title of your article and a description (using part of your abstract is fine), and highlight the contribution your article makes to your field and why it will appeal to the journal’s readers. Also, review your style formatting to be sure it is consistent with your discipline (APA, MLA, etc.), and prepare your final version according to the journal’s instructions.

Finally, send your article out for submission.

As a graduate student, there are many demands on your time, and revising an article for publication isn’t always a top priority during the academic year. Belcher’s 12-week plan for writing a journal article fits easily into the summer months with a few weeks to spare for vacation time!

Source

Belcher, W.L. (2009). Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Success in Publishing. Los Angeles: Sage.

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