

UC Santa Cruz

Publishing Tips Series Season 1

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Season 1, Week 3 - What are the decision points during the publishing process?

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Publishing Tips Series – Season 1, Week 3

November 7, 2024

This is the third week of the Publishing Tips Series, Season 1, running from October 24 to December 5, 2024. This series addresses frequently asked questions on publishing from graduate students. This week's installment covers **"What are the decision points during the publishing process?"** Here are this week's takeaways:

- Know what to expect throughout the stages of the publishing process, and
- Consider which decisions are the responsibility of you as the author.

Spotify link to listen

[Season 1, Week 3 podcast episode](#) (same content as the following text-based version, only in audio format)

What are the decision points during the publishing process?

So far in this Publishing Tips Series, we have looked at specific parts of the publishing process, including how long it takes to get published and choosing a journal. This week's tips zoom back out to look at all the decision points throughout the course of the publishing process. Each decision point can mean a different outcome and a different course of action for you as the author.

The corresponding author – the author who receives communication from the journal as the article goes through the publishing stages – is the one who is involved in these decisions for the most part. You may be the only author and thus the default corresponding author, which is common in the humanities. Alternatively, you may be co-authoring an article with your advisor, peers, and/or coworkers – one common scenario involves colleagues in a lab in the sciences co-writing a paper – and one of you is the corresponding author.

The following tips describe these editorial and authorial decisions in more detail and are divided by decisions that the journal makes about your article and points where you as the author have to make decisions about your article.

Decisions on the part of the journal at the desk

The journal's editorial team goes through several decision points with an article. When an article is submitted, the first step is the desk review, conducted by the journal's managing editor or another person on the editorial team, which can result in several possible desk outcomes:

- *Desk acceptance* – This decision means that the article is in scope for the journal, meets the journal's standards for methodology and quality, is not plagiarized, adds something new to the field, and/or is ready to be considered by an editor for peer review. The characteristics on which journals judge new submissions may vary from journal to journal.
- *Desk edits before acceptance* – This request means that your article is nearly ready for an editor to consider, but your manuscript needs some changes to fit the journal's style, such as updating the formatting, making a stronger connection to the journal's scope, and/or adhering to anonymity for review.
- *Desk rejection* – This decision means that the journal has deemed this article out of scope and/or that they believe the article has issues that are irreconcilable with the journal. A desk rejection happens before peer review.
- *Desk rejection with an invitation to resubmit* – This outcome indicates that your article is promising but requires substantial enough edits that the journal does not want to keep the article in their queue while you make these edits. It also means that you are free to resubmit elsewhere if you would prefer, or you may resubmit to the same journal after making the edits.

These desk review decisions may vary depending on the journal, and it is best to read the correspondence from the journal closely and respond to it in a timely manner.

Decisions based on peer review

Next, once your manuscript goes through peer review, the journal, specifically the editor assigned to your article, will make decisions based on **peer review** feedback as well. Possible peer review outcomes include:

- *Acceptance* – Yay! Your article received positive peer review(s) and will be published by the journal. More steps follow an acceptance, though. The manuscript will need to be copyedited and typeset so that the text and formatting are polished and in the journal's style. You will also be asked to sign a publishing agreement to give the journal the copyrights necessary to publish (more on this in the next section on decisions on the part

of the author). Acceptance is usually the stage when authors will be asked to deanonymize their manuscript if it has been anonymized for anonymous peer review.

- *Minor revisions* – Having the author make revisions is a common decision by a journal. Revisions are based on feedback from the peer reviewers and editor(s). (*More on how to respond to peer review next week!*) The request of minor revisions means that the journal does not think that the requested edits will be involved, time-consuming changes. The journal will typically provide a deadline by which the author(s) must complete the revisions and re-submit the manuscript.
- *Major revisions* – Again, revisions are not uncommon for a journal to request from an author. Essentially, the journal deems major revisions to be more time intensive and significant than minor revisions. Will readers know if you made major or minor revisions? Typically, with anonymous review, readers of the published article will not know which kind of revisions were done on an article, but some types of [open peer review](#) reveal the peer review comments and process to readers, which may or may not reveal the identity of the reviewer. It is good to know what type of review your article will receive as you go through it.
- *Rejection* – Journal acceptance rates are far less than one hundred percent, so rejections are par for the course for authors when they are attempting to publish research. Rejections are not the end of the road for an article because an author may resubmit the manuscript to another journal since the manuscript is no longer under review at the journal that rejected the manuscript and definitely not under contract to be published there. Trying again at another journal is worthwhile after putting so much effort into writing a manuscript already. If the journal shares feedback about why they rejected the manuscript, the author may consider incorporating the feedback before re-submitting to another journal. If the journal does not share feedback, or very detailed feedback, it may be possible to ask the editor for more information, especially after an article has gone through review.

Peer review may bring any of these outcomes, and all of them have actions that you can take, which we will cover next.

Decisions on the part of the author

The author – you – have agency and choices to make during the publishing process. Your choices include:

- *Whether to submit to the journal* – We covered how to choose a journal last week, but it is worth highlighting that this is the very first choice an author has for publishing an article. An author also has the option to withdraw their paper from the journal throughout the publishing process if the timing or feedback is not working for them.
- *Whether you agree or disagree with the reviewers' comments* – Sometimes reviewers' feedback includes suggestions that would require more research or extend the scope of

your paper beyond what you intended or have the bandwidth to add. Sometimes the feedback is reasonable, and other times it does not make sense for the paper, and the author may discern which is true for their paper. *(Again, next week's tips will cover responding to peer reviewers' comments!)*

- *Whether to sign a publication agreement* – Publication agreements cover the terms under which the journal will publish your manuscript. Authors are offered a publication agreement when their article is accepted. For journals, publication agreements are often click-throughs, in which the author is offered a series of information and questions to agree to and/or make selections. Selections often include choices of open access in the case of hybrid journals, payment for article processing charges (APCs), and Creative Commons licenses. It may be possible to [negotiate your publishing contract](#), though many journals have standard language, so reach out to the editor if you need to discuss the terms. Typically if you do not sign the agreement, the journal cannot publish your article. *(In the last week of this series, we will talk about copyright considerations.)*

These decisions on the part of the author are in your hands, and you may reach out to the Library with questions.

Tips on navigating decisions during the publishing process

- Check the formatting guidelines. The journal's instructions for authors (also called various names, like "manuscript guidelines") provide rules to format your article and hopefully avoid desk edits or rejection for formatting issues. Formatting specifications may cover citation styles, article sections, font, heading style, length, layout, figures, and/or more. Some journals give more formatting directions than others.
- Keep your co-authors updated. As the corresponding author, you may need to loop in your co-authors because the journal may only communicate with you. Include your co-authors in the decisions if they want to be involved and let them know where the article is as it moves through the steps. Revisions are a time when co-authors will most likely be involved.
- Consider what revisions to make. During revisions, you as the author have the choice of whether to incorporate feedback on your manuscript. If the feedback does not match your focus for the paper, you may consider sharing your concern with the editor instead of applying the feedback. *(Again, more on this next week!)*
- Choose a license. Applying a Creative Commons (CC) license to your article – one of the decisions when signing a publication agreement – opens up your rights under copyright for greater reuse of the article. As an author, you are the copyright holder, and through your publishing agreement, you may transfer exclusive or nonexclusive rights to the publisher so that they can publish your article. When you sign a publishing agreement, you may also be asked to choose a CC license, primarily when publishing

with an open access journal. [Read more about licenses](#), and reach out to the Library with questions about choosing one.

- Publishing a book instead? Check out the [UC Press blog posts for authors](#), which covers parts of the book publishing process. Monographs involve book proposals shared with the press, and [The Book Proposal Book](#) provides the ins and outs of proposals, plus author Laura Portwood-Stacer offers a [newsletter](#) about proposals and book publishing.

Putting it into practice

1. Look up the author instructions for your journal of interest on the journal's website and see what formatting requirements (e.g., citation style, sections for your article type, headings, etc.) that there are. Apply this formatting to your manuscript before submitting.
2. Talk with your peers about article rejections. You are not alone! Your colleagues, and even your advisor or committee members, have experienced rejections from journals. *What did your peers, advisor, or committee members do when they received a rejection? What happened next with their rejected article? Did they successfully publish their article with a different journal?*

More questions? Contact the Library at research@library.ucsc.edu or [sign up](#) for a one-on-one Zoom meeting about publishing.

Talk with you next week about responding to peer review feedback!

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