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Publishing Tips Season 3, Episode 4: How to regroup from rejection, try again, and get published with Matthew Evans

Martha: This is season three of the UCSC Publishing Tips podcast. I am your host, Martha Stuit, she/her pronouns, the Scholarly Communication Librarian here at the University of California, Santa Cruz. This third season is a little different from the previous two seasons. Instead of answering common questions about publishing from graduate students and candidates, this season offers interviews of graduate students and postdocs themselves, including master's students and PhD students or candidates, and postdoctoral researchers, and we talk about their publishing experiences.

These interviews were conducted in the spring of 2026. The aim is to share stories so that graduate authors may learn about publishing from each other. These interviews span eight departments at UCSC, so there is a range of disciplines included. Keep in mind that even if an author interview is not about your area of study, there is still something to learn about the publishing process and the effort and feelings that go along with it from these peer stories.

This episode's interviewee is Matthew Evans, pronouns he/they, who is a PhD candidate in the department of Psychology. Our interview includes topics like desk rejections and manuscript revisions following peer review. Matt received an award for his article, so we talk about that achievement, too.

It's great to be here with you today, Matt.

Matt: Mm-hmm.

Martha: I wondered if you could start with introducing yourself with your name, pronouns, department, year and program, and research focus or area of study, and anything else you'd like to share.

Matt: Yeah. My name is Matt Evans. My pronouns are he/they I'm a sixth-year PhD candidate in the psychology department. I work with Professor Nicolas Davidenko in the High Level Perception Lab.

And in that lab, we study a lot of different high-level perceptual processes, so that's things like face perception, multi-sensory integration. My research specifically focuses on music cognition and perception, and I'm especially interested in mental imagery for music, and one specific type of mental imagery for music, which we call involuntary musical imagery, but most normal people call it an earworm or having a song stuck in your head.

Martha: How did you get into that area of study?

Matt: It was sort of a long path. I've been a musician my whole life, since I was four or five years old, and I started playing the piano and played many, many different instruments throughout elementary and middle school, in jazz band and orchestra, and I was in some really bad rock bands in high school and, and, uh, undergrad.

I did the classic UC Santa Cruz, uh, very bad Grateful Dead cover band. Which was fun. Uh, and, uh, uh, but I, I never really put in enough work as a musician to be as good as I wanted to be at it. But I've also sort of always known that I was interested in psychology, and a friend gifted me a book years ago called This Is Your Brain on Music by Daniel Levitin.

It's a New York Times bestseller, um, very accessible book, and it introduced me to this concept, this field of music cognition. And then probably 10 years later, I was, uh, at UC Santa Cruz as an undergrad, knew I wanted to be a professor, so I knew I needed to get research experience, and I happened into, uh, a conversation with Professor Nick Davidenko, and we were chatting about all sorts of different things.

Nick does a lot of interesting work with illusions, and he introduced me to this illusion that I'd never heard of called the, the speech to song illusion. It's a really strong effect. It's really where just listening to someone say a sentence repeated several times, they stop sounding like they're saying it and start sounding like they're singing it.

And that sort of reminded me of, like, oh yeah, there was this whole field of music cognition and perception that I thought was really fascinating when I read about it years ago. And so as an undergrad, I designed this very poorly thought out and executed study that really didn't go anywhere, but it was enough to give me something to write about on my grad school applications.

And then I ended up staying with Nick Davidenko in the High Level Perception Lab at UCSC for my PhD program. And so the summer before PhD program started, it was 2020, uh, so we were peak-

Martha: Oh

Matt: ... lockdown. Yep.

Martha: Quite the time.

Matt: Summer, summer of 2020. So Nick and I, we met outside at a dog park or something, uh, and we're just chatting.

And the way I remember it was Nick said something along the lines of, "Okay, so it seems like this senior project you were working on isn't really going where you wanted it to. Let's

brainstorm some other things you might be interested in. Do you wanna stick with speech to song?" And Nick was actually the one that recommended earworms.

So then I eventually discovered that what I was interested in was involuntary musical imagery, and it turns out it was a really sort of exciting moment in my career because literally in the English language, the first paper that, uh, does empirical work on this phenomenon of involuntary musical imagery is from 2006.

Which as an, as an early career, like the earliest career you can be as a researcher, is really sort of exciting to stumble upon, 'cause it turns out, like, you can still to this day, if you're interested in this topic, you can read every journal article that's ever been published on this topic in a year, right?

Martha: Wow.

Matt: Of, like, dedicated-

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: ... study. Or probably less if you were really focused on it.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Um, there's just-

Martha: So there's a lot of room for more research.

Matt: There's a lot of room for more research, and it's very possible to become expert very quickly. There's a lot of areas of psychological science where it's not feasible to read everything on the topic.

And so not only was there a lot for me to read and, and learn about, but I could pretty confidently identify gaps. One of the studies that had always sort of stood out to me in that book that I mentioned, the This Is Your Brain on Music, was a study about absolute pitch. You've probably heard of, like, perfect pitch, right?

Martha: Yeah.

Matt: So if I were to sing, um, "La," right?

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Someone with perfect pitch would be able to say, like, "Oh, that's a C#," or... I don't have perfect pitch, so I don't know if that was a C# or not. I d- It probably wasn't. Um- ... uh,

in fact, there's a 8.3% chance that it was, and- ... the remainder that it wasn't, 'cause there are 12 options. Uh, assuming that I was even singing one of the 12 Western tones. I could have been in between. What most of us have is relative pitch, right? So if I sing, "Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da," even though there's no lyrics, you know you can recognize that I'm singing-

Martha: Yes, Happy Birthday.

Matt: Right.

And it doesn't matter if I'm singing it at that pitch height or if I were singing it, "Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da." You still recognize it as the same melody. Right? And that's because relative pitch lets us identify interval relationships regardless of the sort of absolute frequency associated with them.

Martha: Okay.

Matt: It's sort of generally accepted that humans have really good relative pitch abilities, with the very rare exception of a handful of people, statistically speaking, who have, in place of good relative pitch abilities, they have very strong absolute pitch abilities. And those are the people that we say have perfect pitch, right?

And so you might assume then that, uh, if I ask you to sing "Happy Birthday to You," you might sing it on a random note.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: It turns out people tend to sing "Happy Birthday to You" on the same note every time they sing it.

Martha: Oh, really?

Matt: Even if they don't have, like, a starting pitch given to them.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And it's not just that they have a preferred starting pitch for any song, because if they sing She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain When She Comes-

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: they also start that song on the same note, but it might be a different note.

Martha: Oh.

Matt: This is research that was done by Andrea Halpern in the '80s.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And it shows that, like, there must be some memory for absolute pitches, even in people who can't name them.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And then Daniel Levitin in the '90s comes along and he says, "Okay, what about songs that have a objectively correct starting note?"

Right? So, um, "Here Comes the Sun" by The Beatles, right?

Martha: Okay. Mm-hmm.

Matt: It's probably been recorded in several keys by cover bands, but the original version that was recorded on whichever album it came out on has a correct pitch-

Martha: Mm-hmm ...

Matt: that it should start on.

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: And what Daniel Levitin did was brought people into the lab and asked them, "Pick a song that you know really well from a list," and the list only included songs that did have a correct starting key.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: "And then bring it to mind. Imagine hearing it as accurately as you can. And then once you are hearing it in your mind's ear, uh, sing it. Recreate what you're hearing in your head." And he did it specifically with trained musicians, and he told them to rate on a scale of one to five how good a job they had done of imitating what they were hearing in their mind.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Now, again, if people don't have any memory for absolute pitch, you would expect just by chance that 8.3% of the time, 'cause there are 12 options for starting pitches if we're rounding to the nearest note, uh, that they would be in the right key. It turned out about 50% of the time people were in the right key, which is-

Martha: Wow

Matt: pretty incredible.

Martha: Yeah.

Matt: Um, so this is a very long answer to your question of how did I get interested in earworms. I had always been really interested in that study. I thought it was really cool. And when I remember reading it in the book, and the example he uses in the book is "Roxanne" by The Police.

Martha: Oh

Matt: So imagine hearing the song "Roxanne" in your head, and it's a hard one because it's hard to sing, but ♪ Roxanne ♪

Martha: Yeah.

Matt: Was that, like, about the note you had in your head?

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Right?

Martha: Definitely.

Matt: Because you know the song well. And it turns out if we were to pull it up and check it, I, I bet you money we'd be maybe not exactly on the right pitch, but higher than chance, right? Okay. Within a semitone or two.

Martha: Close at least.

Matt: Um, and, and for a song that I did know really well that was in my own pitch-

Martha: Mm-hmm ...

Matt: we'd be even closer, or within my vocal range rather. And I remember reading that at a coffee shop, hearing it in my head, and then, like, humming the note to hold it and looking up the song on YouTube, and it was exactly the right pitch.

Martha: Wow.

Matt: And I went, "Oh my God."

Martha: That's wild.

Matt: It's crazy, and it's so unexpected. And when you ask people who've done this experiment, without showing them whether they were right or not, you ask them, "Do you think you were right?" They almost always say no. Um, so we don't know that we have this accurate memory, but we have it.

But most people don't spend a lot of time sitting around thinking of a song they know really well and then trying to hear it in their mind's ear. Not at all. But what does happen all the time is you just get a random song that pops into your head.

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Right? And it might be a song that you've heard recently, it might be a song you know really well, or it might be a commercial jingle that you haven't heard since you were 12 years old.

And I was interested in, are we gonna see the same effect if we are looking at that kind of musical imagery?

Martha: Ah, okay.

Matt: In the wild, much more common, much more sort of what we would call ecologically valid, right?

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And I spent a month or two doing my best to make sure that no one had done this study already.

Uh, spoiler alert, someone had.

Martha: Oh.

Matt: Uh, but it was as an unpublished dissertation, and we learned about that unpublished dissertation from a reviewer.

Martha: Ah.

Matt: Uh, which was a little bit of a terrifying moment. It's such a common experience, I think, as a researcher, to come up with a really interesting question and idea, and then go, "Someone's done this already."

Martha: Definitely.

Matt: Um-

Martha: Yeah. Yeah. But there are ways to distinguish your research.

Matt: Exactly. Yeah. Then that was, that was one of the first lessons that I learned in all this. And it, it helps a lot 'cause when I teach research methods, for example-

Martha: Mm-hmm ...

Matt: a lot of times students will come up with a question, and then they'll be like, "Ah, but so-and-so already did it."

I'm like, "But did they? Did they do it exactly the way that you are going to?"

Martha: Right. Could you ask a slightly different question-

Matt: Exactly

Martha: ... or change the methods a bit and get different results?

Matt: Yep. Could you find a way where maybe if you did this a little differently or in this sample or whatever, that it would be, it would be dis- distinct enough to be valuable.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: So anyway, in the psychology department here, we, we do a first-year project, a second-year project, qualifying exams, dissertation proposal, and then dissertation.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Uh, and so this was my first-year project, and it stretched well beyond my first year- ... because it was kind of stupidly ambitious.

Martha: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Matt: Um, there's two sides to this. First of all, it was peak COVID so we couldn't bring people into the lab, but we didn't really want to bring people into the lab because the whole point was to, like, capture people's daily life earworm experiences.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: So we used, uh, a method called experience sampling, and one of the great things about doing research at a university like UC Santa Cruz is we have so many undergraduates who are really exceptional and interested in getting research experience.

I had a team of RAs who helped me sort of iterate this study, and then critically, an undergrad who came from the computer science department because we needed someone to build a web app for us. 'Cause the way that we collected these data were people would sign up for the study, and they'd give us their phone number.

Um, after having everything explained and giving informed consent, they would agree and give us their phone number. And then we would send them text messages six times a day at random times. The text message would take them to a website, and the website had the survey. And the first question on the survey was, "Right now, in this moment when you received the text message, is there a song stuck in your head?"

And if they answered yes, then it would give a little microphone icon and it would ask them to sing whatever they were hearing in their, in their mind's ear into the phone. So same sort of basic method as the Daniel Levitin study. But in the wild, as it happens, looking back, we were kind of weirdly lucky because we sent out, I think off the top of my head, it was like around 1,200 surveys, and we got about 900 responses back, which for experience sampling is a really good response rate.

And I think part of that can be attributed to the fact that people were stuck at home for the most part.

Martha: True.

Matt: Um, so there wasn't a lot of, like, people driving or being in class or whatever when they'd get the text message that they would then have to skip. Uh, at the end of the day, we got 132 recordings of people's earworms, and of that 50% of them were in exactly the right key.

69% were, uh, within plus or minus a semitone, which is like the one, one note apart, so like an F to an F sharp.

Martha: Mm-hmm. That's amazing.

Matt: It was really, really exciting result. We weren't expecting that. We were expecting to replicate the Levitin result but with a smaller effect, right? We think... By the time we actually had these results, I was well into my second year, and by the time we submitted it to a journal, I was at the beginning of my third year. But, um-

Martha: Yeah. Well, let's-

Matt: But yeah ...

Martha: ...let's talk about the publishing then from that. Uh-

Matt: Yes, of course.

Martha: What, uh, tales from your publishing journey would you like to share with us?

Matt: It was long. We started data collection in earnest, like January 2021.

That sounds right, because I started grad school in September of 2020.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And I think we probably had piloting done and ready to actually collect data by, by that winter.

Martha: And this is that same study with the text messages?

Matt: This was that text message study.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Yeah. Um, that wrapped by the end of that year, and then we spent probably the next year analyzing and writing that manuscript.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: My, my advisor was the one who used the term ambitious to describe this project, uh, which I, I maybe would've said stupid, but, uh, it was certainly ambitious, and I'm, I'm very grateful that he was open to it. So yeah, we submitted. We, we finally had a manuscript ready to submit in the summer of 2022, and we decided we wanted to aim high with our submission.

So we sent our first submission to the Journal of Psychological Science, which is considered a top journal in the field.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Um, and we received a very quick but very kind desk rejection.

Martha: Oh.

Matt: Um, which for, for any listeners who haven't done the publishing process before means the editor of the journal reviewed our submission and said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

So it never made it to the peer review process.

Martha: Still disappointing.

Matt: Disappointing, but very kind. And she said something about how it was a well-written, interesting article that she just thought was too special interest for the journal, which Psych Science is a very broad interest journal, so fair enough. Then we submitted to, uh, another journal, which I won't name...

Martha: Okay

Matt: ...uh, because they were real mean to me.

Martha: Oh, bummer.

Matt: Um, yeah, no, we got another pretty quick desk rejection. The first one was a little discouraging, but, but more like, okay, well I'm glad we tried, right? And this one, she rejected it for reasons that, in our opinion, were the sort of thing that we felt were very addressable during the peer review process.

I think she called it, uh, theoretically unfounded, uh, which I disagree with.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: But, you know, that's fair. And so that one, that one stung a lot more, but it was again, at least a quick rejection.

Martha: Yes. That's the upside of a desk rejection, is you know pretty soon and can start looking for another journal.

Matt: Exactly. Um-

Martha: Yeah ...

Matt: and so we were able to pretty quickly turn around and send it to the journal Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics. From them, we got... I don't think we actually got any notification, if I remember correctly, at least in our process. We didn't get a letter. We didn't get the opposite of a desk rejection.

Martha: Mm.

Matt: We didn't get a letter from the editor saying, "I have sent this out to reviewers."

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: We just got radio silence long enough.

Martha: Oh.

Matt: And I was, like, watching the submission dashboard, and it was giving us updates on the process, and eventually it said out for review. Um-

Martha: Good

Matt: And

Martha: But it would've been nice to be told that.

Matt: Well, I don't, I don't mean this in any way to, to come across as a complaint about the journal. I, I understand they have, you know, a huge volume to deal with and, and it's harder and harder to find reviewers these days. And I, I only share that part a- again, as experience for any- Yes ... anyone who's-

Martha: It can be a little opaque-

Matt: It is

for

Martha: what's going on-

Matt: Yeah, and- ...

Martha: once you submit to the journal ...

Matt: and of course it's nerve-wracking. And it's your first one, so you're like, "Oh, God, like, I feel really good about this, but who knows?"

Martha: Mm-hmm,

Matt: mm-hmm. And so we did eventually get a response. And the letter we eventually got back from the editor said, "I have received two expert reviews of manuscript 'blah, blah, blah, blah, blah,' "

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: "entitled 'Absolute pitch in involuntary musical imagery.'" The decision we were given was what's called a major revision. The options basically are a desk rejection, which is the one that we'd experienced twice at that point, or it can get sent to reviewers. And then once it gets sent to reviewers, they can either say accept or reject or, you know, accept with minor revisions, depending on the journal,

or revise and resubmit, right? And we got, uh, again, the major revision version. And in the classic, this is a, like a meme, uh, in publishing. Reviewer one had a few small minor things for us to change.

Martha: Yes.

Matt: And reviewer two had, like, four pages of-

Martha: Oh, wow

Matt: ... um-

Martha: So, classic reviewer two.

Matt: Yeah ...

Martha: very opinionated.

Matt: Yes. And I am so grateful to them. Uh, of course, I wasn't in the moment, right? But I can look back on this process with kind of clear eyes and, and say that not only is this a better paper that has frankly received awards and accolades that it wouldn't have otherwise, but I am a better scholar as the result of the way that this reviewer pushed.

And, and reviewers don't get paid

Martha: No.

Matt: Right? And, and so you get paid the same amount, which is zero-

Martha: Mm-hmm ...

Matt: whether you really put effort into a review or not.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And whoever this person was, I still don't know, 'cause that's part of the deal, uh, thank you for what was clearly hours of work that you put into this, this review.

So we had a, a round of major revisions.

Martha: How did you go about those?

Matt: Yeah. So the process that my advisor uses and taught me, at least from this journal, the revisions come in the form of a sort of a free-form letter.

Martha: Okay.

Matt: So I just took the letter and copy pasted it into a Google Doc, and then that became the sort of template for our response.

And, uh, I just respond to each thing line by line.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: For the minor revisions it was easy, and in some cases they were suggestions that we disagreed with, and we said so. We said, you know, "Thank you so much for the suggestion. We have decided not to pursue this analysis or whatever," and for XYZ.

Martha: Yes. It's, uh, good to explain why that is-

Matt: Right.

Martha: ...why you, why you decided not to.

Matt: And in the case of a minor suggestion, you can get away with that, right? For the major revisions, I mentioned that the, the desk rejection that we received previously, one of the things that the editor mentioned was that it lacked theoretical grounding.

And indeed, reviewer two really sort of questioned our theoretical grounding. And so I spent the majority of my time re-engaging with the literature, not just the earworm literature but the voluntary recall literature and the involuntary recall literature, and a lot of stuff that I hadn't gotten into by just typing involuntary musical imagery into Google Scholar.

Um-

Martha: That must have taken a lot of time ...

Matt: ...took a lot of time. It took a lot of time. We spent, I wanna say, four to six months on that revision. They gave us a year. We took a lot of analyses out based on that reviewer's suggestion because they, they felt that there were some things we were doing that we sort of threw the kitchen sink at it and said, like, "Oh, well this is a replication of that, and the series of this."

And they said, "What are you... No, stop. Focus up."

Martha: Yeah.

Matt: Um, and, and so we did that, but it was mostly a really big rewrite of the intro, and then this is the, I will- I'll say, embarrassing part, and I still get sort of, like, chills thinking about it, is we resubmitted it.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And we waited and waited, and we got it sent back, and reviewer one said, "I'm satisfied.

Thanks so much." And reviewer two, and I have this written, and it's rough, "The authors have made several substantial changes to this manuscript and should be acknowledged for these efforts. My main concern is a lack of thorough engagement with previous literature, including some inaccuracies in summarizing previous research."

I just misunderstood one of the previous studies. And again, thank you to reviewer two for closely engaging with my work because they were like, "You know, the author says blah, blah, blah. This is factually incorrect." It's like, "Cool. Good to know." So I, of course, it was a very humbling experience. And it's a, it's a real reminder to me that, and I- I remind people that I am mentoring this, that we are graduate students.

Of course, there's a level of quality that is expected by the stage in our career, but that level is not at perfection, right? If we didn't still have major things to learn, I was about to say we'd have the degree already, but it's a lifelong process. So it was very humbling, but it was sort of a back to the drawing board moment for me and like-

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: ...okay, I need to engage with this more closely, and I did. And we, uh, resubmitted, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited. Uh, and then we got the really sort of exciting email from the editor saying, "It's my pleasure to accept your manuscript as written." And then, and then comes reviewing the draft and making sure the formatting's right-

Martha: Yes

Matt: and all that.

Martha: Yes, copy editing, type setting-

Matt: Yeah

Martha: ... signing your agreement.

Matt: Yes. Thank you to the UCSC Library, by the way, for paying my open access fee.

Martha: Oh, that was gonna be one of my questions too.

Matt: Yes.

Martha: Was it open access?

Matt: Yeah, so it is open access. You can, you can Google "Absolute pitch in involuntary musical imagery," and it'll pop up.

It's in the journal, uh, Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics, and it is free.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Uh, you don't need to log in to get it.

Martha: That's great. How did you decide on open access?

Matt: So we were gonna go open access no matter what.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: My advisor was going to pay out of pocket because he's a saint. The fee for AP&P, and I think this is a pretty standard fee in my field at least, uh, was $3,500, I believe.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: So well out of budget for me.

Martha: Yeah. That's pretty standard, but also really expensive.

Matt: Right.

Martha: Especially as a grad student.

Matt: Yeah. I think the UCSC Library has an agreement with the journal, so it all happened, like, tied together.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Where I was able to just type in my affiliation, and they were like, "Yep, we have an agreement with that university library."

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: "If you attest that you have no funding sources-

Martha: Mm-hmm ...

Matt: they can pay part or all, depending."

Martha: Yes.

Matt: And I had no funding sources, so-

Martha: Yes ...

Matt: the UCSC Library paid for my, for my open access fee, which was not only exciting and, and, and good in terms of freedom of access, but then also selfishly, the sort of next step in this cool story was my advisor reached out to the press office.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: The UCSC press office. Said, "Hey, we just published this new paper. Let us know if you might be interested in it. We'd be, you know, we'd like to do a press release." And so I got to do an interview with the UCSC press office, which got released.

Martha: Neat. And- As what? As a news story?

Matt: As a news story. It...

We were in Tuesday Newsday.

Martha: Neat.

Matt: Um, and it got picked up by a lot of outlets. So a lot of it was in the sort of modern era of, like, quote-unquote, journalism. A lot of them were just sort of copy pastes of the release from UCSC. We had write-ups in- Oh God, I don't wanna misquote. I think Cosmos Magazine and-

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: Popular Science and-

Martha: Wow

Matt: ... the Forbes news, almost exclusively the internet editions, right? Like, not any of the press ones.

Martha: Sure.

Matt: But... And then I got, uh, I got to do an interview for Scientific American's podcast, I wanna say. So we just got a ton of attention. It's exciting for my ego, but it's also, like, good for scientific dissemination.

And because it was open access, all of these outlets were much more willing to talk about it 'cause they could just drop a link and say, "You can read the paper here."

Martha: Right. They didn't have to have a subscription or-

Matt: Exactly ...

Martha: or purchase access.

Matt: Yeah. So thank you to the library for that.

Martha: Definitely. It sounds like you had already been familiar with open access, but it sounded like it brought a lot of readership and other benefits.

Matt: Yeah. One of the sort of main, at least older school metrics used to judge... If you've heard the phrase journal impact. Of course you have, and a lot of that's based on how often articles that are published in that journal are cited across journals.

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Um, and then as an individual researcher, of course I'm on constantly checking my Google Scholar profile-

Martha: Yeah!

Matt: To say like, "Oh, who's, who's been citing this paper?"

Martha: Right. So your field looks at all those metrics.

Matt: Yes.

Martha: Some fields put more weight on them than others.

Matt: Right. I, I don't know how much it has mattered for me, but it's just, like, number goes up, and I like to see number go up. Yes. But there's another metric, um, called Altmetric, which is calculated, uh, a little more broadly, and it, it sort of scrapes the web and looks for mentions across all of these other, um-

Martha: Yes

Matt: areas. And so because Altmetric is picking up all of these, like- electronic magazine mentions of our work. Mm-hmm. And then the podcasts and Twitter mentions, all, not anymore, um.

Martha: Social media.

Matt: Social media mentions, yeah.

Martha: Yeah.

Matt: And then it gives you a percentile ranking- Mm-hmm ... for articles of your same age from that journal and overall, and we were the, you know, top article from the journal on, on Altmetric.

Martha: Congratulations.

Matt: Um, thank you. And I have no idea how much, if at all, this influences this decision-making. But then I got one of the coolest emails I've ever gotten, which was titled AP&P Best Article Award.

Martha: Wow. Yeah, tell us more about this award.

Matt: I, I, I didn't apply for it. I didn't know, I didn't know it existed.

Martha: Ooh.

Matt: It was the best kind of possible award you can get.

Martha: Yes. Yeah.

Matt: Cause there was no stress. I just one day got this email from the editor of AP&P.

Martha: Sounds like a great email.

Matt: Yeah. The subject line is "AP&P Best Article Award." It says, "Dear Matthew, I'm writing to let you know that your paper, 'Absolute Pitch and Involuntary Musical Imagery,'

has been selected as the Psychonomic Society 2025 Best Article for Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics."

And the Psychonomic Society is the parent society that publishes- Oh ... seven to nine articles in the cognitive science space.

Martha: Mm-hmm. Journals?

Matt: Uh, jour- sorry, journals.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Thank you. In the cognitive science space. It came with a $1,000 cash prize. Uh-

Martha: That's great, too.

Matt: It was, it was ni- although it was hilarious because I was telling a, a non-academic friend about it, and he's like, "Does that come with any money?"

And I was like, "Yeah, $1,000." And I realized in that moment that that is less than a third of the cost of open access. Which, uh, and, and, uh, yeah.

Martha: Fair point

Matt: ... and which I just, uh, again, no, I don't mean-

Martha: Mm-hmm

Matt: ... like, it's just funny. It's not- It is, yeah ... not a complaint at all. It's just this is how our system works right now.

Martha: Right.

Matt: Um, but, uh, but no, it was very, very exciting. Very exciting. And, um. And again, I, I don't, you, you don't know how all of these things, it's a complex system and you don't know how all these things influence each other. I'll be starting as a tenure track assistant professor of human cognition in the fall at, uh, St. Cloud State University. Um-

Martha: Congratulations!

Matt: Thank you. Um-

Martha: Yeah. Tell us more about what's next for you now.

Matt: It's a teaching-focused position, which I love. I love teaching, and I'll still have, you know, opportunities for research. I'll get to work with undergrads, which I love.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And I don't know how much this influenced their decision, but I certainly included on my application that we had received this award for this publication that-

Martha: Yes

Matt: ...you know, started off with two desk rejections and then a year's worth of revisions, which made it obviously a much better paper. And so yeah, I'll be starting in, in the fall. Uh, my job, official job title is assistant professor of human cognition, but I'll be in the psychology department. I'll be teaching intro to cognitive psychology and learning and memory and research methods and experimental psych.

And, uh, and then also, um, uh, we have a shared lab space, so I'll be continuing work. I've got a paper that was my second-year project, which was four years ago now that we still haven't, uh, wrapped up because I, other things kept taking priority, but that manuscript is close to ready to go, so that'll, that'll be, you know, back into the publication process again.

Then my dissertation, which my advisor is currently reading it and, uh, and making notes for me, and then I will revise and send it to my committee and then hopefully not have too much, too many major revisions from them. And, and then, and then it'll be signed, and then I'll defend in June, and then I'll move to Minnesota and start a career.

Martha: That's all so exciting.

Matt: Yeah. For anyone who is on the job market, a major part of how academic job application materials, uh, you know, a major chunk of it is publication history. Of course, it varies by field, and it varies massively by sort of mission of the university, right? So an R1 like UCSC will have much higher output expectations of their applications than a teaching-focused university will, which is, you know, why I was a competitive candidate with quote, unquote only-

Martha: Yeah

Matt: one publication. Yeah, it's a big part of why I'm, I'm able to do this is because of, you know, this process and the mentorship from my advisor and the help from the, the library and, and, and all of that, so.

Martha: Yeah. Yeah, I think you were connecting the dots between the success of your article and now your next steps with this job and, and also looking ahead towards publishing other parts of your dissertation.

Matt: Yes, exactly.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Yeah, I've got a couple lined up, and the next sort of mountain to climb is the tenure process. I'm very excited and grateful that, uh, the Minnesota State Faculty Union is quite strong, and I'm looking forward to joining that.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: And there's very clearly defined requirements for tenure.

Martha: Okay.

Matt: Um- Oh, good ... and so I know what's expected of me, and-

Martha: That's so nice to have that clearly laid out.

Matt: Exactly,

Martha: yeah. Is the goal more articles, or will you be looking at a monograph at some point?

Matt: Yeah, so there's, there are five, uh, sort of criteria, um, and they're weighted in different order.

The goal is definitely gonna be publishing the work that's already been completed. So that's my second year project, which was looking more at how attention and earworms interact. When you focus on a task, the earworm tends to go away. Then my dissertation, which was a laboratory manipulation of, uh, trying to force the earworm to be in the wrong key, and it turns out, uh, it's really hard to do that.

People just have good, accurate memory for absolute pitch in familiar melodies, and it's just really hard to break it. So that is an interesting result that I'm excited to write up and, and hopefully expect to be able to publish. And then- Uh, at the same time as I'm doing that and teaching, I will also be, uh, you know, trying to identify interested undergrads to, to start building a lab, collecting new data, and doing new studies.

And I'm really excited to help advise undergrads in their own work that they can submit to conferences.

Martha: Yeah, that sounds exciting both for your own work and to get undergrad- graduates involved with research and having research experience.

Matt: Especially because St. Cloud State doesn't have... we do, we, we have a master's program for industrial organizational psychology.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: But I am not in that field. And so I won't be directly supervising master's or PhD students. So I will have all of the mentorship time that I have, I will get to devote to undergrads, um, which is really exciting because one of the things that I'm, uh, looking forward to is being able to provide opportunities.

Martha: Sounds like a lot of fun.

Matt: Yeah.

Martha: Well, as we wrap up, is there any, uh, last advice or ideas, things that you want to say about publishing?

Matt: Uh, I'm sure a lot of academics will relate to this. I like being good at things right away, and I, I get frustrated with things that I'm not good at early on. Um-

Martha: So true.

Matt: Right? And like I mentioned, you know, I stopped playing music because I, I stopped being the best person in the room at it.

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Um-

Martha: That's what happened to me.

Matt: Yeah, yeah. I think it's a common, common tale. Uh, and, and the name of the game, I think that, you know, I have this very clear evidence. Any time I start to get frustrated with something, all I have to do is look back on this process to be like, "Persistence."

Mm-hmm. And obviously, like, there are boundary conditions to any statement like this. Um, there might be times when it's time to, you know, move on to something else. But-

Martha: Right ...

Matt: um-

Martha: Like sunk cost fallacy.

Matt: Exactly, yeah. But, but, but it's that point is almost always further along than I think it should be.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Right? I tend to be ready to give up before I should be, and, uh, so much cool stuff has come out of not letting myself get discouraged to the point of giving up. I was, of course, discouraged at several points along this process. Oh,

Martha: definitely. The publishing process can be so harsh and scary and disappointing.

Matt: Yeah. And I was very fortunate to have such a strong advisor who really takes his role as co-author seriously. And-

Martha: That's great.

Matt: Yeah, it was. I think I've seen s- you know, internet posts, social media posts or something that's like, you know, you know the paper's almost ready when you never wanna talk about this project ever again.

Right? Um-

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Uh, it almost has to get to that point where you're like, "Oh, God, I'm so sick of talking about this."

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Um- And then, then you, then I understand it enough that I can explain it in a way that other people will read it and say, "Oh, this is so cool."

Martha: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Matt: And really at the end of the day, like that's, that's the other big lesson that I've taken from my advisor and have really taken to heart is even in, and maybe especially in academic writing, we are storytellers.

Like, we're reporting facts so we shouldn't be embellishing, but we're still telling a story. As far as like imposter syndrome goes, there have been a lot of times where I've been reading an article. I'm like, "I, I just don't understand it. Am I just du- am I just bad at this? Did I just... Am I not meant..."

And, and then I'll look at it later and be like, "Oh, no, they just, they just did a really bad job writing it." Like-

Martha: Right

Matt: ... this is... I'm not dumb. This is just a bad paper.

Martha: Yes.

Matt: Um, and so I think that one of the most important things I can do is not just do good science, but report it in a way that's as accessible as possible.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Matt: Because I had that moment with Daniel Levitin's book where I was like, "Ah, I wanna do that for the rest of my life." And I want as close as I can get to doing that for other people, the better. And I would love to write a book. I would love to, you know, moonlight science communicator. I think that'd be great, but-

Martha: Yeah.

Yeah. Um- That's a really interesting area.

Matt: Yeah.

Martha: And it takes a lot of work to look at your research and identify what the story is and communicate that clearly. That doesn't happen overnight. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, thank you so much, Matt. Yeah. It's been really great to talk with you today.

Matt: Yeah. Thanks so much for having me.

Martha: Thanks for listening. This season of Publishing Tips was produced by Daniel Story and me, Martha Stuit, with additional editing support from Isaiah Brazel and Jennessy Barba. Daniel, Isaiah, and Jennessy are all part of the University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, and we thank them for their support of this podcast.

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Thank you!