

# Publishing papers: The people and the process

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This discussion on getting MA papers published was participant driven and involved 30 minutes of small group discussion and 30 minutes of summarizing and commenting on the small group discussions. Several themes emerged regarding the systems and staff of journals, advice on where unpublished authors can start, dealing with rejection, strategies for juggling more than one article at a time, and opportunities to get involved as publications staff. This article is a summary of the various topics discussed during this discussion format presentation at JALT2005.

今回関係者一同によってMAの発行誌の発行のあり方について話し合われた。小グループによる30分間の話し合いと、その後内容を要約しそれに対する批評が30分行われた。システムと職員の配置の考慮、発表の場に対する著者への助言、記事が却下されたときの対応の方法、2つ以上の記事を載せるときの対策、職員として働く機会を得ることなどいくつかの課題が出された。これはJALT2005にて話し合われたいくつかの課題を要約したものである。

Increasingly, teachers are pursuing post-graduate qualifications, such as MAs and PhDs, and as part of their studies these teacher/researcher/students are producing a large volume of high-quality, carefully researched material. It seems a shame that many of these papers are only read by their authors and markers. Thus this discussion at JALT2005 was intended as a venue for participants to share their stories and seek advice about getting academically published.

Additionally and increasingly, universities are making hiring decisions based on an applicant's publications. One participant described how, after being hired at a university part-time, he was contacted with a request for "a list of your publications." While the story worked out in the end, the experience inspired him to attend the presentation and learn how improve his résumé for the future. Another participant saw publication credits as a stepping stone from part-time to full-time positions.

**Table 1. Themes of the publishing papers discussion**

Theme	Comments
How are the systems and staff of journals structured?	Most journals are comprised of all volunteer staff.
Where can unpublished authors start?	Credible journals conduct anonymous reviews, so reviewers don't know if a given author is published or not. Most journals expect their reviewers to include comments and suggestions for revision. These comments and suggestions should help unpublished authors raise their articles to a publishable standard.
Building several papers from the same research	Many publications, such as The Language Teacher (TLT), have black lists of authors who simultaneously submit the same article to two different publications. However, more than one article can emerge from one piece of research.
Dealing with rejection	Rejection and suggestions for revision should be considered positive opportunities for growth.
Transforming an academic paper for publication	Most such papers require rewriting for a journal audience, but generally have sound research and literature reviews.
What other opportunities are there to gain experience which can improve an author's skills?	Since most journal staff is all volunteer they are constantly interested in adding talent to their staff. TLT, in particular, is always interested in signing on proofreaders.

The discussion was divided into two parts. The first was small group discussion, and the second involved whole group discussion and a summary of the small group topics. The small group discussions were recorded using digital voice recorders, as was the whole group discussion and summary. On reviewing the audio recordings, several themes emerge, which are highlighted in Table 1.

The following sections will summarize the discussion of the themes introduced in Table 1 in more detail.

### The systems and staff of journals

The majority of journals are comprised of all-volunteer staff. This means their editors, reviewers, and editorial boards are fellow teachers. As such, they are interested in well-written articles which exhibit originality and careful research. There

is generally an unofficial hierarchy of importance assigned to different journals, which employers may take into account when hiring (Braine, 1998). This hierarchy is illustrated in Table 2.

I am reluctant to include the table because it may imply one publication is better than another, but it was part of the discussion at JALT2005. Please remember that the hierarchy isn't intended to distinguish between different levels of quality. Regional publications often publish very high quality, region-specific papers, and international publications can and do publish papers of questionable usefulness to the field. Instead, it is better to think of the table as illustrating differences in production capacity. Internationally edited volumes of papers are relatively rare, and therefore have the lowest capacity of the group, meaning they can accommodate the fewest authors. On the other

Table 2. A hierarchy of publications

	Type	Example	Comments
Refereed Publications	Book publication with an international publisher	An edited volume of research papers	This can be considered the top of the hierarchy, and thus involves the fewest authors and the most competition
	International journal	ELT Journal	International journals also have extremely high standards
	National print journal	TLT	There are more of these journals than international, so as a category they can accept more articles
	Online Journal	Asian EFL Journal (AEJ)	There are comparably more of these journals than print publications, so they can publish even more articles. Be careful that the journal is refereed; i.e., has an editorial board and anonymous reviewers
	New Online Journal		Organizations like the British Council are constantly advancing TEFL as a profession, and part of this involves sponsoring new journals. However, be careful to check that these publications are refereed
Non-refereed publications	Doesn't involve anonymous peer reviewing	Book reviews, many university publications (Kios)	While publications, these don't necessarily carry the same weight with potential employers, but they can be a good venue through which to gain experience.

hand, internet publications have a relatively large capacity, and can therefore publish more papers. Thus a well-written and researched paper is more likely to be accepted by an internet publication than a print publication. This is a product of the different mediums and not a product of the papers they publish.

One suggestion for verifying the quality of a publication was to check whether it has an ISSN. Publications with ISSNs may be considered to be more legitimate than those without.

### Unpublished authors start here

One participant stressed it was important to realize that publication credits aren't mystical. Since his background was

journalism, he considered it natural to be published. That said, after looking over Table 2 many unpublished authors will assume the natural place to start is from the bottom, and will look to the book reviews section of *TLT* or *AEJ*. Many of the participants in the discussion agreed this was a good place to start. Additional suggestions are summarized below:

- Authors may want to start with a “canned English” article which explains some teaching technique or methodology that works for the author. Such articles are highly structured, and are therefore more approachable to authors with little experience.
- Collaborate with another author, although one participant cautioned that employers may not

weigh coauthored articles as heavily as articles which have a sole author.

- Look to smaller publications, such as SIG publications, to start.
- Try to build a personal relationship with the editor that goes beyond typical rote correspondence—many editors will appreciate the effort. This opinion is also supported by Rentz (2005).
- Watch out for special issues which cover a particular topic of interest to you and your specialty.
- Some start-up journals are more willing to work with authors in order to prime their first issues.
- Turn effective presentations you have done into papers.
- Do action research—Share innovative teaching ideas or techniques which have improved your classroom, and which you’ve researched.

While the above suggestions may be good places to start, please remember refereed publications conduct anonymous reviews, and therefore a non-refereed publication, such as a book review, will only help an author insofar as it improves writing style and organization; when submitting a research paper, previous publications don’t count as far as that paper and its reviewer are concerned.

If you have a completed paper, perhaps something written for an MA, another option is to query the editor of a potential publication, asking if they are interested in the topic. Editors

who reply to such queries may be more inclined to work with you through the revision and publication process. Editors who don’t reply may not be editors you want to work with toward your first publication. In fact, journal editors themselves have said they prefer to view the publication process as a collaborative effort (Rentz, 2005, p. 293), and at the discussion, John Adamson, who is part of the editorial team at both *AEJ* and *Asian Business Journal*, encouraged participants to query editors regarding potential articles.

Additionally, JALT offers a peer support group, which is an opportunity to get free advice about a paper from fellow professionals. For contact information, please see Table 3.

### Dealing with rejection

The consensus at the discussion was that all authors face rejection, and that very rarely are manuscripts accepted in their original form. In fact, some participants weren’t even interested in this topic for small-group discussion since they were already used to accommodating rejection. According to Rentz (2005, p. 293), editors are interested in making good articles great, so being offered a chance to revise a manuscript is something authors should look forward to as a chance to increase the significance of their contribution to the field (Rentz, 2005, p. 294).

Rentz (2005) goes on to note that,

As a rule, editors “try to create the most supportive environment [they] can for authors, helping them work through reviewer comments to arrive at a publishable manuscript that pleases both authors and reviewers, and that satisfies the intellectual demands of the community.” (p. 294)

Rentz' view is one that dovetails nicely with the discussion. Authors should assume revisions will be necessary, and that those revisions will “take one’s work to a higher level than one could ever have reached by oneself.” (Rent, 2005, p. 294)

Hopefully your reviewer comments are instructive (they usually are), and you can use them as a tool to bolster your paper, then send it to another publication, which will offer a fresh start. Editors and reviewers even go so far as to consider articles that aren’t resubmitted “a waste of time and effort” (Braine, 1998, p. 5).

Another concern was the amount of time the publication process takes. One participant mentioned that a rejection took six months, another that publication took two years. Braine (1998, p. 6) mentions an article which took four years from conception to publication. For authors trying to meet review committee deadlines, choice of journals may be critical. There are some additional suggestions in the section titled, “Building several papers from the same research” below. However, it’s important to remember simultaneous submissions, sending the same paper to more than one publication, are unacceptable.

### Transforming an academic paper for publication

Many participants were interested in adapting papers from academic coursework. Several useful comments included:

- Read the publication, and read in general. Rentz (2005, p. 294) notes that an effective literature review is a necessity.

- Change the paper’s voice to match the publication, and change the paper to look like an article published in the journal.
- Consider situations where a cross-disciplinary article might be of interest, particularly in bridging specialties.
- Avoid university publications, as most are non-refereed.
- In most cases you will have to reduce the word count and narrow your references.
- Make sure to match the journal’s formatting standards. One participant recommended *EndNote* <[www.endnote.com](http://www.endnote.com)> as a useful tool for organizing references.

It was also mentioned that full dissertations are published by *AEJ*. Advantages of publishing a dissertation include gaining access to a larger audience and the chance to write a forward which could count an additional publication.

### Building several papers from the same research

Simultaneous submissions, or sending the same paper to two publications, are unacceptable. Much of a publication’s time goes into reviewing and suggesting revisions to papers, so having papers that editors and reviewers have been working on pulled by the authors just prior to publication is too costly. Particularly since journals are comprised of all volunteer staff, publications are careful to make sure staff time is spent productively, and working on papers which will be published elsewhere isn’t productive.

That said, a good deal of time and thought goes into a particular research design, and it seems a shame to only publish one paper after so much work. One way to get several publications from the same research is to write with several different angles in mind. For example, when conducting research into student attitudes, it may be possible to write one paper about the results of the study, another about the process of organizing the study (how was institutional and faculty support arranged?), another about the measure design (test, questionnaire, or something else? How did you verify its effectiveness and refine it?), and still another about the process of growth experienced as you went through the design, implementation, and publication process. These are just some possibilities, and each is a unique paper unto itself. Thus while simultaneous submissions are unacceptable, different papers based on the same research process are practical.

Please take note, however, of Braine's (1998) advice regarding generating multiple papers from the same research,

If more than one manuscript is generated from the same, usually large-scale project, the author should make note of the other articles in the cover letter which accompanies the manuscript. Further, the other articles should be noted and referenced in the manuscript. (p. 7)

### Other opportunities to gain experience

As they are staffed by volunteers, publications are constantly looking for new members. Such positions not only bolster résumés, but also offer exposure to papers that have been

accepted for publication and offer an insider's view of the process, which can help to further demystify how journals work. *TLT* in particular is interested in signing on proofreaders. The editorial staff of *TLT* is often drawn from its proofreaders, which offers the opportunity to gain experience in several different positions within the publication.

A question raised was whether or not such experience helps during the hiring process at universities, and one participant who had been on hiring committees said most employers want faculty who are willing to give extra effort, and such experiences were definitely positives on a résumé. Other advantages mentioned include the opportunity to branch out beyond just one specialty and to gain a broader picture and understanding of the field.

### Conclusion

Hopefully this paper has demystified the process behind getting published—the discussion at JALT2005 seemed to. Finally, in Table 3 I would like to offer some contact information for different publications. Table 3 is an adaptation of the handout used in my presentation, with some information added which arose during the course of the discussion.

I will finish this summary of the JALT2005 discussion with some encouragement from Braine (1998),

Although the publication process may seem daunting, the proliferation of new journals in applied linguistics and ELT should be an encouragement to new authors. If they choose the

Table 3. Some places to start

Publication Name	Notes	Contact Information
<i>Asian Business Journal</i>	Accepts academic articles relevant to business and teaching business English relevant to Asian contexts; internet publication, also planning a print volume in 2006	<a href="http://www.asian-business-journal.com/">http://www.asian-business-journal.com/</a> editor@asian-business-journal.com Senior Associate Editor Dr. John Adamson
<i>Asian EFL Journal</i>	Accepts articles relevant to Asian contexts; also accepts dissertations/theses; internet publication, also publishes print volumes	<a href="http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/">http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/</a> asian_efl_journal@yahoo.com Contact: Roger Nunn asian_efl_journal@yahoo.com
<i>ELT Journal</i>	Interested in articles with an international scope; quarterly publication	<a href="http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/">http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/</a> Keith Morrow editor@eltj.org
<i>JALT Journal</i>	JALT member publication—bi-annual; interested in research articles or book reviews relevant to Asian contexts	<a href="http://jalt-publications.org/">http://jalt-publications.org/</a> Current editor: Steve Cornwell jj-editor@jalt-publications.org
<i>The Journal of Asia TEFL</i>	Interested in articles, book reviews, and research reports relevant to Asian contexts; internet publication	<a href="http://www.asiatefl.org/">http://www.asiatefl.org/</a> Contact: Prof. Jin-Wan Kim jinwan@snu.ac.kr
<i>Journal of Language and Learning</i>	Interested in both theoretical and applied articles and reviews	<a href="http://www.jllonline.net/">http://www.jllonline.net/</a> Contact: Dr. Graeme Davis editors@jllonline.net
<i>The Language Teacher</i>	JALT member publication—monthly; interested in articles, interviews, book reviews, summaries of lessons, or conference reports relevant to Asian contexts	<a href="http://jalt-publications.org/">http://jalt-publications.org/</a> Current co-editors: Ted O'Neill Jacqui Norris-Holt tlr-editors@jalt-publications.org
<i>Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal</i>	Accepts articles, book reviews, and forum pieces; internet publication	<a href="http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/">http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/</a>
<i>JALT CALL Journal</i>	Regular Papers (full research papers), Forums (including new ideas and teaching hints), Software Reviews	<a href="http://jaltcall.org/journal/">http://jaltcall.org/journal/</a>
<i>JALT Peer Support Group (not a publication)</i>	Reviews papers and offers free advice	peergroup@jalt-publications.org

right journal, pay careful attention to manuscript preparation, consider revision a learning process, and are patient, they will be rewarded. (p. 8)

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