Increasing the Odds That Your Manuscript Will be Published

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The Gerontological Society of America® (GSA) Journals

- The Gerontologist
- The Journals of Gerontology: Series A
- The Journals of Gerontology: Series B
- Public Policy & Aging Report
- Gerontology & Geriatrics Education
The Journals of Gerontology: Series B is a bimonthly journal of The Gerontological Society of America. The Social Sciences section of the Journal publishes research on aging from the fields of anthropology, demography, economics, epidemiology, geography, health services, political science, public health, social history, social work, and sociology.

Five types of contributions are considered:

- Original Research Reports.
- Brief Reports.
- Review Articles.
- Theoretical or Methodological Articles.
- Commentary or Letters to the Editor.
Criteria for Success in JGSS

- Successful articles for JG:SS should be:
  - Theory-driven and rooted in a social science foundation
  - Move knowledge forward in the field of gerontology
  - Apply rigorous and appropriate methodology
  - Well written, focused, and comprehensible without being too comprehensive
- More leeway given to:
  - Junior scholars
  - Scholars from developing countries
  - Articles addressing under-studied topics
Optimizing Success

– Choosing the “right” journal for your goal
– Qualities of your paper that will put it on the path to acceptance
– Common pitfalls
– Handling a revise and resubmit
– Handling rejection
Strategies for Choosing a Journal

- **Poll Question #1:** For those that submitted manuscripts, how did you select the journal for submission?

- **Fit-based:** What journals are *you* citing? This could be a good indication that your research is in the right “camp”, establish scholarly continuity, and better insure that the reviewers will be familiar with the ideas and jargon of your article.

- **Audience-based:** Who reads the journal? Your own discipline, a multi-disciplinary audience, professional organization with built-in audience that sponsors the journal.
Strategies for Choosing a Journal

– **Status-based:**
  - Relying on the journal impact factor (the average number of citations received per paper in a given year among papers published in that journal during the two preceding years).
  - The impact factor is highly discipline-dependent and varies highly among disciplines: 5-8 in the biological sciences and 1-3 in the social sciences.
  - High rejection rate also indicates selectivity.
Know the “culture” of the Journal

– Is the journal more theory-based, basic or applied?
– Does it have methodological tradition: quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods?
– Does it have a disciplinary or multidisciplinary focus?
– Communicate with editors directly about your topic and approach, they are usually more than willing to provide feedback,
– Seek out editors at professional meetings and workshops
If You are a Junior or Emerging Scholar

– Serve as a reviewer-in-training or a mentored-reviewer.
– There is often keen interest in having junior scholars review.
– One benefit is that you get to read the other reviews and the editor’s letter.
– This will sharpen your ability to craft a winning article and avoid potential problems.
To Optimize Success of Your Manuscript

• (Aside from Scientific Merit)
  – Don’t alienate reviewers and editor
    • Keep to journal style and standards: cite references correctly, stay within word/page limits
    • Write clearly and concisely
    • Make logical argument, have smooth flow between sections, and be systematic to make your paper easier to follow.
    • Avoid overuse of acronyms, they make the document difficult to follow.
    • Don’t do too much! You need not explain the world, only a piece of it.
Good Practices

- Cite articles from the journal to which you are submitting

- Maintain conventions of the journal and scientific publishing more generally (e.g. section headings)

- Recommend a reviewer or two to the editor

- Proofread, proofread, proofread…
Common Problems Leading to Instant Rejection

- Poor substantive, stylistic, or methodological fit to journal (read the journal!)
- Doesn’t make strong case for advancing the literature; has no or shallow roots in the literature
- Contributes an unexciting replication or trivial improvement to knowledge
- Does not emerge from the literature it purports to advance
- Data set, variables, design, method are inadequate to the task
Common Problems that Enhance Chance of Rejection

- Assuming that the editor and reviewers will naturally find that your research makes a contribution to the literature. You need to make your case!

- Paper doesn’t communicate why the issue is important, what gap it is filling, how it contributes to and extends the literature.

- No (or ambiguous) research questions or hypotheses to set up expectations that guide the paper.
Common Problems that Enhance Chance of Rejection

– Article does too much (overly complex) or not enough (too simple).

– Alternative explanations for the findings are too compelling, unacknowledged, and/or unincorporated.

– Discussion is simply a recapitulation of findings and does not provide interpretation of results or directions for future research (for applied research, makes no policy/practice recommendations).

– Language issues, spelling errors, inattention to detail.
Revise and Resubmit!

– Poll question #2: For those that received a revise/resubmit for submitted manuscripts, what were your next steps?

– Take a deep breath—the reviews may be harsh but you have your foot in the door.

– You probably haven’t read your article in some time, so you have a fresh perspective on it.

– Make a list for yourself of the major and minor changes you intend to make.

– You can’t add length to the manuscript, so efficiency is key, cut judiciously.
Letter to the Editor and Reviewers

• Once your article is ready to resubmit, compose your letter to the editor and reviewers
  – Go through the main points made by reviewers and for each, explain succinctly how you addressed them and on what page(s) it can be found.
  – If there are some suggestions you don’t agree with, explain why. Do not simply ignore the suggestion.
  – Hold your ground if you think a particular change is not necessary and give a reasoned argument (sometimes this refers to omitted variables or tests that may lie outside the scope of your research).
Letter to the Editor and Reviewers

– Remember that no research is perfect, there will be flaws and do your best to convince reviewers that they are not fatal.

– At the end of your letter, thank the editor and reviewers for their comments and for providing you the opportunity to resubmit your article. Note that their comments were very helpful and improved the manuscript (even if you really don’t think so!).
Your Article is Rejected: What do you do?

- Poll question #3: For those that have received a rejection for submitted manuscripts, what were your next steps?

- First and foremost, don’t panic, it has happened to all of us.

- What next? Should you tank the article? No. Take a deep breath. Put the review aside for a few days to let the sting of rejection fade. Then pull out the review and read it all the way through.

- You have the benefit of 2-3 reviews, take advantage of them in revising the manuscript.

- If you truly believe in your article, send it to another journal fairly quickly, even a higher ranked journal.
Choosing a New Journal

– Revise the article based on the previous journal’s review but mostly focus on the so-called “fatal flaws”. There may be idiosyncratic suggestions that will not come up again so be judicious in your edits.

– You might be rejected again, but keep trying. Remember, almost all articles have a home….somewhere.

– Developing a thick skin is a virtue—peer-review can be brutal, but is survivable.
Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as ‘quite an improvement.’
Are Social and Behavior Scientists More Critical than Natural Scientists?

The American Economic Review, Review of Economic Studies, and Journal of Political Economy rejected it as being “trivial” and “incorrect”.

Only on the 4th attempt did the paper get published in Quarterly Journal of Economics. Akerlof won Nobel Prize in 2001 for ideas represented in this article with 2000+ cites.
Final Piece of Advice

• You can’t publish if you don’t submit!
• Know when it is good enough by asking mentors or colleagues to read your manuscript.
• Very smart people and very good researchers have stalled their careers because they have been reticent to submit.
Questions?

Thank you!

GSA (www.geron.org)

• Oldest, largest national/international professional membership organization
  – 5,600 interdisciplinary members touching all facets of aging
• Mission
  – Promote multi- and interdisciplinary research in aging
  – Translate and disseminate research findings
  – Promote/advocate for education/awareness on aging across disciplines
  – Foster application of research into policy development