

**WRITING AND PUBLISHING ACADEMIC
ARTICLES IN THE HUMANTIES**

By

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Introduction

I wrote this brief guide for my advance undergraduate and graduate students. The purpose was not to teach them the basic mechanics of essay writing, for that they would have learned in their writing courses, but to explain the structure of a publishable paper and to elaborate the process of submission, editing, and final publication.

Thus, in a way, this concise guide also attempts to demystify the process of humanities publication and provides some experiential insights into the research writing, and structuring of a paper. Readers interested in the basic mechanics of writing research papers should read this guide in conjunction with books specifically focused on the intricacies of composition and writing.

Most graduate students have to take a scholarly writing course in their first year. The main purpose of such courses is to teach them the techniques about researching and writing scholarly articles. Based in my own experiences of publishing academic articles and monographs, this brief guide is meant to augment what you might have learned in your classrooms. While I cannot promise absolute success, I do, however, suggest that some of the steps outlined in this guide could be quite useful for successful publishing in the humanities.

This guide is organized in four chapters: Chapter One covers the philosophical and practical reasons for publishing, Chapter Two provides the details about research and writing of a scholarly paper, Chapter Three deals with writing the first draft, and Chapter Four informs you about the process of submitting your paper to the right journal and following it through to its ultimate publication.

Chapter 1: Why We Publish?

Remember, humanities publication is always a conversation with past and contemporary scholars in your field of study.

Though all of us in the humanities are trained and are expected to write and publish, we are never really encouraged to ask ourselves as to why do we need to write and publish? Answering this question is key to developing the kind of academic writing and research one conducts. Listed below are some of the reasons that I have heard about the need to write and publish:

- To produce knowledge.
- To contribute to our Field of Study.
- To impact the world.
- To meet professional requirements.
- For professional recognition.
- To create a body of work.

Writing to produce Knowledge

When we write to produce knowledge, what we are acknowledging, imperceptibly, is that we see ourselves as producers of knowledge in our field. The writing so guided, tends to rely on an Arnoldian model of research and encourages a sort of scholarship of detachment.¹ The scholarship of detachment is deeply concerned with the objectivity of our work and is more focused on the long-term impact of our writing. Writers who are motivated by this mode of writing, often do not tend to be engaged with current politics or state of the world; their writing, thus, tends to hope to accomplish some change over a long period.

¹ This insight comes from Mathew Arnold's famous essay about the functions of criticism. For details please read Arnold, Matthew. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*, Second Edition, Editors, Leitch *et al* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010): 695-714.

We often also use this mode of thinking to rationalize our privileged location in the academy and through this market-derived understanding of our work, we can protect ourselves from the everyday wants and needs of the world. Thus, while the world continually moves toward harsh inequalities and brutalities of gender, race, and class we can keep writing our deeply specialized esoteric works thinking to ourselves that we are doing our share of work and in the end, in the long run, when the world catches up with it, our work will become relevant and will be understood and be used to change the world.

Most social scientists rely on the same kind of argument. Since they are trained to think of themselves as scientists, they have to create an aura of detachment from their object of study. As a result, they train themselves to collect the data and then provide a dispassionate analysis of the data. This became clear to me after a conversation with a sociologist friend recently. When I asked him as to what his opinion was about how to change the living conditions of the group he was studying, his response was that seeking an amelioration of the situation of his sample subjects was not his job and if he did so, he would become an activist. His argument was hinged upon the belief in knowledge production and under this logic, his job was to produce knowledge for activists, governments, and other bodies. It was the function of those other groups to use his meticulously collected and analyzed data to make policy changes.

There is nothing wrong with thinking like this and if this is how you have been trained in your field then your research should be guided by this, but keep in mind that this is only one disciplinary approach and if you find essays that do not follow this pattern, then those essays might have been conceptualized and composed under a different set of assumptions.

Writing to Contribute to our Field of Study

In one of his books, one of my former colleagues, Mark Bracher, terms this the “discourse of the discipline.”² Under this register, we teach our students the major debates in their fields of study in order for them to specialize. The students, in turn, worry only about the discipline and what is current and in vogue in it and then produce professional scholarship that displays their knowledge of the field. Needless to say, this knowledge of the field is necessary for professionalism and also for publications, for how would one come up with something new to publish if one did not, if your writing is field-specific, knowing the field, its major critics and theorists, and its established canon is a prerequisite for writing publishable articles.

Writing to Impact the World

While this is what guides most of my scholarship, this mode of approaching one’s research is still quite controversial in the English departments. By and large, most senior established scholars in most of the English departments feel that it is not their job to try to change the world. Mostly younger scholars or scholars who specialize in highly political or contestatory fields (gender studies, postcolonial studies, African-American studies etc.) tend to do mostly political and activist work. Their writings, by and large, tend to connect the critical analysis with the world outside the academy and hope to either effect some change or at least have an ameliorative strain. If this register is important to you, your writing will have to be different from a traditional paper and will have to engage with the real-world issues.

² For details please read Bracher, M. (2006). *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Writing to Meet Professional Requirements

This probably is the least “heroic” reason to write and publish, but has the most impact on your life as a humanities scholar. First, if you are a graduate student, you are pretty much required to write research papers for your graduate courses. Secondly, while in graduate school you are also required to produce a finished and defensible dissertation.

If you are a graduate student entering the job market, your faculty mentors will advise you to publish in your field, for only then you will be competitive with all the other freshly minted PhDs entering the market.

Furthermore, even after you land a tenure track job, you are required to produce a consistent body of work in order to keep your job, win tenure, and get professional promotions. Thus, even though this sounds like a very cynical reason to publish your work, this, in fact, happens to be the prime motivator for a lot of scholars to continue publishing.

To Garner Professional Recognition

Whichever sub-field of literary studies you are engaged in, one important reason to write and publish your work is also to garner material and symbolic recognition. If you become a well-known figure in your field of study, through your publications, not only would your institution acknowledge it in material terms but your opinions within your department and outside of it would carry more weight.

This recognition is not just self-serving: it is in fact connected to pretty much all that you want to do as a scholar. As a highly published scholar, you will be more mobile, attract better graduate students, be asked to give public presentations, and will generally be regarded as the person to go to when questions about your specific expertise arise

in the media as well as in the academia. Having this symbolic recognition can, in turn, assist you personally but can also help you in placing your graduate students' work, and, if you like, it can also help you make an impact in the world.

To Create a Body of Work as a Reference

This aspect of scholarly publishing became clear to me when I started writing political blogs and when the frequency of my public talks increased. In both instances when someone objected to my views in a blog or in a talk—considering the narrow focus of the topic—I started referring them to my other published work where, it seems, I had already answered that particular question. Thus, overall if as a scholar you also hope to have a public presence, you will realize that your body of work itself becomes a reference for you to argue your point to varied and diverse reading or listening audiences.

Conclusion

Overall, I have suggested in this article that we all have different reasons to want to publish our work, but there never is a single reason for it. It is important for you as an emerging scholar to know why you write, for this knowledge will guide your research and publication priorities. In the next chapter, I will discuss, albeit briefly, the research process involved in writing a publishable paper. But please do bear in mind that the reasons to write as discussed in this article will still play an important role in your research process, as your research priorities and methods will be guided by the underlying reasons to publish.

Chapter 2: Preliminary Steps for Writing a Paper

I understand that there are hundreds of books that explain the mechanics of academic publishing. My aim here is not to dwell on the mechanics, but to rather give you some basic ideas about the process of choosing a topic, researching about it, and then composing the first draft. If you are a graduate student, please keep in mind one simple principle: **Write every class paper as if you aim to publish it!** This principle will force you to write papers that are worthy of your time and that have some possibilities instead of writing about things that have been covered, probably more eloquently, by other scholars.

Coming up with a Paper Topic

This is one of the most important steps for academic publishing: choosing a topic. This applies especially to all those who are slogging through their graduate studies, often overworked and underpaid. As a key principle, one that has helped me a lot, always choose something that is eventually publishable. Think of it this way: you have to produce a good paper that would take your time and effort, so why not put your efforts into something that can be, with revisions, eventually published. Here are some of the steps that would help you choose your topic:

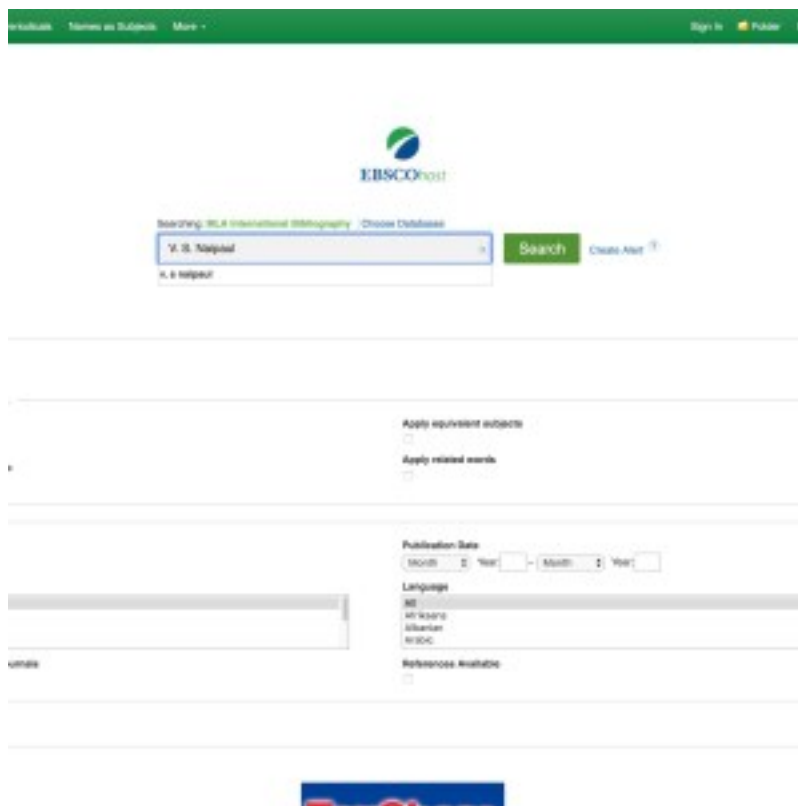
- Choose something that you care about: I know this sounds like a cliché, but if you are going to put so much effort into a writing project, make sure that you care enough about it to sustain the activity. Furthermore, chances are if you care about an issue, it will eventually figure prominently in your future work. Therefore, use the forced opportunity of a graduate course to write about something that is likely to be important to you in the future.
- Perform broad research. Broad research is usually synchronic: it means you look for whatever has been recently published about your tentative topic. This allows you to learn varied perspectives about your topic and will also enable you to place your argument within a contemporary discussion.
- But what if nothing has been published about your chosen text? Well, that is a good thing! You can still read works that are tangentially related to your topic and then offer your views about an unexplored or “undiscovered” text!

Where to start?

MLA International Bibliography, available at all research universities, is the ideal place to start your research for academic publishing. Just look up your topic, author, or text and see what all has been published about it or related to it in the last few years. If possible, at least download and print the abstracts to get a general idea about what has been published.

This basic exercise into finding whatever has been done about your possible topic is crucial as it allows you to figure out whether or not what you are planning to spend so much of your time and energy on is a topic worthy of your effort. Thus, the research in breadth will decide whether you want to keep the chosen topic or want to amend it or abandon it altogether.

Look at the pictures below as an example of a general search using the MLA International Bibliography:



The image shows a screenshot of the EBSCOhost search interface. At the top, there is a green navigation bar with links for "Home", "Home as Subject", and "More". On the right side of the bar, there are links for "Sign In" and "Folder". Below the navigation bar is the EBSCOhost logo. The main search area features a search box containing the text "V. S. Naipaul" and a "Search" button. To the right of the search box is a "Create Alert" link. Below the search box, there are several filter options: "Apply equivalent subjects" with a checkbox, "Apply related works" with a checkbox, "Publication Date" with dropdown menus for "Month" and "Year", "Language" with a list of options (All, Afrikaans, Albanian, Arabic), and "References Available" with a checkbox. The interface is clean and professional, typical of a university library database.

Library | Choose Database

Search History

- Representing the "Abject": Dynamics of Narration and Self-Fashioning in V.S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness***
 By Chakrabarty, Sujata. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2019 Fall, 31 (3): 397-415. (Journal Article)
Subjects: 1900-1999, Indian Trinidad writers, India, abjection, self-fashion, postcolonialism, Trinidad and Tobago literature, Naipaul, V. S., *An Area of Darkness*, prose
- Saviors of place: V.S. Naipaul's enigma of departure**
 By Pabon, Shanta. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2013 Feb, 11 (1): 139-150. (Journal Article)
Subjects: 1900-1999, Indian Trinidad novelist, immigrant experience, England, childhood, Caribbean culture, Trinidad and Tobago literature, Naipaul, V. S., *The Enigma of An Area of Darkness*, postcolonial novel
- V.S. Naipaul: Lo sguardo e la ricomposizione identitaria in *The Enigma of Arrival***
 By Terigi, Anna. *Acta Universitatis Turicensis*, 2015, 184-215. (Journal Article)
Subjects: 1900-1999, visual perception, visual arts, search for identity, belonging, Trinidad and Tobago literature, Naipaul, V. S., *The Enigma of Arrival*, novel
- Mito, historia y narrativa en tres relatos sobre El Dorado: Sir Walter Raleigh, Arturo Uslar-Pietri y V.S. Naipaul**
 By Alvarado, Daniel. *Cuadernos de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana*, 2010 May/Jun, 13 (1-2): 79-88. (Journal Article)
Subjects: 1900-1999, El Dorado, myth, 1900-1999, English literature, Raleigh, Sir Walter, *The Discoverer of the Large, Fish-and-Beautiful Empire of Eldorado*, prose, Uslar-Pietri, Arturo, *El camino de El Dorado*, Naipaul, V. S., *The Loss of El Dorado*, Venezuelan literature, novel, Trinidad and Tobago literature

WLA International | Bibliography | Choose Database

Advanced Search | Search History

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 and for v. s. naipaul

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Beyond Trinidad: Five Novels by V.S. Naipaul.

Author:	Naipaul, V. S.
Source:	South Atlantic Quarterly (Durham, NC) 54(2) 1974, 75: 385-403. (Journal Article)
Peer Reviewed:	No
ISSN:	0038-2574
General Subject Areas:	Subject Literature: Trinidad and Tobago literature Period: 1900-1999 Primary Subject Author: Naipaul, V. S. (1902)
Document Information:	Publication Type: Journal Article Language of Publication: English Update Code: 130401 Sequence Number: 0031-0287
Abstract:	V.S. Naipaul writes precisely phrased, deftly ironic universalized fiction. His concern is contemporary man, who survives, and sometimes even flourishes, despite psychic conflict, cultural fragmentation, and an indifferent universe. Naipaul admires man's indomitable spirit even while admiring his weaknesses. Essentially a moralist, he insists upon principled behavior. Not only the limited <i>Softage of Elvira</i> reflects his moral concerns, <i>Beneath the Jolly</i> . The Mysic itinerant pursues a serious truth, man's failure to accept personal responsibility. The near-somber <i>A House for Mr. Stone</i> , whose building but glacial time is apparently vitiated by circumstances, actually develops the same theme. Mr. Stone and the English Companion, which has a symbolic structure, is a serene myth in which an elderly hero bravely gains his manhood by losing his illusions. The alienated hero of <i>The Mimic Man</i> also succeeds in learning to live with harsh reality. He sustains himself. Naipaul believes that the novel should concern itself with the condition of man in the world today.
Accession Number:	1974102387
Copyright:	© 2018 Modern Language Association

Result List | Refine Search | 10 of 884

Conduct in-depth Research

Now that you have researched in breadth and honed your possible topic, it is time to perform deep research. This involves reading selected major articles related to your topic as well as any major books that have been published about it. At the least, based in my own experience, you will read at least ten relevant articles and a few books to really grasp what is being said or has been published about your chosen topic.

After you have read in-depth, you will now be able to decide the ultimate fate of your topic and if you still think you can say something different or “original” about the topic, in comparison to other works published about it, then now you have the point of entry into the scholarly conversation. Finding this point of entry is crucial, for otherwise you will end up writing an article that has already been written!

Furthermore, when you submit your article, your reviewers will not only be looking at your article alone but will also be evaluating whether or not you are aware of the works on the similar topic published by others. And if you engage with those works in your essay, the reviewers will further evaluate as to whether or not what you are saying is comparatively good enough to be considered worthy of publication!

Ask Around and Seek help

Even though we are trained to think of ourselves as lone-wolf researchers, we do live in an extremely connected and collaborative world of research. If you are in a graduate program and writing a paper for your class, your professor and your colleagues are a wonderful resource during the incubatory period of your research, and even during the writing process.

Do contact your professor and request to discuss your paper ideas with her. Chances are that the professors will point you to certain important texts that you might still need to consult. Jot down those suggestions as the texts or theorists that they mentioned are probably important to them may be important for your paper.

Similarly, do not hesitate to share your paper ideas with your colleagues; they might be able to give you some generalized and some specialized suggestions about your paper.

Also, if you are taking a course but it has nothing to do with your area or concentration, seek out fellow graduate students in your class who might be specializing in that particular area and ask their opinion about your topic. I recall many instances where I either contacted my fellow students about a paper that was more pertinent to their area of study and similarly I assisted quite a few of my own colleagues when they had questions related to postcolonial theory, my field of expertise. Join the Graduate Student Writing Support group: If none exists, form one!

Now that we have shared some basic ideas, it is time to move on to talk about some basic techniques that I have found useful in writing my articles for publication.

Thesis Statement

As a reviewer of refereed articles, I have often noticed that as I start to read an article for review, I am expecting to find out what the paper is arguing about on the very first, or at the least, on the second page. In other words, as a referee I am immediately looking for the thesis of a submitted article. Pretty much all major journals in humanities request and ask for a clearly defined thesis for the submitted article. Thus, just from the future publication prospects of an article, it is crucial to have a clear and well-articulated thesis. Furthermore, it is also necessary to craft a good thesis, for the quality of your writing would depend upon the clarity of your thesis. The thesis also enables to review your own draft and to understand immediately as to what does not belong in your essay: anything that does not directly or indirectly have a bearing on your thesis. Thus, having a clear thesis is important both for the quality of your paper and for the chances of its eventual publication.

Crafting a Thesis

The thesis also decides the kind of paper you will end up writing and the writing strategies involved will be decided by the specific type of your thesis. There are, generally, papers with three kinds of theses:

- Expository
- Analytical
- Argumentative

Expository Paper: An expository paper usually explains something to a reading audience. Here is a good example:

In this paper I will explain as to how in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children Salim Sinai is the ultimate unreliable narrator.

Obviously, the very statement of thesis suggests that you as a writer are assuming that your audience does not know much about your subject, and you, therefore, based on your own research or someone else's research are going to use your knowledge and skills to explain this particular subject to your readers.

In literary studies, all papers that explain how something works [what is a sonnet, for example] would fall into this category. Note, even though the thesis sounds less complex, one can write quite sophisticated papers using such a thesis. The only thing to keep in mind is this: YOU are explaining something to your audience from an authoritative position as a scholar.

Analytical Paper An analytical thesis breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience. Here is a good example:

Using Chandra Mohanty's discussion of female agency, In this paper I will analyze the acts of agency performed by the female characters in Flora Nwapa's Efuru. I will also read the text to further elaborate as to what particular enabling conditions within the plot make such acts of female agency possible.

Note that even though the thesis does use theory, it is only using theory to analyze the acts performed within the body of the text; it is not arguing for or against, hence it is not an argumentative paper, and the attempt to analyze the enabling conditions is also geared toward proving that the acts of female agency do exist in the novel. The analysis, thus, provides an explanation of something present in the novel and elements that make that "presence" possible.

Argumentative Paper: An argumentative paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.³

³ This information about three kinds of theses has been modified from Purdue Online Writing Lab: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/thesis_statement_tips.html

Using Fredric Jameson's concept of the ideologeme, I plan to read Osman Sembene's God's Bits of Wood to suggest that if solidarity is assumed to be the ultimate ideologeme of the novel, the one can clearly understand the mechanics of the labor strike within the novel and then apply this knowledge to contemporary labor struggles within neoliberal capital.

A paper with such a thesis is arguing that the novel can teach us something about labor strike within the novel but also, the paper argues, this knowledge can be useful in the real-world struggles of the workers. Since the paper argues for a certain specific point of view within the novel and advocates for a certain specific reading, it displays all the major tropes of an argumentative paper.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have covered the process involved in planning a paper and the significance of crafting a concise and effective thesis. Please bear in mind that a clear thesis will help you organize your paper better and it is absolutely necessary to spend some time in coming up with a strong and clear thesis statement. In the next chapter I will discuss the actual organization of the whole paper itself and the process of composing and revising the first draft.

Chapter 3: Writing the First Draft

Needless to say, there are plenty of good books, especially written by composition theorists and scholars, that can help you learn the art of crafting the first draft. This, essay, therefore, contains brief guidelines based in my own personal experience of writing the first draft, an experience that of course relies on the knowledge I gained during my education and in actual practice of writing publishable articles. By now, I am assuming, you have conducted your research, taken your notes, formulated your thesis and are ready to commit to writing a first draft. Bear in mind that the way you write is absolutely depends upon your own personal techniques of writing: some people, I for example, sit down and write a complete first draft in one sitting; some take their time and develop their draft paragraph by paragraph making sure to get the writing as perfect as possible to the final version. In my case, I have found a quick writing of the first draft more useful to the way my mind works.

Some Basic Steps

My essays usually need more extensive editing after I have composed my first draft. So, please figure out what is your “natural” style and then follow its rhythms in writing your first draft. Here are some of the steps I follow:

- I make sure that I have sufficient time to at least finish the draft in one sitting.
- I work with a practiced structure (explained below) so that the ideas are generally transcribed in the sequence in which they are supposed to appear.
- I do not stop to add quotes/ citations in the first draft. Instead, I just leave myself hints to add it later. For example, if discussing a certain idea by a theorist I would write “In his book X Foucault discusses the use of power as follows: YY). Or leave myself a note like this: “Insert quote from xxx.”
- The point is to capture and develop your own ideas and thoughts first. You already know what are you conceptually responding to, and the specifics of the “What” can be added later.
- I try to have a workable full draft in one sitting (This mostly works with essays of about 6000 words). I usually do not stop to correct the spelling or syntactic errors (When working on a book, MS Word often gives up on auto-

spell checking my document). For example, see the errors in a picture of this very chapter I was writing it for my blog:

The screenshot shows a WordPress editor for a draft article titled "How to Write and Publish Academic Articles in the Humanities (Part 4)". The main content area contains a section titled "Writing the First Draft" with a paragraph of text and a bulleted list of tips. The right-hand sidebar includes a "Publish" section with options like "Save Draft", "Preview", and "Status: Draft", a "Format" section with options like "Standard", "Gallery", "Link", "Image", "Quote", "Video", "Audio", and "Chat", and a "Categories" section with a list of categories including "Uncategorized", "Announcements", "Books", "Commentaries", and "Concepts Explained".

Some Things to Keep in Mind

I am not going to belabor the mechanics of writing the draft, for I am assuming you already know that, but my purpose here is to share the process that works for my writing and might be of some use to you. Here are some of the things I keep in mind while composing my first draft:

Introduction and Thesis

In the beginning of my essay, I briefly introduce the text I am writing about. Usually, this introduction is one compact paragraph and includes the main thesis of my essay. For example:

PUBLISHED IN FRENCH in 1960, Ousmane Sembene's Les bouts de bois de Dieu [God's Bits of Wood] serves a two-pronged purpose of representing a narrativized, particularistic account of a strike while also

offering certain universal aspects of class struggle. This dual focus on the local and the global makes the novel a perfect didactic instrument for teaching resistance in the current state of neoliberal capital. Using Fredric Jameson's concept of the 'ideologeme', this essay discusses the novel's attempt to represent the 1948 Dakar strike as a clue to learning the absolutely necessary preconditions for successful resistance in the neoliberal regime of high capital.

Explain your Theory and your Reasons for Writing the Essay

I make sure to cite and explain the particular theory that I am using. It is important to explain as to which particular “understanding” of a theory or a concept are you using, so that your readers know that you are applying a specific understanding of the theorist or theory. Furthermore, this brief explanation also kind of “teaches” the reader as to how to read your essay clearly. Here is an example of this practice:

The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification (principium divisionis) of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted. (Bourdieu 1984: 170)

To unpack this, a habitus both produces the system of judgements [of taste and art etc.] and also provides a classification, or hierarchy, of these judgements. For example, the distinction between high and low art would, in this sense, be constituted by the habitus and then explained and formulated within the same logic of the habitus. And, as Bourdieu suggests, it is within the gap between these two corresponding functions of the habitus that one can learn the governing system of appraisal within a specific lifestyle. This aspect of the habitus is important to bear in mind while dealing with PWE [Pakistani Writing in English] and its reception within and without Pakistan.

From one of my recently published book chapters, the above is an example of introducing your theory and then explaining its specific usage in your argument. I always give a reason as to why it is necessary to read/ understand the text I am writing about. in other words: Why does it matter for me to write it and for you, the

reader, to read it? For example, in the article I am using as an example here, this is the reason I provide to my readers:

This essay discusses the novel's attempt to represent the 1948 Dakar strike as a clue to learning the absolutely necessary preconditions for successful resistance in the neoliberal regime of high capital.

Thus, the essay announces at the outset that there is a two-pronged purpose for this essay: to discuss the chosen text and to draw some particular lessons for real life politics. (Depending upon your particular subfield in English studies, the politics part may not be necessary for you)⁴

Provide an Account of Previous Work on the Text

Then, I provide an account of previous works published about the text and add where I am either building up on previous work or challenging my predecessors' opinion of the text (Word of advice: be generous in dealing with other people's work). This is where you will discuss the articles that you had researched during the early stages of your publication plan.

Provide Transitions and Signposting

Do not be afraid of telling your reader as to why you are discussing a certain part of the text, and after discussing a part of the text make sure to provide signposts and clear hints to the reader about where your discussion is headed. Usually at the end of a long paragraph, I add something like this:

Having discussed xx I would now move on to YY, as it is important to zzz.

This kind of signposting is absolutely necessary, as it leads the reader from one part of your argument to the other, thus making the essay more readable and your intent clearer.

⁴ To read my full article on Sembene, please visit: <http://postcolonial.net/publications/>

Anticipate Counter Arguments/ Criticisms of your Essay and Craft a Built-in Response

As you write, try to imagine how someone not familiar with what you are doing or someone invested in a different view of the text would respond to your argument. One of such people could be the reviewer of your article. Where necessary, explain either within the text of your essay or in a footnote that you are aware of an alternative way of looking at the same problem and that you are rather choosing to go in a different direction. You may even provide your reason for this different approach.

Conclusion

Keeping some of these things in your mind, please follow the general writing techniques to finish your first draft. After you have finished your first draft, then you can work to revise it for the soundness of your argument and for style and coherence. It would be great if you could workshop the paper with your mentors and peers. When you think your paper is ready for submission, only then should you consider the next step of submitting the paper. I will discuss the submission and final publication process in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Submitting Your Essay

Finding the Right Journal

Now that you have revised and finalized your paper, it is time to submit it to a reputable peer-reviewed journal. How do we know which journal to submit our articles to and whether or not the journal we have chosen is a real journal and not a predatory publishing mill?

Of course, the main journals in your field would be pretty obvious. For example, here in the US journals such as *PMLA*, *Victorian Studies*, and other journals associated with a university, corporate academic publishers (like Taylor and Francis or Springer), journals published by academic associations are pretty well-known. Another way of finding out the reputation of a journal is by looking up if the journal is indexed in the *MLA Directory of Periodicals*. Of course, you can also ask your mentors and colleagues about where to submit your articles.

Avoid predatory/ Deceptive Journals

As for predatory journals, it is always better to do your research. There used to be a running list of predatory journals maintained by a librarian, but that list was taken down after fear of legal reprisals. But you can still use some of the following criteria to figure out if it is a fake journal:

- You recently presented at a conference and you receive a badly composed email asking you to submit your article.
- The journal charges a publication processing fee. Note, while subventions is often part of scientific and some social sciences journals, humanities journals generally do not charge a publication fee.
- The journal website has obvious stylistic and spelling errors and does not list an editorial board, editorial team, or explain their professional affiliation with an association or a university.
- If they offer to publish your paper without the review process.
- If you cannot find any details about people listed as editors or members of editorial board.

Follow the Journal's House Style

So, let us assume you have surfed the web and asked around, and now have a list of possible journals. Now, the topic or subject of your paper will further refine your list, for you still need to submit your article to a journal that publishes on the subject that you have chosen for your paper. After you have reached your final short list of journals, it is now time to revise your article according to the house style of your selected journal. You may also want to browse the journals table of content to see what kind of papers they have previously published.

Most journals explain their house style on the Author Guidelines or Submission Guidelines page. Please read those instructions and follow them throughout the process. Here are some of things usually listed under author guidelines:

- Whether or not the journal accepts simultaneous submissions.
- The preferred citation style of the journal.
- The format in which they want the article.
- Blind peer review requirements.
- The likely time required for review.
- The submission and editing process

Submitting the Paper

After you have revised the paper according to the author guidelines of your chosen journal, it is now time to actually submit it. If the paper accepts online submissions, then please follow the online instructions. Pakistani scholars, please note that most US journals require US Letter size for your pages and not A4, so please make sure to format accordingly. If they require you to send hard copies, then please mail the hard copies to the specific editor or to the address listed for submissions.

The Review Process

If you submitted online, you will probably get an immediate confirmation message and you will probably also be able to track your article through your online account with the journal.

After the editors receive your submission, they will send it out to at least two reviewers. Some journals may also first do an in-house review before sending your article to reviews. This practice allows the editors to decide whether or not it is worth their while to invest time and resources in conducting the review. Chances are, if your article does not meet the journals criteria, is not ready for review, or is on a hackneyed topic, the editors will let you know pretty soon that they will not be sending it out for review. Most journals, however, automatically start the review process after an article is submitted.

Editing After Reviews

So, you have waited from three to, sometimes, six months and have now received your reviews:

Most reviewers are requested to give substantial comments and they choose one of the following recommendations:

1. Accept without revisions
2. Accept with minor revisions
3. Accept with substantive revisions
4. Revise and Resubmit
5. Reject

The no 1 rarely happens and has never happened to me. No 2 happens when the reviewers find your topic compelling enough to suggest that even though the essay needs a little bit of editing, it can be published after addressing some minor issues. Number 3 happens when your essay is about a promising and original topic and hence worthy of publication after some major changes are made. No 4 implies that your essay requires revisions of the kind that would need another round of review, probably by the same reviewers. And of course, we all know No 5, for who has not received a polite rejection message in their academic life. Needless to say, it is always prudent to agree to revise.

To revise, please read the reviews carefully and highlight what the reviewers have pointed out. Then deal with each issue carefully and revise. If you decide not to incorporate any suggestions, please compose your reason separately so that you can add it to your letter to editor.

Note: a “revise and resubmit” is not a rejection: it still is a chance at publication so you should never give up on the essay.

After you have edited the paper, it is better if you share your revised essay with a friend or a colleague. Before you send the revised essay back, please also compose a letter explaining your revisions. In this letter, please explain how you have dealt with each issue raised by each reviewer. I always divide my letter into two parts, Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 2, and then address each reviewer's concerns separately.

Now, you are ready to send your revised article back!

Copyediting and Proofreading

A well-run journal will always assign your paper to a copyeditor or a line editor and will never make any changes without your consent. After the copyeditor has gone through your paper, he or she will send it back to you with suggested corrections and comments. Please read carefully, accept or reject changes, respond to comments and send the paper back in a timely fashion. This is also the last stage where you can still make some extensive changes, like revising a sentence or rearranging a paragraph. So, be diligent and deliberate.

Proofreading and Publication

After the copyediting has been finalized, the editor will send your article to the layout editor. The latter will make the galleys and send them to you for final proofreading. This stage is not meant for substantial changes but only to correct any typos or spelling errors. Please read carefully, for this is almost the final version of your article.

Note you cannot make changes directly to a galley. You will have to write a note. For sample:

- On page 9, line 8 Change "far" to "for"
- Page 10, footnote 11, line 2, replace "Saeed" with "Said"

Generally, this would be the format for any corrections that you might request. After the proofread file is back, the editor will schedule your article for publication and soon, after all your hard work, your article will be published!!!

Conclusion

As I stated in my introduction, this is an extremely brief guide and is meant for those who already know the basics of scholarly writing. My hope is that these practical suggestions would augment your formal learning of scholarly writing. I write regularly about issues of scholarly interest and most of my writing can be found on my website: <http://postcolonial.net>. Please feel free to visit my website and add any queries or suggestions!

About the Author

Author of several academic books, Dr. Masood Raja is an associate professor of Postcolonial studies at the University of North Texas and editor of *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*. Raja's public writings are available on two of his websites:

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