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Conference Participation and Publishing (Chapter Eight of Prepare, Succeed, Advance: A Guidebook for Getting a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies and Beyond)

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Conference Participation and Publishing

Two clear marks of a good scholar or doctoral student are published pieces of research (articles, essays, reviews, etc.) and active participation in academic conferences (presenter, chair, respondent, etc.). Especially for graduate students, the research experience can be very isolated and have a minimal impact without attention to such avenues of dialogue and interaction. Also, practically speaking, when the time comes for the job search, a demonstration of such activity often shows that the prospective professor is a real participant of and contributor to the field of biblical studies. We will begin by discussing how to get involved in conferences.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Conferences come in all shapes and sizes and have a variety of purposes. For biblical studies, the “big event” is usually the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting (SBLAM) which circulates around major venues in the United States.¹ This conference is divided into over 100 smaller study groups (called “program units”), which cover

1. See <http://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/AnnualMeeting.aspx>.

nearly every sub-discipline of biblical studies imaginable from biblical books (Pentateuch, Synoptic Gospels, disputed Pauline letters, etc.), to methodologies (social-scientific, semiotics, rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, etc.), to specialized topics (warfare in ancient Israel, Bible and film, Pauline soteriology, etc.). There is truly something for everyone.

Other meetings are more modest—for example, some doctoral programs have a yearly symposium, sometimes jointly held with another university or seminary. On some occasions, graduate students present in a group separately from the scholars. Other times such lines are not drawn.

Besides the SBLAM, there are a few other major conferences worthy of mention. First of all, several academic groups hold their own meetings either close to the same time as the SBLAM or under its auspices. As for the former, the Evangelical Theological Society has its annual meeting usually just before the SBL conference. At the very beginning of the SBLAM, the Institute for Biblical Research meets in conjunction with SBL. While both organizations are evangelical, the latter one is more focused on biblical studies, though ETS does have a number of program units devoted to biblical books and topics.

Both SBL and ETS have regional meetings throughout the United States that typically meet in the late winter and spring. These conferences tend to be rather small and excellent places for students to get some experience presenting and meeting other students and scholars.

In the United Kingdom, the most popular biblical studies conferences are the British New Testament Society conference and the conference for the Society of Old Testament Studies, which meet separately. Also, the Tyndale Fellowship (associated with the Tyndale House in Cambridge) holds an annual meeting every summer and is divided into “study groups,” including biblical archaeology, biblical theology, Old Testament, and New Testament. Finally, New Testament scholar Steve Moyise organizes a conference that meets yearly in Wales called The Annual Seminar on the Use of the Old Testament in the New.

Beyond the United States of America and the United Kingdom, there are also major conferences held by the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS), and the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies.²

2. The SBL also holds an annual international meeting.

A number of other societies, oftentimes affiliated with a denomination or religious group, organize conferences such as the Catholic Biblical Association, the Society of Pentecostal Studies, the Wesleyan Theological Society, and the Stone-Campbell Journal. Though one should not aimlessly seek out membership in various groups, if you do associate yourself with a group that has a conference, this might provide an excellent opportunity to get some experience presenting your research and meeting other people.

PRESENTING A CONFERENCE PAPER

The Proposal

The process of presenting an academic paper begins with a good idea (from your end) and the conference “call for papers” (from their end). The call usually comes 3–6 months in advance (by an email list or through the conference website) and potential presenters are encouraged to make a proposal.

A proposal typically requires a title for the presentation/paper and an abstract (along with your personal information).³ The title should be clear and catchy. You may want to be transparent in the title regarding the texts you are going to deal with in general. One option is to make the main title a bit humorous, mysterious or poetic, and then allow the subtitle to be more explicit about topic and texts. It is perfectly normal and encouraged to run your title and abstract by friends and mentors.

The abstract is rather more important when it comes to assessment. An abstract is meant to give the interested reader a taste of what you will be discussing. In some cases, it is appropriate to provide a summary. In other cases, you may feel that it is better to discuss the questions and issues involved, but leave the conclusion unstated to raise interest.

In terms of choosing the topic, you may want to draw from your dissertation or graduate coursework. However, try and give the topic broad appeal so that the subject seems interesting to a wide range of people. Consider the wider implications for the study of that material

3. While this is the normal practice, some groups may require a copy of the entire paper. For the SBLAM, first time presenters are required to submit the whole paper with their proposal.

(hermeneutics, historical or social issues, authorship, etc.). This will certainly increase its chances of acceptance. However, be wary of aiming too broadly as an unwieldy topic could make committee members suspicious that the subject cannot be treated in the course of a short paper.

Another important consideration is originality. Does the title and abstract communicate that something “new” will be said? Make it clear that you will be driving the discussion forward by opening up a new perspective or working with different kinds of evidence and materials.

Finally, as with anything else, be absolutely sure that the proposal is completely free from spelling and grammatical errors—a sloppily written proposal will make the judgment process much lighter as they have an easy reason to throw out one.

It may help to know how proposals are decided upon. In the first place, a committee is normally in place (as with SBLAM) to decide upon the proposals. A chair is responsible for collecting and distributing the proposals.⁴ The committee then works through a discernment or voting process to decide. For the SBLAM, some groups vote based on a ranking system where each committee member assigns a score to the proposal from 1–4. When the tally is made, the highest scoring proposals are placed in the open slots. Thus, the acceptability of the proposal may depend on the slot-to-proposal ratio and the composition of the committee.

Getting Accepted and Writing the Paper

Once the proposal is accepted, you should move forward and write the paper if you haven’t done so already.⁵ The organization of the paper should be like any other type of argumentation: introduction, methodology (if worthy of explicit mention), main arguments, and conclusion. One popular and effective way to begin an academic paper is to talk very broadly about a subject and slowly narrow in on the issue. This eases the hearers into the paper. Another route is to start

4. In most cases, the ideal is that proposals are judged based on merit and not status, so the proposals are passed along without names attached to them.

5. If you do not write the paper before sending the proposal, at least sketch out the outline of the argument and ideas and think through the main books and articles that will become conversation partners. If you don’t do this, you may end up not being able to logically make the arguments that you originally presumed and face the embarrassment of pulling out of the paper or re-directing the topic.

with a bit of humor. This is best done with anecdotes, not with actual jokes or puns.

In terms of length, it is often difficult to know how long to make a paper. This obviously depends on the time-slot, but other factors are involved such as the complexity of the topic and the personality of the speaker. A safe range to work with is to average about 100–150 words per minute. If you have a twenty-five minutes slot, you will want to aim for between 2500 and 3750 words for the paper. As for myself, I try to plan for about 125–130 words per minute.⁶ If you have a tendency to make extra comments during a paper (that are not written), you may want to write a shorter paper.

Inevitably, I see presenters (young and old, student and scholar) try to squeeze a 6000-word paper into a twenty-five-minute slot. What usually happens is that the paper is read at a lightning speed (and thus unintelligible) or the presenter has to cut out parts of the paper on-the-fly (which comes across as unprofessional). A third possibility is that the chair, whose role it is to keep the papers on time, will let the presenter go overtime. However, this is impolite both for the next presenter and also for the auditors.

On the matter of communicating well to a listening audience, avoid long lists, facts, and figures. I always encourage presenters to have handouts for the attendees. It is useful to give the title of the paper, your name and contact information, a basic outline of the paper, and any key texts or information that you want them to have for reference. This is especially useful when dealing with arguments where you will make reference to Greek or Hebrew biblical texts.

In addition or instead, you may furnish the audience with copies of the entire paper to follow along. While the gain is that the participants will have the whole paper for reference later, the downside is cost.⁷

The Big Day of Presentation

In most cases, it is advisable to dress conservatively. I tend to show up to the meeting room about twenty to thirty minutes early. Sometimes

6. For more on speech rate see <http://www.write-out-loud.com/speech-rate.html>. The site acknowledges that speech rates vary widely: “Studies show speech rate alters depending on the speaker’s culture, geographical location, subject matter, gender, emotional state, fluency, profession or audience.”

7. Also, some may be wary of passing out ideas that have not yet been published or copyrighted.

it is harder to find the room than you think, and other times you may have to help rearrange furniture or help set up the microphone. It may also ease your nerves a bit to visit shortly with the other presenters and the chair ahead of time.

In that time before the seminar or unit begins, ensure that you have some water and also a pad and pencil with which to write. I would also recommend bringing two copies of your reading manuscript to the session, just in case you ruin one with coffee or in the rain. For extra safety, I tend to email an electronic copy to myself so that if the physical copies completely disappear, I can access it and print it at the business center of my hotel.

When reading the paper, make eye contact as often as possible, but in a comfortable way. Your voice should be clear and sufficiently loud and you can feel free to take a brief sip of water, especially at natural breaking points in your paper.

Normally, a short time of discussion is permitted at the end of a paper.⁸ Make use of your pencil and paper and write down the questions. Sometimes the audience will pick up on gaps in your reasoning or items you overlooked. In other cases, someone will point out an error in the data. It is good practice to accept criticism graciously. This can be very difficult to do and takes practice for some. However, the more open and approachable you are, the more feedback you are likely to get. It may help to remember, if you feel threatened by a criticism or pointed question, that you were selected to give this paper and you have something worthwhile to say. The question and answer time is not a defense of your paper *per se*, but should be viewed as a time for mutually beneficial discussion and one for you to find ways to improve your work.

Sometimes you will not know the answer to a question. In such cases, as with the doctoral defense, it is okay to confess ignorance. However, it is often profitable to venture a guess. Another special situation is when there is silence and no one asks a question. This can be awkward, but it does not necessarily mean that the paper was uninteresting or unworthy of comment. During such times, the chair usually pipes in with a question to prime the pump. If not, don't worry. It is not uncommon for a paper to generate few or no comments.

8. At the SBLAM, discussion varies and will sometimes take place after all papers are presented. A common schedule is to limit discussion to five minutes after each presentation.

PUBLISHING BOOK REVIEWS AND ESSAYS

Introduction

Publishing a book review or review essay⁹ is an excellent way to get writing and publishing experience, and also it normally involves receiving the book for free!¹⁰ During a PhD, writing a book review can be a nice break from the seemingly endless task of progressing through the dissertation.¹¹ One reason why doctoral students choose to review books is to acquire new works in their own field and especially ones that relate to the dissertation. Occasionally, it is faster to get the book for review than to request your academic library purchase it or to have it come through inter-library loan.

Also, I try to review books outside my own narrow field of expertise to help expand my knowledge and spark ideas that might inform my thinking. If I don't get such books to review (with deadline pressures), I tend to put such aspirations on the backburner.

Finally, I recommend reviewing books because it is a nice practical exercise in active and critical reading. When you read a book with the knowledge that you have to write something substantial about it for print, you tend to be a careful reader, looking to see what the thesis statement is and how the author(s) set out to prove it.

The Process of Becoming a Reviewer

Often, when students first consider writing a book review for print, there is the assumption that you (as reviewer) get to choose the book and then you seek out a journal who will publish it. While this is a logical assumption, there is a bit of a different system, especially for those who are just beginning. In reality, journals are not normally anxiously

9. A "review essay" is essentially a work that lies somewhere between a standard review and an article. Sometimes, in a "review essay," the essayist will discuss several recent books (that are similar in subject matter) at once. In other cases, one book is under review, but the essayist uses the book as a case-study to discuss wider issues in the field. And sometimes a review essay is simply just longer than a normal "book review."

10. In almost all cases, authors are not paid for writing book reviews or articles (unless it is for a magazine).

11. See an encouraging discussion of this issue in a past issue of the SBL online publication called "SBL Forum": <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=311>.

looking for people to review the important books. Oftentimes, they handpick who they want to review those kinds of books.

To help you understand where you might come in in the process, it may be useful to know generally how journals work with publishers. When a new journal is formed, typically the editor(s) will contact various publishers and request to receive relevant books they produce for review. The publisher, once it has assessed the validity and excellence of the journal, will set up the journal book review editor (or journal headquarters) to receive regular shipments of books to circulate to reviewers. Once a review on a book has been published, the publishers desire for the journal to send them a copy of the review to pass on to the author.

The book review editor of a journal, then, is often receiving dozens of books and it is his or her responsibility to find reviewers. It is not as helpful for the review editor if a person simply contacts her and requests to review a certain book. Also, in such circumstances, the editor cannot really be sure that the potential reviewer is a good reviewer.

A better approach is to contact the review editor of a journal of interest, and politely request to be added as a reviewer in a particular area of interest (such as Gospels, prophetic literature, Christian origins, etc.). The editor, then, can get back to you with a book suggestion or list of books in your field. You may or may not get a chance to review the exact book you wanted, but it is best to see this as the building of a good relationship between you and a journal. Eventually, if such a relationship is built, you can put yourself in a position where it would be more possible to request specific items.

Choosing a Journal

There are many different kinds of journals in biblical studies and religious studies. Some journals have only a few book reviews per issue, while others have many (such as *Journal of Theological Studies*). Some journals don't have any book reviews (*Tyndale Bulletin*). Other journals are completely devoted to academic book reviews. Four journals that you should be aware of are: *Review of Biblical Literature*, *Religious Studies Review*, *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, and *Theological Book Review*. All of these are "review journals."

Two of these, *Review of Biblical Literature* (RBL) and *Theological Book Review* (TBR), are particularly useful to know about because

they maintain an active list of books available for review online. RBL is the premier biblical studies review journal founded by SBL. It is published in print as well as in pdf files through its website: www.bookreviews.org. RBL maintains, on its website, not only a catalogue of every book review they have published (which is nearing 5,000), but also a running list of books available for review (for SBL members). At any given time, they have hundreds of books available. The process of acquiring a book through RBL is special. Once you have chosen a book you would like to review, you then need to present a short proposal regarding your qualifications for being a good reviewer for that particular text. The editorial committee may receive many proposals for the same book and will select one person based on his or her expertise and the strength of the proposal.

Theological Book Review (based at Liverpool Hope University, UK) also maintains a regularly updated list of books available for review on its website: <http://www.hope.ac.uk/theological-book-review/theological-book-review.html>. This journal, while not as well-known as RBL, encourages graduate students to be involved.¹²

How do you choose a journal to work with? If you are new to this process, I suggest steering clear of the weightier journals. Start with a seminary journal or another smaller periodical. First, locate the website of the journal. Then, find the book review editor's contact information.¹³ Send an email to the appropriate editor giving your name, degree program (or your highest degree), a short (2–3 sentence) bio, and what subject area you are interested in. Then, you may simply write, "I am interested in writing a review for your journal. Do you currently have books in my subject area of interest?"

In response, they may send you the name of a book or two, and you are free to take or leave the offer. Or, they may send a list of books and you can select one.¹⁴

12. Typically, due to postage costs of mailing books out, potential reviewers would need to be located in the UK.

13. Some journals may have only one editor that covers all matters in the journal, whether articles or reviews. Other journals may have several editors, and even several book review editors.

14. Once you have a handful of reviews under your belt, you might be able to select two or three books at once and work on them at the same time. For good reasons, journals tend to send only one for first time reviewers. Once you have built up some credibility and your writing skills are proven, there is usually more wiggle room in this area.

Once Approved, the Process of Reviewing a Book

Once you have worked out with the editor which book you will review, the book will be sent out. Deadlines for book reviews vary depending on the journal. Some journals desire a fast turnaround time to ensure that they stay on top of the demand and provide the earliest reviews on a book. Typically, a reviewer has at least three months to read the book and write a review. Other journals allow for more time and offer up to a year to finish a review. The journal website will often contain guidelines for reviewers that should be read carefully.

In terms of length of a review, this also varies from one journal to the next. *RBL*, for example, is quite generous and reviews sometimes appear that are over ten pages. Generally, though, a review is about 600–1,000 words. *TBR* publishes short reviews of 250–300 words. Again, such matters will be stated in the style guidelines either on the website or sent to you by mail.

When it is time to write and send the review, you will need to follow the format of the journal as requested. Most journals today allow email submissions which are more cost efficient, easier to track, and allow the editor to re-format or edit the review easily.¹⁵

Advice for Reading Books and Writing Reviews

While a book review is normally a very short piece to write, and this can make it easier, sometimes it is still difficult to decide what to write about. Occasionally, the journal editor or guidelines will specify how much attention should be devoted to summary of the book and how much to critical interaction. Nevertheless, a helpful general format is as follows: short introduction (10%), a summary of the book chapters and argument (45%), positive feedback (20%), negative feedback (20%), end statements (5%). Clearly, the majority of a review is a fair and clear description of the content of the book, especially the thesis statement or main idea. If the book is an edited collection of essays from multiple authors, it may be helpful to list out the chapter titles and contributors.¹⁶ The introduction of the review, like any good opening, should

15. It is helpful to be aware, though, that journal editors tend to not proofread the reviews as well as they do the articles, so you will want to be extra careful that your review is free from grammatical and spelling errors before submission.

16. I only do this, though, when such information is not readily available on WorldCat, Google Books, or Amazon.com (“look inside” or “search inside”).

try to attract the reader’s attention. You may want to start with a provocative question or make reference to a perplexing or controversial issue in the field that the book addresses. In the end-statements, it is profitable to give your overall impression of the book, what audience it would most suit, and its enduring value for scholarship. In terms of review etiquette, one should avoid harsh and undue criticism. In most journals, negative feedback in reviews is welcome and even desirable, but it should be done in a gracious manner.¹⁷

When it comes to reading the book, it probably won’t be enough to simply “read” through the book and then write the review. I suggest reading it when you can take notes and in such a way that you can refer back to critical junctures in the book when you are ready to write. When you read, you will want to be on the lookout for these items: the central thesis or idea of the book, the methodology employed, the key points of argumentation, and key assumptions. Ultimately, your readers will want to know, among other things, whether the author successfully defended the thesis statement or main argument. You will also want to look for the following: omissions (*Was anything left out that should have been discussed?*); focus (*Are some areas given too much attention while others are more thinly treated?*); attitude (*Is the author fair in his or her assessment of the work of others?*); sources (*Does the author use primary sources responsibly or just as “proof-texts”?*); and originality (*Is the argument fresh?*).

Personally, I find the best way to review a book and remember what I thought about it is to make notes *in* the book itself.¹⁸ For those of you who are willing to do so, I offer here my own system for making annotations. When I read a book that I want to analyze closely, I use the same system of marking. Whenever I come across what I consider to be a main point that the author is making, I write “MP” (main point) in the margins. If I come across a statement that I might want to quote from the book (whether it is excellent or disconcerting), I write “Q” (quote) in the margins. If I come across a point that I find useful or impressive, I place a “*” in the margin. If there is a statement with which I disagree or find serious fault, I place an “X” in the margin. When there

17. For my own good practice for each review, while I am reading the book I try to discern at least two areas that are weak as well as at least two useful items or points.

18. Some of you, I am sure, like to keep your books free from markings. Feel free to skip this section.

are pages (especially with “MP” or “Q”) which I will want to find later again, I circle the page number, so that when I flip through the book, I can navigate there quickly.

In the back of the book, I find a blank page where I can scribble thoughts and concerns, and where I can keep track of things like the number of typos or errors.

Advice for Reviewing Commentaries and Textbooks

One of the doctoral student’s favorite items to review is the biblical commentary. However, these have become specialized kinds of resources that do not work like other books. They are reference works and it can be a bit daunting to review one. What do you comment on? What is a review reader interested in knowing? I suggest, when you are reading the commentary, to pay special attention to the following factors: audience/depth (*Who is the commentary written for and what is the intended level of depth? Pastors? Scholars? Has the author maintained consistency regarding depth and level?*); originality (*Does the commentary fit a niche? Is it unique enough to warrant a library purchasing it?*); methodology (*What is the scholar’s approach to the text? Rhetorical? Historical? Blended? Is it too one-sided? Is it consistent?*); format (*Does the commentary flow nicely? Is it well-organized?*); introductory material (*Is the introduction too short or too long? Does it cover the most important issues?*); sources and ancient texts (*Does the commentary refer to helpful sources? Does the commentary accurately interact with the biblical text and other ancient texts?*); currency (*Does the commentary make use of current discoveries, methodologies, and recent secondary literature?*); and appended or additional items (*Does the commentary offer useful charts, bibliographies, excurses, or charts?*).

Textbooks are also a bit unusual to review because they do not typically have thesis statements. Some of the same areas of evaluation could apply for dictionaries and textbooks: audience, depth, format and organization, useful appendices and charts, and currency.

PUBLISHING JOURNAL ARTICLES

Introduction

One of the most important ways to improve your CV and share your research is by writing articles for good journals. While books take years

to write and publish, articles are important because they are current, cutting edge, widely available, and easy for readers to consume in a short time. In fact, I suggest that a PhD student should try and publish at least two articles during the doctoral program in view of attracting the attention of potential employers when job-hunting time rolls around. How, though, do you get started in this area?

Finding an Idea

The first thing to do is come up with article ideas. These can come from all sorts of sectors. One convenient place is graduate course essays. In fact, it is wise to think ahead and write course essays in such a way as to make them “publishable.” We will discuss what that means in a moment. Another place to find ideas is your dissertation. Quite often, you will end up doing more research and taking more notes than you can fit into the actual dissertation. The “extra” material works nicely as a basis for a good article.

Finding a Journal

There are many different kinds of journals and periodicals that one could consider for publishing an article. Some journals are associated with an organization (like SBL), while others are independent. Some come from a confessional perspective while others do not. And, of course, some are interested in a specific portion of the Bible or methodological (or ideological) perspective. Perhaps, though, the most useful taxonomy is simply one that ranks journals according to academic excellence.¹⁹

WORLD-CLASS JOURNALS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

The Catholic Biblical Quarterly
Journal of Biblical Literature
Journal for the Study of Judaism
Journal for the Study of the New Testament

19. There are some organizations that publish rankings of journals in religion and/or humanities. An example of this would be the European Reference Index for the Humanities or the Excellence in Research for Australia Initiative. The list provided in this book is geared more towards assessing journals based on the frequency of appearance of leading scholars as authors as well as the overall tendency to rely on such journals in dissertation research.

Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
Journal of Theological Studies
New Testament Studies
Novum Testamentum
Revue Biblique
Scottish Journal of Theology
Vetus Testamentum
*Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der
 Älteren Kirche*
Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

EXCELLENT (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)²⁰

Biblica
Biblical Interpretation
Biblical Theology Bulletin
Biblische Zeitschrift
Bulletin for Biblical Research
Currents in Biblical Research
Early Christianity
Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses
Harvard Theological Review
Horizons in Biblical Theology
Jewish Quarterly Review
Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
Journal of Theological Interpretation
Judaism
Neotestamentica
Tyndale Bulletin

VERY GOOD (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Evangelical Quarterly
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
Perspectives in Religious Studies
Restoration Quarterly
Westminster Theological Journal

20. It should be noted that normally *Interpretation* and *Ex Auditu* would fit into this category, but I do not officially list them because they don't tend to accept unsolicited manuscripts.

OTHER NOTABLE JOURNALS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Anvil
Bible Translator
Biblical Archaeological Review
European Journal of Theology
Expository Times
Irish Biblical Studies
Themelios
Trinity Journal

The Writing, Submission, and Assessment of an Article

When it comes to actually writing out the article, have in mind one or two journals that you are considering for submission. Download or request the style guide from your first choice and get a sense for the expectations.²¹ In terms of length, the average journal expects an article that is between 6,000–8,000 words. Articles should be thoroughly researched, working with classical resources as well as the most recent sources. It is also expected that the article interact with worldwide research (i.e., French and German scholarship as well as Anglo-American).

It is fundamental that the article clearly demonstrates original research. It is usually not enough to summarize a concept in a field or explore a theme. Also, use of original languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic) should be accurate and insightful. As a matter of general practice, to ensure that I have written my best work, I try to (1) read the paper (or a condensed version) first at a conference and learn from the feedback, and (2) have a colleague or mentor read and comment on the article.

Once it is time to submit the article, make sure that it is completely free from grammatical and spelling errors. Also, double-check that foreign language words are correct, especially accents. To submit an article, you normally send it to the journal editor. Consult the journal website for specific instructions. Some journals still request that the article be sent in hardcopy through the mail. However, sometimes the website may request articles through the mail, but the editor doesn't

21. If you are using a reference-management software package such as Endnote, you can switch easily from one kind of style (e.g., Turabian) to another.

mind email submissions. It is always worthwhile to check with the editor if you wish to send the article by email.

In the email, it is helpful to include your name, whatever Greek/Hebrew fonts you are using, and provide a statement that you have not simultaneously submitted the same article to another journal.²² Additionally, I ask for a very general idea of how long the assessment process will take. Normally, it can range between two months and one year. On average, an assessment is made in about three months.

Academic journals in the humanities tend to subscribe to a policy of double-blind peer review. That means that the article submission is sent by the editor to two reviewers (sometimes more) and they are “blind” in the sense that the author’s name is removed from the article so as to maintain anonymity for the purpose of fairness and objectivity. Also, the identities of the reviewers are hidden from the author, with the editor acting as a go-between.

Often the reviewers come from the journal editorial board. The names of the scholars on the editorial board typically appear on the journal website to show the prestige and range of scholars for that journal. It is almost impossible, though, to “guess” who will receive your article. In fact, it is sometimes necessary for the editor and board members to send the article outside of the board for review if the subject matter requires a specialist or if the normal board members are unavailable.

The process of review usually involves reports on the article sent back to the editor. This includes an evaluation of the originality of the article, its overall academic excellence, and sometimes a discussion of whether it fits the journal’s profile in terms of method or scope. If the reviewer finds an article unworthy of publication, a list of problems is provided. In turn, the editor passes on the news to the author along with comments.²³ If the article is accepted, the reviewers usually have suggested or required corrections/modifications. The author is given some time to make these adjustments.

There is the possibility that the editor and reviewers are on the fence about the article. In such cases, they may request that the article

22. Almost all journals require this last piece of information as they do not want to hear back from the author that another journal has accepted the same article as this wastes the time and efforts of the reviewers.

23. Unfortunately some journals do not provide feedback if an article is rejected.

be re-written or significantly modified and the outcome could still be unclear.

If the article is accepted and corrections are requested, the author is responsible for deciding how to edit and improve the article based on the comments. If you are unsure, it is acceptable to ask the editor for advice or clarification. There is no standard timeframe for making these improvements, and it would depend largely on the nature and quantity of the corrections. Typically, author and editor would work out a deadline for corrections.

Once the corrections are approved, the article is placed in line for publication. How quickly the article appears depends heavily on the frequency of issues (bi-annually, quarterly, yearly) and how many articles are accepted in a given year.²⁴

Once the article has been published, the journal will inform the author and furnish him or her with “offprints”—copies of the article to keep or distribute to friends and colleagues. However, as journals continue to go online as well as in print, it is becoming more common to simply receive a digital (often pdf) copy of the issue or article in lieu of a set of offprints.

Dealing with Rejection

If an article is rejected, it can be difficult and discouraging, but it is also a very common experience for scholars as well as students. I tend to work with a “three-strikes” principle of article submission. I pre-consider three journals that fit the article in terms of scope and method. Two of them are usually in the “worldclass” and “excellent” categories, and one of them in the “very good” or “notable” category. I send the article first to the highest category and work my way down once it has been rejected. If an article has been rejected three times, I usually table it and consider it unworthy of publication. Of course, at each level of rejection, the feedback of the reviewers should be taken into consideration, and changes should be made to improve the argument.

If an article has been rejected by a journal, it does not necessarily mean it was seriously flawed. Some journals have so many submissions, they have to be very cautious and hold to the highest standards

24. Even though the article may not appear for years, it is common for authors to list them as “forthcoming” in their CV.

for publication. Sometimes it is truly the case that a reviewer was biased against an idea or ideological statement in an article, but the point of double or triple review is to provide balance to such possibilities. Nevertheless, just because one journal deems the article “unpublishable” does not mean that another journal’s reviewers will come to the same conclusion. Again, it is advisable to have a current or former professor or supervisor read the article and provide clear and honest feedback.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I turn parts of my dissertation into articles during my PhD? The answer to this depends on the policies of your current program. Some programs, such as mine, did not mind if parts of the dissertation were published. It would be a problem if I had previously published a few articles before my PhD and then tried to turn *those* articles into a dissertation. Some institutions see it as an advantage to publish chapters as articles which helps to demonstrate that the dissertation actually is “publishable,” which is one of the criteria for evaluation.

The bigger problem may be that a publisher may not be interested in publishing the dissertation as a monograph if too much of it has already been put into journals. It may be worth talking this over with your supervisor and strategically publishing only a couple of articles out of your dissertation chapters. Also, some monograph series would be concerned if you have already published the “big idea” or main argument of the dissertation in the form of a journal article. Thus, it may be safer to publish exegetical insights or methodological matters that are only ancillary to your main work.

Will I limit myself if I publish with a confessional or denominational journal? There is no need to steer completely clear of confessional or denominational journals. It is true that some potential employers may frown upon such research activity, but you can be selective as far as what you put on your CV. More importantly, strive to publish at least *some* articles in the “worldclass” category. In the end, part of your academic world is getting your research into the hands of others, and you can best decide which venues you wish to use for this. Also, some topics, such as theological and hermeneutical discussions that relate to ministry or spiritual formation, may be more “at home” in confessional journals.

Can I exceed the suggested word limit for a journal article? A suggested word limit is usually general and offers the potential contributor a sense of what the journal can handle in terms of length. If the suggestion is 6,000–8,000 words, going over by a few hundred words is probably not a problem. It is a different thing to exceed it by thousands. If you are more than 750 words over the limit, I suggest contacting the editor for consultation.

When can you submit another article to the same journal after getting rejected? There are plenty of good journals that fit a wide range of subjects, so you really wouldn’t need to send another article to the same journal immediately. I suggest allowing a distance of at least one year before revisiting the same journal for consideration after a rejection.

What are the best original language fonts to use for journal articles? Check the journal website for guidelines. Oftentimes, the journal will specify which fonts are acceptable. If not, you can feel free to contact the editor. Many journals are changing over to unicode fonts.²⁵

Can I check in with the editor and find out the status of my article? *When?* Again, when you send the original email submitting the article to the editor, make sure that you politely request an idea of the time it takes for assessment. Patiently wait until that time has passed before making an inquiry. If you still have not received any information two weeks past that time, it is reasonable to contact the editor again and politely ask for an update. In the summer and at Christmas time, delays are more likely.

25. For a helpful resource that links to a wide variety of font-related matters, see the NTGateway (<http://www.ntgateway.com/greek-ntgateway/fonts/>).