

EXPANDING YOUR AUDIENCE: HOW TO PUBLISH OUTSIDE OF ACADEMIA

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Workshop Outline

- Benefits of Non-Academic Writing
- Genres of Non-Academic Writing
- Publication Types
- Translating Your Ideas for a Broader Audience
- How to Pitch an Idea to an Editor



Professional Benefits

- Gives YOU and YOUR WORK exposure to a broader audience
- Offers networking opportunities with nonacademics
- For jobs outside the academy, shows ability to operate outside of the university context
- Shows academic job market that you have a public profile
- Demonstrates ability to break down complex ideas into accessible forms, a boon for any teaching profile



Personal Benefits

- Synthesizing and simplifying your research can help you understand it better
- Gives you a different way of approaching and thinking about your work outside of the seminar, conference or dissertation
- Gives you a chance to work more creatively and to inject your own voice more forcefully and centrally in your writing
- Could provide some small form of payment or even a secondary revenue stream



Genres of Non-Academic Writing

- Book/film/concert/theater review
- Personal essay
- Social, political or cultural trend piece
- Interview
- Op-ed, also known as an editorial or opinion piece
- News article (e.g. about scientific finding)



Publication Types or Categories

- Online magazines (Slate, Salon, N+1, *Huffington Post*, L.A. Review of Books)
- Newspapers & Magazines (*The Atlantic*, *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*)
- Popular Blogs/Newsletters (The Awl, Feministing, The Rumpus, The Hairpin, LitHub)
- Higher Education publications (*Vitae*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*)



Translating Your Ideas: Audience Analysis

- Review articles and publications that cover topics relevant to your interests for a mainstream audience
 - How do the publications or articles cover these topics? What language do they use? Key terms?
 - How are these pieces structured? What's the frame for introducing the topic/ideas? How do they work with evidence? How do they conclude?
- Imagine your audience as a group of intelligent readers who may or may not have gone to grad school and who likely did NOT pursue a PhD
- Experiment with reducing the complexity of your topic. Which ONE or TWO ideas are most central and easily articulated?



Translating Your Ideas: The Bigger Picture

- Think about stakes of your interests for a mainstream audience
 - Why would your friends outside of academia (or your parents) be interested?
- Rethink timeliness and significance for a broader context
 - How does your research correspond to events in the news?
 - How does your research encounter current trends in fiction, television, film, general culture?
- Develop a non-academic citation strategy
 - This will look different than APA, MLA or Chicago style citations with which you are familiar
 - You may merely “cite” someone by saying: “As TK says, in an influential essay, ‘.....’”
 - Or you may hyperlink to the cited content.



Translating Your Ideas: Notes on Style

- Reduce jargon to make your writing more accessible to less esoteric audience or understand that they may need definition
 - Intersectionality: What does this mean to the average person?
 - Subjectivity: How would you explain this idea to your mom?
 - Foucauldian power relations: Uh, what?
- Avoid nounification of verbs and verbification of nouns
 - Problematizing, othering
 - Abjection, subjectification
- Simplify sentence structure. Try to keep sentences to less than three lines.
- Reduce wordiness, keep it short and seek the cleanest articulation of your ideas.



Translating Your Ideas: Science Writing in Focus

- Think about the broader implications of your findings

Is your work advancing basic science? Did you make a new discovery (even small discoveries are discoveries!) Did you develop a new methodology, tool, or intervention? What are some ways that other researchers, policymakers, and/or the public might apply your findings?

- Balance between accuracy and simplicity

Others who write about your work are more likely to go too far and over-simplify, to the point of distorting the message and being inaccurate; you're more likely to go too far to the precise but incomprehensible to many → aim for the middle! E.g.:

- “Science just proved that owning a dog makes you live longer” ❌
- Dog ownership and the risk of cardiovascular disease and death – a nationwide cohort study ❌
- Can having a dog help you live longer? OR Dog ownership linked to living longer, study finds ✓

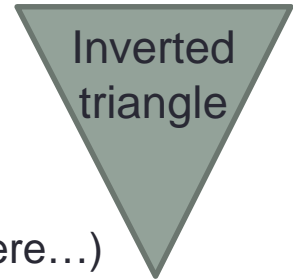
Imagine you are writing for an intelligent middle/high school student.

Know which details are necessary and which ones are distracting.



Translating Your Ideas: Science Writing in Focus

- **Structure of academic science writing**
 - Intro (3 moves: Establish research territory, identify gap in the literature, fill the gap)
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Discussion
 - Conclusion
- **Example structure of non-academic science writing**
 - “Lede”– something to grab their attention
 - Summary of basic finding (get to the point early): 5 W’s (who, what, where...)
 - Brief summary of methods (just the gist)
 - Discussion of results
 - Exploration of alternatives
 - Implications – longer discussion of why your research matters



Selling Your Idea: Writing on Spec

Writing on spec means producing the article or essay *before* it has been accepted for publication.

- Typical for academic journal publication, but not often the case for non-academic writing.
- Downside is that there is no guarantee your piece will get placed.
- Check the publication site for information about submissions formats, including whether or not you must submit already-written pieces.



Selling Your Idea: Pitching

Pitching is proposing a piece that you have not yet written

- Typical for newspapers and online magazines
- Benefit is that you don't have to lay out time for research and writing before knowing that a piece will be published
- You will likely need to propose a piece several weeks (or even months) ahead of projected publication date



Writing the Pitch Letter

The pitch letter should achieve three primary goals:

- Introduce you to the editor and demonstrate any connections to publication or mutual friends/colleagues
- Present your idea in clear and compelling language, demonstrating your ability to produce the article
- Demonstrate your idea's timeliness and relevance for the publication's audience

MOST importantly, the pitch letter needs to be concise and easy for the editor to scan for the most important information



Organizing the Pitch Letter

- **Opener**: Introduce yourself and mention any connections that you might have to the publication and/or editor. Might also discuss relevant experience. Make sure this is catchy.
- **Pitch**: Describe in specific detail, but briefly, what it is you want to write about.
- **Sell**: Explain why the piece is a good fit for the publication, emphasize timeliness and relevance. Demonstrate that you're able to do this work, either by talking about academic background and writing timeline.
- **Exit**: Thank the editor for their consideration and provide contact info.



Best Practices for the Pitch Letter

Do

- Keep your pitch short
- Demonstrate knowledge of audience/readership
- Provide clear, reasonable dates for submitting a draft
- Provide contact information

Don't

- Use academic jargon
- Refer to academic debates when talking about your idea
- Use vague or confusing language
- Go over 500 words



Pitching and Publishing Schedule

Get a sense of the editorial calendar and workflow so that you can work backwards to figure out the timeline for pitching your article.

Example: Review of Qiu Miaojin's *Notes of a Crocodile* (May 2, 2017 pub date)

- Reviews of fiction usually are published on publication date (May 2, 2017)
- Copyediting and posting can take anywhere from 1-10 days (April 21-April 31)
- Edits of first draft can take two weeks to one month (March 21-April 7)
- Receiving the ARC and writing the review can take up to a month (February 21-March 7)
- Ideal pitch date: February 14-March 1, 2017 (2-2.5 months before pub date)



Talking about Compensation

- Talking about payment often makes students uncomfortable, but remember that you are providing a service and your work has **value**.
- Some publications run on little to no budget and may not be able to pay you. If they do, it may be a modest sum. If that's the case, make sure that it *is* compensating you in some other way: getting your voice out there, giving you a publication credit on your CV or fulfilling a desire to write.
- Always ask for money! If none is available, be sure that this piece is serving your professional goals within or outside of academia.



Thank you!

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