GETTING PUBLISHED: AN OVERVIEW FOR OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARIANS

Michael Lorenzen

Central Michigan University

These are Notes from the Presentation

- This PowerPoint was not shown at the conference. However, these are the notes I used during the presentation. I hope you find this useful.

Overview

- Why Publish?
- **Types of Publishing Opportunities**
- **Finding the Right Place to Submit**
- **What to Look for in a Journal**
- **Tips for Submitting**
- **Dealing with Revision Requests and Rejection Letters**
- **Other Ideas**

Off-Campus Librarians are the Innovators of the Profession

- Librarians involved in distance education have long been on the leading edge of serving patrons. From the use of telephones and the postal service in the 70s, to the discovery of chat and e-mail reference assistance in the 90s, to taking advantage of all the possibilities that the Web and course pack software has to offer, it has been off-campus librarians who have helped to lead the entire library profession into this new era of librarianship.

Off-Campus Librarians Contributions to Scholarship

- The library literature is rich with the contributions of off-campus librarians. Many books and journals have featured articles from librarians writing about issues relating to distance librarians, and by extension, librarianship as a whole.

Not all Off-Campus Librarians

- Despite this, many librarians in distance education do not publish or publish very little. For whatever reason (fear, dislike of writing, not knowing how to submit), the profession is missing these important voices in our scholarly communications. In addition, these librarians are missing the many personal benefits that accrue to a person by writing and publishing.

All have something to contribute to the literature of the library field

- Gordon (2004) wrote, "Always keep in mind that you are qualified to write for the profession merely by being a part of the profession" (p.1). And it stands to follow that off-campus librarians are qualified to write about their jobs by the very fact that they hold these jobs.

librarians who write also help themselves

- Henson (1999) noted, "The combined activities of writing and publishing cause us to escape our routine ways of thinking. Thinking in new ways is energizing. If we are clever, we can direct this energy so that it helps us achieve many of our professional and personal goals" (p. 21).

Types of Publishing Opportunities

- Some options for publishing include book reviews, newsletter articles, how-I-do-it-good articles, research articles in journals (either peer-reviewed or not), regular columns in a journal, or even writing or editing a book.

The book review is perhaps the easiest

- Reviews can run from a small paragraph like in a publication such as *Choice* or can be a minor essay that takes up several pages of a journal. These types of publications do not garner much credit for those seeking tenure or promotion. If you want to be a reviewer, search through library journals. Find the ones that print book reviews in areas you are interested in. E-mail the editor of the journal, explain what you want to do and what your qualifications are, and hope for the best One perk of reviewing books is that the reviewer usually gets to keep the book.

Newsletters

- Most state and regional library associations have monthly or quarterly newsletters which are used to keep members informed. The editors of these newsletters are often looking for writers who will contribute articles about programs that libraries are doing or summaries of professional development activities. Often, a simple query to a newsletter editor is all it takes to start writing for other librarians.

"How-I-do-it-good" or "how-my-library-does-it-good" articles

- These articles provide a detailed report on how a person or library is serving patrons or solving a problem. These are published not only in library magazines but often in library journals as well. These are useful to the profession as a whole because they give reports from the field on what is going on. However, some library scholars do not like them because these types of articles usually contain little or no research.

"How-I-do-it-good" advice

- For those wanting to write for an actual journal for the first time, this type of article can work well. Most off-campus librarians can think of something novel or different that their library does. If a writer is willing to write this up in a serious manner and also include a literature review and suggest how other might use the information, it probably will result in a publishable manuscript.

Research Articles

- Bring on SPSS and NVIVO!

- These articles can contain qualitative, quantitative, or mixed research methodologies. The articles usually have well developed literature reviews followed by an in-depth review of the research conducted, why it is important, and what the researcher found. Writing this type of article is time consuming and usually requires a librarian to receive institutional approval to work with human subjects.

Publish or Perish

- If a librarian is required to publish to achieve tenure or promotion, this is the kind of article that is required. Even for those not required to publish, writing research articles is one of the quickest means of gaining recognition in the library profession.

Peer-Review

- There are two methods of gate keeping for what gets published in library journals. Most journals use a double blind peer-review method for submitted manuscripts. The editor of the journal sends manuscripts out to reviewers who comment on the article and make recommendations on whether to publish or not. However, some journals have only an editor who makes the final decision and no peer-review is used.

Writing Columns

- For those wanting to write for journals but who are not interested in conducting research, writing a column may be the answer. Many journals have regularly appearing columns which are submitted by one person or which are rotated amongst a group of authors. The writing in these columns does not go through peer-review but is vetted by the journal editor. This type of writing usually addresses hot topics in the field and is meant to both be entertaining and thought provoking.

Writing Books

- This is perhaps the most difficult way to get published but it also can be the most prestigious. It also can make the author some money. Writing a book requires commitment and may take years. Many authors seek agreements with book publishers before they even beginning writing to assure that their final work will be published.

Editing a Book

- Authors can also get a book published by agreeing to edit a book. This route does not require nearly as much writing but it does require the editor to find and manage a multiple number of authors which in many cases can be harder than writing the entire book alone.

Finding the Right Place to Submit

- The first thing to do when considering submitting a manuscript is to look at the library literature. Spend some time searching for your topic in databases such as *Library Literature*, *LISA*, and *ERIC*. Which journals are publishing articles which are similar to the article you have written or intend to write?

Lists

- Another good way to find journals to submit to is to watch for Call-for-Papers e-mails which tend to circulate on a variety of library listservs. These types of messages are often abbreviated as CFPs. Journal editors will often send a message out to a group they believe may be interested in writing on a topic. The message will include details on what the editor is seeking and what the requirements are for length and timeframe.

Conference Papers

- Many library conferences publish their proceedings as a book, as a special issue of a journal, or online. This counts as a publication and has the potential for the author to be read widely in the field. Pay attention to announcements which are seeking presenters for a conference. Is there a paper you have written or are thinking about writing which would fit the conference theme? Does the conference publish their proceedings?

Journals for Off-Campus Librarians

- Off-campus librarians can publish articles in any library journal. The topics off-campus librarians write about are varied and applicable to the profession as a whole. However, some are more likely to feature articles written by distant education librarians.

Journals for Off-Campus Librarians

- These include the *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning, Journal of Library Administration, The Reference Librarian, Computers in Libraries, New Review of Libraries and Lifelong Learning, Reference and User Services Quarterly, Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Information Supply,* and *Reference and User Services Quarterly*.

Non-Library Journals

- Librarians should also not be afraid to submit to publications that are outside of the library field. Distance education librarians have much to offer journals in fields such as education, computer science, and communications for example. What better way for librarians to sell their ideas to other professions than by writing for their journals?

What to Look for in a Journal

- There are many questions to consider before submitting. For example, is the journal peer-reviewed? Is it indexed and findable by those doing research? Is the journal prestigious and does that matter to you? Who are the readers of a journal? How long does it take to get an article published assuming it gets accepted? Is the journal a traditional journal published on paper or is it an e-journal?

Peer-Reviewed?

- Some librarians who are working with a promotion and tenure system may have no choice but to choose a peer-reviewed journal. Otherwise, they may receive no or little credit for publishing an article. If this is the case for you, make sure of this status before submitting. If you are not sure, e-mail the editor and ask.

Indexed?

- Whether a journal is indexed or not is very important if you want people to actually read and cite your article. Although many read journals as they are published, most articles are found when researchers type in a search phrase in *Library Literature*, *LISA*, or *ERIC*. If a journal is not indexed in one or more of these databases, it will be invisible to most researchers.

Journal Prestige?

- There is a hierarchy of titles in the library literature. For example, the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* is more prestigious than *Illinois Libraries*. However, both of these publications are indexed and widely read. If prestige matters, then the author should research this before submitting. The rejection rates of journals are usually public and journals with a low acceptance rate tend to be regarded higher than those with higher acceptance rates.

Audience?

- Another question to ask is who the audience for the journal is. For example, reference librarians are more likely to read *The Reference Librarian* while library directors are more apt to read the *Journal of Library Administration*. If the article is meant for a certain audience, it is helpful to submit to a journal that is read by that audience.

Time to Publication?

- Journals take different lengths of time to publish articles. Some are quick and may publish an article in six months while others may keep you waiting two years. If an article needs to be published quickly as it may become dated quickly or for tenure reasons, a journal with a fast turn-around time is essential.

Online Journal?

- Many journals now are published exclusively online. They often are peer-reviewed and are indexed in library databases. What distinguishes these journals from traditional journals is they are not published in paper. Most in the library profession consider these journals to be good additions to the library literature. However, authors dealing with tenure and promotion considerations may want to make sure their institution's policies do not hold biases against electronic journals.

Tips for Submitting

- There are several steps that can be taken to increase one's chances that a manuscript will be accepted. These include sending a query letter, following the author guidelines, proofreading the manuscript, and being respectful and only submitting a manuscript to one journal at a time.

Query Letter

- If you have a manuscript you would like to submit, e-mail the title and abstract to the editor. Even if you are certain that the manuscript is fits the journal, this can be helpful. Editors can share with submitter's information on how long the reviewing process is likely to be, what the editor is currently looking for, and other tips on what to do that may help with publication.

Follow Guidelines

- Probably the most important piece of advice that submitters should follow is to read and follow the author's guidelines for the journal. An author ignores these at his or her own peril! An easy way to annoy an editor and encourage them to reject a manuscript is to ignore or imperfectly follow the author guidelines. If an author has not taken the time to read the author guidelines, why should the editor bother to read the manuscript?

Proofread!

- Another important step before submitting a manuscript is to proofread it thoroughly. All manuscripts will have a few minor errors and that is understood. However, these errors should be minimal. A manuscript with multiple spelling, grammar, and formatting problems is going to look unprofessional and seriously irritate the editor and/or referees.

One Journal at a Time

- Finally, only submit a manuscript to one journal at a time. It is unethical to submit to more than one journal at a time. It takes a great deal of time to get a manuscript reviewed and an editor does not want to learn that your paper has been approved for acceptance somewhere else after doing this work.

Dealing with Revision Requests and Rejection Letters

- If you get a manuscript back from the editor with the request to rewrite it, do so. This is good news as it indicates if you follow the advice provided by the editor and referees, the manuscript will get accepted. It is highly unlikely that a manuscript rewritten to the specifics of these comments will get rejected.

Rejected!

- If a manuscript is rejected, read the rejection letter carefully. What were the reasons listed for the rejection? In most cases, these will be valid and reviewing them will actually help make the manuscript better if it is rewritten. If you have questions, ask the editor for clarification.

Be Polite

- Sometimes a manuscript just will not be accepted by an editor. If you feel there is no point contesting this with the editor, thank the editor and move on. Do not send a nasty note back to the editor. Not only is this impolite but it could sabotage your attempts at getting published in the future!

- The simple truth is that the library field is not a difficult one in which to get published. If a manuscript is rejected at one place, move on. Find another journal and submit it there. Keep doing this until the manuscript is accepted somewhere. Unless a manuscript is truly awful, it is probably publishable in some venue in the library literature.

Conclusion

- Off-campus librarians have a lot to offer the library profession. Their trailblazing activities are of interest to others and one of the best ways to do this is to write for publication in the library field. There are a variety of options for this from writing book reviews to writing books. However, the most likely route for most librarians is to write articles for journals. With the careful selection of the right publishing venue and by submitting correctly, off-campus librarians can make a big impact in the library literature.