



## CHALLENGING, FRUSTRATING, BUT ULTIMATELY REWARDING: THE TRIALS OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

**W**hen JAMES NICHOLSON set out to turn an assignment he'd written as part of his Master degree into a paper for publication, he had no idea what he was letting himself in for. He shares his learnings below.

The publishing process can be intimidating and writing an article based on your own research is a terrifying thought. But it doesn't have to be that way. Recently I published an academic paper in a scholarly journal and I learned a huge amount from the process about my own writing style and ability and about the scholarly publishing lifecycle.

In an attempt to inspire others to publish an academic paper, I thought I might share my experience. You may be a student or a practitioner, a graduate or a librarian, but if you have ever thought about researching and publishing an academic article then there are a few details from my experience that may help you along the way. Please note that at this point I am a long way from being a seasoned academic, rather I am an extremely early career researcher who has caught the publishing bug.

I had written a mini-thesis assignment for my Master of Information Management course at RMIT University which I

then submitted for peer review after my course finished last June. When writing assignments I was extremely thorough. This was evident when my research project had a word limit of 8,000 and I finished at just over 10,000. My approach was broad and considered a wide range of areas within the topic. Now this works well for assignments because I was able to showcase my critical thinking faculties, research ability and writing style. However, this approach does not work for journal publication, as it is far more focused. Instead of writing broadly, I had to rewrite with more detail and relate back to my research questions. My takeaway from this is I suggest focussing your literature review and subsequent discussion later in the paper on the research questions and within the context of the study. Continually refer to them and consider if what you are writing is relevant in this context. Ask yourself if you still on the same topic that you started on and if not, what needs to change – where you are or the topic itself.


The second major issue I ran into is apparently a well-known problem in academic publishing – at least that's according to the remarks of the editor – writing with detail and clarity. My paper lacked both and this was most evident in the methodology. It is critical to communicate when,

how and why you collected the data you have. There must also be clear instruction around the data analysis such that the exercise is replicable. This is harder than one might first think it to be. Describing your research is easy in your head because you are immersed in the project, however, trying to disseminate this into clear instruction that can be understood by someone coming to the subject without all the knowledge in your head requires much deeper thought.

After having my paper broken down by review and rewriting it, just to have it broken down again, I certainly had thoughts at that stage just to give up entirely as this process had been going on for seven or eight months. In fact, at one stage I emailed my mentor and the editor to seek reassurance that the paper had merit and ask if I should bother sticking to it. I should, they said, and so I did, and I'm glad I did, because the process was a learning curve I needed for future projects. It gave me the tools more easily to write a second, a third, or maybe more academic articles. That's not to say I now write without challenge; on the contrary. But it has given me the resilience to adapt, to rewrite, and to refine, and will make my future papers much stronger.

My paper was finally published in May 2017 in the *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association (JALIA)* and I couldn't have been more proud. It was a challenging process, however it was also an enjoyable one and has fuelled my enthusiasm for my next project and given me the tools and experience to hone my writing. I want to let others who have never published know that it is worthwhile and that they should give it a go. It is challenging, and frustrating, but ultimately very rewarding and the skills I have learned will serve me well into the future.

My article was fortunate to have an experienced co-author, Dr Katherine Howard, who mentored me and gave encouragement at just the right times. And I would also like to thank the *JALIA* editors, Gaby Haddow and Mary Anne Kennan, for their support and guidance throughout the process. Without their empathy for a first-time publisher like me, I've no doubt that the publication process would have been far more difficult.

You can read my paper at ([bit.ly/2KLRfF4](http://bit.ly/2KLRfF4)). 

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