

## First Steps

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## So you think you have an idea for a manuscript?

- Background research
  - Is there an audience for your idea?
  - Is your idea high-quality?
    - Quality test for an education manuscript: do you use the idea and would the idea be a good project 10 years from now (since so much is available electronically, projects can be accessed for longer periods and must be useable for longer periods)?
    - Run it by colleagues who will critically review your idea. Would they use it in their classroom?

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## More Background Research

- Has your idea already been published by someone else? Check all appropriate sources.
  - Even if someone previously published your idea, your work still may be publishable:
    - Can you extend the idea?
    - Can you refute some of the information in print?
    - If it is a controversial topic, even supporting the published paper could make your paper publishable.
    - Is your project in a different environment or research system than what is in print?
      - » E.g., An educational study that used rural students as their subjects may end up with different results than if they had used urban students.

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### Where to submit?

- Before collecting data or writing the manuscript, get an idea of appropriate venues for submitting your manuscript.
  - Do not initially tailor your idea and format to fit only one journal. Read a range of journals to get a sense of what type of information you will need for publication.
    - Qualitative data?
    - Quantitative data?
    - Student feedback
    - Statistics?
    - Photographs?
    - Permission slips from students?
    - Permits for using city, state, or national lands?

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### After you complete data collection, but before writing the manuscript...

- Select the venue
  - People in academia try to publish in what we call “high-impact journals.” These journals are well-respected because of the quality of the articles. There is a system that ranks the impact of journals. If you are familiar with the rankings and use them to select a venue, fine, but let’s discuss better ways to pick a journal.

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### How to pick a journal

- Best way: Is your work appropriate? If not, the manuscript will immediately be rejected by the editor and will not be seen by reviewers.
  - Visit the journal’s website. They often list their “aims and scope” and tell you what types of articles they do and do not publish.
    - E.g., You use a great “how-to” project in your biology class. Many educational journals, such as *Teaching Issues in Experimental Ecology*, are focused on educational theory and do not accept “how-to” articles. There are venues for practically every type of paper, however, you just need to do your research.

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### Other ways to tell if your work is appropriate for a particular venue...

- Does your work meet the quality standards of the publication?
  - E.g. Top journals only publish important projects that have statistical results shown to be highly significant. If your data are fuzzy, it is best to aim a lower.
- Do you cite other articles from the journal? A journal that you rely on heavily for background research is often an appropriate place to submit your work.
  - Get bonus points: Journals also like it when you cite them because it may increase their “impact.”

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### Have all the details

- Before you begin writing, read the author guidelines (on-line or in a hard copy of the journal).
- While you are writing, follow the author guidelines and formatting exactly.
  - I have never known someone to be rejected solely on formatting, but there are always stories of someone getting rejected, or at the very least, irritating editors, because formatting was ignored.
    - Read other articles from the journal and check formatting. The author guidelines are often vague, but **each journal has its own formatting** and copying formatting from (recently!) published works is a sure way to get everything correct.

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