

Publishing advice

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Abstract

Warnings/caveats Neufeld: There are a lot of criticisms about the current publishing system within philosophy, all of which we don't engage with here. Our point of reference for any advice is the philosophy publishing system as it currently looks like. My advice is an amalgam of my own anecdotal experience, participating in workshops such as this one, and the anecdotal evidence other, wiser people have given about publishing.

Warnings/caveats Del Pinal: My advice is based on anecdotal 'evidence'. As an author, I have gone through the journal submission process around 20 times; as a reviewer, around 50 times. Other sources are the experiences/stories of colleagues and friends in the profession, most of whom are now at the assistant/associate professor level. Given those limitations, my advice is definitely M&E-biased (esp., Phil Language and Mind), and within those topics probably a bit towards interdisciplinary topics like Semantics and Cognitive Science.

For guides/advice on publishing in philosophy, see:

- Daniel Muñoz' [tips on publishing](#)
- Eric Schwitzgebel's [publishing advice](#)
 - comments/discussion of Schwitzgebel's advice in [Philosophers' Cocoon](#)
- Michael Huemer on [publishing in philosophy](#)

Contents

1	Publishing and timing (Neufeld)	2
1.1	When should I start submitting to journals?	2
1.2	When is my paper ready?	2
2	How do I choose a journal? (Neufeld)	3
2.1	Overlooked ways of publishing	4
2.2	Elli's journal selection hack	5
3	Miscellaneous (Neufeld)	5
3.1	Should I co-author?	5
3.2	What about publishing in edited volumes? Book reviews?	6
3.3	Publishing too much?	6
4	Rejection (Del Pinal)	7
4.1	Desk rejection	7
4.2	Rejection with peer reviews	7

5	Revise & Resubmit (Del Pinal)	7
5.1	Writing a response letter	8
5.2	Revising your paper	9
5.3	(Conditional) acceptance	10

1 Publishing and timing (Neufeld)

1.1 When should I start submitting to journals?

- *If* you want to have one or more publications by the time you go on the job market, I'd recommend starting to submit at least two years before you plan to finish graduate school. So if you plan to go on the market in your fifth year, I recommend starting to submit in your third year.
- You probably know that peer review in philosophy can take a long time. And you probably also know that acceptance rates of philosophy journals aren't too high.
- A couple of my publications had one round of revision, and the process between submitting and acceptance still took a year. This is simply because reviewing can take a long time.
- Add to that a couple of rejections before your paper gets an R&R (which is not at all uncommon and shouldn't crush you—see below), and we're quickly at two years. I would say that my average time of receiving a rejection was between 3 and 4 months.
- (In section 2, I'll familiarize you with the ultimate Elli-fast-journal hack)

1.2 When is my paper ready?

As with all things that are messy, it's hard to say something general here. However, there are two things—at extreme ends of a spectrum—that I've observed pretty often throughout my (short) career, and I advise against either of them.

- Not willing to let go
 - This is common among graduate students: You've written a paper, you've incorporated a lot of feedback, maybe even your advisors or mentors tell you to submit it, but you're still not willing to let go. You are hovering over them for weeks, months, or even years more, without changing them very much. You have a clear case of diminishing returns: you're putting a lot of time into your paper, but don't get anything out of it. In this case, it's a good rule of thumb to let go and to submit.
 - (As one of my mentors once told me:) In contrast, think about the increase of efficiency you have when you send a paper off: you move a paper from your desk, now being able to devote yourself to other projects, to the desk of a very competent expert in your area (the reviewer), who continues to work on *your* paper for you (of course, since you'll be a reviewer at some point too, you'll indirectly return the favor).

- Too willing to let go
 - At the same time, I’ve seen (as referee, but also as peer and advisor) a surprising number of cases in which the papers looked very underworked.
 - In many cases, this became apparent in a lot of ‘superficial’ ways: a lot of references would be missing, paper would be full of typos, numbering not consistent, etc. Of course, if a paper is content-wise amazing, it probably won’t necessarily matter that it’s not up to standards in these more superficial ways. But you at least don’t help your chances of getting a positive review if your paper already looks unprofessional—it just gives the reviewer a bad impression of you, and makes them feel like they have to do the work that you didn’t feel like doing.
 - Of course, the same point can hold content-wise. When I started refereeing, I was surprised about how often authors made extremely controversial statements without any argument (but still use locutions such as “I’ve argued”), how often counter-arguments or counterexamples that seem to be fairly obvious are ignored, or how often very relevant literature—especially literature that makes fairly similar points—is not engaged with or not even acknowledged.
 - Lesson: Once you finish your paper: edit, edit, edit! Ask for feedback (cf. Elise’s and Josh’s [advice on seeking and integrating feedback](#)), try to make your sentences clearer, check whether the transitions between paragraphs make sense, whether everything you say in a paper is said for a reason, check for typos, references, etc. But if you notice that you’ve hovered over paper for a day and only changed a comma, it’s time to let go (see above).

2 How do I choose a journal? (Neufeld)

There are a couple of things to consider when you submit a paper for publication to a journal. Do you want to submit it to a generalist journal (Mind, Nous, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Phil Review, ...) or a specialist journal (Mind & Language, Linguistics & Philosophy, Ethics, Philosophy of Science, ...)? Do you want to submit it to a ‘top-tier’ or ‘mid-tier’ journal? These questions have been addressed quite a bit elsewhere, so we won’t talk about them too much here. For more information, check out these places:

- A (non-perfect) [ranking of generalist philosophy journals](#)
- Daniel Muñoz’ [tips on publishing](#)
- Eric Schwitzgebel’s [publishing advice](#)
 - comments/discussion of Schwitzgebel’s advice in [Philosophers’ Cocoon](#)
- Michael Huemer on [publishing in philosophy](#)

Here, we rather talk about some issues that haven’t been covered in other places (we think): ways of publishing that are often overlooked, and how to best factor in time when choosing where to submit your paper.

2.1 Overlooked ways of publishing

Apart from the obvious and main ways of high-quality publishing, there are some other ways of making your hard work contribute to your number of publications that are often overlooked or not known, especially by early-career people.

- **Comments and replies.** This is probably the most important overlooked way of publishing. A lot of journals—e.g., *Mind*, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Analysis*—accept short(ish) commentaries or response pieces to papers they have published. If you are working as an interdisciplinary philosopher, the same holds for a lot of non-philosophy journals (e.g., *Cognitive Science*, *Semantics & Pragmatics*)
 - Publishing a commentary or response in these venues is a perfectly respectable way of publishing. You’re getting peer-reviewed, you list the publication in the ‘normal’ publication section of your CV (according to all of my academic mentors), etc. (don’t confuse with book reviews!). This makes sense: you’re doing normal philosophy, you’re engaging with and debating someone; the only restriction is that the piece you respond to has previously appeared in the same journal. But, I think, many journals also *like* if their publications get serious engagement and responses, and this aspect of publishing is sometimes under-used, so your likelihood of acceptance might be slightly higher.
 - I think this is a great way of publishing in many ways. Think about all the times you read a paper and thought: Oh man, I wish I could respond to that person right now! Or all the times you summarized arguments against a paper in your notes or review-chapters. Of course, it shouldn’t be your *main* way of publishing: writing longer, original pieces should still be your main focus. But it is a great way to (a) actually engage in a direct, fruitful debate with another philosopher, (b) directly get something ‘out of’ hard work you put into research and scholarship, and (c) make use of an under-used way of publishing!
- **Philosophy Compass.** As above, I think this way of publishing is something many early-career people don’t have on their radar (or compass, ha ha), simply because it isn’t talked about that much.
 - *Philosophy Compass* publishes short overview articles on a specialist topic in philosophy (a selection of titles of recently published pieces: “Hannah Arendt on the evil of not being a person”, “Structural injustice”, “Experimental philosophy and the method of cases”, “Quantum indeterminacy”). It’s a well-respected journal and would definitely be a nice addition to anyone’s publishing record.
 - As before, I think it’s a great way to make hard work you put into scholarship and research count towards your publication record. Especially during grad school, a lot of us spend a lot of time becoming absolute scholarly experts on a narrow philosophical topic. Our dissertations also often include overview chapters or introductions.
 - But how does it work? Importantly, you *can*, but *don’t have to* be invited to write a piece for *Philosophy Compass*. You can also contact a section editor

of *Philosophy Compass* yourself with an article proposal. If you do that, you first determine the area section that your article would best fit in, then find out who the section editor of that area is, and send them a (professionally serious) email with your proposal. Your email should address what makes you very well-equipped to write such an article, why the topic would be a great addition to Phil Compass, the topics you'd like to cover in your article, and other aspects you think might convince the editor.

- If they say no, don't be too disappointed—this can happen for all sorts of reasons. But notice that sometimes one and the same topic could go into various area section... ;)

2.2 Elli's journal selection hack

If time is an important factor in your journal decision-making, here is a way of choosing a journal as a function of time-for-response, keeping journal quality/ranking constant:

- i. You visit the [APA journal survey](#)
- ii. We click on 'Average response time'. (Note: we don't care about acceptance rate. Given the nature of the survey, data about average response time will be much more reliable)
- iii. The table will be ordered according to average response time.
- iv. You find the journal with the specifications you're interested in (e.g., top-tier and generalist) that's highest on the list.
- v. You submit to that journal.
- vi. If you get rejected, you take the next one on the list.

This is a great way to choose your journal in a way that's sensitive to time constraints. It has worked very well for me.

3 Miscellaneous (Neufeld)

3.1 Should I co-author?

Co-authoring can be a great collaborative way to publish. There are many things that are great about it.

- You can combine expertise. If you're a pro in, say, formal epistemology, and your friend is a pro in, say, feminist philosophy, you can combine both areas of expertise to get a great paper in feminist formal epistemology, or formal epistemology feminism, or something like that.
- You can do philosophy and develop ideas together. That's a lot of fun!
- You (sometimes) don't have to spend as much time on paper writing as you would do if you were to write the paper alone.

But there are also a couple of things you should keep in mind:

- It's always good to get clear on expectations at the beginning to avoid any sorts of conflicts. E.g., have a conversation about the order of authors, how much everyone is expected to contribute, timeline, etc.
- While co-authoring is great, you shouldn't *only* co-author. Evaluators (on the job market, tenure cases, etc.) will want to see that you can produce substantial work autonomously.

3.2 What about publishing in edited volumes? Book reviews?

These are a little more tricky.

- There are a couple of things to consider when you're invited to publish in an edited volume. Is the volume published by a prestigious publisher (e.g., OUP)? Are other, well-known people in your field committed contributors to the volume? If the answers to the questions are 'yes', there are good reasons to accept an invitation to contribute a piece for an edited volume.
- Again, however, there are important things to keep in mind. You should *not* use your main papers that you worked hard on during graduate schools as a contribution to an edited volume.
- Because the bar of 'getting accepted' for an edited volume is rather low, and generally they operate via invitation, these sorts of publications 'count less' towards your publication record in job applications etc.
- Outside of these considerations, edited volumes can be a great way to get your ideas out.
- Book reviews are, I think, a great service to the profession. I'd generally encourage people to write book reviews. However, since these usually take a considerable amount of time, for prudential reasons, I'd generally advise writing book reviews after the more sensitive stages of one's career (of course, there can be exceptions).

3.3 Publishing too much?

There's one way I can imagine that publishing too much can become a problem: if you publish *too diversely*.

- Every now and then, I see graduate students that have a huge publication record—say, 12 publications in their 4th year.
- However, almost every paper is on an entirely different topic.
- I'd generally advise against publishing in this way, especially during graduate school. Although the publishing system has a lot of problems (that we don't talk about here), it's generally supposed to be an index of your expertise in an area. But it's very implausible that you're an expert in 12 completely different areas while you're in grad school. So people will infer, e.g., that you just randomly tried to 'get lucky' with a bunch of term papers (and got lucky).

4 Rejection (Del Pinal)

Two kinds: desk rejection and rejection with reviews.

4.1 Desk rejection

- Typically, you won't get even a brief explanation for the rejection.
- Even if the handling editor sends you a brief 'explanation', I wouldn't give this info too much weight—unless the editor says something concrete, which is rare (at least in phil journals, kind of common in psychology, cogsci, linguistics/semantics journals).
- If you think you selected the right kind of journal (e.g., general over specialized), don't change your opinion too quickly based on a single desk rejection—i.e., until you start accumulating desk rejections from a similar class of journals.
- One risk when choosing a general over a specialized journal is that the former are more likely to issue a desk rejection without comments/reviews (even months after initial submission).

4.2 Rejection with peer reviews

- Typically, two or three reviews are forwarded to the author.
- This feedback can be very useful:
 - Even if negative, I think it's rare to find reviewers that are more uncharitable/sloppy than your average future non-reviewer reader...
 - A typical reviewer may well provide you with more detailed comments on your paper than your dissertation advisors, unless you have an amazing advisor and/or specially lazy reviewers.

How much should you revise based on peer reviews that resulted in or recommended a 'rejection'?

- Depends on many factors, but say you have say three or four weeks to spare. Wait a few days after first reading reviews, then re read them as charitably as possible, select a subset of the more interesting/useful/important comments and try to incorporate or address them in a revised version of your paper.
- However, give yourself a strict deadline for this process and don't revise too much. On your next submission, you will get probably new reviewers, who may focus on different issues, and so on...

5 Revise & Resubmit (Del Pinal)

The specific responses in this class cover 'revise and resubmit', 'major revisions', or even 'rejection with invitation to resubmit':

⇒ Any of these outcomes is really good news! It is the typical route to official acceptance of your article. Getting from initial submission straight to ‘conditionally accepted’/‘minor revisions’/‘accepted’ is rare.

⇒ However, getting from R&R to an official acceptance can be A LOT of work! It can be stressful and time consuming (it can take as much time/effort as writing the 1st version of the paper).

Once you get an initial R&R, you have two main tasks:

- (i) Write a response letter
- (ii) Revise your paper

5.1 Writing a response letter

- Create a new document and copy all comments by the editor and reviewers.
 - You may need to reformat etc., but spending a day on this will pay off in the end. You will spend a lot of time reading and re reading your reviews!
- In general, you should be able to cluster the comments, in such a way that you can outline your response below each natural cluster (objection 1–response, objection 2–response, etc.).
 - Use a different font/bold type to clearly distinguish reviewers’ comments from your responses.
 - You can use this document to keep track of your progress, make sure you are addressing most of the comments, etc.
- Handling editors may add their own comments and/or summarize the changes they ‘recommend’ (meaning you SHOULD!) make to get an official acceptance. Make sure you incorporate/address the editor’s suggestions! This practice is perhaps more common in other fields, but I have gotten comments from editors of phil journals.
- Once you finish revising your paper, you will have to go over your response letter (RL) to make sure references to pages, examples and so on are accurate. Also:
 - If you directly responded or incorporate a comment in your revised paper, then in the RL you should just briefly indicated what you changed and where (be specific) in the paper—but you don’t have to re write your entire response in the RL.
 - Typically, I try to only write extended replies in the response letter in cases when I didn’t directly incorporate/respond to a comment/suggestion, basically explaining why I didn’t/what I did instead.
- I recommend beginning the RL with an opening paragraph where (i) you thank the editors and reviewers for their help and comments, (ii) briefly explain the structure/organization of the letter, and (iii) you outline the two or three main changes that you made to your paper. For example:

- If you added a new section, you can mention that and briefly summarize its goal.
- If you revised/refined one of your core claims/arguments, mention the change and briefly outline any advantages.

After you submit your first R&R, you can get (i) ‘accepted’ ‘conditionally accepted’, ‘minor revisions’, (ii) another R&R, or (iii) rejected.

- If your revised paper is accepted with ‘minor revisions’, your new RL can be brief, basically just outlining any final changes you made to your paper.
- If you get another R&R, then you should write a new RL similar in structure to first RL, i.e. where you outline each response to each comment, etc.

5.2 Revising your paper

- (i) Keep a copy of the first submitted version of your paper. (ii) Create a new copy for the revised version. (iii) I also usually create an additional document ‘notes on TITLE OF PAPER’...
 - You can use the ‘notes on...’ doc to experiment with responses, try out new/substantially revised sections or ideas, etc.
 - E.g., when I’m hesitant/reluctant to revise a section, or try out a new idea/argument, I try working first in the ‘notes on...’ doc.
 - This can be liberating, compared to making substantial/radical changes directly in your revised paper (when changing your paper, you may feel more protective, conservative, greater risks/stakes etc.).
 - Also when revising, you will probably have many ideas for follow up projects, which you can outline/sketch the ‘notes on...’ document (which can help avoid going into side quests etc on the paper itself)
- When you first read through the editor’s/reviewers’ comments you may feel overwhelmed...
 - It is not uncommon to get 2 or 3 different reviewers, adding to 6-10 pages of comments, which may include some harsh remarks, (borderline) insults, supposedly ‘knock down’ objections, etc.
 - By the time you get the first R&R and round of reviews, you may have forgotten various details of your paper, so important to re read the paper and comments a couple of times.
- Still, a nice thing about the R&R process is that, even on bad days, you can make progress by addressing the ‘minor’ comments (typically, you get many of these).
 - As you start adding responses like ‘fixed! See p. 14 footnote 3’ to your RL, you will get a sense that you are making (maybe slow but) steady progress.
- Concerning the ‘main/major’ comments/criticism, I recommend trying to address all/most of them.

- An honest attempt to respond to or incorporate most ‘major’ comments will greatly increase your chances of getting an official acceptance.
- Major comments/criticisms are usually useful and interesting, or at least a reformulated, charitable version of them is.
- Even when you think a comment is based on a serious misunderstanding, it can be informative in revealing what other readers will likely also misunderstand.
- Finally, during the R&R process itself, do not spend too much time fixing issues not directly mentioned by the editor/reviewers.
 - In particular, don’t spend too much time fixing things that occurred to you in the meantime (many exceptions here obviously)—when evaluating your R&R, editors and reviewers will be focused on whether you addressed their concerns.
 - Once your paper is (conditionally) accepted, you can fix any remaining issues (not mentioned by the editor or reviewers)

⇒ The R&R process can be really exhausting! Try to find/keep in mind the positives!

- Many of us write hoping that we will (at some point) be carefully read. For the life of most of our papers, its official peer reviewers will remain amongst their most careful readers.¹
- Responding/reflecting on peer reviews can spark follow up projects.
- Once your paper is accepted/published, your peer reviewers may contact you to continue the conversation, may respond/promote your paper, etc...
 - E.g., some of the most important phil friendships/influences I now have were at some point my reviewers (who initially contacted me after official acceptance or publication to continue discussing the paper or related topics).

5.3 (Conditional) acceptance

Congrats! Typically, you get a deadline of several weeks/months to submit the final version, so:

- You can still make some final changes...
- You will typically have to make many style edits—the flow/structure of your paper can get a bit choppy/disrupted/weird after the arduous R&R rounds.
 - To re-energize myself for (the process of) making final revisions, I sometimes re-read some chapters of a writing style guide and try to apply some of the lessons/advice. One of my favorites is [Williams & Bizup \(2017\)](#).

¹ This will become more and more obvious as you begin moving onto the next stages of your career: e.g., when you encounter the first few public summaries/replies/criticism of one of your published views, its not unlikely that you will think, ‘my official reviewers were not too bad after all’.

Publishing advice

- Add your acknowledgements! Thank your handling editor, reviewers, and anyone else that helped you with the project...
 - Even this process can be informative! Thinking about who helped you with what can help you reflect on questions like: did you spend too much time in this specific paper (e.g., presented too many times, send it out to too many people)? Or perhaps you worked on it too little or too isolated (e.g., didn't present at all, or too few times, didn't have anyone read it)?
- Upload the final version of your paper to [PhilPapers](#), your website, etc., and send links to people that have helped you with it, or that you think might be interested in it.

References

Williams, J. M. & J. Bizup. 2017. *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace*. Boston, MA: Pearson twelfth edn.