

Academic Publishing

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The Undergraduate Research Journal (URJ) functions as a way for IIT students to publish manuscripts of research projects they have been involved in. Undergraduates can send manuscripts that undergo a similar process to publishing in academia. For students who would like to pursue a career in research, it's helpful to know exactly what publishing entails, meaning the process an article goes through when being considered for a journal. Let's say you have a publishable manuscript written, edited, and polished to perfection – what comes next?

The first step involved in the publishing process is choosing a journal. The quality and science of the work matter, but the fit of the manuscript of the journal is equally important. It's recommended that academics get a thorough understanding of the type of journal they seek to publish in, and this can be done by looking at other articles on the same topic with similar methods. Be sure to follow the guidelines of the journal such as formatting and including the relevant information needed for the manuscript to be published (APA, 2021a).

It should be noted that a paper can't be submitted to more than one journal at a time due to publishing guidelines involving ethical concerns (APA, 2021a). The reasoning behind this policy, as stated by Wagner (2009), boils down to the possibility of publishing dispute(s) occurring between two or more journals that may claim the right. Editors from these journals work on peer reviews and edits of the same article, unaware that they are doing the same work to an unnecessary end.

Be aware of predatory journals, which are fake publications that imitate a legitimate journal, using techniques to trick authors into submitting articles. They often solicit articles by email, with a great deal of focus on the publication fee, with a quick publication that usually doesn't use peer review. Check the resources at the end of this article to identify if a journal is predatory (APA, 2021a).

Publishing fees have been considered a red flag to many academics, but not all journals that do so are predatory. For example, some journals charge a fee for specifics such as formatting. Many journals are starting to include open-access options that require authors or the submitting institution to pay a fee. The open access allows articles to be read freely and doesn't generate revenue for the journal, which the fee covers. Some journals may offer a "hybrid" version of this model, offering both open-access and subscription-based options (APA, 2021a).

On the other side of the publishing process stand the editors of the journal. When the assigned editor receives a manuscript, they determine if it should go for review. Qualified reviewers are considered for their expertise, if they're reviewing for that journal, and/or recommended or opposed by the author of the article. Reviewers submit recommendations typically 2-3 weeks after accepting the offer to review, and the assigned editor decides whether the manuscript is fit for publishing or not. These recommendations are usually considered altogether, seeing if there is a general agreement over revisions or large disagreements. In the case of discordant reviews, additional feedback is sought from another reviewer. Editors typically

weigh feedback at their discretion, and many attempt to be consistent and fair with authors and reviewers alike (APA, 2021b).

While serving as a peer reviewer in academia isn't a professional requirement, it is noted to be important for development to improve writing skills and keep up with new studies. Peer reviewers give authors revisions, which are typically defined between those considered minor and major. The former might consist of so few that the editor may not send the manuscript out for re-review, while the latter means large changes must be made. Major revisions are almost always sent back to reviewers for a re-review to determine whether the comments have been addressed and no new comments are raised. If authors are unable to satisfactorily address the comments, further revisions may be required, or the paper may be rejected (APA, 2021c).

Peer reviewers are incredibly important in academia, as all authors rely on them to be published. Most journals have at least two to three, sometimes even four reviewers. More reviewers may be added in certain situations involving specific expertise to make reviews consistent and accurate. Some journals use the blind review method to do this, where authors and reviewers are blinded to each other's identities (APA, 2021c).

Articles typically undergo multiple rounds of revisions. This process typically involves the author(s) providing a detailed response letter addressing all comments made by the reviewers. If a revision isn't feasible, it should be addressed as to why not, and potentially be considered a limitation of the study (APA, 2021c).

To increase the chance of publication, researchers are encouraged to consider the target audience of the manuscript, follow guidelines, and pay attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in citations (APA, 2021b). In the case that a manuscript is rejected, the author(s) can revise per the comments given and determine where they want to resubmit (HSL). Sometimes an editor may reject a manuscript but will invite the author(s) to resubmit. This means that the manuscript may have the potential to be published in that journal with extreme revisions per commenter concerns. However, it should be noted that even with these changes, the article could still ultimately be rejected (APA, 2021c).

In the case that an article is accepted, and all revisions are satisfactorily addressed, then it can be published in the journal. When authors publish an article in a journal, they continue to own the copyright of the original work and can send any version of their work before its final format. Licensing of published articles varies by journal and should be tracked individually (APA, 2021a).

We, at the URJ, hope to provide an opportunity for interested undergraduate students to publish research and undergo a process similar to that in real-world academia. If you are interested in submitting, reach out to an associate editor on the executive board, or contact us at urj@iit.edu.

Additional Resources

Predatory Journals:

- How to Avoid Predatory Journals (APA, 2016): <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/04/predatory-publishers>
- Scholars beware (Beall, 2016): <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/04/scholars>

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