

Pedagogue Bonus: Advice on Publishing (w/Lori Ostergaard)

Pedagogue podcast

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue Bonus, a short episode that covers a single topic or a question. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this bonus episode I talk with Lori Ostergaard, Professor and the Chair of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at Oakland University.

Lori is also the editor of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. Her archival research examines the history of composition-rhetoric at Midwestern normal schools and high schools. She focuses primarily on the research theories and practices of educators working during the first three decades of the 20th century. Lori's research has appeared in numerous journals including *College English*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Composition Studies*, and *Composition Forum*.

In this bonus episode we talk about academic publishing. I'm thankful for Lori's willingness to sit down as the editor of *WPA*, one of the leading journals in writing studies to talk with us about academic publishing.

SW: So first, Lori, thank you for joining us and spending time talking about something so important. I can think of a lot of best practices I've heard about publishing. For example, there's a lot to be said about knowing the journal's values and audience, familiarizing yourself with what's already been published by the journal, and knowing and situating yourself in the academic conversation you're entering and building on. But there's also a lot of questions and perhaps mystery, too. What journal should I target? Who are the reviewers? What are they looking for? What should I do during the revise and resubmit phase?

This topic can be approached broadly, so maybe we could start there, with helpful tips and strategies we should consider before publishing. Maybe something we should think about more closely even while writing. And then do you mind talking more specifically about what you have found to work well in a manuscript published by WPA?

LO: So that's a fantastic question. So I mean, I think the first and most important thing is figuring out what journal you're targeting. I think that one good way to find a target journal is to look at your own work cited, right? What journal are you citing the most? That's a good target. Now find another journal, look at the journal online, look at the masthead and the editorial board. If you recognize those names and those names are people you cite and use, that's a good journal for you. If they are people in your field, but they're sort of adjacent to your corner of the field that's going to take some revising to address them. And I think find the article in the journal that best models what you're doing and go through and annotate it. So look at the introduction and, "Okay, they start with an anecdote now they're talking about their methods." And annotate one article and then look at your article and annotate it too, what are you doing and what things can you pull in?

And that's sort of how I taught myself how to write some history articles was by looking at the ones that I really admire. And if you look at the books and the journals I was reading at the time, you'll see my notes in the margin, "Do this, do this, put this here." So thinking in terms of really making sure that you're using the journal as a model. And I think all of us need to spend more time working our introductions. You know, like we think of the heart of the essay is the results, the heart of the essay as the analysis. Sometimes it's the review of lit, it's all of that sort of super intellectual stuff that's the most important part. But for readers who are coming into your work, that introduction has to do so much and it has to do it so quickly.

If I don't know what's about by page seven, if I don't know what you're doing by page three, if I don't know why I should care on page one, you've lost me. So I need to know how is this relevant to me. What type of intervention are you making in the conversation? How are you making that intervention? What am I going to get out of reading this thing? And so I think we all need to spend a lot more time working on those introductions. Article writing is not like mystery writing. You're not sort of solving everything at the end. And it's not a suspense, right? So you're not hinting around at your conclusions because if you do that we're going to be like, just come out and tell us what your conclusions are and then walk us through the process that got you there. So work on the introduction. And you know the reviewers you can, you can almost guarantee that we will at least consider people in your work cited to review your article. You know, frequently we'll say, "Oh this person be good or that person would be good." And we have an idea of who we want to review. But a lot of it comes from, "Okay, who are you citing?" Because these are the conversations that you're being becoming a part of. And we want to know how those people, not how they see your treatment of their work, but how they see your work contributing to that conversation. So I think that's really important to recognize that your reviewers are, you've identified them for us. And recognize that if you get a revise and resubmit and Reviewer 2 has the most comments, we're going to send your work back to Reviewer 2. If your Reviewer 1 loves your work, then they're still going to love your work when it's revised. We want to know how well you did.

And then the final thing I think I'll give is, but we have a lot of authors who get a revise and resubmit and never resubmit. Yeah, it's surprising, right? Because you've gotten to the point where the editors have identified this is a work that probably fits in our journal, right? And the reviewers have given at least some positive feedback and they've given suggestions. And so you are over the first hurdle. So as hard as it is to look at those reviewer's feedback and figuring out what to do with it, just do it. Revise it, send it to friends, send it back to us. Because otherwise you're just moving on and starting over at another journal. Right. And we've already said, this looks okay to us.

So you know, we've had one article out of, well more than a hundred since we've taken on the journal that we looked at it and the reviewers said, "Yeah, publish this with minor revisions." And we said, "Yeah, we're going to publish." Like everything else is revise and resubmit really. That one article is so far the only one that we've said, "Yeah we're accepting. They just nailed it." It shows where it's sort of entering the conversation. The article demonstrates the intervention that the author is making in the conversation. You know, their... I don't think their research was particularly huge or staggering, but they definitely acknowledged this is not a gigantic study

that's generalizable, but you know, I think they kept the boundaries of the research pretty clear and they admitted to those boundaries.

It's just something that you sort of open up the article and it reads like an article in your journal. I don't know. So that's why I think you have to read the articles in the journal and I am a huge offender in this way. You know, I have definitely sent out articles to journals where I've been like, "Man, I have sent this thing out a hundred times and I can't get it to the next process." And just sort of targeting like, okay, this is a random one. Let's see how it goes. And not reading enough. And not really knowing, trying to place something and make something work in a journal that just doesn't do that type of work.