The World Needs You: Sharing Your Work and Getting Published



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Abstract In this chapter we look at the topic of getting published and—more broadly—at disseminating your work. We start by looking at the many reasons (personal, professional and academic) that teachers have for sharing their research, observations, reflections and experiences with the wider community, and the range of possible forms of 'outputs' to get published. We review the broad range of platforms and channels available nowadays, from traditional anonymous peer-reviewed journals, published teaching materials, practitioner-oriented forms of publishing, as well as less formal social networks. We highlight some of the potential pitfalls and some strategies for choosing the most appropriate avenue for publishing your work. In the latter part of the chapter we offer guidance on how to develop your writing abilities and some 'insider tips' to increase the chance of getting your work published.

Keywords Getting published · Publication outputs · Publishing strategies · Publishing platform

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1 Introduction

The first scholarly journal was published over 350 years ago, in 1665 (Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, London, https://royalsocietypublishing.org/rstl/about) and since then peer-reviewed journal articles have become the gold standard in academic publishing, including in the field of language education. In this article, we consider some of the types of journals that exist for language teaching professionals and ways of getting articles accepted. However, it is important to recognize that there are many other, equally valuable types of publications, as we will show. In fact,

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perhaps rather than asking where to 'publish' one's work, it may be more useful to ask how best to 'disseminate' it. Although 'publishing' often refers to research studies, there are many other types of writing that teachers can share, such as evaluations, literature reviews, classroom experiences, critical reflections, and so on. Even the word 'writing' does not capture all the different ways in which teachers can share their work, with audio and video allowing the teacher to add their personal voice. But before considering which options are best for you, it is important to ask why you would want to share your work and this will be the focus of the first section.

2 Why Share Your Work?

When we ask colleagues and teachers we work with why they spend often considerable amounts of time to get their work in front of others, we get a range of responses.

So others can learn from my mistakes
I want to share my findings/show what works
It is a requirement from my employer/the ministry/official body
My job depends on it
I need to publish to get promoted
We get rewarded financially for publishing
I want to go to conferences
To learn/as a form of professional development
To get my name out there
I want to connect with others who have similar interests
It's satisfying to see my own ideas in print

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Which of these applies to you? It is likely that there is more than one reason and you can probably think of others. It is also likely that your answers would change for different areas of interest and at different stages in your career. The point here is that in some situations your motivation to disseminate your work may lead you to consider producing a research paper for submission to an academic journal. In other situations, you may instead choose to create a poster to present at a conference or to write a short reflective piece for a website or a teachers' newsletter. We will look at the range of options in the next section. Here it is worth pointing out that there can often be a mismatch between what people aim for and what they achieve. For example, when pressed, many people will admit that the idea of other people reading their work and perhaps as a result even becoming 'known' in a particular area is a motivator. It can be sobering to consider that, according to some sources, 98% of all publications in the arts and humanities are never cited (this is a very much disputed estimate, but it does give an indication of the chances of 'getting read'!). This is not to say an author's work has not been meaningful in other ways, but it may not have the exposure they were hoping for.

It is reasonable to consider a decision to share your work from a cost–benefit perspective; what is the required effort and what is the return, either personally or professionally? A short reflective piece or a book review may require much less time than a research article or a book. This then begs the question: what can be shared and what counts as a 'publication'? In recent years many universities and governments have started to better recognize the importance of practitioners' work in forms other than research articles. This is reflected in the use of the term 'outputs' rather than 'publications'. An internal document from the institution where one of us works has a rather impressive list of possible outputs:

Book Authored	Performance Written
Book Chapter	Edited Book
Book Review	Educational Material
Conference Abstract	Essay—Published
Conference Poster	Intellectual Property
Conference Presentation	Journal Paper
Conference Proceedings	Monograph Copy
Artefact/Object/Craftwork	Presentation (non-conference)
Composition	Report
Design Output	Scholarly Edition/Literary Translation
Dramatic and Literary Texts	Software
Exhibition—Solo	Awarded Doctoral Thesis
Exhibition—Group	Awarded Master's Thesis
Exhibition—Curatorial Exercise	Discussion/Working Paper (published)
Film/video Documents	

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Although not all of these are relevant for most teachers (and others could be added, such as teaching ideas and experiences), they do demonstrate that journal articles and books are far from the only possible outputs. Thinking about your reasons for sharing your work and the range of outputs, mentioned here, which might be the most appropriate for a project you are working on now?

3 Where to Share Your Work

As the lists here suggest, there are many different avenues for sharing your work. In general terms, it is possible to see some categories in the range of places where you can get your ideas heard. Here is a list, with some examples at the time of writing.

Practitioner publications such as magazines or newsletters for teachers, produced commercially (e.g., *ET Professional, Modern English Teacher*).

Practitioner publications produced by international and local professional organisations or societies (e.g., IATEFL Special Interest Group newsletters and magazines).

Academic journals published by major publishing houses (e.g., *Applied Linguistics*, published by Oxford University Press).

Academic journals published by professional organisations (e.g., *TESOL Quarterly*, published by TESOL International).

Open-source journals (e.g., Language Learning and Technology).

Edited collections of papers or chapters (such as this one).

Publishers of teaching materials (e.g., Cambridge University Press).

Social media groups for teachers (such as Twitter #tesol and public Facebook groups such as Global English TESOL).

Online discussion forums (such as those hosted in eslcafe.com).

Online sites for resources (such as Teachit English).

Online repositories of articles (such as Academia.edu and Researchgate.net).

Wiki sites, for sharing resources (such as teflpedia.com).

Personal blogs (often using the Wordpress platform).

Personal websites of educators and authors.

Many teachers find it is useful to 'start small' by writing up a brief article about a teaching idea or experience for a teacher's magazine or newsletter, whether local or international. A writing project that is too ambitious risks never being completed or being too complex to sustain. Innovative ideas for classroom use, accounts of projects, reviews of new texts, and small-scale classroom research, particularly if they include examples of learners' outputs are often welcomed by publications which publish frequently and are continually in need of good content. Typically, these kinds of publications look for short contributions of around 850–1500 words, although some will accept contributions up to around 2000. In these cases, the decision to accept or reject a contribution is made by the magazine editor, usually fairly quickly.

More academic publications, such as peer-reviewed journals, normally follow a policy of 'double blind peer review'. This means that submitted articles are sent out to two or more 'referees' who will read and make a recommendation to publish or not, or to ask for changes. These journals often take many months to make a decision, as they await the reviews from the referees. Very few of these journals will pay the writer a fee, but they may give discounts on other publications that the publisher publishes. A number of 'open access' journals (meaning that they can be accessed by anyone, without a subscription, have now begun charging a 'publication fee', sometimes of several hundreds of US dollars. Before parting with any money, do check the journal's credentials, how long it has existed, the quality of articles it has published, and if, for example, it is listed in citation indexes such as SCOPUS. Unfortunately, there are now a large number of sometimes fraudulent or purely money-making businesses which are only too ready to take your hard-earned cash, and which apply very few quality control measures. A very fast acceptance decision (sometimes a matter of hours or days) usually indicates a less-than-thorough review process. These publications often have titles which sound prestigious or which sound very similar to well-established journals. Be wary, in particular, of journals that do frequent mailshots, asking for contributions, and which do not disclose the fee required. If there is a publication website, look carefully at the terms of publication and hidden charges. Do an internet search of the mailing address listed—if you see that there are many publications coming from the same address, that should raise alarm bells! Publication in these

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kinds of journals can sometimes give a future employer a rather negative impression as to why you chose to publish *there*; they are therefore best avoided.

Some teachers have successfully become authors of teaching materials, sometimes with some of the world's largest publishing houses. If you are interested in trying to get your teaching materials published, it is important to check publishers' websites to see what they require in a proposal. Most usually, this is a rationale for the materials, how they are different from what is already on the market, the proposed 'extent' (that is, number of pages, use of artwork, components, and so on) and some samples of complete units or chapters. If you get a rejection, do not give up. Because of the highly competitive nature of the markets they operate in, many of the larger publishing houses rarely accept or even look at unsolicited proposals for new materials but prefer to commission the works they publish from authors they know or who have been recommended to them. It is important to remember that for most publishing houses, publishing is a business which aims to make a profit. In this case, many publishing houses may wish to take few risks with 'new authors' and instead commission 'proven' authors with a detailed brief of what they want for their markets. It is often therefore wiser to approach the smaller publishing houses, which may have lower overhead costs and may be looking to expand their publishing list and may be more inclined to take a risk with something new.

Wherever or whatever you publish, it is always wise to check who will retain the copyright. Check the small print in any agreement you sign. Some publishers will require you to sign a contract which passes the copyright to them. This will effectively prevent you from using the same material elsewhere, even if it is just a short magazine article. Publishers make money from reselling or licensing the material for which they hold the rights to other publishers in other markets, so check the terms of any agreement you sign, and if possible, get legal advice if you are concerned. It is also wise to check when any rights you sign away will revert to you—for example, after a certain period of time or when the publication is no longer in print. You should also watch out for a clause which requires you to give the publisher first right of refusal on your next work. This would effectively limit your future options and possible earnings and may delay publication. Publishers may argue that this is part of their 'standard contract'. In fact, there is no 'standard' contract that cannot be negotiated and, when challenged on these kinds of clauses, most reputable publishers will back down. Membership of a writers' organisation, such as the Society of Authors (UK), can often offer excellent guidance in this regard.

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4 Developing Your Skills

It can take a long time to develop the skill of effective writing, but for sure one of the most important requirements is to get as much practice and as much feedback as possible. Becoming a good writer is essentially a matter of learning to read through the eyes of another. That is, a good writer is one who can anticipate how the reader will understand and follow the text, and who can craft their writing accordingly. Writing

is a dialogue, a dialogue between yourself and your future reader, whose 'turn' in the conversation you have to imagine. This fact suggests some basic strategies that you can adopt in developing your skills at writing, whatever kind of text you are producing.

4.1 Picture Your Reader

Think about whom you expect will read what you have written. What do they 'bring' with them in terms of their background knowledge, experiences and expectations? How might that affect how they understand what you are writing? This is important, for instance, if you want to use what you have written in one context for publication in another context. For example, it is unlikely that an assignment you have done on an academic course will be suitable, without modification, for a teacher's magazine. The audiences are different, and so are their purposes in reading.

4.2 Share Your Writing

If possible, give your writing to others to read before you submit it for publication. Ask for feedback. Ask what they think you are saying in your text. For example, you could ask them to write a brief summary of what you have written. It is often enlightening to discover that what you think you said is not what they have understood. In this case, it is likely to be your text that needs fixing, not your reader!

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4.3 Write with a Co-author

Writing with a co-author can be difficult, but the benefits can also be great. Writing with a co-author can create a genuine conversation around your text, allowing you to check and refine your text together as you each try to express and understand each other's contributions.

4.4 Read and 'Reverse Engineer'

If you read a text that impresses you, or which you think is particularly well-written, try to identify *why* this is so. It could be in the kind of language that is used, the style, the use of examples, or in the structure of the text—that is, how it moves forward, step by step, taking the reader with it. Try to apply similar principles in the text that you produce.

4.5 Offer to Read and Review

You can learn a lot about writing by reading other writers' work, particularly if you can then discuss it with the writer. Writing reviews can help you focus closely on the nature of what they have written and see where writing strengths and weaknesses may lie.

4.6 Shadow an Editor

If you know someone who is an editor or someone who is proofreading for someone, ask if you can also read the text, and discuss why changes have been made. Similarly, if you know someone who is an experienced writer, ask them if they would 'talk you through' how they wrote their text.

4.7 Submit for Publication

When you have something that you think you would like people to read, send it for publication. Even if your work is rejected, you can learn a lot from the feedback you get. Most frequently, an editor will give you some kind of feedback, which you can use to improve your work.

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4.8 Write!

In the end, the best way to improve your writing is by writing, and by writing a lot, frequently. Try keeping a teaching diary for yourself. Write letters to an imaginary reader. Set yourself a goal to write a certain number of texts in certain period of time.

5 Improving Your Chances of Success

Following the advice we have listed in the previous section should significantly improve your chances of successfully 'getting published'. There are, however, some further 'tips and strategies' for improving your chances. We want to warn readers that the advice given here can seem rather opportunistic, even cynical. We do not advocate that you lower your standards or look for shortcuts simply to 'get your work out there' but that you take the advice given here as a complement to producing good-quality work, and for improving the possibility of sharing it in a way that meets

your needs. We will use the words 'publish' and 'publication' in this section as most of the tips here pertain to sharing work through more formal channels—but read these as also relevant to a wider range of dissemination options.

5.1 Be Strategic

Choose carefully what and where you want to publish. Think carefully about your reasons for wanting to share your work. Which outlet (journal, conference, magazine, website, and so on) will help you achieve your goals best? The journal *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* for example, may have an excellent reputation, but is both difficult to get a paper accepted in it and is read by far, far fewer people than, say, an article in *English Teaching Forum.* Neither is better than the other, but they serve different audiences for different purposes. Which matches your aims better? Related to this, consider the issue of readership. Who are the readers of the publication you are thinking of submitting to? Are they researchers and academics or other teachers? Where are they? In your area or in a distant context? How is the publication viewed by other language teaching professionals? Does the publication best match your purposes in getting published?

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5.2 Know the Purposes of the Publication

It is important to carefully consider the stated aims of the publication you are thinking of submitting to. The journal *Second Language Writing* really does want to publish articles that deal with writing and is unlikely to consider articles about very different subjects. Similarly, the journal *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* wants authors to describe an innovation in a particular context. Explicitly address the link with the aims of the publication early on in your article or in your letter to the editor that accompanies your submission. A poor or unclear match is the most common reason for a desk-rejection (a rejection of your paper without a review). Read a number of recent issues of the publication and identify the topic areas it covers and try to match your writing style (within reason) to that of the other contributions.

5.3 Weigh Up the Odds of Acceptance

Many journals will state their rejection rates (the percentage of papers submitted that are rejected, either outright or after review) and submitting to a journal with a lower rate may increase your chances. Newly launched journals may not yet have an established readership or high numbers of submissions and so may be easier to get published in. Clearly, you will have to weigh their less-established reputation against

this. Choosing a publication that appears on a more frequent basis may also increase your chances of getting your contribution accepted.

5.4 Look for 'Special Editions' or Special Sections

It is also worth looking out for calls for contributions to special issues or books on a topic that closely aligns with your own. If yours is a particularly specific topic, there may not be that many other people to 'compete' with in the review process and a publication will have the advantage of being highly relevant to your area of interest. Similarly, it is worth considering special sections or columns that some publications offer. For example, *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* will accept 'innovative practice' papers that are shorter and report on new ideas. Although they have to meet similar quality standards, their format and audience may make them easier to write, especially if you are new to the process. Many publications include different types of contributions, which may have different criteria for acceptance. These include reviews, discussion points, questions and answers, letters to the editor, interviews, teaching ideas, 'spotlight' on a particular topic, news, conference reports, and so on.

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5.5 Do Your Own Quality Control Before You Submit

A poorly written text, with many language or typing errors, or which is poorly organised with inconsistent use of formatting or headings, is likely to be rejected without full review. For the editor of a publication, poorly produced texts suggest that the writer does not take sufficient care or does not respect the intended readership. Editors are principally responsible for ensuring that the *content* of a contribution fits the aims of the publication. Problems with the presentation quality of a submitted text are likely to require too much attention from an editor, and so will almost certainly be turned down. Such problems may also suggest that the content cannot be relied upon anyway. The implication is clear: proofread your work many times, and get others to proofread it as well, before you decide it is ready to submit.

5.6 Respond Positively to Feedback

Knowing how to write to editors and (indirectly) reply to reviewers is an important part of the process. Ensure that you write in a professional manner, and are not too casual, which can give an impression of a lack of thoroughness. Remember that although feedback may sometimes be painful, in most instances it is intended to be constructive and oriented to your product (the article), not at you. Acknowledge

feedback and ideas, even if you do not agree with them, politely and gracefully. If you are asked to resubmit your work, explain how you have taken comments on board, and where you have not, explain - in non-defensive terms - why not. Using a table or some other clear way to illustrate how you have changed the paper as a result of the feedback, with page or paragraph numbers where possible, is a real help and will increase your chances. See the review process as a learning process, not as a trial.

Of course, when a rejection comes, it hurts. Just remember that *all* authors, including the experienced and the most 'famous' ones suffer rejections—sometimes more often than you might expect. In fact, rejection is the norm. Ask yourself what you have gained from a rejection. What insights did you get, whether about your topic, your writing, the journal, or something else? Even though you may be upset, thank the editor(s) for their work. And remember, quite often a rejection may have nothing to do with the quality of your work but may have more to do with what the publication is looking for, who its readership is, and the range of contributions it wishes to publish. It is possible, for example, that your contribution is rejected because it is *yet another* article from a particular part of the world. As we said, the first key to success in publishing is to be strategic in *where* you submit for publication.

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6 Conclusion

One of the determining features that makes English language teaching a profession is that ideas are shared, debated and refined in an ongoing manner. The vitality and strength of ELT today owes much to those who have gone before and who have stimulated others to think and engage in discussion. In this sense, and as the title of this chapter states, the ELT world needs you, and all of us, to contribute to the progress of our profession, so that we can continue to improve and understand the work we do. The aim of this chapter has been to provide ideas on how you can take part in this process, and contribute in a lasting way to our incremental growth as professionals and to improving the experience of language learning worldwide.

7 Discussion Questions

1. What would you like to publish? What do you hope to gain from the publication of your work? What risks do you think there are in getting published?
2. Look at the list of the range of places where you can share your work. Find an example for five or six different types of publication and try to define the audience, types of output and topic areas they specialise in and what they would *not* publish.
3. Look at the list of suggestions for ways to develop your writing skills. What do you think you can learn from using each of the suggested strategies? What

pros and cons do you think there are for each one? Can you add any further suggestions?

4. Find an article from a journal, magazine or website or something that you have recently written. How would it need to change for a different type of publication or a different audience?

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