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Editorial:

Goldilocks and journal publication: Finding a fit that's "just right"

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Getting your work published in journals in ways that will help to advance your scholarly record is a complex and multifaceted process. This article is written for early career researchers and graduate and postgraduate students, providing practical advice about what to consider when developing a research and publication profile and establishing yourself within a research community. It explains a range of criteria that are useful to consider when choosing the best journal "fit" for each publication and for your academic trajectory. We hope that considering the elements identified and explained in this article will help you to find a fit that is "just right" for each of your future publications.

Keywords: Research publication, Research dissemination, Journal selection, Journal impact factor, Researcher index

In higher education, researchers and (post)graduate students are evaluated largely based on individual performance and the establishment of a professional identity within a research community. Researchers are also held accountable for conducting and disseminating scholarly work that demonstrates leadership, outreach, and/or collaboration in ways that advance their ideas. Beyond adding another entry to your curriculum vitae, publications are meant to disseminate your work in order to create impact at institutional, regional, and/or national and international levels. These are sizable expectations that require researchers to use considerable foresight about how to create a focus for each project; build and use advanced personal management, project management, and collaboration skills; and develop a viable plan for dissemination of their work. In addition, researchers must also think about simultaneously advancing their research trajectories and their professional identities. In this article, we offer some experience-based and field-specific protocols and advice that are especially relevant to graduate and postgraduate students and new faculty about finding publication outlets that are "just right" for sharing scholarly work.

Pathways leading to journal publications: Developing ideas and networks

As an educational researcher, think of disseminating your academic work as its larger purpose; that is, to establish yourself as a scholar with an important message to share and to further engage in knowledge exchanges with a larger scholarly community. There are multiple ways to share your work with other academics. In most instances, dissemination through publication in a peer-reviewed journal is the "gold standard;" an indication that other scholars who participated in a blind, rigorous peer review process have deemed your work to be of high quality, well written, and helpful to advancing knowledge and/or practice. Scholarship that is not yet ready for peer-reviewed publication or that has a different purpose can be shared during a conference presentation, symposium, roundtable, or poster session. Scholars who present their work at conferences often engage in dialogue with others that helps to further develop their ideas. These ideas can then later be expanded and/or refined so that they can be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Many academic organisations hold annual research conferences during which – in addition to presenting research results – scholars have opportunities to participate in formal and informal networking opportunities to share innovative approaches, products in development, and research that is still in process. Academic

conferences provide especially good opportunities for new academics and graduate and postgraduate students to introduce themselves to senior researchers, initiate conversations about current and future projects and funding possibilities, and request recommendations of journals and other outlets for sharing their work.

As an added benefit, some organisations publish conference proceedings online as a way to disseminate content to researchers who were not in attendance. Conference presentations that are published as proceedings are more likely to be read and cited than those without proceedings. Seeing conference sessions as possibilities for interim project results to be shared and critiqued can help researchers to further develop and disseminate their work in ways that complement and support eventual refereed publication. Table 1 summarises how work on a particular project might be developed and shared in multiple ways by following a presentation-to-journal-publication pathway.

Table 1
Development of scholarly work through conference-to-journal pathways

	Conference presentation *without* proceedings	Conference presentation *with* proceedings	Peer-reviewed journal publication
Purpose	Present new concepts, techniques, and/or results, including interim findings.	Present new concepts, techniques, and/or results, including interim findings.	Present final report of results. Allows for detailed description of research design, relevant extant literature, results, and implications for the field.
Dissemination opportunities	Present, network.	Present, network, publish.	Publish with highest probability of outreach.
Project stage	Could be a work in progress or a completed project. Presentation slides are sometimes shared in lieu of a paper.	Could be a work in progress or a completed project. Often includes suggested edits from peer review but is usually limited in length.	Complete and comprehensive reporting of project findings.
Peer review	Blind review, usually limited feedback.	Blind review, often limited feedback with opportunity for revisions.	Blind review with more detailed feedback and possibility for more than one iteration of feedback through a revise-and-resubmit process.
Availability of contributed content	Conference website/database, but contents may be available to attendees only. Some conferences permit virtual participation and/or viewing of recorded sessions.	Conference website/database, but proceedings may be available to attendees only. Presentation titles, authors, and abstracts are often available to all.	Articles are searchable via journal indexes and academic databases. Better to cite a journal article than a conference proceeding, given typically greater detail and more review, revision, and editing.
Potential impact	Impact limited to session attendees and website visitors.	Impact based on availability of proceedings to readers who did not attend the conference.	Impact based on the specific journal's profile (e.g., rigor; ease of access).

Some academic organisations – such as those listed in Table 2 – offer both conferences and journals as venues for sharing scholarly work. In such cases, authors often have opportunities to meet with editors during conference sessions that provide information about submitting manuscripts to the associated journals. Conference participants might also initiate informal hallway conversations with editors to discuss whether the contents of their papers align with the themes and scope of organisation-sponsored journals.

Such conference-to-journal pathways to publication are more interactive and developmental than traditional manuscript submission for refereed review and can therefore be especially supportive of researchers who are newer to the publication process.

Table 2
Examples of organisations with linked conferences and journals

Organisation	Conference	Journal(s)
Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education	International Conference on Innovation, Practice and Research in the Use of Educational Technologies in Tertiary Education (Proceedings available at https://ascilite.org/past-proceedings/.)	Australasian Journal of Education Technology
Association for Learning Technology	Annual Conference of the Association for Learning Technology (Conference programs and recordings of keynote sessions available at https://www.alt.ac.uk/altc.)	Research in Learning Technology
Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education	The Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education Annual Conference (Proceedings available at http://learntechlib.org/.)	Journal of Technology and Teacher Education Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education
International Society for Technology in Education	The International Society for Technology in Education Annual Conference (Session descriptions and selected papers available to members at https://www.iste.org/events/iste-events.)	Journal of Research on Technology in Education Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education

However, most academic journals are not connected with particular conferences. Since a manuscript can be submitted to only one journal at a time, how might you increase your odds for publication while improving dissemination and potential impact of your published research? The key is determining which journal is the "best fit" for a particular manuscript. The next section provides some useful tips in this regard.

Choosing a journal: Fit

Remember that the goal of publication is not an end in itself; it is to share your work so that the focus of the article is aligned with its readership, maximising the publication's potential impact in the field, and advancing your contributions to the research community. The choice of a journal to which you submit a manuscript should be made according to a set of specific criteria. Some of these are imposed by educational institutions, while others are based on personal preferences or career goals. For example, your university may use criteria related to journal impact factors (average citation frequency) and other quality indicators to guide your selection of publication venues for your work. You usually do not have much control over such criteria. However, within those parameters, you do have considerable agency in your decision-making. Your choices may include considerations such as the geographical location of the journal, its target audience, its areas of focus, the types of articles it includes, and/or whether it is an open access journal.

Foci

Geographical location may sound like an odd criterion in the digital age, as most journals are now global in scope and incorporate articles from researchers in many countries. Yet, some journals do have particular geographical foci, often traceable to history and/or support from professional associations. AJET (*Australasian Journal of Education Technology*), for example, as its name implies, has focused on educational technology use in Australasian contexts primarily, whereas BJET (*British Journal of Educational Technology*) has focused mostly on educational technology work done in the United Kingdom. *Educational Technology Research & Development* (ETR&D) has a strong North American focus. Journals and discipline-based professional associations can be considered communities of practice of sorts (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), since members gather regularly in physical and digital spaces to advance their research through presentations, panel discussions, and community-building conversations. Contributing to an association's journal is one way of becoming involved and engaged in a scholarly community of practice. A journal's geographical scope may become important as you think about where your research results may be used most frequently and easily.

A journal's areas of focus and the types of articles it publishes are also important criteria to consider. Some journals focus broadly on education in general, while others address a particular educational discipline or field more specifically, such as educational technology. Others, like AJET, narrow the journal's focus additionally to a specific educational level, such as post-secondary education. Still others narrow their contents to particular inquiry foci (e.g., *Journal of Learning Analytics*). Have you written a highly specialised article that reports on a specific data set of interest to a particular audience or a manuscript that claims a broader focus that will be helpful to scholars working in multiple fields? As you make a journal choice, consider how broad or narrow the focus of your article will be, as well as the nature of its intended audience.

Research methods

In addition, some journal editors prefer to publish research that uses either quantitative or qualitative methods, or a combination of both. Some editors will accept conceptual papers and/or literature reviews, while others will consider only empirical (data-based) studies. This information can be gleaned from the stated scope of the journal, which is usually available on the journal's website. Once you have decided the journal that you will target, familiarise yourself with its published articles that are relevant to your topic. When appropriate, consider citing them in your manuscript. In this way, you will be inviting readers from within the journal's community of practice to consider and build upon your work.

Accessibility

Another journal selection criterion is more values-based and concerns the accessibility of knowledge that can be derived from your work. Many high-ranking journals require authors to sign over copyright. These journals control access to their articles through commercial licenses and subscriptions, paid by either individuals or institutions. Alternatively, some journals, including AJET, are open access, which means that your published article will be readable by anyone with an Internet connection. Recently, some commercial journals have begun to charge individual author fees to publish their articles in open access mode. Others offer open access and do not require fees. (For more information about open access journals, please see Costello, Huijser, & Marshall, 2019.)

How will potential readers locate your article, once it is published in a particular journal? This is also something to consider as you select a journal outlet. Multiple academic reference location tools – both subscription-based databases, such as [Education Research Complete](), and freely accessible search engines, such as [Google Scholar]() – index educational technology research publications. (Twelve of the most often-used tools are described in Gusenbauer, 2019.) The number and sizes of the databases or engines in which a particular journal's contents are referenced help to determine how easily other researchers will be able to locate your article once it is published. Since journals' impact factors (described and explained below) are calculated primarily in terms of the frequencies of citations of their publications, the nature and number of the searchable resources in which a target journal's contents appear are important considerations.

The three largest searchable databases that contain refereed educational technology publications are World Wide Science (https://worldwidescience.org/), ProQuest (https://www.proquest.com/), and Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com). In January 2018, Google Scholar contained more than 389 million records; World Wide Science included more than 323 million; and ProQuest indexed more than 280 million citations (Gusenbauer, 2019). However, searches in Scopus (https://www.scopus.com/), which contains in excess of 71 million records, and Web of Science (http://wokinfo.com/), which includes more than 155 million, plus Google Scholar, are used more frequently to gauge the scholarly impact of research publications (Cochrane, Redmond, & Corrin, 2018). Although information about most published educational technology journal articles (and the contents of many conference proceedings) can be located using Google Scholar, the same is not true of Web of Science or Scopus searches (van Aalst, 2010).

Does this imply that authors should preference submitting their work to educational technology journals that are indexed in Web of Science and Scopus (e.g., AJET)? Perhaps. This may no longer be necessary, however, given the growing recognition of Google Scholar's comprehensiveness when compared with other academic search services – despite its persistent errors in citation numbers (Gusenbauer, 2019) – and authors' growing use of academic social media networks such as ResearchGate (https://www.researchgate.net/). These services allow researchers to share post-print (pre-publication) versions of their publications (Cochrane et al., 2018), subject to publishers' permissions.

Journal quality

Metrics that are used to assess faculty and student performance and promotion by many academic institutions draw upon journals' citation counts and published impact factors. Numbers of publications in journals with high impact factors are "conventional methods for measuring a researcher's academic credibility." (Cochrane et al., 2018, p. ii) It is for this reason that many authors consider the quality metrics reported by journals carefully when they are deciding among different venues for publication of their work. There are multiple ways to calculate journals' impact using citation numbers. Some are used more frequently than others and can emphasise different disciplines and fields of study.

There is often confusion, however, about the reasons why particular impact indicators are reported, what their strengths and limitations are, and how the information that they convey is similar and different. Table 3 provides a quick reference guide of key information about five of the most commonly used measures of journal impact: Journal Impact Factor (JIF), CiteScore, SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), Eigenfactor, and Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP).

Table 3
Primary indicators of journal impact

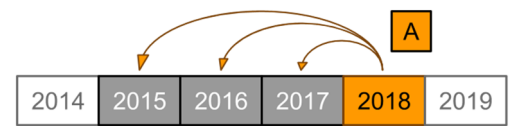| Impact indicator	Calculation	Use
Journal Impact Factor (JIF) Based on Journal Citation Reports data Calculated annually	The number of times articles published in the previous two years have been cited in the year of reporting, divided by the number of citable items. For example: $$\frac{\text{Number of times articles published in a specific journal in 2017 \& 2018 were cited in all journals in Journal Citation Reports in 2019}}{\text{Number of citable items published in that journal in 2017 \& 2018}}$$	Applicable only when a publication is indexed in Journal Citation Reports. JIF cannot be used to compare journals across different disciplines, since journals are situated within different fields, have different readerships, histories of citation practices, etc. To access: In Web of Science, access the JIF from an article's record by clicking "View Journal Information." To learn more, please refer to Hoeffel (1998).

CiteScore Based on Scopus citation data Calculated monthly	The number of times documents published during the previous three years have been cited during the reporting year, divided by the number of documents. For example: $$\text{CiteScore 2018} = \frac{A}{B}$$ A — Number of citations in 2018 to documents published in the previous 3 years (2015-17). B — Number of documents published in the previous 3 years (2015-17). *Figure 1.* CiteScore calculation. Adapted from Zijlstra & McCullough (2016, ¶ 9).	Applicable only when a publication is indexed in Scopus. Compares citations of multiple document types, rather than just published articles. CiteScores are freely available, but underlying data are accessible only to Scopus subscribers. To learn more, please read Da Silva and Memon (2017).
SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) Based on Scopus citation data Calculated annually	A Scopus algorithm calculates the "prestige value" for each journal. The more citations articles from a particular journal receives, the higher the calculated prestige value. The SJR value is then adjusted based on article citation frequencies multiplied by prestige values.	Free resource. Applicable when comparing quality indicators across different fields. Calculations are similar to JIF but are normalised for work in fields that don't cite others' work as frequently as other fields do. To learn more, please refer to Falagas, Kouranos, Arencibia-Jorge, & Karageorgopoulos (2008).
Eigenfactor Based on Journal Citation Reports data Calculated annually	Calculated by dividing the number of citations from a particular year by the total number of a journal's publications cited in the previous five years. Excludes authors' self-citations. All journals' Eigenfactors for a particular year sum to 100. To allow for comparisons, normalised Eigenfactor values are calculated. 1.00 is considered to be an average normalised Eigenfactor; values above 1.00 indicate greater comparative journal impact.	Compares journal citations within a particular discipline, rather than across disciplines. Citations from highly cited journals influence this score more than citations from lesser-cited journals. To learn more, please refer to Bergstrom, West, & Wiseman (2008).
SNIP (Source Normalized Impact per Paper) Based on Scopus data Calculated annually	Ratio of a journal's citation count per publication to the "citation potential" within its discipline or field. Citation potential is measured by estimating the total number of citations in a particular field during the two years prior to the publication year being considered.	Permits direct comparisons of journal citations in different fields. The longer the reference list of a publication, the lower the value of a citation originating from that publication. To learn more, please refer to Beatty (2016).

How reasonable is it to consider a target journal's impact factor as part of your selection process? The answer may be determined, at least in part, by whether your institution uses journal impact factors when evaluating faculty work, either individually or by organisational unit. This practice varies among institutions, and even among departments and programs within the same institution. Moreover, since stronger target journals' quality metrics can indicate higher potential readership and citation of your work, you may wish to select journals with better comparative quality ratings. Then again, if refereed publication is what is required of you, regardless of impact factor, then it may be wise to choose the journal to which you will submit your manuscript based more upon its focus, scope, and characteristics of its readers than upon how frequently its articles are cited in other publications.

Author quality

The measures described above provide a sense of different quality-related "identities" for different journals. These journal quality indicators are often confused with measures of individual authors' scholarly "identities." They can be similarly represented, in part, by calculating the frequencies of the authors' works' impact factors, conceptualised as numbers of citations over time. Four key measures are used most often at present: h-index, g-index, m-index, and i10 index, which are described in Table 4.

Table 4
Primary indicators of author impact

Index type	Calculation	Use
h-index The quantity and impact of a researcher's publication record. See Hirsch (2005).	Calculated as the number of publications (h) which have been cited at least h times. Values increase over time. This index is not a measure of current productivity.	To review longer trajectories of research. Helpful if you work in a field in which researchers actively cite each other's work.
g-index The quantity and impact of more frequently cited items in a researcher's publication record. See Egghe (2006).	Calculated by ranking articles from highest to lowest numbers of citations, then finding "the (unique) largest number such that the top g articles received (together) at least g2 citations." (Egghe, 2006, p. 131)	To counterbalance more frequently cited with more infrequently cited publications in author impact calculations. A researcher's g-index is always equal to and sometimes higher than their h-index.
m-index The quantity and impact of a researcher's publication output averaged over total publication years. See Hirsch (2005).	Calculated by dividing the h-index by the number of years of a researcher's publication activity.	To balance comparisons of early-career and established researchers' publication records. May not be as useful to researchers with low h-indexes.
i10 index Impact of a researcher's work that is listed in Google. See Delgado López-Cózar, Robinson-García, & Torres-Salinas (2014).	The number of articles written by an author that have been cited (by other authors) at least 10 times, according to the contents of the Google Scholar database. Automatically calculated; appears in Google Scholar author profiles.	To provide a simple-to-understand reflection of the impact of an author's more frequently cited works. Criticised for being easily manipulated and more inaccurate than other author impact measures.

Author impact measures are evolving quickly. While author-level "publication metrics can [support] compelling narratives," we agree with Carpenter, Cone, and Sarli (2014), who caution that "no single metric is sufficient for measuring performance, quality, or impact by an author" (p. 1169). Rather, by understanding how the different measures are calculated and comparing their affordances and constraints, researchers can use them to help to build strong cases for evaluation of the impact of their scholarly work.

Choosing a journal: Logistics

Although the journal criteria explained above may be critical factors to consider when selecting a publication outlet, there are also important logistical realities that need to be appraised. Awareness of timing, acceptance rate, and maximum manuscript length can also help to determine the journal to which to submit a manuscript.

Time from submission to publication

Is there a deadline by when your article needs to be published, such as an annual faculty review or a tenure portfolio due date? If you are a graduate student, is research publication a program requirement? Some doctoral students, for example, are opting to write and publish a series of refereed articles in place of a book-length dissertation document (see Nehls & Watson, 2016). In these cases, some universities require that one or more of the articles be accepted for publication before the author can graduate. These types of deadlines make time-to-publication an important factor when deciding the journal to which you will submit your manuscript for review. It is appropriate to ask editors what the current time-to-publication is.

Different journals have varying timelines between initial submission of a manuscript and its publication. Increasingly, journals provide early release of articles online, as soon as the manuscript has undergone copyediting and final proofing. Highly-ranked educational technology journals (including AJET) average 5–7 months' total time to publication, with 2–4 months between initial submission and receiving the editor's first decision (Bond, 2018), which is based upon reviewers' synthesised evaluations of a manuscript. If a journal promises much swifter timelines than these, be cautious; it may be a predatory (specious) journal that does not use peer review, even if it claims to do so. Predatory journals also typically charge sizable manuscript submission and/or publication fees. (See https://beallslist.weebly.com/standalone-journals.html for a list of predatory publishers and publications.)

For readers who are, as yet, unfamiliar with the specifics of the refereed review process, Niederhauser, Wetzel, and Lindstrom (2005) provide a detailed explanation of the sequence of the actions taken by editors and reviewers between when a manuscript is first submitted to a journal and when it may be published. It is important to remember that all of this work is done voluntarily, as service to our profession, so procedures and timelines may vary somewhat between journals.

Acceptance rate

More than half of most rigorous research journals' submissions are typically declined by editors without sending them out for review (e.g., Bond, 2018). Then, as a result of peer review, additional manuscripts are rejected. Journals' acceptance rates include the results of both review phases. The highest-ranking educational technology journals' acceptance rates typically range between 8% (e.g., *Educational Technology Research and Development*) and 20% (e.g., *Computers and Education*) (Brigham Young University, n.d.; Ritzhaupt, Sessums, & Johnson, 2012), compared to 5%–8% acceptance rates for top-ranked general educational research journals such as *Educational Researcher, Harvard Educational Review,* and *Teachers College Record* (Columbia University, 2014).

Manuscript length

Most education journals specify manuscript length limits, either in words or pages, given a common font, font size, and margin size: typically, 12-point Times New Roman on a double-spaced page with one-inch margins. Maximum lengths range from 4000 to 12,000 words or 16 to 48 double-spaced pages, with means of 8000 words or 32 pages (Hadre & Mortensen, 2014). It is important to consult the target journal's instructions to authors for specifics such as whether references and/or estimated space for tables and diagrams are included in word count or length limits.

Other specifications

Other logistical considerations that can impact journal selection include the ways in which manuscripts are submitted (e.g., online or via surface mail); the specific expertise of the editorial board members vis-à-vis the focus of and/or methods used in the manuscript; and the nature of the journal's readership (e.g., researchers only vs. researchers and practitioners). It is important to review all of the information provided about the journal's scope, audience, requirements, and review/publication processes before finalising your submission choice.

Conclusion

Selecting the venues through which to share your work – whether conference, journal, or both – is important, and the decision process is more complex than you might assume. In this editorial, we have suggested primary criteria to consider when deciding how and where the fruits of your scholarship will be made available to other researchers. As well, we suggest that you view the publication process as an opportunity to develop your academic identity, engage in professional networking, and begin to feel at home among fellow researchers. In becoming familiar with the range of options, expectations, and preferences involved in this process, we recommend, like Goldilocks, to first consider all of the possibilities. Then, compare your choices to your goals, requirements, and predilections relative to the results of a particular scholarly endeavor. We encourage you to select the publication and/or presentation venue(s) that fits "just right" for the nature of the work, for your potential readers, and for the developmental trajectory of your scholarly endeavors.

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