

# Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Creating and Contributing to Scholarly Conversations  
across a Range of Genres

---

*Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather*

Elon University Center for Engaged Learning  
Elon, North Carolina  
[www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org](http://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org)

©2020 by Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather. This work is made available under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) license.

This publication extends “Writing Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Articles for Peer-Reviewed Journals” by Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather (2019), originally published in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry (TLI)*, the official journal of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL). Articles published in *TLI* are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) license. The original article is available at <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.7.2.3>.

“Writing a draft paper” (Reflection 24.1) was originally [published as a blog post](#) and is reproduced by permission of the author, Pat Thomson.

“What makes a good critical friend?” (Reflection 26.1) was originally [published as a blog post](#) and is reproduced by permission of the author, Rebecca J. Hogue.

Series editors: Jessie L. Moore and Peter Felten  
Copyeditor and designer: Jennie Goforth

### **Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Healey, Mick | Matthews, Kelly E. | Cook-Sather, Alison  
Title: Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education / Mick Healey, Kelly E. Matthews, and Alison Cook-Sather  
Description: Elon, North Carolina : Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, [2020] | Series: Center for engaged learning open access book series | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2020941985 | ISBN (PDF) 978-1-951414-04-7 | ISBN (PBK) 978-1-951414-05-4 | DOI <https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa3>  
Subjects: LCSH: Academic writing handbooks, manuals, etc.; Education, Higher Research; College teaching; College teachers as authors

## CHAPTER 27

### PREPARING FOR SUBMISSION

*Polish and then repolish your work after you consider your manuscript finally written. (Sadler 2006, 32)*

*[There is a] common tendency both to procrastinate (by not writing) and to perfect (by endlessly revising). To get published, you have to train yourself to get over both tendencies. (Belcher 2009, 271)*

Rewriting, revising, and refining make for good writing (see [chapter 24](#)). However, as editors and reviewers, we observe that all too often our colleagues submit work before it is ready. In this chapter we review some of the checks that you should undertake before you press the submit button. As the two quotes above indicate, authors need to find a balance between striving for perfection and letting go. We offer a checklist for final steps to take prior to submission; discuss the function of keywords, which are commonly used in journal publications and can maximize the likelihood that readers interested in your topic will find your work; and remind you of the role critical friends (see also [chapter 26](#)) can play at this final stage of preparing a manuscript.

#### **Checking Your Manuscript**

As well as checking the title, abstract, and text, you will need to sort tables, figures, illustrations, copyright permissions, references, keywords, acknowledgments, and biographies, and you must ensure that everything is in the right format and style for your chosen outlet. A brief checklist is provided in Table 27.1.

**Table 27.1: Checklist before submitting your manuscript**

<b>Reread the guidelines for authors for your chosen outlet and check that you have complied with all of them, including, unless otherwise stated:</b>
The text adheres to the stylistic and bibliographic requirements outlined in the author guidelines.
The layout and placing of tables, figures, and illustrations follow the publisher's guidelines and you provide titles and sources. Check that you can obtain any copyright permissions needed if your manuscript is accepted for publication.
The references in the text align with those in the list of references and vice versa.
The number of words is included at the end of the manuscript and it is fewer than the publisher's maximum for the genre you are submitting.
Ensure your email account is set to receive messages from the publisher, as notification emails can sometimes be sent to spam or junk folders.
Check quoted material against the original source (include page numbers where appropriate).
Ensure that you have properly cited all information taken from outside sources and that you have not inadvertently plagiarized.
Proofread and spell-check one last time (and if you don't feel strong in this area, have someone else proofread your text, or read it aloud—this will catch a lot of missing words and typos).
<b>For journal publications</b>
The manuscript has not been published previously, is not currently under review by another publisher, and represents new, unpublished findings or arguments (or an explanation has been provided in comments to the editor).

The abstract aligns with the text (i.e., you do what you say you do).

The keywords supplement rather than repeat those used in the title.

*A copy of this checklist is available in the online resources.*

If your manuscript will go out for double-blind review, ensure that you also submit an anonymized version of the manuscript with all identifying names and institutional affiliations removed. Use “Anon (date)” or “Author (date)” for references to your own work, exclude other details, and put these under “A” in the list of references. Exclude acknowledgments and biographies that may identify you or your institution.

If the contribution includes reporting on research that you have undertaken with human participants, include a statement in the methods section or at the end of the text that the research was successfully reviewed according to your institution’s research ethics committee guidelines. Don’t forget to omit the institution’s name in the anonymized version of the paper.

Though you should always be consistent in following the publisher’s guidance regarding layout and style, don’t try to seek perfection in the content of your piece of writing. You will never be able to prepare for every possible point that reviewers may raise; they will usually surprise you regardless of how much you try to anticipate. You need to make a judgment regarding what you think the reader *needs* to know to understand your argument, methods, and conclusions, and what it *would be nice* for them to know in the space you have available. The phrase “beyond the scope of this article” (Belcher 2009, 272) is a very useful one to help you keep a clear focus, indicate what cannot be included because of that focus or length restrictions, and avoid over-claiming what your writing is contributing.

Editors are busy people and in the case of learning and teaching journals usually undertake the task on a voluntary basis. Making their lives easier by following to the letter the publisher’s instructions for layout and style is both sensible and considerate. Submitting

manuscripts that show little attention to these guidelines signals disrespect and laziness and may give the impression that your manuscript was prepared for, and rejected by, another outlet. Your aim should be to submit a manuscript that makes a good initial impression. Take particular care to ensure that the references are in the house style. As seasoned editors, we spend a significant amount of time correcting the style of references. Upon receipt of your manuscript, the editor should think, “This looks publishable in this journal.”

### **Selecting Keywords**

Most journals require keywords, at least for their research articles. Keywords are used by journal publishers, search engines, and indexing and abstracting services to categorize papers. Most proprietary databases default to only searching the title, author, abstract, and keywords, not the full text of the article, so ensuring a range of words appears in these (including alternative words that readers may use in search engines) will help prospective readers find your paper and increase the probability of it being read and cited (Margy MacMillan, personal communication, July 25, 2019). Unfortunately, as James Hartley (2008, 37) notes, there are “no rules for formulating them [keywords], little guidance on how to write them, and no instructions for reviewers on how to assess them.” The kinds of words used vary by discipline, so pragmatically it is probably best to begin by looking at the guide for authors for the journal you are targeting, as well as the keywords used by other papers in that journal and in works you cite. The function of keywords is to supplement the words used in the title, and as the words in the title will be picked up automatically by indexing services, there is no point repeating them (Kate, Kumar, and Subair 2017), although it might be useful to include common synonyms for your title words. To select keywords, read through your manuscript and identify words and phrases that are used repeatedly. You may also consider, when appropriate, including the discipline, the educational sector, the institution or country, and the method used, as well as words that relate to the topic (Hartley 2008; Kate, Kumar, and Subair 2017). The aim in choosing suitable keywords, as

well as using precise and evocative words in your title and abstract, is to maximize the discoverability of your work and facilitate search engine optimization, so that your work appears in a high-ranking placement in search results pages (Taylor & Francis, “[A Researcher’s Guide to Search Engine Optimization](#)”).

### **Seeking the Fresh Perspective of Critical Friends**

We emphasize throughout this book that writing is contributing to or creating a conversation. If you proofread a manuscript alone, you are likely to miss stylistic and formatting errors, and so critical friends have a role at this final stage, too. They can catch errors and omissions that you might have missed from overfamiliarity with the text and ensure that your manuscript will be as ready as it can be to enter the wider conversation in the field. We recommend that you ask a critical friend to give your manuscript a final scan before you submit it. This may be someone outside academia, such as a friend or relation who comes to the text fresh and focuses on clarity and grammar. Some writers, particularly those for whom English is not their first language, use the services of a professional editor to copyedit (not just proofread) their manuscript to catch errors in their written English (Flowerdew 1999; Moreno et al. 2012).

### **Submitting Your Piece**

When you submit to a journal, you may want to include a short (half-page) cover letter that makes the case for why the editor should consider sending your article out for review. According to Aijaz Shaikh (2016), “A good cover letter first outlines the main theme of the paper; second, argues the novelty of the paper; and third, justifies the relevance of the manuscript to the target journal.”

Most publication venues have online submission processes. These are not necessarily straightforward or intuitive, and they vary across platforms. It is therefore a good idea to explore and practice with the system well before a deadline. You can also contact the managing editor if you are having trouble because they can clarify or help, or as a last resort, you could attach a copy of your full submission, and

if appropriate, the anonymized version, to an email explaining the trouble you are having submitting through the online system.

### **Over to You**

Once you have completed the final check of your manuscript, you have come up with some appropriate and complementary keywords, and your critical friend has caught any stylistic issues that remain, it is time to let go and press the submit button. Doing so rarely constitutes the end of the conversation. In relation to this phase of the writing process, we recommend that you address these questions:

- Have you gone through the checklist in Table 27.1 to ensure your manuscript is ready for submission?
- Have you devised a list of keywords that complement those in the title and abstract, if the genre in which you are writing calls for those?
- Have you asked a critical friend to read through for a final check of the readability of the manuscript?