Writing and Publishing in Philosophy

Developing written work through to publication is a significant part of your job as an academic philosopher. Publications are among the most heavily weighted criteria in hiring for permanent academic jobs.

This tip sheet offers general advice for writing and publishing in philosophy with a specific focus on peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and edited collections.

Writing academic philosophy:

In writing philosophy, you are aiming to contribute to a conversation. A successful piece of written academic philosophy should do at least two main things: (1) develop and compellingly communicate a core idea and (2) appropriately engage related ideas already published. Both the balance and the details of implementation of (1) and (2) will differ by topic, genre, intended audience, and style.

Overall, the best way to improve your writing is to read reflectively. Read articles in highly respected journals and monographs (see below). Reflect on the structure, scholarship, rigour, argumentation, and style of these works and incorporate them into your own writing.

Some norms for academic philosophical writing are universal:

- *Academic philosophical writing should always be well-structured.* You should have a clear thesis and a structure supporting it Every section should be clearly identified for its contribution to the thesis, and every sub-section should identifiably support that section. Each paragraph should contribute to its section and each sentence should contribute to its paragraph. The overall piece should be of a length and a structure appropriate to the thesis.
- *Academic philosophical writing should always be both clear and compelling.* Both *what* you think and *why* you think it should be rigorously explained. Remember that you are not writing for yourself. Your own notes should include far more detail, scholarship, and consider objections and replies than your polished writing for others. You are not aiming to communicate everything you know about a topic. As a rule of thumb, take

your reader to be another philosopher who is not an expert in your topic, but who is busy and cantankerously looking for reasons to reject what you say.
- *Academic philosophical writing should always be scholarly.* In philosophy, it is both allowed and expected that you will consult widely and become knowledgeable on what others have published concerning your idea. You are expected to reference, and both directly and indirectly engage with them as appropriate. Consult what is already published on your topic, especially in your sub-field, in philosophy generally, and ideally in all relevant areas.

The process of developing a core idea into a polished piece of written academic writing takes time. You should anticipate extensive editing and rewriting. Through sharpening what you thought was a single core idea, you may discover that what you though was a single paper is two, three, or none at all. An argument you took to support your thesis may be discovered to be a powerful challenge against it. In engaging with others, you may discover new objections, errors, mistakes, confusions, or additional relevant literature which overlaps or undermines your ideas. These are opportunities for improvement. Cultivate an attitude of humility and openness to feedback. Consider re-framings, abandonments, elaborations, and clarifications as normal and expected parts of the process.

Further useful tips and advice on writing philosophy:

- Michael Huemer's *Publishing in Philosophy*
- Jim Pryor's *Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper*
- Harvard Writing Center's *A Brief Guid to Writing the Philosophy Paper*
- Peter Horban's *Writing a Philosophy Paper*

Peer-reviewed journal articles:

Academic philosophers are expected to regularly publish peer-reviewed journal articles and you will typically be expected to evidence some publishing success to secure a permanent academic job. Publishing in highly respected peer-reviewed journals is a key tool for improving your application.

The peer-review process involves your article being anonymously evaluated by editors and commissioned reviewers. Think carefully about your submitted title, key words, and references, as these inform an editor's choice of reviewer.

Especially if you are on the job market, aim to publish your articles in the most well-regarded places that you can. Scimago, The University of Missouri, and a well-known survey-based ranking by Brian Leiter offer general rankings of philosophy journals. Leiter also provides rankings of journals in continental and moral philosophy. You can often find forum discussion on particular sub-fields, e.g. *The Philosopher's Cocoon*. When considering a journal, consult their editorial board and the quality of the authors and articles they publish. You will eventually develop your own sense. If you're unsure whether a journal is well-regarded in general or in your subfield, ask an experienced colleague.

Journals' websites provide information concerning the focus of invited articles, acceptance rates, and submission and review processes. Attend carefully to this information. While most journals are flexible about particulars of formatting and citation styles until after a paper is accepted, you should always attend carefully to length, anonymity, and requested file formats.

The process can be frustrating. In top-tier journals, acceptance rates are low (e.g. 3%) and response times are slow (e.g. four months). You may not receive any comments, and you will often disagree with the comments you receive. You may consider respectfully nudging a journal editor well beyond the journal's stated expected time. Sending early, repeated, or aggressive messages, however, will not speed the process or improve your chances of success. Respectfully accept editors' decisions. Expect the process to take time and involve set-backs. Be patient and kind to yourself.

Tips on publishing journal articles:

- Edit, edit, edit. Then take some time away from the draft and edit some more.
- Select a potential journal, read a range of its articles, and edit and frame accordingly.
- When you think you have a final draft, solicit (more) feedback from someone that is an expert in your area and from someone that is not.
- Expect rejection. Unless you have received fatal feedback, learn what you can from any comments, edit, and submit elsewhere.
- Note you can't have the same article under consideration at more than one journal at a time.
- Quantity matters, but quality is key. Especially early in your career, aim to show that you are capable of publishing in the most well-regarded venues.

- Aim to have at least one paper under review, one you're editing, and one you're drafting.

Monographs:

A monograph allows you to develop a core idea at great length. It is a significant, respected accomplishment. Before writing a monograph, you should consider whether it is something which deserves a book-length treatment and whether now is the time to devote to its development.

Think carefully about publishing your doctoral work as a monograph. If you do, substantially edit and reframe it, as the purpose and intended audiences of your doctoral work and a monograph are different. Ask your supervisor or examiners of your doctoral work whether they recommend pursuing its publication in whole or in part and carefully consider their advice.

A philosophical thesis appropriate for book-length treatment will often require chapter-length argumentative steps. Consider developing potential book-chapters as independent articles for journal submission. If you are on the job market, it is unwise to depend on any single publication.

Aim to publish your monograph with a well-regarded press. There are few to consider. For one representative list, see this 2020 blog post by Eric Schwitzgebel. Academic presses have are editors, including one responsible for commissioning and receiving pitches for monographs in philosophy.

You may be approached by an editor interested in commissioning your monograph. If it is an editor of a well-regarded press, then carefully consider the offer, including whether there is a mutually agreeable topic worthy of your currently devoting an extended time. Otherwise, decline.

As an early career researcher, you must typically pitch your monograph to an appropriate editor. Unlike journal articles, a monograph may be under consideration by many presses simultaneously. So, consider contacting multiple appropriate subject editors of academic presses at once. Standardly, you will send them an email with your book proposal. The email to the editor should *briefly* introduce: you, your book, why you're the best person to write the

book, and why they should want to publish *this*book *now*. Book proposals can be variously structured, but should typically include: an overview; table of contents; chapter abstracts; intended audience and market; competition; and a brief biography. Be prepared to send a sample chapter if requested.

Like journal editors, subject editors commission reviews. Monograph reviewing is not blind and reviewers typically comment on the suitability of the author. Expect minor or major revisions to be requested. In the final stages, further changes will be suggested or required by a copy editor.

If successful, at some stage you must sign a contract. As with any contract, read it carefully, clarify any ambiguities, and respectfully negotiate. Include whether you would like to do your own indexing or for the press to do it for you. It may be surprising that you are offered a small or no advance and that your royalties are likely to be small. Academic publishing is niche and financial gains are typically negligible. Solicit advice from experienced colleagues.

Edited collections:

Edited collections which feature academic philosophy are sometimes pitched and sometimes commissioned by both academic and popular presses. Many of the above considerations concerning monographs apply including regarded academic publishers, pitching, and contracts. You should negotiate for editing, but typically not for contributed chapters. Avoid spending time developing commissioned work for minor popular presses.

Especially if you are on the job market, think carefully before either editing a collection or contributing to one. Note that collections make take considerably more time than articles to be released. In both cases, ask yourself: is this merely a seemingly easier route to publication or will it increase my reputation and help me join the conversation?

- On contributing: Book chapters are typically not weighted as heavily as journal articles or monographs, although contributions in respected presses presented with leaders in your field can be valuable opportunities. Aim to have at least as many publications in journals as you do in commissioned collections.
- On editing: Editing takes a lot of time, but can facilitate networking and fruitful engagement and help establish your expertise. Before agreeing to

edit, ensure that established others would be willing to contribute. If not, you will be saddled with a lot of work for little benefit.

Additional venues

Though peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and edited collections are the established forums for academic philosophy writing, you may choose to place your work in other venues. These platforms can reach broader or more targeted audiences and can increase the awareness and impact of your research. If you are seeking a permanent academic job, be careful to balance the presentation of your work in these venues with a track record of success in academic presses.

- *Social media*. Social media provides opportunities to network and raise awareness about you and your ideas. It can be an efficient way to share successes, paper drafts, and resources. You may develop a personal blog or widespread to share your ideas, but remember that these are not the same as peer-reviewed publications and budget your time accordingly. Especially if you are on the job market, think carefully about the way you are presenting yourself on any social media platforms that are accessible to the public or others in the philosophical community. Always be careful and rigorous when presenting your written work to the philosophical community at large.

- *Mainstream media*. Public and popular presses and media outlets also have subject editors who commission work or to whom you might pitch. For outlets with wide readerships eg. *BBC*, *Aeon*, *The Conversation*, or *The New York Times*, you will often need to know or have an introduction to the subject editor for a piece to be seriously considered. To "break in", you might (a) contact the marketing and communications division of your institution with your idea and intended venue(s); or (b) ask another philosopher who has published in your candidate venue for an introduction to an editor. Whenever you pitch for mainstream media, keep it brief, and have the full piece polished and ready, written in the style of the intended venue. For more, see our page on public philosophy writing.

- *Collaborations with external partners*. You may have the opportunity to write when collaborating with external partners, e.g. charitable bodies, museums, medical organisations, businesses, governmental bodies, and so on. Always remember to keep your audience and the purpose of your writing in mind in your style, word-choice, structure, and referencing practices. You should exercise humility in being guided by your partner to conform to any constraints, and to craft any requested or suggested written work into something suitable for the aims of the partnership.

General tips and advice:

- Write often. Ideally every day, if only briefly. Reflect on the structure, style, and clarity of your writing, every time you write anything (e.g. even texts, emails, and so on).
- Read reflectively, especially in venues in which which you aim to publish. Consider e.g. structure, argument, word choices, rigour, scholarship, and style.
- Consider reading aloud to spot grammatical and other errors you might otherwise miss.
- Solicit feedback and receive it humbly. Consider finding a group of colleagues with whom you can regularly exchange.
- Consider writing (or editing) collaboratively with others. In philosophy, while joint publications are traditionally not regarded as highly as single authorship, this is changing. Writing collaboratively can be a useful means of accountability, and the resulting work can benefit from a multiplicity of expertise and perspective.
- Take your time. You will never get it perfect, nor should you aim for your final word on a subject, but you should aim to *get it right* before you submit and again before you publish.