

# **Guidelines for Writing an Article Based on Your Dissertation**

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Ideally, your dissertation is based upon original research on an issue of enough importance it is worth sharing with others in your field. Unfortunately, most dissertations will only be read by the members of your committee, yourself, your editor if one is needed, and maybe your mother. For all the work put into a dissertation by yourself and your committee that is a very disappointing outcome.

There is an expectation in the doctoral world that your study will be of enough importance to share with others. And the best way to do that is for you to write an article based on your dissertation that will be published in a journal or some publishing venue in your field.

The challenge of writing that article is that you have had to follow a fairly distinctive formula in preparing the dissertation, and that formula does not translate easily into the formats usually required of articles, opinion pieces, blog reports, etc. So, if you believe that you have written something worth sharing with your colleagues in your field, an article should be written very soon after you pass the final doctoral defense. Waiting too long to write an article encourages procrastination, may make your data out of date, and may lose the interest of a committee member or two who may volunteer to review your drafts.

There is also another factor that should compel you to write an article. As a new doctoral graduate, you have joined a special club of highly educated aspiring leaders in your field, and there is an expectation, at least from your committee and program leaders, that you will add to the knowledge in your field by writing. You have a professional obligation to make this commitment to your mentors and colleagues a reality.

You have recently learned a great deal about good writing just by completing the dissertation, and it will be helpful for your future success if you continue to improve your writing skills by continuing to write. With some help about how to write an article based on your dissertation you will be very proud when your article is accepted for publication.

I have worked with a hundred plus doctoral students in my career as a professor of higher education at the University of Illinois, The University of Texas at Austin, The University of California at Berkeley, Nova University, and Kansas State University. I have always encouraged students to write an article or two based on their dissertations, and I am pleased to share my experiences in the form of a set of guidelines. In my publishing experience I have written 18 books, 24 monographs and reports, 28 chapters in other books, and over 200 articles. I also published three articles from my dissertation.

**Guideline 1**—The first thing you must do is to be realistic and consider whether or not there is an article worth publishing based on your dissertation. Is the topic of the article relevant to the issues in your field? Does your study address an issue in a creative and innovative way? Do your findings answer important questions? If the conclusions and implications were implemented would they make a difference in practice? One way to answer some of these questions is to ask a member or two of your dissertation committee if an article based on your dissertation is worth publishing. This might be a good question to ask your committee at the conclusion of your defense.

**Guideline 2**—If you decide to write an article, take some time to acquaint yourself with the primary publications in your field. You should have a good start because of your dissertation and the reading you do as part of your work. Select several publications that seem likely to publish on topics and issues related to the subject of your dissertation. Keep in mind that some publications are more research oriented while others are more practical. Select the type of publication you prefer and consider crafting both types of articles to submit to two different journals. Then, before you even begin thinking about how to write the article, read the guidelines the journal sets for potential writers. These can usually be found on the Internet under the title of the journal. There may be format requirements, standards for word length, suggestions for reference guides, abstracts required, etc. Know the requirements before you launch.

**Guideline 3**—Here is the really hard part: trim down the study to a hard core of the most relevant findings. This is very challenging because you spent so much time addressing all the components required in a dissertation that everything you wrote is important to you. But an article is a compressed version of your study featuring only the key points that will interest a potential reader or journal editor. **Write for the reader!**

**Guideline 4**—As you prepare your strategy for writing an article consider whether or not you may be able to extract more than one article from your study. In cases where you have more than one research question you may be able to write an article for more than one of those questions. Your literature review may lend itself to an article. In these situations, you may be able to use modified sections on methodology and other components in all the articles you write.

**Guideline 5**—If the guidelines you are following in the journal require an abstract you only need to modify the one you wrote for the dissertation to ensure it reflects the content of the article. If no abstract is required you can still use the dissertation abstract—modified, of course—as the introduction to the article. In an introduction you need to tell readers, as briefly as possible, the purpose and significance of the study so they will understand what to expect and will want to keep reading. **Write for the reader!**

**Guideline 6**—In a dissertation the section on a review of the literature is often the longest. In an article you may include a brief section on the relevant literature related to the points in your article, or you may sprinkle relevant quotes and citations throughout the article.

**Guideline 7**—You will also include a section on methodology in your article, but it needs to be pared down to the basic essentials. You worked hard on this chapter in your dissertation to make sure you could illustrate an understanding of research methods required by your committee—especially the professor with strong research credentials. In the article make a case for the research methods you selected to frame the study, and make sure information on participants, sample size, surveys, site selection, interview processes, etc. are clearly stated. **Write for the reader!**

**Guideline 8**—Your section on findings/results is a key section in your article because it is where you clearly display your answer to the “so-what” question or questions you asked in your research questions. This is the section that answers the question your readers will ask “Where is the beef?” You may use tables to

illustrate your answer, but do not overkill with tables. A narrative explanation of the findings, in lieu of a complicated table the reader has to interpret, works better. And if you include a narrative explanation you do not need to include a table.

### **Write for the reader!**

**Guideline 9**—The discussion/analysis section is equally important to the findings/results section because this is where you “make meaning” for your audience. This is what you have learned and concluded about the topic at hand—accurate, focused, limited to the scope of the context, and relevant to the profession. You probably do not need a section on conclusions if this section is framed appropriately. And you do not need to suggest further research which is a common element in dissertations. **Write for the reader!**

**Guideline 10**—You will have many more references in the dissertation than you will need for the article. In the dissertation you include many references because you are informing your committee that you have covered the subject thoroughly. In the article you only need those references used in the article. You may actually include new references in the article not used in the dissertation that refer to new information. Since you may have been working on the dissertation for a number of years it is likely that there are some relevant contemporary quotes and other information you could add in the article. If your subject is a “hot topic” there are likely new quotes and information that would make your article up to date.

### **Final Steps**

You should now have a draft of your article, but there is still more to do. Ask a colleague who will be frank with you to review the draft and critique it. A professor on your committee would be an excellent choice for a review. If you have colleagues who have published ask one for a review. Ask a member of your communications staff to review it for clarity and correct grammar. Secure as much feedback as you can from reliable sources.

After making sure that you comply with all the guidelines of the journal to which you are submitting the article send it on its way but submit only one article at a time. With some journals you will only be required to send an email with the article attached; some journals will require you to submit the article through a more complicated process.

Be patient. There are informal venues for publishing you may hear from in one or two weeks. The more formal and established journals will likely send your article

to reviewers in the field which will take longer. After receiving the reviewers critiques, if the editor thinks your article is promising, you will receive the critiques and will be asked to edit your article to comply with the recommendations. If the critiques are reasonable to you send your revised version as soon as you can. If you think the critiques are not reasonable (and sometimes that is the case) thank the editor and indicate you will not continue to revise your article.

If you are sure your article is worth publishing do not give up if it is rejected several more times. Keep revising and keep sending to other journals. However, if the journal suggests your article could be published for a fee ranging from \$100 to \$500 do not accept such an offer; these journals are not respectable journals and operate only as a money-making business. You can actually get an entire book published if you are willing to pay the fees.

Do not give up is the important conclusion to reach at this point. If you followed the guidelines above then you began this process by determining with input from friends and professional colleagues that your article is worth publishing. So, stay with it, and, if you decide the effort is not going to achieve the outcome you want, begin work on your next article.