

Things to Keep in Mind.....

When is your paper ready? You want to make sure that your paper is appropriate and meets the journal guidelines. You also want to keep your work circulating. If you cannot work on a paper for three or more months, you may want to send it out for review. Keep in mind this is a good time to use this strategy since graduate students do not typically have to pay the submission fees to the journals.

Should you circulate your paper? Ask your advisor, other professors, and your colleagues to read your paper and give you feedback. If there is a venue that addresses your field of interest (such as the Social Network working group and the Social Movement/Social Justice working group), make sure that you get involved. You can learn a great deal by reading other papers and having a group of colleagues respond to your work. You may also want to talk to your advisor about sending your paper to professors at other universities. Not only will this give you a fresh perspective, it provides you an opportunity to network with other individuals that share your particular interest.

Should you collaborate with another student or a professor? Sole-authored articles are important for the CV but the old saying "two heads are better than one" is very true and can lead to good publishable material. Sometimes talking with someone who does similar work to your own or has similar interests can give you both a new angle. The process is very different from working alone and it can be difficult at times. Although you will spend extra time figuring out different writing styles, work habits, and opinions, working with someone else – be it a mentor or graduate student colleague - can be motivating and help you stay on task.

How do you choose a journal? Keep in mind that journals are idiosyncratic and as a result the articles may reflect the particular interests of the editor. Look at past issues of the journal and see what types of articles have been published over the last year. Do this for several journals. You may find that one or two journals have several articles published in your area of study, and may be a good target for your own work. Ask your advisor help you with this process. S/he can help you determine which journals are good candidates for you to target.

What happens when a paper is rejected? There are a couple things to keep in mind if a journal rejects your paper. First, it is not personal. A rejection from a journal does not mean that your paper is junk and that you should trash it. Keep in mind a rejection is an opinion, and like all opinions you agree with some and not others. Second, the editor or reviewer may be wrong. S/he may reject your paper on grounds that you think are false or unreasonable. While this is irritating, it is not worth dwelling on or responding to (especially the latter).

What should you do with rejections? The first time you read a rejection letter and the accompanying comments you may be disappointed and/or annoyed. Put the letter and comments aside awhile. After a few days have passed, re-read and assess the comments. Look for the feedback that can help make your paper better in the long run. You will also want to talk to your advisor. S/he has been through the process before (including rejection) and can help you determine what, if any, changes you should make to the paper before sending it out to a different journal.

Set realistic expectations and keep at it! It is a long process but one you can learn to navigate!