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The Publishing Tips Series

Point-of-Need Guidance to Teach Graduate Students

Graduate students require guidance to navigate the scholarly publishing process as new authors. Librarians grapple with reaching authors with relevant information at the right time. Unlike the more reliable schedule for some library services like instruction and orientation, authors publish at various times year-round. In response to these challenges and findings from my own research on graduate student needs, I created and piloted the Publishing Tips Series in the fall of 2024 at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). This series is an asynchronous text- and audio-based program, addressing common questions about publishing from graduate students.

Why I Created the Publishing Tips Series

My sources of inspiration came from research, students, and colleagues. When I looked at the literature on graduate students learning to publish and conducted research on the topic, I saw that graduate students have a gap in publishing literacy because it is not consistently taught.[1] To fill this gap, my colleagues and I conducted a survey on publishing to graduate students that included the open-ended question, "Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share about the publishing process?" A student responded, "Given the uncertainties in timing of publication process and when certain questions come up, a freely accessible source of info (i.e., webpage or prerecorded content) would be much more useful to me than a workshop at a particular date/time." This strong statement expresses an interest in more support available just in time and sporadically, which helped me conclude that I needed to take an asynchronous approach that was active but also could be accessed at any time. One more major source of inspiration was the Research Impact Challenge by Rebecca Welzenbach at the University of Michigan.[2] In 2019, Welzenbach conducted a two-week opt-in email program with messages sent once daily and reported good engagement and positive feedback with this approach.[3] These findings and this model informed the Publishing Tips Series.

Designing and Implementing the Publishing Tips Series

The Publishing Tips Series took about three months to develop, including producing the content, sorting out logistics, and promoting and running the series.

Content

First I mapped out the content. The publishing questions that this pilot addressed were:

1. How long does it take to get an article published?

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2. How should I choose a journal for my article? Is this a good journal?
3. What are the decision points during the publishing process?
4. How do I respond to peer reviewers' comments?
5. How do I get support for the cost of open access publishing?
6. Can I use this thing (e.g., photo, quote, data, figure) in my article without violating copyright? Also how does it work to include an article in my dissertation?

Each question formed one weekly installment of the Publishing Tips Series. The content primarily focused on articles but also mentioned books and dissertations when relevant.

The ways that I determined the topics included reflecting on questions I have received from graduate students, gaps in the publishing literacy of students as identified by research, and threshold concepts that were necessary to establish before subsequent guidance could be shared. The most frequent questions and comments that I have heard in workshops and consultations with graduate students are the questions about time to publication, followed by how to address peer review feedback and expressions of surprise that publishing can cost money (weeks 1, 4, and 5). Additionally, research shows that students expect to receive journal recommendations from their advisors.[4] Although valuable, a journal recommendation does not teach authors what factors to consider in choosing a journal (week 2). The issues of decision points during the publishing process and copyright (weeks 3 and 6) are ones about which authors ask less frequently but are crucial to know for navigating publishing, so weaving those in for context and reference when students reach those stages of publishing was important. Many publishing matters were compelling but did not make the cut, owing to the need to fit the series in the quarter schedule, capacity for running this pilot, and the goal to be succinct.

Furthermore, I had to presume some baseline knowledge of publishing on the part of the readers and listeners. Teaching concepts like why researchers publish, what peer review is, what copyright is and why it exists, and more would have made the series long and unwieldy, though these would be great topics for a future iteration of the series.

The tips ranged in length from 1,100 to 1,700 words, and the identical audio episodes ranged in length from eight to twelve minutes. Although I hoped they would be shorter, the concepts are complex. To make the tips approachable and actionable, each installment included an overview, headers and brief sections, a list of tips, a section called "Putting It into Practice" with exercises to learn more, contact information for questions, and a preview of the next week's topic. Participants could not only read or listen to the series but also engage as lightly or deeply with the exercises and resources as they liked.

Logistics
After planning and writing the content, the next issue was how to space and schedule the series. Because students receive high volumes of email and have full schedules, I opted for a frequency of once a week for six weeks, with emails sent on Thursday afternoons to avoid the rush at the start or end of the week. The pilot ran from October 24–December 5, 2024, skipping Thanksgiving break.

Although the content was distributed at set dates and times, the Publishing Tips Series is meant to be asynchronous so that participants can engage with it on their own time. The series was time bound because students signed up for the incremental distribution in the

same ephemeral window of time. However, students could read and/or listen to the content anytime, whether it was the same day, following week, or next summer. Although sign-ups have concluded, the content is available online for anyone to read[5] and on Spotify to listen.[6]

Choosing software and platforms was a matter of availability. The University Library subscribes to an email marketing platform, so it was the clear choice. The campus uses Google Workspace, including Forms, which served as the sign-up mechanism. Anyone could register, so the form included a question about affiliation with the university.

For the audio portion, episodes mirror the written content and offer an alternative way to absorb information. Students could listen while doing something else like commuting. Making the Publishing Tips Series multimodal so that it could either be read or heard increased the learning options. With support from the University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, I used Spotify for Creators to upload and share the audio as podcast episodes, Blue Dot Sessions for music, Hindenburg for recording, and the Library's Audio Production Studio for equipment.

Promotion and Implementation

Next up was promotion of the series, which required a variety of strategies. At the annual resource fair during graduate student orientation, a cross-departmental team handed out flyers containing a logo and QR code with a signup link. Librarians promoted the series to classes, departments, and faculty. Emails with the flyer were sent out by the Graduate Student Commons and Division of Graduate Studies. I added a blurb about the series to the quarterly library newsletter that the library sends to graduate students. I contacted individual faculty so that they could share the series with students or participate themselves.

Running the series went smoothly. All of the content was written prior to the start, but not all of it was loaded into the email platform or recorded. The recordings were typically not ready until the day before or day of the email, so the timing required finalizing the email and episode a few hours before it was sent.

The participants totaled eighty people, which is a contrast from the typical three to fifteen attendees at my publishing workshops on a campus with 2,000 graduate students. Participants consisted of sixty-one graduate students, two undergraduate students, one faculty member, and sixteen staff, mostly from the library but also other units at UCSC and across the University of California.

The readership and listening rates were strong. The open rate for emails ranged from 85% to 94% of recipients. As of May 2025, episodes have been either streamed for at least sixty seconds or downloaded for a total of thirty-one times across all episodes.

As the Publishing Tips Series concluded, I gathered feedback. The last message of the series included a feedback request with a link to the form. A reminder message went out to encourage more responses. To incentivize feedback, two $50 gift cards were given to two randomly selected graduate student respondents. Participants who provided feedback numbered fourteen, primarily graduate students.

During and after the Publishing Tips Series, several unsolicited events reflected its value. A graduate student participant replied to one of the series emails to say the series was helpful and they looked forward to subsequent weeks. A faculty member invited me to teach a session about publishing in their course during the following quarter. Advertising this series was a way to highlight how the library offers author services.

Takeaways from the Publishing Tips Series

My goal was to not let perfect be the enemy of good. It was not feasible to have everything prepared and scheduled prior to launch. Staff illness and other circumstances necessitated on-the-fly adjustments. For example, a podcast episode was not ready one week; I still sent out the textual content in the weekly email and included a note saying that the episode would be ready the next week. Despite my interest in having everything ready to go at the start of the series, the ability to make changes, as one may do in a workshop, was useful. In the future, I would consider setting up the series as an automation so that people could subscribe to receive the content at intervals whenever they sign up, instead of during a set time frame, but it would require everything to be ready at once.

Based on what I learned, I would continue offering the two formats—text and audio—as well as add videos or visual content so that participants have even more options for consuming the series. The series frequency of once a week worked well, as did the length, though more content would have been good if time and scheduling allowed because students have a lot of questions about publishing. Additionally, discipline-specific publishing guidance could be incorporated into the content more directly.

For future iterations, I would like to discuss more introductory topics about publishing, such as how journals relate to publishers, how common rejection is, and how to develop a publishing strategy. Adding author interviews would be compelling to provide real-life stories about academic publishing. The episodes in this first season matched the emails, but adding author stories raises questions of whether episodes would match the text portion, whether episodes would instead be supplemental, whether interview transcripts would be included with or in emails, and how to find the stories to feature. Stories could include faculty experiences, student endeavors, tales of rejection, and more.

Next Steps

The Publishing Tips Series reached more students than a single workshop of mine has, and the feedback was overwhelmingly favorable. Plus, now that the content has been created, it can be shared repeatedly. For librarians considering moving their outreach to an asynchronous mode, I found this form of instruction to be manageable as the only scholarly communication librarian, scalable to any number of participants, more active than web pages, and excellent in terms of feedback. Although the one-on-one connection from workshops and consultations is lost in this approach, the asynchronous method still leaves the door open for participants to reach out with questions. The scale means it reaches many more graduate students. Since some students may be nervous to ask their question or not know the library can help, the series gave them a low-barrier way to engage with the library and learn about the topic.

Given the success and positivity, I am considering leveraging this format for subsequent series, such as a part two with answers to other publishing questions, a series on copyright, and/or one on dissertation submission. The series effectively demonstrates the need for and value of point-of-need support for graduate student authors.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Christie Hurrell et al., "Learning and Teaching about Scholarly Communication: Findings from Graduate Students and Mentors," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 24, no. 1 (2024): 83–104, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2024.a916991; Christy Caldwell et al., "'It Is Such a Hidden Curriculum Thing': Graduate Students' Perceptions of Publishing," *Journal of Graduate Librarianship* 2, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.59942/2995-9063.1021.

2. Rebecca Welzenbach, "Research Impact Challenge – Research Guides at University of Michigan Library," LibGuide, accessed June 6, 2025, https://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=914633&p=6589581.

3. Rebecca Welzenbach, "Research Impact Challenge Report Out," March 14, 2019, http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/148279.

4. Caldwell et al., "'It Is Such a Hidden Curriculum Thing.'"

5. Martha Stuit, "Publishing Tips Series – Research Guides at the University of California, Santa Cruz," LibGuide, accessed June 6, 2025, https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/publishing-process/publishing-tips-series.

6. Martha Stuit, "UCSC Publishing Tips," Spotify, accessed June 6, 2025, https://open.spotify.com/show/4hDdNALwOcAuvcft39GDut.