

EDITORS' CORNER

Publishing in *American Antiquity*: Advice for Young Scholars

At the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in New Orleans the editor of *American Antiquity* joined other editors and authors in a publication workshop for students organized by Rachel J. Hamilton. The topic was how to publish in archaeology. The panel discussion featured short presentations by David S. Brose, Daniel Goodwin, Jaime Litvak King, Vernon J. Knight, Jr., J. Jefferson Reid, and Prudence M. Rice, followed by a question-and-answer period. Although the room was packed with students, many more who were not there could have benefited from the workshop. We feel, therefore, that our contribution to the workshop is appropriate for an "Editors' Corner." What follows is a summary of the editor's remarks prepared in conjunction with the managing editor.

Communication is at the center of our professional responsibility within government, private, and academic settings. At the core of communication techniques available to us in this multimedia, high-tech age is publication in scholarly journals. Learning to communicate effectively through publication is an integral and critical part of the professionalization process in archaeology. The question, then, is not whether to publish, but when, what, how, and where to publish. All of these questions cannot be addressed here, but we would like to address a few topics of concern to young scholars as they begin or refine their responsibility to publish.

First, we discuss the organization of the editorial office. Second, some practical steps to publishing in *American Antiquity* are offered. Third, we list a few of the major problems and pitfalls to avoid.

How is the office organized? Working together with the editor at the University of Arizona are Dr. Teresita Majewski, managing editor and coordinator for Current Research; Barbara Montgomery, editorial assistant for production; and Drs. Axel Nielsen and María Nieves Zedeño, editorial assistants for Spanish Language. Other associate and assistant editors who assist in preparation of materials for the journal operate elsewhere, and largely independently, to carry out publication tasks related to specific sections of the journal.

The manuscript-processing pathway for the journal is illustrated by tracking a manuscript submission from receipt to publication. Four copies and an original manuscript are received, logged in, and assigned a manuscript number according to whether the submission is an article, report, comment, or forum (see "Editor's Corner: *American Antiquity* and Space," *American Antiquity* 55: 449–450). The author is sent a postcard to acknowledge receipt of the manuscript. The editor selects four referees to get full coverage of all aspects of the subject treated in the manuscript (see "Editor's Corner: Peer Review at *American Antiquity*," *American Antiquity* 55:665–666). The author of a paper may suggest potential reviewers or persons to avoid. We ask that complete addresses be provided for possible referees, but name only for those to avoid. The manuscript is then filed until the reviewers return their evaluations. An attempt has been made to monitor slow reviewers, but the office is overloaded, especially this past year when the production process "went electronic." We have yet to achieve the desired turn-around time for getting an initial decision back to an author.

Editorial decisions on a manuscript are made on the basis of the editor's reading of the paper, the referees' comments, and the editor's evaluation of the referees' comments. Most commonly, the editor encourages an author to revise and resubmit. At this stage the managing editor also provides input on matters of style and formatting. The revise-and-resubmit process continues until the author and the editor are in agreement that the best publishable paper has been crafted, at which time the manuscript is turned over to the managing editor to put into production.

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Not every manuscript submitted is published. Most of those counted under the “rejection” category are inappropriate for *American Antiquity* in that they treat topics better suited to specialized or regional journals. Often the specialized nature of a paper is apparent upon submission, while at other times the editor may rely on the judgment of reviewers. In either case we make an effort to refer authors to appropriate publication outlets.

What are some practical tips for publishing in *American Antiquity*? First, match the presentation of an idea to the audience. Keep in mind that the *American Antiquity* audience is broad and international. Be certain that you have a single idea that is well developed rather than a group of ideas that look like several papers in one. By the same token, do not try to force one idea into doing more or having a greater relevance than it actually deserves. Pay close attention to clarity and precision of language; you are reporting or seeking to convince, and you want to be understood (see “Editor’s Corner: On the Language of Archaeology,” *American Antiquity* 56:387–388). Tables and figures should be clear, properly prepared, and essential to the paper. Be sensitive to gender in language.

When preparing your manuscript for submission, follow the *American Antiquity* style guide (Vol. 48, No. 2, 1983) and refer to recent issues or contact the managing editor for matters not covered. Language evolves, and a new style guide is currently in preparation. Authors should have *Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th ed., on a nearby bookshelf.

The references cited in your paper must be accurate and essential to your presentation. Be certain that each reference cited in the text has a counterpart in the “References Cited” section at the end of the paper. Check the accuracy and page numbers for verbatim quotations and paraphrases of others’ ideas. Reference all critical points in an interpretation or argument to author(s), year of publication, and *page number*.

Get colleagues to comment extensively on your paper. It is always preferable to be criticized by your friends informally than by others in print. Constructive criticism is one of the essential components of scholarship at all academic levels. Set up discussion groups to encourage and give candid criticism.

A well-crafted, concise abstract is usually the last section you write, yet it is essential to your paper. Given the many places that journal contributions are indexed and abstracted, as well as the fact that many readers judge whether to read an article from the abstract, the abstract may well be the most important part of the paper. It should be a *factual summary of the contents and conclusions of the paper*, refer to new information that is being presented, and indicate its relevance. The abstract should *not* be an outline of the paper with each item in the outline expanded into a sentence. Do not use passive voice. Extremely useful treatments of the subject can be found in “A Scrutiny of the Abstract, II,” by Kenneth K. Landes, and “Guide for Preparation and Publication of Abstracts,” originally prepared by The Royal Society, London, England. Both are published together in the *Bulletin of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists* 50:1992–1993 (1966). It is also the author’s responsibility to submit a Spanish-language translation of the abstract (usually at the revise-and-resubmit stage). Be sure that the Spanish version of the abstract is prepared competently, and with all the proper accents. Contact the editorial office if you cannot locate someone to prepare your abstract. You should expect to pay for a proper translation.

Of course, the converse of tips for “getting published” is the list of common errors to avoid, not all of which are fatal flaws. The following is an abbreviated list of some of the more common errors, omissions, and inconveniences we encounter. Writing is unclear, too wordy, or disorganized. Artwork is sloppy or will not reproduce well. The references are riddled with errors. The manuscript relies excessively on personal communication and hard-to-find gray literature to support arguments and inferences, so that only through heroic efforts can scholars verify data and interpretations. The work of others is unnecessarily denigrated. Regarding the involvement of colleagues, there are important issues of coauthorship and of the protocols of group research that must be kept in mind as we develop explicit procedural guidelines.

The toughest obstacle to overcome for young scholars is rejection. After vehemently proclaiming the idiocy of the reviewers and the editor’s spineless and myopic capitulation to their ineptitude, two points should guide the calmer thoughts of the rejected scholar. First, the reviewers put much

time and effort into your manuscript, and their comments should be taken seriously. Second, always revise and resubmit to another journal because few other than *American Antiquity* have a backlog of papers awaiting publication.

The final piece of advice is to work closely with the editorial office, and call if you have questions before or after submitting a manuscript. Our role is to assist young scholars in exercising their responsibility to publish.

J. Jefferson Reid
Editor

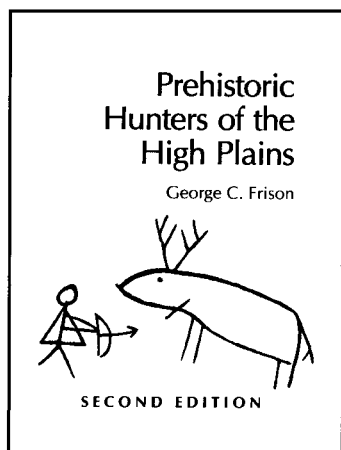
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