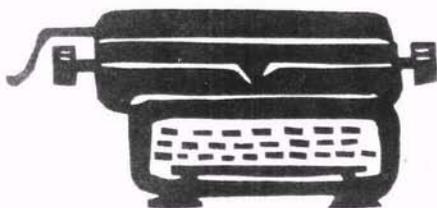


Writing for Journal Publication



WILLIAM C. MILLER*

BEING published in professional journals is competitive. Each year, *Educational Leadership* receives over 700 articles and publishes approximately 130. Other journals have a much higher rejection rate. These odds can be greatly improved by taking a rational approach to the problem of having your manuscript accepted. The following suggestions will help.

1. *Analyze your reasons for writing.*—Take care not to get caught in the “publish or perish” stampede. Writing that is produced just to get published usually shows it.

Editor's note: At the ASCD 1974 Annual Conference, a special session was held for fledgling authors. Almost 200 individuals interested in writing for publication received an orientation to the ASCD publications program by Mary-Margaret Scobey, then Chairperson of the Publications Committee, and Robert R. Leeper, Editor and Associate Secretary of ASCD. A panel discussed writing for professional journals. (The panel was composed of Stanley Elam, *Phi Delta Kappan*; Derek Burleson, SIECUS; and William C. Miller, Wayne County Intermediate School District, Detroit, Michigan; and moderated by James E. House, Deputy Director, Detroit Education Task Force.) This article is based on the presentation made by Dr. Miller, present Chairman, ASCD Publications Committee.

Hopefully, you have a burning, unique message and a sincere desire to share it. Perhaps you know of or are involved in a really significant or effective program and feel a responsibility to disseminate information about it.

It may be that you want to respond to the challenge of expressing an idea that's important to you with clarity and impact. You may have experienced the inner satisfaction of seeing your words in print or having your colleagues compliment you on a publication and wish to have that feeling again. You may share with the late Earl Kelley the realization that writing can help you clarify your own thinking. Dr. Kelley was delighted with what emerged as he wrote, often exclaiming “I never knew I knew that!” Anne Morrow Lindberg is also a great proponent of the value of writing. She has said, “I must write it all out, at any cost. Writing is thinking. It is more than living, for it is being conscious of living.”¹

2. *Be prepared to work.*—James Michener, one of America's most accom-

¹ Quoted in *Time*, March 11, 1974. p. K11.

* William C. Miller, Deputy Superintendent, Wayne County Intermediate School District, Detroit, Michigan, and Chairman, ASCD Publications Committee

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plished and acclaimed writers, states, "Getting words on paper is difficult. Nothing I write is good enough in the first draft, not even personal letters. Important work must be written over and over—up to six or seven times."² If you can imagine researching and then writing and rewriting a novel like *Hawaii* seven times, you can appreciate the effort involved.

3. *Plan your approach.*—To be successful in writing, you must have something worthwhile to say. One reason much of the writing for professional journals is so poor and the rejection rate so high is that the writer's purpose is just "to get published" rather than to communicate something of value. Clarify your purposes, and plan carefully.

Select your target group and *then* locate the appropriate journal.³ (Become familiar with the purposes of the organization the journal represents, the journal themes, style, and format. Query the journal. A brief letter inquiring about the editor's interest in the article you are considering will save both you and the editor a great deal of time. Editors are generally helpful people. In reality, they depend on you. They need manuscripts and are often willing to give assistance to a fledgling writer whose manuscript shows promise.

You'll be more successful if you plan ahead. Study the list of future themes of the journal you've selected. Identify emerging issues. Try to anticipate trends. Remember, the content of magazines is selected well ahead of time, so seasonal articles must be submitted early and being "timely" requires careful planning.

² James A. Michener. *A Michener Miscellany: 1950-1970*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1973.

³ Dr. Elam mentioned several publications which describe the purposes, readership, and manuscript requirements for professional journals. These sources are:

Darlene Arnold and Kenneth Doyle, Jr. *An Index to Publications and Publishing Opportunities in Psychology and Education*. Minneapolis: Measurement Research Center, University of Minnesota, n.d.

Alvin Renetzky, editor in chief. *Directory of Scholarly and Research Publishing Opportunities*. Orange, New Jersey: Academic Media, 1971.

4. *Give attention to style, technique, and mechanics.*—Whole books have been written on writing technique and style. You may wish to study such volumes. In general, you should avoid wordiness. (Don't use such phrases as "due to the fact that," "with reference to," "inasmuch as.") Using words economically and keeping sentences short will aid clarity. The writer should avoid "educationese" and should use a style which is appropriate to the target journal (neither too formal nor too "folksy").

A technique which will foster clarity is to outline first and then write to the outline. To *really* polish your work—outline, write to the outline, outline what you've written, reorganize that outline and rewrite to the revised outline. Such an approach is hard work and time consuming, but will result in tight, logical, and effectively written prose.

Although certainly not as important as what you say and how you say it, the appearance of your manuscript can affect its reception by the editor. The manuscript of an experienced writer reflects attention to mechanics. Your manuscript should be neatly typed, on good quality paper, double-spaced, and written on one side of the paper only. The document should be paper clipped (not stapled) and should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Your name, title, address, and the approximate number of words of the manuscript should appear in the upper right hand corner of the first page. It's a poor policy, incidentally, to send your manuscript to more than one editor at a time. Acceptance by two journals can be embarrassing and will assure that your future submissions will be rejected out of hand.

5. *Get reactions to your writing.*—Before you send your manuscript to an editor, you need to test how well it communicates. It's difficult to be objective about your own work, so it will be helpful to get colleagues to react to the manuscript. It would be well to establish an ongoing mutual criticism arrangement with another writer. Not only will reactions help, but it is useful to be in a

climate where writing is valued. (That is why a large proportion of articles come from university faculty members.) It is essential to keep writing, and to keep the search for suitable topics for articles in the front of your mind. Be alert to ideas and to emerging issues. Watch developments in your day-to-day work which are worthy of sharing. Use efforts in other areas (speeches, teaching, research, and personal experiences) as subjects of articles.

6. *Select the type of article with care.*—In general, most editors have too many exhortative articles. (Such articles exclaim that education needs to be better, and urge us onward and upward without specifying exactly how.) Many journals welcome articles which describe a program or practice ("Here's how we did it.") Articles which present new concepts and ideas are usually well received. Most editors are short on readable articles which are based on research or present significant data in a digestible form. Remember, the key is to know the type of material your target journal uses.

A good way to get started in writing for journals is to offer book reviews. Many professional magazines use these short, tightly written pieces (and credit is given in the journal and your name would be listed in *Book Review Digest* and other guides (if you're *still* concerned about seeing your name in print)). Study the types of books reviewed in the journal you've selected. Query first and then do your best.

Many who attended the ASCD conference session seemed awed by the prospect of writing for journal publication. Others seemed to fear rejection of their material. Writing a professional article isn't easy but it's within the skill of all professionals. Many articles used in *Educational Leadership* are by first time writers. Robert Leeper reports that often these first time efforts are superior to the solicited manuscripts from experienced writers. The list of themes for *Educational Leadership* appears in the May 1974 journal and also on pp. 4-6 of this issue. Study them, plan carefully, pick up your pencil, and get started! □

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