Publishing from your Master’s or PhD Research

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My Perspective

• Postgrad supervisor
• Research-focused academic
• Methodology: Epidemiology, intervention research, qual/mixed methods
• Content areas: Public health, work & health, policy & practice interventions

• Alternative perspectives—many…
Why publish?

- Growing expectations to do so...
- Publications are a key measure of research performance, from university-level down to supervisors
- ...

Why publish?

- To be a practicing scientist...
- You have to open your work to external scrutiny...
- Which is done mainly through peer-review of publications, presentations (e.g., conference papers), funding proposals, etc.
Peer review

• Peer review ~ critical appraisal by other scientists who are external to your supervisor group, university, collaborators

• Relies on dispassionate and well-reasoned critique, civility, declaration and mitigation of CoI, engaged and active editorial involvement…

• An imperfect process… but alternatives?
## Some pro’s and con’s

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro’s</th>
<th>Con’s</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Real experience of science ‘warts and all’</td>
<td>• Takes more time than traditional thesis (peer review process months, sometimes years)</td>
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<td>• Published authorships yours forevermore</td>
<td>• Sometimes requires funding, or challenging decisions about how best to use limited funding</td>
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<td>• Improves the quality of your research</td>
<td>• Publication challenges/difficulties could redirect your research focus</td>
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<td>• Builds collegial and collaborative networks around the world</td>
<td>• Peer review can be bruising: harsh, wrong, everything in between…</td>
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<td>• Facilitates external examination process</td>
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<td>• Happy supervisors… happy universities…</td>
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Peer review can be bruising

- Critical to learn how to take criticism
- Many PG students very self-critical
- Most new to external review and feel anxious or vulnerable
- Be mindful of the trap of equating your work with your self
- Imposter syndrome widespread
Shame  Vulnerability

• Don’t conflate shame and vulnerability
• Shame = believing we are flawed, unworthy
• Vulnerable = uncertainty, risk, emotional exposure, open, engaged
• Shame is limiting/crippling, kills innovation
• Vulnerability can be scary… but essential for learning/growth

See Brene Brown’s books
Overcoming publication challenges

Use your supervisors and other networks to help you weigh up pro’s & con’s

• Keep the whole thesis in focus
• Don’t have to publish all sections/chapters
• Look far and wide for publication support
• Aim (realistically) high, but don’t be discouraged. Knock-backs ok!
• ‘Every paper has a home’
Writing a Paper: A public health / epidemiology perspective
Qualifications…

• One of many approaches to/perspectives on paper writing
• Public health / epi perspective
  – Multi-authorship common
  – Typical research article 3000-4500 words
  – IMRAD structure the norm
• Focus on empirical results or “Original Research” paper
• Introduction
• Methods
• Results and
• Discussion

How to Read a Paper: Getting your bearings (Deciding what the paper is about) Greenhalgh, T. BMJ, 1997;315:243-246

How to Read a Paper: Assessing the methodological quality of published papers Greenhalgh, T. BMJ, 1997;315:305-308
Introduction

• What’s known in the area?
• What are the gaps in knowledge?
• How does this research contribute to advancement of knowledge?
• (‘So what?’)
• Conclude Intro with clear research questions or hypotheses
Methods & Design

• Do the research methods & design suit the research question?
• Typical subsections
  – Study Design
  – Study Population / Sample
  – Data Collection
  – Measures
  – Analysis
Results

• Usually some descriptive results, progressing to analytic
• Concise—can be shortest section
• Answer RQ’s(!)
• Typical tables (figures):
  – T1 Sample descrip, summary measures
  – T2 Crude or bivariate analyses
  – T3+ Multivariate analyses
Discussion

• Clear interpretation of results?
• Conclusions justified by the results?
• How does the paper’s contribution relate to what is known in the field?
• If applicable, what are the implications for policy and practice?
Discussion

• General structure:
  – First (para): summarise results in relation to RQ (w/o repeating results…)
  – Relate findings to what’s known
  – What’s new or novel in findings?
  – Strengths & limitations
  – Implications for policy & practice (if appl)
  – Conclusions / Future Directions
Abstract

• Structured (vs not):
  – Aims/Obj/Background
  – Methods
  – Results
  – Discussion

• Some journals also require
  – *What’s Known? What does this paper add?*
  – ‘*So What?’*
Abstract

• Clear, concise, and interesting?
• Adequate detail, but not too much?
• Conveys/tells a story?
• Draws the reader in, makes him or her want to read the full paper?
Getting There

• RQ = your anchor, always return there when hit difficulty
• Structure (above) vs the art of expression
• Develop & test your story, your narrative by presenting at conferences
• View conference presentation as a way to refine and sharpen your paper
• Anticipate and don’t be discouraged by criticism (thick skin)—take what’s helpful, let the rest go
Remember—
“Every paper has a home”

Excellent library resources:
Where to Publish
Your Publishing Plan
Your Author Profiles