Guidelines for Publishing in *portal*

Marianne Ryan and Sara Dreyfuss

If you would like to publish your work in *portal* but do not know where to begin, this primer might be useful. Following are parameters to keep in mind and an overview of what *portal* editors and referees look for in a submission.

**Editorial Philosophy, Aims, and Scope**

First, make sure that *portal* is the right journal for you. Look at two or three of its recent issues to get a sense of the topics it covers, its scope, and its intended readership. The editors of *portal* reject many submissions simply because they are aimed at the wrong audience. Almost all *portal* articles deal with the impact of libraries within the context of higher education. Manuscripts about elementary education or K–12 libraries, for example, are likely not a good fit.

*portal* focuses on qualitative or quantitative research about the role of libraries and librarianship within the academy. Articles may address how technology affects librarianship and scholarship or examine the role of libraries in fulfilling the mission of their parent institution. Other papers deal with such topics as archival practice, copyright, data management, organizational theory, digital humanities, information technology, new approaches to research and teaching, and open access. Still others link librarianship to other disciplines, including computer science, management, and law. Both basic and applied research papers, including case studies, are welcome, as are essays that explore the more theoretical or philosophical underpinnings of the library profession.

The editors and Editorial Board of *portal* consider it critical for the library profession to engage a global audience, and so the journal welcomes submissions from other countries. To ensure clarity and readability, *portal* encourages international authors to seek a thorough review of any manuscript by a professional colleague who is fluent in English.

**The Manuscript Review Process**

Submissions to *portal* go through a double-blind review process: the reviewers of the paper do not know who the authors are, nor do the authors know the identity of the reviewers.
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The managing editor redacts any information or embedded metadata from the manuscript that could identify the authors and sends it to two referees, members of the *portal* Editorial Board.

The *portal* reviewers rate the submission using a standard assessment rubric. It asks the referees to evaluate the manuscript in several areas, including appropriateness to the journal’s readership, originality, literature review, research methodology, and clarity of writing. Some referees also provide authors with a marked-up manuscript with additional comments and suggestions.

The editors who launched *portal* in January 2000 started the new journal in part “to provide a more inviting, constructive, and productive environment for authors.” Managing Editor Gloriana St. Clair explained:

> The major journals in most disciplines have prided themselves on their high rejection rates. The rationale has been that a high rejection rate signifies a strong commitment to and compelling evidence of quality. Nothing could be more wasteful of the scarce resources for library research than to replicate a system that encourages authors to create a finished product to be judged and rejected.

The editors of *portal* think a more productive approach is to offer rich feedback as a type of mentoring to inexperienced authors. St. Clair says, “The *portal* board and editors want to help authors from the moment they decide to engage in research to the moment when they elect to submit the finished product either to *portal* or to some other journal.” The assessment framework asks referees to indicate when a submission has merit but needs additional work before publication. If they determine that an author should revise and resubmit a manuscript, the editor will forward that recommendation to the author. Once the author has incorporated the suggestions of the referees, the revised manuscript will go back for review, usually to the original referees but occasionally to two other members of the Editorial Board. Over time, we have seen this process produce outstanding results.

**Manuscript Preparation**

Follow *portal*’s instructions for manuscript preparation to the letter, including the requirements for length, formatting, and citations. If you do not comply with the guidelines, the editors and referees may have concerns about your article even before they have read it. Some of *portal*’s requirements for the preparation of manuscripts are:

- Write in Microsoft Word™ or a similar word-processing application.
- Avoid using any enhanced features of the software, such as fixed headers or footers, the numbered list option, or automatic footnotes.
- Target a manuscript length of about 25 to 35 pages double-spaced. Length is not an exact science, and the *portal* editors often make exceptions for longer submissions, but very brief papers of just a few pages are not suitable.
- Send your article as an attachment to an e-mail in which you provide your full name, academic title, affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address.
- Submit manuscripts and related communications to editor Marianne Ryan, mryan21@luc.edu, with a copy to managing editor Sara Dreyfuss, portalmanagingeditor@gmail.com.
• If your paper has multiple authors, designate one person as the corresponding author.
• Ensure that you have not published the article previously nor have submitted the manuscript elsewhere simultaneously.
• Provide an abstract of approximately 100 words highlighting the scope, methodology, and conclusions of your paper. See the following section on “The Abstract” for additional information.
• Include headings and subheadings. These signposts make it easier for readers to follow your paper.
• Keep use of the passive voice to a minimum.
• Use standard United States spelling. Consult the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) for questions related to spelling and word division.
• Spell out acronyms and abbreviations the first time you use them in the text.
• Include the full name of an author cited in the text when first mentioned, rather than using only last name.
• Obtain copyright permission for any materials from other publications to be reproduced in your article.
• Scrupulously prepare references as endnotes in the Chicago Manual of Style humanities style. See the following “References” section for further details.

Consulting a checklist of more general guidelines for getting an article published can be additionally helpful.4

References

The rules for references in portal include the following:

• Prepare your endnotes according to the 17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style.5
• Provide an endnote citing the source for any direct quotation of a sentence or more as well as for any summary or paraphrase of an author’s ideas. If you need several sentences to explain an author’s reasoning, one note number and one endnote should suffice, but make it clear in the text that you are still citing the same author. Do not use long strings of ibids in endnotes.
• If possible, place note numbers at the end of a sentence or at the end of a clause. Avoid using more than one note number in a single location. If you want to cite more than one source for a given passage, group the citations into a single endnote, separated by semicolons, and put them in the same order as the corresponding material appears in the text.
• When available, provide a URL (uniform resource locator) or DOI (digital object identifier) for references that will enable readers to access them online.
• Do not include an access date on which you consulted an online source; it is not necessary. Such dates have minimal usefulness. You may return to a source several times over days or months when writing your article, and editors cannot easily verify any date you report.
Tables, Figures, and Illustrations

Include appropriate charts, graphs, tables, drawings, and photographs to support your text and summarize your findings. Graphics can add interest and value to an article even if they duplicate information in the text. Many visual learners grasp facts better when presented in graphic form, and some readers look only at the tables and figures without reading the text.

In portal nomenclature, a “table” consists of words and numbers displayed in columns, created entirely on a keyboard. Graphic material, such as pie charts, bar graphs, drawings, and photographs, are called “figures.” Here are portal’s rules for tables and figures:

- Submit all tables and figures as individual files, separate from the article manuscript.
- Create tables and similar material in Microsoft Word using the table function or inserting tabs to create space between columns. Do not use Excel.
- Submit all figures in a high-quality graphics format, such as a tiff (tagged image file format), gif (graphics interchange format), or jpg (Joint Photographic Experts Group) file, with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi (dots per inch). Do not submit figures in Word because the image quality will be poor.
- Ensure that all figures are coherent in gray scale because portal does not print in color.
- Number tables and figures in the order in which they are first referenced in the text, using Arabic numerals.
- Indicate in the text approximately where each table or figure should go.
- Provide a title for each table and a caption explaining each figure.

Feature Articles

Starting five years ago, portal revitalized its features to provide additional publishing opportunities, especially for novice authors. Features are edited but typically not peer-reviewed. They may be shorter than other articles and sometimes lack a research focus. Send proposals or questions about features and related communications to the appropriate feature editor, with copies to Marianne Ryan and Sara Dreyfuss. The following features appear regularly in portal:

- Reports from the Field, Editor Diane Dallis, ddallis@iu.edu, is portal’s longest running feature. It showcases individual and local experiences and lessons learned, institution-specific initiatives, or research that is more limited in scope.
- Global Perspectives, Editor Mark Stover, mark.stover@csun.edu, is designed to underscore the increasing internationalization of higher education and the essential role of libraries in global engagement. Launched in 2015, it spotlights submissions that explore partnerships and initiatives with an international emphasis.
- Worth Noting, Editor Tomalee Doan, tomalee.doan@asu.edu, covers noteworthy trends in academic libraries or in higher education more broadly. It first appeared in 2017, replacing portal’s Book Reviews column. Worth Noting has presented
pilot programs, interviews, and success stories. Occasionally, it features reviews of books and technology solutions.

What to Strive for in Your Article

Your Topic

Articles published in portal should contribute to new knowledge in the field of librarianship by building on previous research or existing scholarship. Try to distinguish your paper from other work on the same topic. Charles Lowry, former director of the Association of Research Libraries and editor emeritus of portal: Libraries and the Academy, noted that articles published in the journal must be “unique, standing apart from other similar work as a new contribution that advances the knowledge of the field or provides a unique service or product.” The editors and referees welcome submissions on topics that have not been widely explored. If you choose a topic that many other authors have investigated, try to explain what your work contributes, how it brings a new or interesting approach, or how your findings move the discussion forward. If yours is a research study, make sure the length of the study and the sample size are appropriate.

Your Writing Style

Write in a clear, readable style. Use mostly short, declarative sentences, and vary the structure of your sentences.

Scholars frequently employ the passive voice, and some sections of academic papers, such as descriptions of methodology, may benefit from using passive constructions. Nevertheless, portal prefers that the active voice is used as much as possible. It will make your writing livelier and more interesting. The active voice also forces you to be clear about who or what is responsible for the action. To convert a sentence from passive to active voice, identify who or what is performing the action expressed in the verb. Make that agent the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly.

Keep yourself out of your article. Many referees and editors believe that the first person is inappropriate for scholarly writing. It may sound awkward, but refer to yourselves as “the authors,” “the researchers,” or “the investigators” instead of “we.” Keep your opinions out of your article, too. Avoid editorializing, value judgments, and loaded words and phrases. Present your information in an open-minded, objective manner. Pay careful attention to your grammar and spelling. Write in complete sentences, with a subject and a verb in each. Make sure your pronouns have an appropriate antecedent and your subjects and verbs agree—that is, a plural subject requires a plural verb, and vice versa.

Editors and reviewers often judge misspellings, typos, and grammatical errors harshly; they can undermine a good first impression. Such flaws raise concern about the overall quality of the submission and the meticulousness of the author. Use your software’s spell check, but remember that it will not catch every error. Proofread your manuscript carefully.
Important Parts of Your Article

The Title
Give your paper a short, catchy title. If the main title does not provide a good description of your article’s content, add a brief subtitle. portal uses large type for titles, so shorter titles look much better.

The Abstract
Work hard on your abstract. Far more people will read this short section than will view the entire article, but many more will read the full article if their interest is piqued by the abstract. The abstract should briefly introduce your topic, summarize your findings, and explain their possible usefulness. Be sure to use keywords that will later help researchers discover your paper. Many databases display only the title, author, and abstract of a journal article on the first screen, and readers must then decide if they want to download the full text.

The Literature Review
Use the literature review to support your work and to show where your findings add to or diverge from past studies. Make sure your review includes the most important and current writings on your topic. Referees often have concerns with scant literature reviews that cite only older sources or omit seminal works on a topic.

The Discussion and Conclusion
These final sections should synthesize and interpret your findings and make the case for why your article is worth publishing. Many writers fail to explain the importance of their discoveries. The conclusion, especially, should describe what is new in your work and what it contributes to the profession of librarianship.

Researching, writing, and preparing a manuscript for publication in portal demand considerable effort. No matter how much time and work it takes, however, finally seeing your article in print will make it worth the trouble.

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Notes
3. Ibid.