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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Writing for publication in *Physical education and sport pedagogy*: reflections and advice from an editorial team

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Abstract The purpose of this article is to provide an introduction to the process of writing for publication in Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, where three issues in particular are analyzed. The first one explains how to write an article for an international scientific publication, drawing the attention that it must be in accordance to the aims and the scope of the journal and that instructions regarding structure should be followed, as well as articles must be clear in regard to theory, method, results, conclusions, summary and key words. The second issue is a step-by-step guide to the review process, which involves the editor's first decision, the decision to return the submission to the author or select two reviewers to revise the article; the feedback given by the reviewers to the editor, which decides and communicates the author; and, if the author must re-submission the article, the way how it happens. Last issue explains how Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy acts in regard to articles written in English as a foreign language. © 2014 Colégio Brasileiro de Ciências do Esporte. Published by Elsevier Editora Ltda. All rights reserved.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Artigo acadêmico;
Revisão;
Pesquisa em educação
física

Escrever para publicar em *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*: reflexões e conselhos de uma equipe editorial

Resumo Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar uma introdução ao processo de escrever artigos acadêmicos para a revista *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, em que três temas em particular são analisados. O primeiro tema explica como escrever um artigo acadêmico especificamente para uma publicação científica internacional, lembrando que ele precisa estar

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alinhado com o escopo e objetivos da publicação e que as instruções quanto à formatação devem ser rigorosamente seguidas, e também que o artigo deve ser claro quanto à teoria, metodologia, resultados, conclusões, resumo, referências e palavras-chave. O segundo explica o passo a passo que a publicação segue para revisar um artigo, que envolve: a decisão inicial do editor; a decisão de retornar o artigo ao autor ou de selecionar dois revisores para revisar o artigo; o *feedback* dos revisores para o editor, que toma a decisão e comunica ao autor; e, se a re-submissão do artigo pelo autor é realizada, a forma como isto ocorre. O último tema esclarece como a revista se posiciona em relação a artigos escritos em inglês cujos autores tenham este idioma como língua estrangeira.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Artículos científicos;
Referato;
Investigación en
educación física

Escribir para publicar en *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*: reflexiones y consejos de un equipo editorial

Resumen El artículo tiene por objetivo presentar una introducción al proceso de escribir artículos científicos para la revista *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*. Tres cuestiones son particularmente analizadas. La primera tiene en cuenta cómo escribir un artículo para una revista internacional, destacando que tiene que corresponder al tema y objetivos de la revista y que las instrucciones en cuanto al formato deben ser seguidas con rigor. Además el artículo tiene que ser claro en relación a teoría, metodología, resultados, conclusiones, resumen, bibliografía y descriptores. La segunda explica cada paso del proceso de evaluación del artículo: la decisión inicial del editor; la decisión de enviar el artículo al autor o elegir dos evaluadores para ello; y, si hay nueva sumisión del artículo, como se la hace. Por último, aclara como la revista se posiciona frente a artículos en inglés escritos por no nativos en el idioma.

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Introduction

Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy is a peer-reviewed English language journal owned by the Association for Physical Education in the UK and published by Routledge. Although the journal is in its 18th volume in 2013, it took its current form in 2004, with a new editor (David Kirk), changing its name from the *European Journal of Physical Education to Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, refocusing its mission, and reconstituting its Editorial Boards. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* seeks to publish high quality educational research for national and international readerships with a specific focus on pedagogy and its components of curriculum, teaching and learning. The journal has grown since 2004 when it published two volumes to 2013 when it published five volumes. In 2012 it was entered for the first time in the Social Science Citation Index with an Impact Factor of 0.769.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an introduction to the process of writing for publication in *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, drawing on reflections and advice from the editorial team which consists of the Editor (Kirk) and four Associate Editors (Hastie, MacPhail, O'Donovan and Quennerstedt). We deal with three issues in particular. These include (1) how to get started to write in the specific genre for an academic article aimed at an international audience, (2) a step-by-step guide to the review process, and (3) advice on writing in English as a foreign language. Our purpose is to decipher the process of writing for publication in a peer reviewed journal and to

provide advice that will assist prospective contributors to this and other journals to avoid elementary mistakes that slow the process of publication down, cause frustration and stress for writers, and increase the workloads of editors and reviewers. We begin at the beginning, how to get started.

Getting started: the specific genre of writing an international academic article

In contrast to writing a monograph, a book chapter or an article for a professional journal, writing an academic article entails a different genre involving several challenges. While there are differences between academic disciplines and traditions in the ways to write academic texts, some general guidance can be suggested. In relation to *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* also some more specific advice can be shared.

Before writing

The first step of writing an academic journal article is often to choose the journal. By identifying potential journals appropriate for your interest a more focused article can be written and we support the idea of writing the paper *after* choosing the journal to aim for. When deciding on a journal, it is important to read the aims and scope statement of the journal to ascertain if the idea for the article suits the journal's readership. In the case of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* the aims and scope text reads:

Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy is the official research journal of the *Association for Physical Education*. The purpose of the journal is to provide a forum for high quality educational research for a national and international readership. We intend this research to have a high impact on both policy and practice.

Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy publishes research that reports educational practices in all appropriate contexts, in particular school physical education, club sport, and active leisure programs. We accept for review papers on a broad range of physical activities, including aquatics, dance, exercise, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure activities, meditative and martial arts and sport.

Pedagogy in these contexts refers to the interacting and interdependent components of knowledge and curriculum, learners and learning, and teachers/coaches, teaching/coaching and teacher/ coach education. We particularly welcome papers that consider the interactions of each of these components and their practice in specific contexts.

All papers must be informed by an appropriate theoretical perspective whether they be conceptually or empirically-based. All genres of educational research will be considered. Regardless of the theoretical perspective and genre, we encourage authors to write in accessible and elegant prose. (<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cpes20/current>)

Not adhering to the aims and the scope of the journal is a very common cause for papers being rejected (even before they are sent for review), and in the case of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* it is often the lack of focus on pedagogy in the articles that warrants many rejections or requests for substantial revisions proposed by both the editors and the reviewers. A suggestion here is to read previous issues of the journal to get an understanding of what pedagogy is and can be within the journal, whether your research topic has been studied and results reported in the journal, and at the same time also to familiarise yourself both with the style of writing and with particular academic discussions in the journal.

When you have chosen a journal, the next step is to read carefully the journal's instructions for authors. It is very important to follow the instructions regarding structure, style of referencing, word count, structured abstract, anonymising the text, and in the case of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* also providing a summary for practitioners. This summary will be published in the Association for Physical Education journal *PE Matters*. To follow these instructions to the letter indicates to us as editors that the authors have concerned themselves with the journal in a serious way. Not following the instructions will inevitably lead to articles being sent back or that delays in the review process will occur.

The writing process

Writing an article involves several initial decisions and considerations. Is it an empirical article using data? Is it a methodological article? Is it a theoretical argument? Is it a combination of these? What is my main argument? How should I structure the article? One good place to start is again to read previous issues of the journal you are publishing in.

Here you can find examples of the different kinds of articles and styles of writing that appear in the journal, as well as gaining awareness of what has been published previously on your particular topic. This is also helpful in the introduction of the article where it is appropriate to refer to previous papers that complement your topic in the journal. One common mistake, as we see it, is that authors do not locate their own work in relation to studies previously published in the journal they are targeting and in other related journal outlets. Through writing an article researchers need to be aware of that they also partake in a certain field of study, and thus entering the field and participating in an on-going discussion. The importance of contextualising the article within the international field of study cannot be stressed enough and this is an issue that both editors and reviewers particularly look at in the review process.

Another issue we as editors often look closely at in the review process is the introduction of the paper. We suggest that this is one of the more difficult parts of writing a paper and that is why many authors often revisit the introduction on completion of the rest of the paper. Writing and re-writing in this way becomes an important part of the research process. In the introduction it is important to include a purpose statement that clearly describes the specific aims, purpose and/or questions of the study. This should help to maintain the focus throughout the writing process. When you are allocated 7000 words, as in *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, to clearly and rigorously describe theory, method, results and conclusions, you cannot afford to deviate from the focus of your argument. An effective introduction commands the readers' attention, introduces the topic, establishes its importance and provides an overview of what the reader can expect in the article.

In order to establish the significance and clarity of the main arguments in the article the framing of the results is also another important challenge. This section must be stringent and sufficiently clear for a reader to follow and to engage with the claims made. This is important if an article is to advance the field further, and one of the basic prerequisites for publication of an article.

A sound and coherent paper can be achieved by considering structure, headings, sub-headings, clearly linking paragraphs and sections together, which combined provide a conceptual map for the article. Throughout the paper, clear arguments for different choices made in the study should also be stated and critically developed.

Writing in the specific genre of an academic paper is accordingly as much about learning how to write an academic paper, and there are a number of ways to progress. One, as we already suggested, is to read academic papers to obtain a feel for the genre and the style of writing. Another is to write with a more experienced colleague. Writing with a colleague who is familiar with the genre and can guide you in the writing as well as through the different challenges of the review process is a valuable and educative experience. In this vein, writing an academic article does not need to be an individual task but rather a task that can be shared with others. To share your writing with a trusted colleague, invite constructive feedback, and be prepared to act on good advice to improve your writing, is one of the most effective ways to become familiar with the specific genre of writing an international academic article.

The review process

Each manuscript when submitted follows the same review process that involves 4 steps:

- 1 – The editor's first decision
- 2 – The decision to return the submission to the author(s) or select two reviewers to review the paper
- 3 – The editor considering the reviewers' feedback, making a decision on the paper and communicating that to the author, and
- 4 – If a resubmission is made, request the same reviewers and consider the reviewers' comments to make a decision on the paper and communicate that to the author. If the author(s) are asked to resubmit for a second time the third decision is usually the final one for the editor.

We work through each of the steps of the process in turn, providing some reflections as we go.

- 1 – The editor's first decision is to consider the appropriateness of the submission to the journal, that is, in the case of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, is the paper focused on pedagogy? The editor also considers the extent to which the submission is newsworthy, current and original. The Editor reads through the paper for coherence, structure and readability, as well as the quality of scholarship. It is important that author(s) take time to contextualize the paper to the aims and scope of the journal and consider the journal's audience and topics covered by previous editions of the journal. It is also important to note that while a paper may be well written and well researched if, in our judgment, it is not reporting original work that extends our understanding of the field, then it is unlikely it will be sent for review.
- 2 – The editor can make two decisions. First, they may return the paper to the author(s), or second, may send the paper for review. With respect to returning the paper, there are usually two situations that would prompt this action. Papers tend to be returned directly to the author(s) if they have not followed the submission guidelines of the journal or if they have not been presented in a scholarly fashion. They can also decide to return the paper to the author(s) if they are not confident that they have achieved the points noted in (1). If the editor decides to send the paper for review, they choose two reviewers, at least one of whom is familiar with the specific topic of the paper. The second reviewer tends to complement the expertise of the first and in some instances may have different skills or approaches to reading the same piece of work. It is useful to the editor and the authors of a submission when reviewers allude in their review to their areas of strength and weaknesses in reviewing a particular paper. Reviewers are asked to return their comments within six weeks and are asked to provide advice on the paper to the editor and the author. In the case of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* (and many other journals), the reviewers will provide feedback to the authors, and will also often provide confidential feedback to the Editor that will not be shared with the author(s). Reviewers also provide advice to the editor on an outcome for the paper (eg.,

- to accept, accept with minor revisions, major revision, reject and resubmit or reject). In the majority of cases, reviewers' feedback is considered and informative.
- 3 – The editor considers the advice of both reviewers. The editor writes to the author(s) summarizing the key points made by the reviewers and draws attention to any particular feedback that they would like the author(s) to focus on when preparing a resubmission. These key points from the Editor communicated in the cover letter are points of advice the Editor believes the authors should prioritise in reworking their paper for resubmission. Sometimes reviewers offer different or contradictory feedback on a paper. When this happens, the editor will choose to either send the submission to a third reviewer or read the paper themselves before deciding on what decision to communicate to the author(s). This occasion arises infrequently with most reviews somewhat complementing each other in the more generic reactions and comments on the paper. It is important that authors take the time to respond to the feedback they receive from the editor and reviewers.
 - 4 – If the author(s) choose to revise and resubmit their paper having followed carefully the advice provided by the Editor, the Editor sends the paper to the same reviewers who read the first version of the paper and once again provide feedback to the author(s) and to the editor. After a second resubmission it is usual to accept or reject the paper, although in some circumstances a further revision may be permitted.

Revising the paper

When you are invited to revise your manuscript, read the editor's and reviewers' feedback carefully. Be positive as you revisit the paper and address each of the reviewers' main points. It is a good idea to construct a table that notes the individual comments made by each reviewer and details how you have addressed each comment. In the event that you disagree with a reviewer's comment or believe they have misinterpreted your intention, state this in your response by providing a reasoned argument. Abusive and rude reviews, even though these are rare, are always removed by the editor so you should not find yourself having to deal with such reviews (Table 1).

Receiving a rejection decision from a journal is always disappointing and it is natural to feel upset initially. It is always a good idea to put the reviews of your paper aside for a few days to allow yourself time to reflect and process the feedback you have received. It is usual that if your paper is rejected you have some feedback from the review process that can guide you to revisiting your paper and pursuing a new submission to the journal or rewriting it for submission elsewhere. Even though it is a disappointment to receive a reject decision, it is important to treat this as an opportunity to learn so that you improve as a writer and scholar.

Writing in English as a foreign language

Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy has a growing readership and authorship from countries where English is not the mother tongue. We understand that the prospect of writing in a foreign language may be daunting. We also

Table 1 Examples of how authors submitting to *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* responded to reviewers' feedback.

| Page line | Reviewer's comment | Author's response |
|-----------|---|---|
| 1.6 | Delete "went about" | deleted |
| 1.17 | Change as "to by" | changed |
| 4.22 | I do not know what this sentence means | Sentence has been re-written and now reads... The students felt that the games they played previously seemed too repetitive across each year of school." [4.28 in revision] |
| 8.23 | Add space before "text" | added |
| 13.3 | Because equity becomes an important finding of your study, you need to add in the findings section (or I suppose you could add it here) what the teacher-researcher said about equity. Folks are going to want to use your ideas in student designed games lessons and the more you tell us about how the teacher got such equitable participation the better | A section has been added to explain the teacher researcher's thinking around equity and its importance. [12.4 in revision] |
| 25.27 | This is your choice, but I didn't like having data in the discussion. The first quote was OK. The second long wiki excerpt seems to me to be long in paper 2. I agree that it shows (I think it does more than hint) a community of practice, but then this belongs in a theme in the findings, so move it earlier in paper 1 | We have moved the majority of the data out of the discussion but we do feel that the first quote is important in reinforcing the point under consideration. [24.13 in revision] |

appreciate this is often unavoidable for scholars who face pressure to publish in the English language. We welcome the submission of papers from pedagogy scholars from all parts of the world and are developing our skills and our strategies on how to assist authors to write in English when this is not their mother tongue.

We recognize, first of all, that writing a paper in a foreign language often takes longer than it does in your native language, and that a considerable effort is being made in an attempt to contribute to an international dialogue. We believe this effort should be recognised by the editorial team. At the same time, the key criteria for assessing the quality of the work are the same as for native English speakers, and the review process described in the previous section is also, in broad outline, the same. In the paragraphs that follow we identify some of the issues we see in papers submitted to *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* and subsequently address how we deal with the review process for these papers.

Some authors focus on clear expression in English as a key criterion of good writing and in such instances we tend to see some language reuse as authors try to scaffold their work on what we have already seen. The outcome of this strategy is what we call "risk free writing" where sometimes the message may become secondary in this process. Such papers often fail to satisfy the key criterion of 'is this news?' In contrast, other authors begin by ensuring the message is right and only focus on the quality of the writing when the message is complete. In these instances we try to recognise the merit of the work but sometimes see papers that have not expended sufficient time ensuring that the writing is of a good enough standard. Often we see that the vocabulary used may be limited and there is often less fluency of expression. If we think the English is of an insufficient standard to be entered into the review process we sometimes recommend that authors employ professional translators if we think there is merit in the paper.

The social and cultural contexts in which individuals are writing influence the paper and as an editorial team we realise that we may not be familiar with the discursive conventions and research base for some submissions. This can hamper our ability to 'see through' the language to the core message and to establish whether the paper warrants entering the review process. Similarly we draw on a pool of reviewers whose first and often only language is English. They face similar issues as the editors in advising authors on revisions to their papers. As a result, we attempt to select one reviewer from the same linguistic tradition to assist in our understanding of the quality of the paper. We also recognise that it takes reviewers longer to review a paper where the quality of the writing is problematic and we have to balance this time demand with the voluntary nature of the reviewer's work. This occasionally means that where we are very confident in the quality of the paper, one of the editorial team will work above and beyond what is typical with authors to assist them in getting a paper to publication. We are constantly balancing the workload associated for authors and reviewers with our aspiration of a broad authorship and readership of the journal.

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to clarify the process of writing for publication in a peer reviewed journal in the hope that we can assist prospective authors to approach the submission process with more confidence, aware that they have avoided elementary errors and mistakes that slow the process down, cause frustration all round, and increase workloads. While we trust that this paper will assist readers to better understand the process of writing for publication we are aware that higher levels of learning and understanding occur when authors engage in the process first hand.

While we seek to make the process as transparent as possible, we appreciate that there are some aspects of editorial and review work that will remain unclear to contributors. As an editorial team we are well aware of our responsibilities as gatekeepers for the field of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy. We take those responsibilities seriously and build checks and balances into our work to ensure that prospective authors are at all times treated fairly and with respect. Occasionally but inevitably, disagreement arises when authors feel that their work is better than editors or reviewers have judged it, or that they have been misunderstood. Peer review is in our view a sound process but it is not an exact science. It is the best means available to us to make impartial judgments about others' work. At the end of the day, editors must exercise their judgment about the quality of a manuscript based on advice they receive from reviewers, and contributors must accept their decisions for better or worse.

We believe that the quality of a journal is judged in part by the way the editors treat contributors and reviewers, and we seek to process papers and respond to inquiries as promptly as possible. Sometimes this is not possible for various reasons, for example, when a reviewer is approached

but fails to respond to an invitation for some time. There can also be delays in the process during the annual academic vacations periods, when reviewers are taking hard earned breaks from work, and of course these vary in different parts of the northern and southern hemispheres. The quality of a journal is also judged by the papers it decides to publish and the ways in which those papers are used through citation and through their use as readings for students. There is a range of metrics that can be used to judge citations and downloads, and while helpful, none of these can provide a definitive judgment about quality. Once again, this is a matter for individuals and groups or researchers to decide based on their own expertise and judgment.

Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy is interested in providing opportunities to scholars from around the world to share their high quality research with the international community. We look forward to receiving your contributions.

Conflict of interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.