THE PUBLICATION LIFECYCLE

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What is the lifecycle?

Once a researcher has produced an output such as an article or book chapter they need to have it published in some way. This can sometimes seem like a daunting process, especially for those who have never published before. It can help to think of the process as a lifecycle, although as with all cycles this is subject to change depending on discipline and the research output chosen.

The basic lifecycle follows the following stages: submit, review, decide, edit and preserve.

Stages of the lifecycle

SUBMIT

Once they have prepared a manuscript, researchers will need to think about the best publisher to approach. They will need to ensure that the manuscript conforms to the standards and format that the publisher wants and this can take a lot of time, especially if they have to reformat from a previous submission.

Although researchers will be impatient to see their work in print they should not submit a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time. This could potentially lead to copyright problems and the submission process often asks for confirmation that the manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere. Manuscripts may be rejected at the submission stage for many reasons, such as being out of scope. If a publisher has rejected a manuscript then the researcher is free to submit it to another publication.

STAGES OF THE LIFECYCLE

REVIEW

Once a submission is under consideration by a publisher it enters a period of review. For many formal academic publications this involves something called peer review – a quality control process for published research. During peer review, several experts in the field will be asked to look at both the manuscript and the strength of the underlying research to determine if it is suitable for publication.

Peer review times can vary between publications but it can mean a long wait for the researcher with the process taking weeks or even months to complete.

DECIDE

Once a review has been completed, comments and a decision on the manuscript will be passed back to the researcher. In some circumstances this may be an acceptance of the manuscript as-is but this is rare. It is more likely that the publisher will ask for changes or additions or even reject it completely. Although rejection can be hard it may not mean that the manuscript is poor but that it is not a good fit for that particular publication. Rejections will usually come with comments on the manuscript which can be used to help improve it.

If changes are requested researchers are free to make these and resubmit the manuscript. This process of review and feedback can be repeated many times before a final acceptance. When a decision to publish has been reached the researcher will typically be asked to sign some type of publication agreement with the publisher.

STAGES OF THE LIFECYCLE

EDIT

Once the publisher has agreed to accept a manuscript they will edit it to ensure that there are no errors and that it conforms to the correct format. At this stage the manuscript will begin to look like the final output such as a book chapter or journal article. Publishers employ production teams who will go through the final manuscript to prepare it for wider dissemination but they may return to the researcher for clarification on certain points.

Once edits are complete, the researcher will be sent a final proof to approve prior to publication.

PRESERVE

The final stage of the lifecycle involves the preservation of the output. In the past, most formal scholarly communication was produced in a fixed form such as a printed book or journal which meant that it was automatically preserved but things have changed. Today's range of research outputs is much broader and in some ways more ephemeral and therefore more thought needs to be given to preservation.
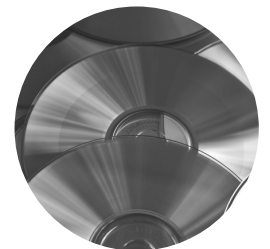
The most obvious way to preserve material is by using a repository such as Apollo – the institutional repository for Cambridge. Repositories offer long term preservation and access to a range of research outputs, including persistent links to ensure that materials can still be found by future researchers.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Watch our video on *The Publication Lifecycle in 3 Minutes:*
http://bit.ly/PublicationLifecycle3Minutes