Demystifying the Publishing Process
Lisa M. Brady, editor in chief of *Environmental History*
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Getting published is no easy task. For many authors, especially those who are new to the process, the system can seem arcane and frustrating. It need not be either and I hope this behind-the-scenes look at my practices as editor of *Environmental History* (idiosyncratic as they may be) will help to reduce authors' experiences of the latter by eliminating some aspects of the former.

It's important to remember that every peer-reviewed academic journal operates differently, despite sharing professional ethics and common goals (publishing the best research relevant to its readers). So, although my practices as editor generally mirror those of editors across the disciplinary spectrum, they are merely representative. That said, what follows should help authors better navigate and understand the process in general, even if the specifics may not apply to every venue to which they submit their work.

Submitting Your Article
Finding the right journal is a matter of doing your research. An easy first step is to look to your citations. Your scholarship is part of a larger dialogue and the journals you cite are likely places for you to publish. Once you identify a few venues, do more research: see what those journals have published recently; read editorial notes to see if there are trends the journal is following (or not); consider whether your work compliments, challenges, or expands on work already in the journal. A second, and no less critical, step is to think about the audience you want to reach (it may not correlate to the journals you cite). Read the mission statements of potential journals and think about how your work fits with those goals.

Once you've identified your top venue, you're ready to begin the process of submission. Most journals now have online submission systems, but not all, so inform yourself about the proper procedure (*Environmental History* uses Scholar One's Manuscript Central: https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/eh). Closely review the requirements for submission—document file formats, citation style, etc.—and **follow the directions**. Not following directions will slow down the process and, for journals that receive hundreds of submissions a year, may automatically result in a summary rejection.

Most journals require a cover letter. This should be a brief introduction to your subject and argument and ought to address why your research deserves consideration by the specific journal to which you're submitting. Make your letter compelling and concise; editors have a lot to read. Not all editors put the same weight on these introductory missives, but assume they will read your letter carefully and use this opportunity to present your work and your reasons for submission clearly and persuasively.

Once you click "submit," you wait. Sorry, that's just how it is.

To Review or Not To Review
Now it's up the editor to decide whether to send your manuscript for review. There are lots of questions an editor asks in making this determination. Some of them (though certainly not all)

are: Is the manuscript pertinent to the journal's mission? Is it of potential interest to the journal's readers? Is it new, either in subject or analysis? Has the journal published on this topic recently, and if so, is it desirable to do so again? Does the manuscript appear to be based on solid scholarship? Making this decision can take a few hours, several days, or—depending on how many submissions a journal receives—a week or two. For *Environmental History*, that decision typically takes 3 to 7 days.

If the editor declines to move forward with review, she will provide her reasons. Be respectful of that decision, as it was not made lightly. Time to move on to your next journal pick.

If she decides to send your manuscript out for review, you'll receive notification (often an automated message from the submission system) and then wait some more.

The Peer Review Process
The peer review process is the gold standard for all scholarly publishing. It involves evaluation by experts in the field and is a check against academic misconduct. Most journals, including *Environmental History*, engage in "double-blind" review, in which the manuscript's author is not revealed to reviewers and the reviewers' identities are not divulged to the author. Peer review, whether blind or open, is a multi-step procedure involving: identifying potential readers; inviting readers to evaluate the manuscript; awaiting readers' reports; and editorial review of the reports and final decision on the manuscript. I'll detail my practices for each step below, with estimates for how long the process takes at that point.

1) Identifying potential readers. The best readers are those who have established authority on the subject matter covered by the manuscript. Their work should, ostensibly, be among the citations, and it is there where I always begin my search for reviewers. In addition, I look for reviewers who have expertise in the region, era, or subject matter more broadly who can provide feedback from the perspective of a general reader. In every case, I want to know that the manuscript has solid scholarly grounding and has the potential to reach a broad segment of the journal's diverse readership.

Authors are asked during *Environmental History*'s submission process to provide a short list of individuals who they would like to have as readers and those they want the editor to avoid. Most authors leave this blank, which is perfectly fine. Others take the opportunity to list people whose work they engage with and whose scholarly opinions they value as "preferred reviewers." Still others list as "non-preferred reviewers" individuals with whom they have had scholarly disagreements or who may have a conflict of interest (for whatever reason). I occasionally solicit reviews from preferred readers; I never solicit them from non-preferred readers.

It can take anywhere from a few hours to several days to find relevant readers. Part of my decision making process is to research potential readers' current work to ensure I have access to the most up-to-date feedback. I also review my records to see how long it's been since an individual last submitted a review (I don't want to ask any individual scholar to read too many manuscripts not only to avoid reviewer fatigue, but also to diversify the perspectives on what scholarship deserves to be published in *Environmental History*). A final consideration is how useful an individual's past reviews have been. Some readers take exceptional care with the task,

others, not so much. I tend not to ask those who have either been lackluster in completing their duties or who have consistently been late in submitting reviews; authors deserve thoughtful, constructive, timely feedback and I want to make sure they get it.

2) Inviting readers to evaluate the manuscript. Once I've identified potential reviewers, I send out letters of invitation. Most reviewers respond within a day or two, but it can take upward of two weeks or more to secure the required number of reviewers (which in most cases for *Environmental History* is 2 or 3; some journals require up to 7 or 8 reader reports).

3) Awaiting readers' reports. Readers for *Environmental History* are automatically given 6 weeks to read a manuscript and submit their evaluations of it. Reports often come in right at the 6-week mark, but occasionally sooner (some within hours!) and sometimes later (8 to 10 weeks is not unusual). Readers are asked to comment on the manuscript's significance, quality, and potential audience. They are encouraged to offer the author suggestions for revisions in argument, evidence, and presentation and to offer a recommendation to the editor to accept the manuscript without revision, with minor revisions, with significant revisions (often called a revise and resubmit decision), or to reject it.

4) Editorial review of the reports and final decision on the manuscript. This is the stage where the editor reads the reports, re-reads the manuscript in light of those reports, and decides whether to move forward with the manuscript or not. Reader reports form the broadest foundation of an editor's decision, but it's important to keep in mind that most readers (~85% for *Environmental History*) recommend revise and resubmit, so an editor's decision must incorporate other factors. These considerations, in my case, include my own assessment of the manuscript's originality and broader contribution, my judgment about what the journal's subscribers will most want to read, and the manuscript's relation to recent or even forthcoming articles. What this means generally is that editors have to decline to publish a good number of excellent manuscripts that will most certainly find publication elsewhere.

From Manuscript to Article
Authors who receive "revise and resubmit" decisions (I have never outright accepted a manuscript, and only twice have rendered a "minor revision" decision) have the opportunity to read the readers' reports and editorial feedback, make changes based on that commentary, and resubmit the revised manuscript to the journal for further consideration. A "revise and resubmit" decision does not guarantee subsequent acceptance—the author must adequately integrate all suggested changes or make a good case for not following specific recommendations in order for the manuscript to move through a second stage of review. This second review may or may not involve peer review; like many editors, I often make a decision based on my own assessment of how well the author made the requested changes. This step can take anywhere from 1 day to several weeks.

Once I deem the manuscript ready for publication (which almost always involves several additional rounds of revision), I send the author the coveted notice of acceptance and the manuscript is sent to the journal's production team. There, professional typesetters and copyeditors work their magic, which may take up to 4 weeks, depending on the production schedule and the complexity of the article's layout. The author receives the article proofs,

reviews them, and makes any necessary corrections. Then the corrected proofs go to me; I also review them and make necessary corrections. Once I have approved the proofs, the article is released through Advanced Access (https://academic.oup.com/envhis) and assigned to a print issue.

In a Nutshell
All told, it can take anywhere from 9 to 18 months to turn a manuscript into an article, depending on how long it takes authors to make revisions and on any particular journal's publication pipeline. From the editorial side, *Environmental History* has a relatively quick turn-around rate, typically publishing manuscripts within a year from initial submission. On average, the time a manuscript spends with the editorial and production teams is five months: the first review process takes about 90 days; the second often takes less time, but typically at least a month; production takes another month or so. Although an article may not appear in print immediately, its publication date corresponds to the day on which it is made available through Advanced Access, which can precede the print publication by several months.

I very much hope this helps to demystify the publication process, at least as it pertains to *Environmental History*. Every journal has developed its own best practices and every editor has her own style and vision. Nevertheless, submissions, peer-review, editorial decisions, and production processes generally follow the trajectory I've outlined above. Knowing this information may not make getting published any easier, but it should at least make the process less inscrutable.