

In What Journals Should I Publish My Research? A Brief Guide for Graduate Students Aspiring to Become Tenure-Track Professors

1. Consider the ‘fit’ of your manuscript: What is the topic of your manuscript? Some journals are highly specialized journals, while other journals have a very broad focus. For example, the journal *Criminology* publishes sophisticated, rigorous manuscripts on a wide variety of topics, whereas the journal *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* is going to focus on studies of juveniles with some relevance to violence and/or involvement in the juvenile justice system. Likewise, the journal *Policing* is going to focus on publishing studies that pertain to some aspect of, you guessed it, policing.

Also consider the possibility that your manuscript may be suitable for journals in disciplines *outside* of the field of criminology and criminal justice. For example, a study on gun violence is equally relevant to the field of public health as it would be the field of criminology. As an additional example, a study on youth psychopathy would be just as relevant to developmental psychology journals as it would criminology journals.

In what journals have studies similar to yours, *particularly studies you cite in your manuscript*, been published? You should consider targeting journals that regularly publish studies on the topic of your manuscript. Further, when comparing your manuscript to other published studies on things like theoretical orientation, methodological rigor, and uniqueness of findings, how does your study compare? Not all studies are going to be earth-shattering, paradigmatic breakthroughs. Those that are tend to get published in more prestigious journals, while those which make more modest, yet still important, contributions are published in less prestigious journals.

2. When in doubt, look to journal rankings: One way the prestige of journals is assessed (and in no way is it perfect) is through journal rankings, the most widely known being *Journal Citation Reports*. As students, you have free access to journal rankings through the FIU Library website. Navigate to library.fiu.edu, click on the dropdown menu ‘find,’ go to ‘A-Z list,’ go to the ‘J’ listings and select ‘*Journal Citation Reports*.’ Once inside of the *Journal Citation Reports* website, select ‘browse by category’ and select ‘criminology and penology’ from the categories list. Hit submit and then click the hyperlink for the listed number of criminology and penology journals (its 61 for 2017).

The list of journals is ranked in order according to the impact factor (IF), which measures the average number of citations per journal article published in that journal over the past two years. The more an article is cited, the more influence it has, and the more citations a journal accumulates, the greater the influence the journal has in the field. If you are interested in the ranking and IFs of journals outside of criminology, you can simply select other categories to search through (e.g., psychology, sociology, public health, etc.) in *Journal Citation Reports*.

You should know that there are many legitimate journals that are not ranked in *Journal Citation Reports* for one reason or another. For one, it costs money to have a journal included in *Journal Citation Reports*. Second, some journals are relatively new, and thus have not been publishing articles for a long enough period of time to receive an impact factor. An example of this would be the *Journal of Developmental and Life Course Criminology*. This journal is the official journal of the American Society of Criminology's division of Developmental and Life Course Criminology, but the journal has only been in existence for four years.

3. Consult with a professor, or two, or three: Part of knowing where to submit a manuscript is a) having an awareness of trends in the field of study, b) familiarity with the editors and editorial board members of journals, and 3) past experience with trying to get manuscripts published. Each of these things are not generally well understood by graduate students who are only starting their academic publishing career. That being said, every professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at FIU has a firm understanding of the publishing game. If your manuscript is on a topic for which a professor is an expert, you are well-advised to ask that professor to a) take a look at your manuscript to assess its overall strengths and weaknesses, and b) recommend journals for which they believe you would have a reasonable chance of having your paper eventually accepted for publication (after going through the peer-review process, which merits its own lengthy but separate discussion). I strongly recommend the rule that if a professor tells you that he or she would feel comfortable having their own manuscript published in a particular journal, you are likely on safe ground sending your manuscript to that journal. *I would go so far as to say that if you have sent your manuscript to a journal without consulting with at least one professor, you have made a mistake.*

4. Avoid predatory journals: While there are many legitimate journals in which to publish your research, there are also many journals that have little to no real peer-review process, accept virtually all of the manuscripts that get submitted, and are not viewed as legitimate by professors at research universities like FIU. These are termed *predatory journals*. How do you know if a journal is predatory? One possible way is if you have received an e-mail solicitation from the journal asking you to publish a manuscript in the journal. Professors who have published research in legitimate journals frequently receive such solicitations (I receive over a dozen such e-mails each week). Note, though, that there is one exception to this rule: Legitimate journals will sometimes have 'special issues' on certain topics. In such instances, the journal editor (or guest editor) may solicit manuscripts from people who are experts on the topic and have previously published quality research on the topic. *Outside of this exception, any e-mail invitations to submit your manuscript for publication are likely coming from a predatory journal.*

Publishing your manuscripts in predatory journals may have an effect opposite of what you had hoped: You spent a lot of time preparing your manuscript and getting it accepted in the journal. Yet, when you go on the job market to try and land a position as a professor, having that publication in a predatory journal listed on your curriculum vitae could do more harm than good. If professors serving on search committees see that you are publishing your research in obscure

journals they have never heard of or know are predatory, they may question the legitimacy of your work and your knowledge of what is considered to be a suitable outlet in which to publish research.

5. Consider the usefulness of initially aiming high: One surefire way to get a sense of the expectations with regard to the quality and sophistication of manuscripts that are considered for publication is to submit your work to very prestigious journals and see what kind of feedback you receive. The journal *Criminology* actively encourages graduate students to submit their work, and the feedback you get from reviewers at more prestigious journals like *Criminology* will often be more helpful than feedback received from reviewers at less prestigious journals. The decision to ‘aim high,’ however, should be balanced against a) what a professor recommends to you, and b) the recognition that aiming high will likely result in a rejection (this is more often than not also true for professors submitting their own work to top journals), which can take anywhere from one month to six months (depending on the journal). For students trying to get their research published so that they can compete for the relatively small number of tenure-track faculty positions available each year, six months is a lifetime.

As a final word of caution: there are exceptions to everything I have said in this brief guide. Different professors may have different views about the publishing game and what they recommend with regard to journals to submit your manuscript. These are merely my thoughts, and I encourage you to get the opinion of other professors. Also, my comments speak very little to the things that should be considered when developing a manuscript for publication. That topic merits a totally separate, and far more lengthy, discussion.

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