

While these points will guide us, our policy for handling conflicts of interest will no doubt continue to evolve over the course of our editorship.

In striving to cultivate new voices in *RTE*, we conceptualize much of the editorial work we do as pedagogical in nature: with the help of our reviewers, we want to build the capacities of a new generation of scholars for creating high-impact scholarly writing that expands the collective knowledge base across a range of subfields within literacy studies. As part of this pedagogy, we'd like to offer 10 tips to new authors. We suspect, too, that these tips might prove useful to authors new to publishing in the social sciences.

## **Ten Tips for First-Time Authors**

**1. Study the journal Submission Guidelines carefully.** Make sure that your manuscript conforms to the submission guidelines. Common errors include (a) not including a word count on the manuscript or exceeding the 10,000-word limit (inclusive of references, tables, figures, etc.), (b) not formatting the manuscript properly in APA style, (c) not blinding the manuscript, and (d) submitting a manuscript with an abstract that does not successfully articulate the significance and/or findings of the article. If you have a question about some aspect of the guidelines, ask a trusted mentor or contact the editorial team. We will be happy to respond to your questions.

**2. Discuss your ideas with the editors.** We are available for such face-to-face conversations at conference roundtables or "meet the editors" sessions at the annual meetings of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Literacy Research Association, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the American Educational Research Association. We are also traveling to international conferences to recruit manuscripts for the journal, including for example the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research. Making contact with the editors will allow you to learn whether they are interested in receiving manuscripts in your area and how you might shape the paper to make it more relevant to the current conversation in the journal. To make the most of a conversation with the editors, come prepared to share one or two ideas or papers you are currently working on. Bringing a one-page document with talking points can help you clearly communicate your ideas with the editors.

**3. Be persistent with your manuscript.** See the submission process as an opportunity to receive feedback from others who are also pursuing your area of study. You have an opportunity not only for substantive learning, but also for procedural learning about how to write and revise an academic article in the social sciences. The reviewing process at *RTE* is vigorous. Upon submission, at least three members of the editorial team read the manuscript to determine whether it will be sent out for review. Manuscripts sent out generally receive three to four reviews. We have been fortunate to assemble an incredibly accomplished, talented, and intellectually diverse editorial board and reviewer pool to maintain the integrity of that process. (Please get in touch if you would like to review for the journal!)

If you receive a “revise and resubmit” decision, keep in mind that these decision letters and reviews are averaging eight pages. Receiving such extensive reviewer and editorial feedback can sometimes feel daunting. Try to keep in mind that an editorial “revise and resubmit” letter aims to guide your revision process, with the goal of helping you interpret the revision suggestions. If a decision letter leaves you feeling uncertain, confused, or daunted, consult with trusted colleagues and mentors or with the lead editor for your manuscript.

**4. Take your revision process a few steps at a time.** Revision suggestions typically ask for two or more areas to be substantially revised. Stage your revisions in passes. A first pass might address the framing of the essay, while another might address the methodology, and so on. Don’t try to do a revision all at once or in just one sitting. Divide the revision tasks into manageable stages.

**5. If you receive a “revise and resubmit” or “reject and resubmit” letter, you are free to resubmit.** In either case, taking the revision process seriously will increase the odds of an eventual acceptance. By “seriously,” we mean writing a detailed letter (to be submitted with the revised manuscript) addressing all the issues identified in the decision letter and in the reviews as though you are speaking with the reviewers. You need not make all the suggested changes, but you do need to persuasively show how you have substantively addressed the reviewers’ and editors’ concerns. A “revise and resubmit” signals that you should substantially revise portions of your text. While a “revise and resubmit” decision can indicate a range of needed revisions, you should take such a decision as an encouragement to revise. A “reject and resubmit” signals that while reviewers and the editorial team see promise in the work, you would need to substantially rewrite large portions—if not most—of your text for the manuscript to be publishable in *RTE*. If you receive a “reject and resubmit,” you should consider whether the manuscript in its present form (or near to its present form) might be a better fit at another venue. If you do decide to rework a manuscript that received a “reject and resubmit” decision, keep in mind that the manuscript will be treated as a new submission, albeit one that has already benefitted from the peer review process.

**6. Learn about and involve yourself in the discourse communities populated by *RTE* authors.** Go to the research-strand presentations at the annual conference of the National Conference of Teachers of English. Go to the NCTE Assembly for Research Mid-Winter Conference and the annual meeting of the Literacy Research Association. Attend presentations by active researchers at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Annual Convention. Go to the meetings of the International Association for the Advancement of Writing Research. Especially seek out presentations given by authors, at these or other venues, who are publishing in *RTE*. Sign up to serve as chair or as a discussant for presentations and panels in these venues or, better yet, take it upon yourself to organize panels or symposia bringing together scholars working in your area. When you do go to conferences, seize opportunities to build relationships with other scholars who are doing work relevant to your research. Finally, volunteer to serve as a reviewer for *RTE*.

**7. Cite previous articles published in *RTE* in your manuscript.** This practice helps demonstrate that your paper emerges from and contributes to the ongoing

conversation happening in the pages of the journal. It also helps you increase the impact of the journal, which in turn makes publication in *RTE* that much more notable.

**8. Pay attention to the quality of your abstract.** The abstract can influence the reception and future impact of your manuscript. High-impact abstracts usually include: (a) a statement of the problem addressed in the manuscript: Why is this research needed now? What previous scholarship are you responding to? (b) a brief description of the methodology, (c) an outline of your findings (we see this feature as critical), and (d) a statement about the significance of the study. Please limit abstracts to 250 words.

**9. Write clearly.** Manuscripts tend to do better in the review process when they are clearly written. Clear writing is accomplished at the discourse level (meaning how the parts of the text, and the argument as a whole, work together) and also at the sentence level. Work to make all sections of your manuscript contribute to its overall argument and coherence. Topic sentences and strong transitions can help reviewers see the flow of your overall logic in the manuscript. The whole article should have an internal consistency: the methodological choices need to make sense in light of the literature review and the conceptual framework, the findings and analysis need to link back to the framing material and to the questions posed in the opening framework, and so on. Peter Smagorinsky (2008), a former editor of *RTE* and a member of our editorial review board, offers valuable advice on how to accomplish coherence with the methodology section as the “epicenter.” To develop clear writing at the sentence level, we urge you to circulate the manuscript to trusted colleagues for feedback on clarity of writing before submitting. If you believe your sentence-level writing is weak, or if someone suggests it needs improvement, it may be helpful to solicit editorial assistance before submitting. You can also learn to do sentence-level editing independently by following Wendy Belcher’s (2009) terrific sentence-level writing diagnostic (pp. 235–265).

**10. Consult Wendy Belcher’s book, *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*.** It offers specific direction and advice about revising manuscripts for publication, with a particular emphasis on developing arguments for academic fields of study. The book makes explicit many of the rules that newcomers to academic publishing may find difficult to crack.

## REFERENCES

- BELCHER, W. (2009). *Writing your journal article in 12 weeks: A guide to academic publishing success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
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- SMAGORINSKY, P. (2008). The method section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science research reports. *Written Communication*, 25, 389–411.