

January 2018

## **Publishing Basics: How to Get Started & Where to Begin: Tips for first-time writers looking to get published**

Shamika Dalton

*University of Florida Levin College of Law, [sdalton@law.ufl.edu](mailto:sdalton@law.ufl.edu)*

Michele Villagran

*San Jose State University, [michele.villagran@sjsu.edu](mailto:michele.villagran@sjsu.edu)*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/slispub>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#), and the [Technical and Professional Writing Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Shamika Dalton and Michele Villagran. "Publishing Basics: How to Get Started & Where to Begin: Tips for first-time writers looking to get published" *AALL Spectrum* (2018): 30-33.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Information at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).



# PUBLISHING BASICS

## HOW TO GET STARTED & WHERE TO BEGIN

Tips for first-time writers  
looking to get published.

BY SHAMIKA DALTON &  
DR. MICHELE A. L. VILLAGRAN

**T**he world of publishing can be overwhelming, especially for first-time writers and newer librarians. Is my idea good enough? Is my article articulated well enough? Will anyone read it? These are all common questions you might have. Most importantly, you want to make a good first impression among your colleagues. The intent of this article is to acknowledge the common internal fears of first-time writers, explore publication opportunities, and provide suggestions on how to get started. Herein we offer a writer's survival toolkit to help throughout the publication process.



### Internal Fears

It is common for first-time writers to experience fears of rejection, inadequacy, failure, or success. It is important to acknowledge your fears without allowing them to consume you. We have found that the best way to overcome your fears is to share them. You will often find that you are not alone. Common fears include:

- **Fear of rejection.** Rejection happens. Not every editor is going to want to publish your article. As the old saying

goes, “Don’t put all of your eggs in one basket.” Well, this is true for publications too. Submit your idea to more than one editor to increase the odds of your article being accepted. All you need is one yes.

- **Fear of inadequacy.** This is a big obstacle for many. Perhaps you do not have family to reach out to for help or advice about publishing an article. If that is the case, find an experienced mentor in the profession who you can trust to share your fears and act as a sounding board throughout the publication process.
- **Fear of failure (or lack of success).** We live in a world where your success is measured by citation counts and “likes.” The thought of no one reading your article is terrifying, but do not get ahead of yourself or be discouraged. Define success for

yourself. It may simply be the enjoyment that you get from writing, or reaching a handful of people who really benefited from your piece.

- **Fear of success.** You may be slowly progressing on your writing due to procrastination because you fear the recognition you may receive. In a success-oriented society, most people will not admit that they are fearful of success. Why is this? Success can be more complicated than failure due to a great level of uncertainty that comes with it. Failure is a more familiar feeling than success for most. Great success can change one’s lifestyle, behavior, and connections. Face this fear head-on and acknowledge why you are resisting. Do not be afraid to take on the new, exciting recognition you may receive as an author.



# PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Advocacy Writing (Washington eBulletin)
- Annotated Bibliographies
- Association Publications
- Bar Publications
- Blogs
- Book Reviews
- Creative Writing
- Institutional Repositories
- Journals
- Newsletters
- Pathfinders
- Public Newspapers
- Social Media

## Publication Opportunities

Your first publication does not have to be a 20-page article or chapter in a book. You can start with a shorter publication such as a blog post, book review, or feature article in a newsletter or magazine such as the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) *AALL Spectrum*. A shorter piece gives you great practice and helps you build confidence with your writing. Do not limit yourself to law librarianship publications. If you are interested in a topic or have a passion for a topic that is broader than our profession (for example, disaster management or intellectual property), research what publications are available. Many, if not all, professions have associations and some sort of publishing opportunity.

## Getting Started

Getting started is the hardest part of the writing process. Below is some advice that will help you on your journey to publication.

- **Volunteer for committees.** Huh? Your professional service could turn into a possible article opportunity with other members of the committee. From time to time, a committee may be charged to conduct a nationwide survey or write a white paper on a particular topic. This is a great way for you to be a part of a larger publication. Be sure to volunteer when regional chapters and special interest sections are recruiting people to write short reviews on educational programs after the AALL Annual Meeting.
- **Find a co-author.** Roundtables and discussion dens at the AALL Annual Meeting are great ways to meet new people with similar interests. Those relationships could lead to publication opportunities. Also, do not be afraid to reach out to a librarian you know who has written or presented on a similar topic to collaborate on an article.
- **Do not reinvent the wheel.** One of the easiest ways to develop an idea is to take an old idea and make it new. Perhaps there is a gap in the research that you can address. Alternatively, you can write about a project you worked on or new technology your library has used. Build upon a presentation you gave at a conference, for either conference proceedings or a more informal piece. Do not feel like you need to come up with an ingenious, complex topic for your first article.
- **Develop your sales pitch.** The first thing you should consider is the audience. How will your article help or be a resource to the reader? Make sure you research the publication's readership demographics. Next, you should choose a "catchy" title. Your article title is the first thing that an editor reads, so make sure it is fresh, interesting, and memorable. Include

a brief summary that highlights four or five major points you plan to discuss in the article. You should also provide an article outline to help the editor visualize how you plan to organize the information. Lastly, be sure to include a little bit about yourself, your current position, and any relevant experience to help the editor understand why you are qualified to write on this topic.

- **Pitch your idea early.** You do not need to wait until your article is finished before you reach out to an editor. Most editors are open and even encourage authors to submit their ideas before they start writing. If your topic is not exactly what an editor is looking for, he or she may offer advice on how you can tweak your idea to make it better fit the publication. You have to be open to changing your idea to better suit their readers.

### How to Survive the Process

One can never be over-prepared when it comes to writing and being published. This handy survival list of practical tips will help keep you on the right path.

- **Create a timeline.** Include mini deadlines on your timeline. This is your writing schedule where you can complete small steps toward a larger goal. Make sure it is manageable with the other responsibilities in your life.
- **Where will you write?** Choose a comfortable place that has minimal distractions and good lighting. There will be distractions and obstacles along the way, but if you anticipate and prepare for them, it will help with your plan for writing. For example, if you have children and pets at home constantly running in and causing distractions, you may need to write at your public library or your local Starbucks.
- **Be ready to organize.** Organize your research and your thoughts. Brainstorming and outlining will help you stay organized. There are paid tools and even free software

available that can help with your organization, including project management tools such as Evernote, Ulysses, or Ginkgo, and mind-mapping software for brainstorming such as Bubbl.us, FreeMind, or Scapple.

- **Revise, revise, revise.** There is no such thing as too many drafts. You will have many versions throughout the process.
- **Let yourself shine through.** This piece is coming from you, so be authentic to yourself and do not be afraid to let your personality come through. This may also keep you inspired and engaged in your writing.
- **Have a support team.** Having a few trusted individuals that you can rely on for support is invaluable. Since you have been the only one reviewing your writing, you now need to have other eyes review it. Get their feedback. Is your piece clear? What is missing? What suggestions might they have that you have not considered?

### Consider the Benefits

Choosing to be an author and getting published definitely has its benefits. To get motivated, consider that you do not simply have to write for writing's sake. Instead, have a purpose and consider the benefits of getting published, such as contributing to the profession and building your reputation as an expert on a particular subject. Publishing successes are items you can add to your resume to show your expertise and help you land a promotion or future job opportunity. Publishing can also lead to presentation opportunities to share your work in-person or virtually. Additionally, any type of published work provides your organization with recognition and publicity.

### Now, Begin!

Getting published can seem like a very daunting task. We certainly know the fears and challenges with getting started. Facing your internal fears is a first step and we guarantee that you are

not alone. Getting started and being prepared are part of the process. You would not run a marathon without training, so do not start writing without a plan. There are many places to look for publishing opportunities, and your first piece does not need to be a novel. You will soon reap the rewards and benefits of your publishing adventure.

As the famous Nike slogan says, "Just Do It!" There is no time like the present and if you do not get started now, then your work may get set aside again. Beginning something is always the first step. We look forward to reading and hearing about your many contributions to the profession and beyond. ■

### CONTRIBUTE

If you are interested in writing for *AALL Spectrum*, email Heather Haemker, AALL Publications Manager, at [hhaemker@aall.org](mailto:hhaemker@aall.org) with your ideas. For more information visit [bit.ly/AALLSpecpolicy](http://bit.ly/AALLSpecpolicy).



**SHAMIKA DALTON**  
INTERIM ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
PROFESSOR OF LEGAL RESEARCH  
University of Florida Levin College of Law  
Lawton Chiles Legal Information Center  
Gainesville, FL  
[sdalton@law.ufl.edu](mailto:sdalton@law.ufl.edu)

© 2018 BY SHAMIKA DALTON



**DR. MICHELE A. L. VILLAGRAN**  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
San Jose State University  
School of Information  
San Jose, CA  
[michele.villagran@sjsu.edu](mailto:michele.villagran@sjsu.edu)

© 2018 BY DR. MICHELE A. L. VILLAGRAN