

Description

Where Should You Look to Benchmark?

Until an allegedly lost manuscript was found in January 2015, Harper Lee, the author of *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, was presumed to have written and published only one book (albeit a worldwide literary classic) in her life.

If you are a new academic researcher seeking guidance on how often you should be publishing your research, Ms. Lee would not be a recommended benchmark for you to follow. As an alternative, you might consider the prolific output of science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, who published over 500 pieces of work, including books, collections of short stories, and non-fiction works.

The Most Obvious Answer

Your research Chair or departmental supervisor might turn to the most obvious answer to the question: “as much as possible.” Pressure to “[publish or perish](#)” can make that advice seem very cogent. However, that maxim fails to take into account the reason why you are publishing in the first place.

As a new researcher with only one listing in your [ORCID](#) account, increasing that number will most likely be a top priority for you. For a more experienced researcher with an established track record of publication, the priority will be different—a substantive position piece or detailed project summary rather than a small piece of a few hundred words just to get your name in print.

Too Many Opportunities

In the past, part of the pressure experienced in an environment of “publish or perish” was the high rejection rate of the limited number of academic journals. In other words, even if you had good research data to work with was no guarantee that it would find a broader audience. However, with the arrival of open access publishing and the ability to get your work published in any journal that offers pay-for-publication [otherwise known as the article processing fee (APF)], there is no shortage of journals, just an increasing number of [predatory journals](#) with questionable peer review processes.

The Least Publishable Unit

If you have just completed a substantial research project, you might be tempted to maximize the amount of material you can get published by breaking up the data into distinct chunks and writing about them from different perspectives so as to make them seem different. For example, a study investigating the academic value perceptions of students and their professors could generate data from both parties and be presented as separate data sets in separate articles. The bad news is that all the reputable journals have already switched to this game. Each chunk of data is referred to as a “least publishable unit,” and the process itself is derided as [salami-slicing](#). By the way, it will guarantee an automatic rejection.

There Is No Magic Number

You may be forgiven for losing sight of this fact, but you (hopefully) didn’t get into academic research to publish a specific number of articles, and if you find a book that promises that there is a number, put it back. If you’re still not convinced, try and remember this one constant: your boss will not be shy in letting you know if you’re not publishing enough!

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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