

Description

In the daily lives of people working in academia, the maxim publish or perish can mean different things depending on where you are in your [academic career](#).

For graduate students, it means that if the research you're working on isn't "publishable," you may have a hard time finding a job.

For new faculty, "perish" means not making progress on the track to tenure.

For established researchers, you are assumed to be only as good as your last project, so if the results don't get published in a prestigious journal, "perish" could refer to a loss of research funding or your position with the university.

A Vicious Cycle

Universities and academic journals are now equally involved in this pervasive culture of publish or perish. Facing budgetary pressures, institutions must depend on prestige to attract research funding, and one of the best ways to do that is to be highly visible in prestigious journals.

For journals, the increase in submissions from academic researchers under pressure to get published raises their operating costs to process them all.

In addition, with so many new journals being published every year, the pressure to maintain prominence via Impact Scores and other measures of perceived rank, generates increased pressure to publish groundbreaking research that will garner media attention and larger numbers of citations.

The Harsh Consequences of "Publish or Perish"

It's easy to dismiss publish or perish as an old maxim that academics use to complain about their terrible working conditions, but research has shown that the longer this culture of pressure persists, the greater the [risk to academic research integrity](#). As the players in this publishing game start to suffer, and the cracks begin to appear, we can see real consequences:

- [Salami Slicing](#) – researchers start slicing up their project results in order to generate multiple articles rather than just one large paper.
- *Multiplication of authorship* – researchers start to join each other's studies as co-authors, contributor, or even guest authors as a way to boost their publication credits.
- *Publication Bias* – in order to maximize citations, journals choose to only publish research with positive results (But it is important to [publish negative results](#)), which in turn limits the number of replication studies to verify those positive results.
- *Citation Obsession* – journals focus on citations to manipulate their [Impact Factor scores](#), and institutions use citations as a metric for performance reviews and tenure appointments.
- *Research Integrity is compromised* – peer reviews get manipulated, results are massaged or outright faked, and conflicts of interest are conveniently ignored.

The culture of “publish or perish” is clearly pervasive and appears to be here to stay. Calls for instant distribution and transparency of both authorship and peer review may help to address problems with research quality, but as long as researchers are threatened by the publication venue of their research, the system will remain fundamentally broken.

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Submitting Manuscripts

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