Early Career Members

How to Publish a Manuscript in ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Journals

As we are beginning to prepare for this year’s International Annual Meeting of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA scheduled to take place 15–18 Nov. 2015 in Minneapolis, MN, the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC) is planning educational sessions to be offered to attendees. The ECMC serves members beginning their careers—new professionals and graduate students in the agronomic, crop, soil, and environmental sciences. The ECMC consists of members from each of the three Societies who serve three-year terms and serves many functions, including: (1) being a voice for early career members within the three Societies and on federal policy topics; (2) developing programming for early career members at the Annual Meeting; (3) serving as the selection committee for the Early Career Professional Award; (4) preparing an article for CSA News magazine on a monthly basis on topics relevant to early career members; (5) moderating the ECMC online discussion boards; (6) obtaining input and developing recommendations on ways to better serve early career members beyond the activities at the Annual Meetings.

Every year, the committee organizes hands-on, interactive sessions to address important issues that most professionals in the agricultural sciences are facing, especially in the early stages of their career. Developing an outstanding research and extension program of your own is definitely exciting, but it can also be challenging. The educational sessions focusing on manuscript writing and publishing have been easily the most attended and successful at the Annual Meeting year after year. The ECMC has decided to offer the workshops again in Minneapolis this year. As the committee met to recap the most commonly asked questions, it became obvious that the central question we need to address is “What is the best approach that can be taken to ensure that the article is publishable?”

As you can imagine, there is no one single answer to this question because the publishing process includes a multitude of issues that must be addressed. In this article, I would like to summarize some of the most practical tips and advice offered by those who have successfully published their research.

Collaboration is Key

As a relatively new cropping systems agronomist and extension specialist at the University of Idaho, I am continuously reaching out to more seasoned faculty members and experienced colleagues for mentorship, network building, and collaboration. Collaborative work generally results in a higher possibility of being published for the following reasons: Firstly, more comprehensive data collection and analysis is carried out when multi-disciplinary projects are taking place; thus the data can be evaluated from several angles, resulting in interesting conclusions. Secondly, the collaborating colleagues tend to encourage each other to put together the manuscript; and the data analysis and interpretation, as well as writing, is shared among several specialists, making the publishing process much less daunting.

Your Work Must Be Relevant and of Value

Whatever you are working on might be extremely interesting to you and your colleagues, but we need to remember that we work to serve our clientele’s needs. Successfully published and highly cited manuscripts are usually those that fit the criteria for relevance and novelty. As an associate editor for Agronomy Journal, when I am evaluating a newly submitted manuscript, this is the first thing that I ask myself: is this work important to clientele and does it significantly enhance the scientific knowledge? If the answer is no, then the manuscript really does not meet the criteria for publication, no matter how well written or how extensive the collected data and analysis. On the other hand, if the work addresses the pressing need of clientele and presents a substantial value to readers, then the manuscript could be revised and improved with the assistance of reviewers and published, even though the original submission is poorly written. Some manuscripts that are of value may be rejected because they appear to be relevant to only a very narrow audience or are specific to a single country or region. This can be overcome by making sure that you explain how your work could be used in other parts of the world or by providing a strong justification that your results could be applicable in other regions.

Read the Instructions to Authors

Even though the grammar and the style could be adjusted and improved through the review process, submission of a poorly written manuscript that does not meet the specified journal’s formatting requirements will most likely be rejected or sent back for major revisions. This often causes delays in the publishing process as the reviewers spend time revising the manuscript. If your article has been