From the SelectedWorks of Professor Shelley Kinash

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Scholarly Publications.pdf

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If you are a researcher, have you ever been told to strive for scholarly or, in other words, peer-reviewed publications? If you are a student, has your assignment description ever stated that you must include scholarly publications as your sources?

*What are Scholarly, or Peer-Reviewed, Publications?*

... articles usually written by academics, sometimes in collaboration with other stakeholders such as teachers or students, which are rigorously reviewed and then published as one article in a journal.

*Here is one example of a scholarly publication.*


This article was authored by Shelley Kinash, Susan Crichton, and Weol Soon Kim-Rupnow. The article presented a literature review and was entitled – “A review of 2000-2003 literature at the intersection of online learning and disability: Electronic curb-cuts.” It was published in the *American Journal of Distance Education*. This paper was published in the 1st issue in the 18th volume of articles published by this particular journal. The article is on pages 5 through 19.

*How did this paper come to be published in this journal?*

Kinash, Crichton, and Kim-Rupnow shared an interest in the topic and decided to collaborate on the writing of this article. They decided that the *American Journal of Distance Education* would be the best fit for their article for three reasons: 1) Kim-Rupnow had published a literature
review in the same topic domain in 2001 in the same journal, and new literature warranted an update; 2) this particular journal has an excellent reputation for publishing rigorous research, and has a wide readership so that the article might be expected to impact online learning practices, and; 3) the authors wanted to ensure that their article was published in a journal that is read by distance educators, rather than confined to the disability advocates who already had access to the information that the article was promoting.

The authors circulated multiple drafts of the article between themselves. Each one would make comments, edits, insertions and deletions. When all three authors were happy with the draft, each of the authors asked for feedback from one trusted colleague. The authors applied this advice to the draft.

Then the authors carefully read the specifications advertised online by the American Journal of Distance Education. The authors had to ensure that their article: was in the requested format; did not exceed word number limitations, and; cited literature according to the specified publication standards (in this case APA). Once again, the authors edited the article.

The authors drafted a cover sheet to the journal editor, and prepared copies of the article with their names and all identifying information (such as the names of their universities) removed. This allows what is called a blind review of the article; it is important that reviewers are not biased by the prior publications of the authors, or by the status of their university.

The editor of the American Journal of Distance Education sent the article to three reviewers who have published in the same topic area as this article. The reviewers are asked to fill-out a form to rate and provide feedback about the article. The main decision of each reviewer is whether the article:

1. Is publishable as is without changes.  
   (This is almost never selected.)
2. Is publishable with minor changes.
3. Is publishable with major changes.
4. Is not publishable.

The reviewers are also asked to assess whether the:

1. article is readable and makes a new contribution to knowledge.
2. literature review is comprehensive.
3. research question is clearly presented.
4. methodology and analysis are sound.
5. topic is an effective fit with the chosen journal.

After approximately six months, Kinash, Crichton, and Kim-Rupnow’s article came back. All three reviewers indicated that the article was publishable with minor changes. The editor included copies of all three reviews, as well as a summary of the changes. For example, one reviewer asked for some clarification with respect to the search engines used within the literature review.

The authors immediately set to work making the requested changes. They sent the final draft back to the editor, with an accompanying note identifying the portions which were edited according to the reviewers’ recommendations. From there, the editor and his assistant carefully checked every detail of the article, such as whether any of the Website links in the reference list were broken. Correspondence went back and forth between the editor and Shelley Kinash, applying these edits.

The next edition of the journal was due to be published in 3 months time. The article was published in 2004. There was approximately 1.5 years between the beginning of the writing process and seeing the article in print in the journal. Many people had reviewed the article, and numerous careful drafts had been written. This is a typical process and timeline.

Does the process matter?

At this point, you might be asking yourself whether this rigorous and time-consuming process is worth it. You might be comparing this process to the ease of putting information up on a Website such as Wikipedia. Why do your instructors and/or employers insist on scholarly references? The answer lies in the reliability and validity. Anyone can say anything on the World Wide Web, and the reader has no way of assessing the quality or truth value. While there are instances of deception and erroneous information in scholarly publications, the rigorous process ensures that these are rare. You can be fairly certain that once an article makes it through to scholarly publication, the information is supported, reasonable, repeatable with equivalent results, and contributes to new knowledge.