



# **Council of Editors of Learned Journals**

## **Best Practices for Online Journal Editors**

May 2008; URLs updated November 2019

### **Introduction**

The Council of Editors of Learned Journals promotes electronic publishing as a legitimate method of disseminating creative and scholarly work in the humanities. The following compilation—representing the best current advice and practices of CELJ members—is intended to support editors of new and existing online journals in their efforts to produce publications whose value to the academy and to broader intellectual and artistic communities will be recognized. Such documents as this, of course, can only point the way: events may outpace CELJ’s efforts to keep these guidelines up to date, and creative minds may find valid reasons for variance. Suggested additions and refinements are always welcome: send them to the current president of CELJ (for contact information, visit <http://www.celj.org>).

Online publication, for the purposes of these guidelines, includes serial journals and magazines that are specifically designed for digital access and that circulate on the World Wide Web, in library indexes, or in some other digital medium; it does not include journals that are primarily produced in print or in print format and disseminated both in print and electronically. Here, as in CELJ discourse at large, the term “learned journal” encompasses scholarly publications (those with a primarily scholarly or critical mission), magazines that focus on creative writing, and journals that do both.

### **Suggested Guidelines for Online Publications**

Fundamentally, editors of online journals should uphold the highest standards of craft and/or scholarly thoroughness, accountability and fairness, as do editors of traditional print journals. However, there are

additional dimensions to electronic publishing. The advice that follows takes into account concerns shared by all scholarly journals, regardless of medium, as well as concerns specific to online publication.

- 1) **Peer Review, Editorial Staff, and Editorial Board.** Peer review, professional editors, and a respected editorial board are the foundations of learned journals. Many fine publications publish good work via an editorial staff (including contributing editors); however, the hallmark of a learned journal, whether online or print, is peer review—a process that typically entails careful evaluation (often, but not necessarily, anonymous) of each submission by several in-house and/or external experts in the field. Editors should list a clearly defined institutional or professional affiliation, or comparable credentials, as should members of the journal’s editorial board. The board should be comprised of scholars and/or artists who are well regarded in the journal’s field. A common way to ensure that a variety of voices participate in what the journal publishes is to rotate editorial board members on a regular schedule.
- 2) **Affiliations.** Electronic periodicals should clearly disclose any affiliation with a publisher, university, scholarly or professional society, or other entity.
- 3) **Mission Statement, Submission Guidelines, Timely Review.** Online journals, like their print counterparts, can help both readers and potential contributors by developing and prominently displaying a statement of mission. Detailed instructions for submitting work to be distributed in online media—including, for instance, recommendations for accessibility and usability in line with the mission and readership of the journal—are essential, as is an explicit commitment to a reasonable timeline for review (often three to four months). In case of unavoidable delay, communication with affected authors is not only a courtesy but a professional necessity.
- 4) **Contract or Publication Agreement.** Like any learned journal, an online scholarly or creative periodical should provide its authors with a contract or publication agreement that spells out the rights and responsibilities of both the publication and the author. Some journals may have nontraditional publication agreements that come in such forms as emails, Websites, and PDF documents; these are acceptable forms of agreement.
- 5) **Style.** The editorial staff should adhere to a consistent style of documentation that is appropriate to the journal’s discipline (e.g., APA, MLA, Turabian, Chicago). In the case of multimedia-intensive

texts where the design encourages nonstandard documentation, the editorial staff may ask for different styles appropriate to the individual text but still accessible to readers.

- 6) **Editing.** Electronic periodicals should make sure the work they publish is edited and proofed for proper grammar and has no formatting, typographical, or spelling errors. Poor editorial work indicates a lesser degree of organizational integrity. If a journal intends exceptions to this general rule, it should have particular reasons for doing so.
- 7) **Web Design.** The principles of design in online journals are significantly different from those in print journals. Although some online journals model their designs on the look of print publications, others may foster and present interactivity and provide opportunities for (1) authors to design texts that make meaning from the advantages and capacities of multimedia elements (linking, video, etc.) on the Web; and (2) viewers and readers to post their comments for other readers and to communicate with the authors or artists and with the editorial staff. Designs should be appropriate to the content and should serve the scholarly and creative material presented. In addition, online learned journals do well to provide viewers and readers with navigation instructions. Each time content is updated, the date and volume/issue number (if appropriate) should be clearly noted.
- 8) **Timeliness and Regularity of Publication.** Online journals should state the periodicity of their publication (whether annual, biannual, quarterly, bimonthly, monthly, or other schedule), and each issue should be clearly dated. Like print publications, electronic journals should conform to their announced schedule of publication.
- 9) **Accessibility.** Accessibility entails ease of use for different constituencies. Online journals should make a good-faith effort to conform to the standards of disability access that are spelled out in the Web Accessibility Initiative's guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>), as well as in section 508 of the United States amended Rehabilitation Act (1998, <http://www.section508.gov>) and the British Standards Institution Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 78 (March 2006).
- 10) **Availability.** Online journals can determine how much or how little of their content to make available to readers through closed-, partial-, or open-access models. If subscription (through registration and/or payment) is required to view some or all content, journals should provide clear subscription information to readers.

- 11) **Indexing and Abstracting.** Reputable learned journals make provisions for their scholarly and creative material to be indexed by one or more indexing services, thus directing interested researchers to the material contained in the journal. An online journal should identify the indexing and abstracting services that cover it. Indexing services are often associated with specific academic disciplines: humanities disciplines typically engage EBSCO's Academic Search, Current Abstracts, Electronic Journals Service, and Humanities International Index; Elsevier Eflow; Thomson's ISI Arts and Humanities Citation Index; MLA Directory of Periodicals; JournalSeek; OCLC ArticleFirst; and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory.
- 12) **ISSN.** One distinguishing mark of a substantial journal is its having secured an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). ISSNs are assigned to electronic publications when they are serials or continuing resources. A journal's ISSN should be clearly displayed on its Website.
- 13) **Archiving.** Like print journals, online-only journals should maintain a complete archive of past issues and prominently indicate how readers can gain access. Viable forms of digital archiving currently include the Stanford University lockss system and the Electronic Collection of Library and Archives Canada, among others; mirrors of Websites can also serve as archival locations.
- 14) **Advertising.** Electronic journals that derive funding from advertising or from links to external sites should avoid conflicts of interest.

## Related Links

ACLS. *Our Cultural Commonwealth: The Report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences.*

[https://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Programs/Our\\_Cultural\\_Commonwealth.pdf](https://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Programs/Our_Cultural_Commonwealth.pdf)

CALJ (Canadian Association of Learned Journals). "Augmenting Print: Planning for Online Journal Publishing by Social Sciences and Humanities Journals in Canada."

CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication). Position Statement: "Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology."

<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/promotionandtenure/summary>

CCCC. Position Statement: "Scholarship in Composition Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Department Chairs." <http://www2.ncte.org/statement/scholarshipincomp/>

MLA. "Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages."

[http://www.mla.org/guidelines\\_evaluation\\_digital](http://www.mla.org/guidelines_evaluation_digital)

MLA. "Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion." (See comments/statistics on electronic publishing throughout.)

[http://www.mla.org/tenure\\_promotion](http://www.mla.org/tenure_promotion)

MLA. "Statement on Publication in Electronic Journals."

[http://www.mla.org/statement\\_on\\_publica](http://www.mla.org/statement_on_publica)

Warner, Allison. "Constructing a Tool for Assessing a Scholarly Webtext."

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/12.1/binder.html?topoi/warner/index.html>

Totosy de Zepetnek, Steven. "The New Knowledge Management and Online Research and Publishing in the Humanities." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 3.1. (2001)

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss1/8>

Developed by CELJ committee:

Eyal Amiran, *Postmodern Culture*

Cheryl Ball, *Kairos*

Linda Frost, *PMS: Poem Memoir Story*

W. B. Gerard, *Scriblerian*

Zoran Kuzmanovich, *Nabokov Studies*

Tom Long, *Harrington Gay Men's Literary Quarterly*

Bob Patten, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*

Ron Sandvik, *North American Review*

Steven Totosy de Zepetnek, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*

Bonnie Wheeler, CELJ vice president (ex officio)

Nicholas Birns, CELJ secretary-treasurer (ex officio)

Jana Argersinger, CELJ president and committee chair