

Publications Syndicates: Process Guidelines and Notes

Peripheries Research & Teaching Scholarship Theme
School of Education & Social Work University of Dundee

Convenor: Prof. Fiona Kumari Campbell (f.k.campbell@dundee.ac.uk)

Meetings will be video conferenced linked using Zoom

The Publication Syndicate helped me immensely to revise my manuscript that focused on the recent emergence of Buddhist structures in Tamil-majority areas in Northern Sri Lanka. Initially, I was nervous as most of the reviewers were experienced researchers, unlike myself. However, my worries gradually faded away and I felt as if the reviewers gently held my hand even though I was not physically present at the University of Dundee where the actual meeting took place. Subsequently, I revised my paper based on reviewer feedback and received full- funding to present it at the Varieties of Peace Asia Conference that was held in Jakarta, Indonesia from 22- 24 October, 2019. (<https://www.varietiesofpeace.net/>) The Publication Syndicate Meeting left me inspired, feeling much more confident to navigate the publication journey. I would like to thank the University of Dundee for setting up a safe space for giving and receiving comments on work-in-progress papers. - Dishani Senaratne

1. What is a Publication Syndicate?

A group of like-minded academics, independent researchers and PhD students who agree to work together co-operatively to further their mutual scholarship and publication. You have the benefit of drawing feedback from members from a range of disciplines who may or maybe be familiar with your research topic.

2. What is the purpose of a syndicate meeting?

Members help move drafts of manuscripts (papers, book chapters, presentations, etc) one step closer to publication. Drafts can be early ones or late ones. We can also provide advice on journal scoping and selection issues.

3. What are the values and principles that underpin the process?

The following are critically important to the success of the Syndicate process:

- Feedback is a “gift” from reviewer to author – author graciously receives that gift and does what they wish with it.
- Generosity of spirit and ideas – *everyone* has something to offer!
- Encouraging and supportive professional behaviours
- Total commitment to confidentiality and trust
- Constructive, respectful feedback
- Absolutely non-competitive
- Productivity

- Feedback contributions do not imply required acknowledgement in paper or pressure for co-authorship of paper
- Commitment to full participation for one semester

4. Size of group

We can be flexible about numbers, but *continuity* of attendance is vital.

5. Selecting the desired profile of the syndicate membership

- Syndicates have the potential to have immense value to those in the early and middle stages of their careers however, a syndicate made up solely of early stage writers may not be of as much benefit;
- Syndicates made up of a mix of early career and senior researchers may not provide as much benefit to the senior members of the syndicate as one made up solely of peer-level researchers;
- This issue is a trade-off between the effectiveness of peer-supported review for experienced staff wishing to enhance their publication output and giving up some of the potential valuable senior level feedback in exchange for early career staff development. Our group happily is made up of researcher from across the spectrum.

6. Frequency and Duration of Syndicate meetings?

- Every 3 or 4 weeks for about one-and-a-half hours. We meet on an assigned Monday from 10.30 – 12.00 (London time) and also provide a video conference link (Zoom) for people outwith Dundee.
- All members commit to attending all the meetings for one semester, so all group members have a turn presenting a manuscript, but also to facilitate trust building and groupwork.
- The plan is to review two manuscripts at each meeting.

7. Role of Facilitator

- recruit (shoulder-tap) syndicate members, conscious of interpersonal dynamics
- consider if desirable to have balanced publication records of members decide on intra-disciplinary, or cross-disciplinary makeup of syndicate
- organise, schedule and chair meetings
- follow up with presenting author two weeks before meeting to ensure manuscript will be available
- get manuscript from presenting author and distribute manuscript (ms) to members approx one week prior to Syndicate meetings. (up to two mss only per meeting)
- ensure that order in which people present mss is planned 2 or 3 meetings ahead
- encourage / prod members to produce mss
- organise who will chair meetings (maybe rotate the role)
- Ensure a cover sheet is attached to manuscript
- maintain file of Syndicate mss.

8. Role of Syndicate members

- make transition from a marker/grader of student papers to a peer helper / collaborator for colleagues
- read ms prior to meeting
- review and prepare written feedback (annotated comments on electronic copy ms copy, so that the author can be sent the feedback after the meeting)
- help move ms closer to publication standard

9. Role of author of a Manuscript (ms) (Refer to Cover Sheet)

- number and date ms
- identify target journal and/or audience
- send copies of draft ms to convenor for distribution
- note whether macro or micro-level feedback is wanted

10. Structure of Syndicate meetings

- Chair asks each member in turn to give feedback / reaction to ms.
- It is recommended that no discussion take place until this process is completed, although the author may ask for clarification.
- Open discussion. Anyone can ask questions, make suggestions.
- Decision made to either:
 - ♣ work through ms page by page, discussing points as they arise, or
 - ♣ terminate meeting if major revisions or restructuring are called for
- At conclusion, members upload ms copies to BOX which are then accessible to the author

11. Types of feedback

Macro level feedback (to be addressed first)

- The 'big picture' - Are these ideas worthwhile?
- Gist; structure; appropriateness to intended audience; overall tone; logical consistency; flow of the paper as a whole.
- How effective are the introduction and conclusion?
- What does the paper contribute that is new and original?
- How is the argument framed?
- Where does the paper lead?
- Where should it lead?
- What theoretical constructs underlie the treatment?
- Should it be more or less descriptive? Critical? Evaluative? Analytical?
- Is it interestingly written?
- How does the content integrate with existing knowledge?
- What and how are any generalisations made?
- How is supporting evidence presented?
- Validity & integrity.
- Does it ring true?

- Are assertions appropriately substantiated?

Micro level feedback (2nd level)

- Detail re paragraphing, structure,
- clarification of sentences or wording;
- Sections (or sentences) that need relocation;
- ambiguities;
- coherence;
- Grammatical points:
- Punctuation;
- consistency of tenses;
- voice;
- Typographical errors; punctuation; spelling

12. General

- there is no limit to the number of drafts a paper can go through
- contributions (feedback, ideas, insights) become the property of the author whose ms is being discussed
- suggest an audio-recording of discussion for the benefit of the author (frees the author to be more interactive in the discussion rather than burdened by note-taking). By default we will be using Zoom video conferencing which will be saved.

Adapted from Notes by Shona Little, Centre for Educational and Professional Development, Auckland University of Technology, November 2002. <https://www.anzam.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Publication-Syndicates.pdf>

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