

7-1-2010

# From Qualitative Dissertation to Quality Articles: Seven Lessons Learned

Glenn A. Bowen

Western Carolina University, [gbowen@barry.edu](mailto:gbowen@barry.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

---

## Recommended APA Citation

Bowen, G. A. (2010). From Qualitative Dissertation to Quality Articles: Seven Lessons Learned. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 864-879. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss4/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



## From Qualitative Dissertation to Quality Articles: Seven Lessons Learned

### Abstract

New scholars frequently face an immense challenge in writing papers for publication. Qualitative research novices, in particular, experience frustration in getting peer-reviewed papers published in top-tier journals. This article is a primer on converting a dissertation based on qualitative research into a journal article. It summarizes seven lessons, learned over a five-year period, about getting published. The lessons focus attention on manuscript content and style, the publication process, and working relationships.

### Keywords

Collaboration, Dissertation, Publication, Quality, and Thick Description

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## **From Qualitative Dissertation to Quality Articles: Seven Lessons Learned**

Glenn A. Bowen

Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, USA

---

*New scholars frequently face an immense challenge in writing papers for publication. Qualitative research novices, in particular, experience frustration in getting peer-reviewed papers published in top-tier journals. This article is a primer on converting a dissertation based on qualitative research into a journal article. It summarizes seven lessons, learned over a five-year period, about getting published. The lessons focus attention on manuscript content and style, the publication process, and working relationships. Key Words: Collaboration, Dissertation, Publication, Quality, and Thick Description*

---

### **Introduction**

Writing papers for publication poses an immense challenge to new scholars. For those who embrace qualitative methods, the process of getting papers published can be even more daunting. After all, qualitative research is still marginalized in some fields, where it is not considered “legitimate” science; and publications based on qualitative research are often undervalued (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004).

Soon after completing a doctoral program, many emerging scholars set their sights on getting published. Mounds of data have already been sorted and analyzed, and the research has already been written up as a dissertation. Converting the dissertation into a journal article or two is the next logical task. Articles in professional publications, particularly peer-reviewed journals, are a tangible touchstone of scholarly achievement. However, doctoral students are not usually taught the process of writing for publication and are therefore unprepared for the attendant demands. An early introduction to the publication process would provide a context for future thinking about scholarly writing, demystify the process, and lead to the improvement of writing skills (Nolan & Rocco, 2009). It would also prepare university-based scholars, especially those who accept tenure-track faculty positions, to handle the imminent pressure to publish.

This paper is a primer on converting a dissertation based on qualitative research into a manuscript that merits publication in a scholarly journal. It is written primarily for newly minted scholars who, with their doctoral diplomas displayed prominently on the wall, are eager to get published. In it, I summarize seven lessons learned in the context of actual publication experiences over a five-year period after I earned my doctorate.

While preparing my dissertation, I similarly learned seven lessons, which I shared in a reflective article in *The Qualitative Report* (Bowen, 2005). The seventh lesson delineated in that widely cited article was “Prepare to publish.” I had long concluded that what has been written down as observational field notes, analytic memos, and preliminary reports should be written up as papers for publication. Publishing is a paramount obligation of researchers, necessary for accumulating a professional body of

knowledge and fully developing its implications for theory and practice (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Indeed, the findings of original research, especially cutting-edge research, should be made available in the public domain as they could provide answers to questions or offer new insights (Bowen, 2005). Besides being a valuable lesson for me, “Prepare to publish” constituted timely advice to doctoral students working on their dissertations. This paper underscores that advice as it offers some guidance to emerging scholars who are preparing to turn their qualitative dissertations into quality articles.

### *The question of quality*

Qualitative research involves the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of largely textual material. Phenomena and events are studied in their natural settings. The issue of quality in qualitative research has been receiving considerable attention in the literature (e.g., Dingwall, Murphy, Watson, Greatbatch, & Parker, 1998; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In this regard, *quality* is a contested concept, often bound up with a debate about the nature of the knowledge produced by qualitative research (Mays & Pope, 2000). Despite this epistemological debate, there is some agreement – at least among many qualitative research experts – that quality research (i.e., good- or high-quality research) demonstrates rigor, trustworthiness, and relevance (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope; Morse et al.), with findings that are applicable or transferable to other, similar settings or groups.

Quality articles are produced by a scientific approach as distinguished from superficial conjecture. They report research results that break new ground and that can influence policy or be applied to professional practice. Quality articles reflect quality of content, style, and organization; they require meticulous preparation so they will be free from flaws. Such articles are coherent, comprehensible, and compelling. They engage readers, stimulate thought, and sometimes spur action. Evidently, quality articles depend, in large part, on quality research.

### **Specific Lessons**

While writing, submitting, and revising papers for publication, I learned seven specific lessons:

- (1) A dissertation summary won't do
- (2) Thick description is necessary
- (3) Collaboration with colleagues has advantages
- (4) Adherence to guidelines and deadlines is essential
- (5) “Revise and resubmit” is quite common
- (6) Electronic journals are not inferior
- (7) Patience and persistence pay

Although all of these lessons may be applicable to any kind of scholarly publishing, they are being considered in the context of qualitative research. (As discussed later, *thick description* is a qualitative research concept.) Prospective authors adhering to a qualitative research tradition – whether case study, ethnography, phenomenology,

grounded theory, or narrative research – may regard them as a set of recommendations or guidelines for their own work. I will discuss each lesson in turn.

*Lesson 1: A dissertation summary won't do*

There are, obviously, fundamental differences in the content, format, and length of a journal manuscript or article compared to a dissertation. A dissertation is typically a lengthy, elaborate work that runs more than 100 pages. A six-chapter format is common (Chapter one, introduction to the research problem; two, literature review; three, research methodology; four, findings; five, analysis and interpretation; and six, conclusion and recommendations). The typical journal article is 15-25 double-spaced pages (4,000-7,000 words) in length. Even beginning scholars know that it is essential to reduce drastically the length of their dissertation if editors are to consider it for publication as a journal article. But therein lies a temptation – and a challenge. The challenge is to avoid the temptation to submit a summary of the dissertation. I will explain why a dissertation summary will not work.

My dissertation was a grounded theory study (designed to generate or discover a theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the data). The study employed in-depth interviews, document analysis, and non-participant observation in exploring community-based anti-poverty projects in Jamaica (Bowen, 2003, 2008a). Those projects were supported by social funds – special grants provided by the national government to non-governmental and community-based organizations, which served as local project sponsors. The dissertation research revealed six “best practices” in community-level stakeholder collaboration and a substantive theory of community-driven development (Bowen, 2003).

Soon after I completed my dissertation, I did a “cut-and-paste” exercise, excerpting large portions of the 184-page document. I then summarized it to reduce its length and, with great expectations, submitted it as a paper to a journal. My submission was roundly rejected. You see, I had tried to report everything in my manuscript (albeit as a summary), perhaps to demonstrate my “scholarliness” as exemplified in my paper’s comprehensiveness. What resulted was really a hodgepodge strung together with subheads. Rather than “lift” large portions of my dissertation (and thus end up with extraneous details), I should have picked one dimension or outcome on which to focus. The reviewers said as much; they clearly recognized a dissertation conversion – and in my case, not a good one.

Editors welcome the submission of manuscripts that fit the scope and advance the goals of the publication. Four broad, sometimes overlapping, categories of scholarly journal articles are as follows: *research* (reporting original research based on systematic data collection and analysis); *review* (critically reviewing literature or an entire study); *methodological* (discussing an innovative research method, design, or paradigm); and *theoretical* (presenting an original theory or assessing existing theories). The typical types of papers that can be generated from a dissertation and their corresponding chapters are (a) critical reviews of the literature; (b) methodological innovations; (c) specific findings or results; (d) implications for policy, practice, and/or research; and (e) insider experience conducting research. Usually, no more than three or four articles stem from a

dissertation. It would not be to one's advantage to try to "squeeze" articles out of material that has already been published. This could lead to weak or repetitive submissions.

Since my dissertation summary misstep, I have written peer-reviewed articles on separate substantive themes from my dissertation, such as *social capital* (Bowen, 2009) and *citizen participation* (Bowen, 2008a). In addition, I have published a number of articles on the methods and techniques employed in my dissertation research, notably *saturation* (Bowen, 2008b) and *sensitizing concepts* (Bowen, 2006). I had learned a lesson: A dissertation summary will not work as an acceptable paper for a journal – at least, not the way I approached it.

### *Lesson 2: Thick description is necessary*

Whereas articles based on quantitative research use numbers and tables to report findings, qualitative research articles rely on words drawn from a mass of textual data. To be sure, qualitative research reports require "thick description" of context, methodology, and phenomena. Thick description results from the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social behavior within its particular context (Ponterotto, 2006). Participants' attitudes and experiences are at the heart of thick description (Bowen, 2008b). As explained by Denzin (1989),

A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. ... It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

Unlike "thin" description, which is devoid of context or meaning, thick description is balanced by analysis and interpretation (Patton, 2002).

Further, thick description helps to show that the research was rigorous, reflecting thoroughness and appropriateness of methodology. This technique contributes to the trustworthiness of the research. In particular, it supports transferability – the degree to which findings can be applied to other settings, contexts, or populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In my dissertation, I supported my analysis of the data with extensive quotes from respondents and excerpts from other data sources, such as field notes and documents (e.g., minutes of meetings, annual reports, and newspaper clippings). My dissertation advisors had made it clear that it was better to err on the side of caution by "over-reporting" than to strive for brevity. As I ventured into a community of scholars, I quickly understood that space limitations in a printed publication demand economy of words and would consequently restrict me to fewer quotes and more summative statements from my research.

While learning to eschew superfluous verbiage, I also learned the importance of thick description of phenomena as a feature of manuscripts submitted to journal editors for consideration. (Editors of electronic journals, which do not have the space constraints

of printed publications, are willing to allow details of data collection and analysis to be reported.) Despite space limitations and length restrictions, it is necessary to provide rich, extensive details in the Results or Findings section of the manuscript. I often use tables and figures to either summarize or augment the narrative.

Over the years, I have learned that manuscript reviewers expect an explanation of the rationale for the research approach or the theoretical basis of the data-collection methods. Accordingly, and in the reflexive spirit of qualitative inquiry, I tend to explain my interest in understanding the social world from the perspective of people – especially ordinary people in remote places – who are directly involved in the events being investigated. Their lived experiences matter to me as a researcher, and I find it compelling to present their “voices” as part of the thick description of phenomena.

Depending on the purpose of the article and the audience to which it is targeted, it may also be necessary to include a thick description of the research participants and procedures – not only the study design and data-collection methods but also the methods of data analysis and synthesis. Describing research participants in adequate detail facilitates the reader’s ability to visualize them in relation to their demographic and psychological characteristics (Ponterotto, 2006). A thick description of the setting and procedures provides a context for understanding the study’s findings. This description, however, needs to be balanced with the need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants beyond the dissertation to published papers.

Mindful that some details are vital to qualitative research articles, I strive to present a concise yet comprehensive account of how the research was undertaken, including the protocols followed, and how the data were analyzed (see Appendix A for the essential elements of a qualitative research manuscript). In the manuscript, it is usually not necessary to give details of the informed consent, protection of human subjects, or confidentiality procedures employed in the study, as required for the dissertation. A concise statement regarding Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the study and a brief explanation of how participants’ privacy is protected should be included in the manuscript to reinforce the importance of ethical considerations in qualitative research. In cases where a detailed description is available to readers (such as in an online journal), I give only a succinct statement of the research procedures and refer readers to that source. For example, in my article on citizen participation (Bowen, 2008a), I summarized the essential elements of the research methods but spelled out the types of participation revealed by the research and the implications for community-level approaches to economic improvement and social change.

Specifying the limitations of the study and the researcher’s attempt to address them is also recommended. There is no need to apologize for small, purposively selected samples and findings that are not generalizable. Rather, it is important to pinpoint the trustworthiness techniques applied in the research and to identify the study’s significance and contributions to the field, despite the limitations.

In my dissertation, I offered a thick description of anti-poverty phenomena investigated (e.g., social capital), indicating how and why events occurred in a particular context (Bowen, 2003, 2009). And in my articles, I have tried to present a rich portrait of people and their actions in the context of social fund projects in local communities. In one article derived from my dissertation, I gave a thick description of social networks:

Local organizations working collaboratively provided the most visible evidence of social networks ... Every community network included the local sponsor of the JSIF sub-project. Local organizations in a social network played primarily a social and civic role; they fostered social relationships and civic participation as well as norms of reciprocity. The presence of a social network signified a community milieu conducive to social capital effects. A network of social relationships, communication paths and influence patterns was found in each community. ... The principal players in this 'social system' were the church, citizens association, PTA and youth club. ... (Bowen, 2009, pp. 259-260)

In that article, as in others, I distilled the literature review from my dissertation, making it succinct, and used only the most pertinent or salient references. For example, I have consistently cited Corbin, Glaser, and Strauss (separately and together) in articles explaining grounded theory.

Scholars in the early stages of their careers will find out soon enough that thick description is necessary for qualitative research articles. Presenting only the findings is not enough. Thick description is an effective trustworthiness technique that will let readers and evaluators know that the research and its findings are grounded in rigorous methods and procedures.

### *Lesson 3: Collaboration with colleagues has advantages*

Collaborating with colleagues who have publication experience and expertise can be advantageous to the research novice. This is a lesson learned in hindsight. Over the years, I often felt isolated in my publication "enterprise" and relied as much on intuition as on writing skills to achieve my goals. It has now struck me that collaborating with senior colleagues could have relieved the feeling of isolation and could also have helped me avoid some of the difficulties inherent in getting papers accepted for publication.

After poring over the pages of the dissertation for article ideas, it is prudent to collaborate with colleagues who are experienced authors. Rather than rush to submit a manuscript, the inexperienced scholar should ask a colleague to review it first. A colleague can cast a critical eye on the manuscript with a view to assessing its quality and its relevance to the readers of a particular journal. Tenured members of a university faculty or published researchers in an organization can offer support as early reviewers of the manuscript and can explain the dynamics of the manuscript review and publication processes. Their critique and feedback can shorten the time between submission and actual publication.

Collaboration can extend into the area of co-authorship of papers. However, this can lead to disagreements and become rather contentious, particularly in situations where a dissertation advisor expects to be named as a co-author, and even the senior (first) author, on papers generated from the dissertation. Tenure-track faculty members (especially assistant professors) have been known to insist on their "piece of the pie," especially when promotion and tenure decisions are rapidly approaching and additional publications would enhance their dossiers. Fine and Kurdek (1993) have suggested that decisions about authorship credit and authorship order should be based on the relative



scholarly abilities and professional contributions of the collaborators. Nevertheless, in my view, articles prepared directly from dissertation findings should list the doctoral student (not the faculty advisor) as first author. Some higher education institutions have established policies and procedures at the department or program level to address authorship issues. When there is considerable faculty-student collaboration, the best approach is to have a written agreement regarding authorship of papers for publication.

Collaborating with colleagues does not have to be limited to those on a college campus or in single organization; it can extend to those participating in professional associations and conferences held elsewhere. Members of such organizations may have garnered experience in publishing parts of their dissertation as articles for peer-reviewed journals.

I understand the value of collaboration and recommend it. Experienced authors can play the role of publication advisors or mentors. They can nurture the scholarly skills of would-be authors and bolster their confidence as they turn in their manuscripts for journal editors' consideration. Support and guidance provided by experienced authors can make a difference in preparing beginners for successful scholarly publishing.

#### *Lesson 4: Adherence to guidelines and deadlines is essential*

Publishers and editors set guidelines for authors, typically covering style and formatting requirements and specifying manuscript length restrictions. Information about the aims and scope of the publication, editorial policy, types of manuscripts accepted, and submission/review procedure is usually provided as well. Some publications make the manuscript review criteria available to authors. (Manuscripts submitted for "blind" or "masked" peer review do not carry the author's name, affiliation, or other identifying information in the manuscript itself.) The editor will probably not assign the manuscript to a reviewer unless it adheres to the guidelines or instructions prepared for authors. In addition to guidelines, publishers and editors sometimes set deadlines, based on an established timetable, for the submission (and resubmission) of manuscripts.

Some journals require that the manuscript be structured in a particular way. Still, a manuscript should be organized in the way that is most effective in conveying the essential information about the research and its results. The basic structure of a qualitative research article is outlined in Table 1. I usually replace the generic "Literature Review" with headings indicating the topics covered in the pertinent literature (e.g., "Dimensions and Characteristics of Poverty") and "Discussion" with the main outcomes to be discussed (e.g., "Evidence of Participation"). However, my decision regarding the nature and format of the headings and subheadings is, more often than not, based on what I see in a sample issue of the journal to which I intend to submit my manuscript. I usually choose a journal for my article even before I write it. By doing so, I am better able to tailor my manuscript to the journal's format and style.

Some journals will reject, unread, a manuscript that does not conform to the prescribed style. The citation style required by the journal may be different from the one used in a dissertation. Most of the journals in which my articles have been published use the APA (American Psychological Association) style; the *Chicago Policy Review* and the *International Journal of Social Welfare* use the Chicago style, while *Social Policy & Administration* uses the Harvard system of referencing.

## Table 1

*Format of Qualitative Research Articles*

---

**Abstract****Introduction**

(including Purpose of paper)

**Literature Review**

(with conceptual/theoretical framework)

**Methods**

- Design
- Setting and sampling strategy
- Data-collection techniques
- Analysis

**Results****Discussion**

(including interpretation or implications of results)

**Conclusion**

---

**References**

I have learned to be diligent in following the manuscript preparation and submission guidelines and have, in a sense, used such diligence to compensate for any shortcoming in the substantive content of my manuscripts. When a manuscript conforms to the style guide, the editor and reviewers can focus on content issues and offer recommendations that make the manuscript worthy of publication.

Aspiring authors should not ignore publication guidelines and deadlines. Before the first submission, the manuscript should conform to the style guide, and every submission (and resubmission) should meet the deadline set by the editor or publisher.

*Lesson 5: "Revise and resubmit" is quite common*

Over the years, I have tried to cite articles from the journal to which I submit a manuscript for consideration. This tells the editor that I value the publication. Moreover, chances are that a potential reviewer's article will get cited. Citing potential reviewers of my work maximizes the likelihood that my manuscript will be considered. Of course, that will not guarantee that my submission will be accepted right away, if at all. In fact, I have learned that I should be prepared to revise and resubmit my paper, no matter how good I think my original submission is. One version of a paper is usually never enough; "accept

as is” almost never happens. It is common practice that most papers go through at least two rounds of revision.

In a blind peer review (with anonymous authors and often anonymous reviewers), manuscripts submitted by both novices and seasoned scholars stand the same chance of being accepted or rejected, because reviewers are not influenced by the authors’ standing or reputation. Each manuscript is evaluated on its own merits – its quality and appropriateness for the journal – to determine whether it warrants publication.

Most of the time, I have received constructive criticism from reviewers. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the review process can yield valuable suggestions on how to revise and ultimately improve the manuscript, which should be treated as “a work in progress” until it gets published (Bowen, 2005, p. 221). There are times, however, when reviews are difficult to understand and to accept. Sometimes reviewers recommend changes seemingly for the sake of recommending changes, and some espouse and advocate an approach that is obviously in line with their own research inclinations but are not necessarily appropriate for the manuscript under review.

Reviewers gave sharply conflicting assessments of my manuscripts on three occasions that I can remember. On one occasion, a reviewer stated: “The paper is well written and presented with solid content, good flow and persuasive arguments ... [and is] publishable in its present form.” Meanwhile, a reviewer of the same manuscript asserted that “the article needs substantial revision in order to elevate it to a publishable standard.” On another occasion, the first reviewer assessed my manuscript as excellent and recommended publication; the second suggested minor changes and checked the “revise and resubmit” box; and the third recommended rejection, unless my manuscript was given a major overhaul. On those two occasions, the editors (who are not obligated to accept reviewers’ recommendations) gave me a free hand in deciding how to treat the reviewers’ comments.

Despite the temptation to characterize reviewers’ unfavorable comments as unfair and even mean, I have always put aside the “glowing” reviews and made the recommended changes that I considered necessary. Although I am tempted to take the path of least resistance by doing whatever the reviewers recommend, I have learned to not feel compelled to make every change that is suggested. I can put up a strong defense when it is called for, while remaining open-minded and respectful. Even when it is not specifically required by editors, I write detailed memos responding, point by point, to reviewers’ comments and specifying the changes I subsequently made, or did not make, and why. For one thing, editors will know that the recommendations were given due consideration; for another, the re-evaluation process will be efficient.

Now, I have got used to incongruous reviews of my manuscripts. I have even got used to negative reviews; they do not hurt my self-esteem as they did at the beginning of my scholarly journey. I have disabused myself of the idea that reviewers provide objective, bias-free evaluations. Furthermore, I have learned to read manuscript evaluations dispassionately and to respond graciously to advice.

Recall that I mentioned my less-than-effective dissertation conversion that resulted in the outright rejection of my submission. After four years, I gave it another shot. This time, I produced a carefully crafted paper focusing on one concept from my dissertation and presented it compellingly to a different journal – and a more reputable one at that. My submission was accepted, subject to some minor revisions, and was

published (Bowen, 2009) as the latest in a slew of articles based on my dissertation (see Appendix B).

Certainly, “revise and resubmit” is quite common and has become the norm for me. There is heightened expectation when reviewers recommend “acceptance conditional on satisfactory revision.” As long as I have an opportunity to resubmit a manuscript, I immerse myself in the process of making the necessary revisions and returning it to the editor long before the deadline. By then, I would have listed it on my CV as an article “under review”; and once it is accepted for publication, I list it as “in press.” The lesson, then, is to revise and resubmit the manuscript, if given that option, and to explain how the revisions address the reviewers’ comments.

### *Lesson 6: Electronic journals are not inferior*

There is no shortage of publications available to the up-and-coming scholar. The proliferation of publications opens outlets for scholarly work; the availability of more scholarly journals means more opportunities to get published. Most of the growth is attributable to the ubiquitous World Wide Web, or the Internet, which has made publishing efficient and cost-effective. The editorial and production processes are faster for electronic publications than for those sent to print.

At first, I was skeptical of Web-based and Internet-transmitted publications. They seemed to lack the prestige of printed journals. Electronic publications, I reasoned, would not be taken as seriously as “paper” publications. But that is not so at all. I have learned that electronic journals are not inferior to those produced in printed form. Some publishers and authors value e-journals because the articles they contain may include dynamic multimedia features such as graphics, pictures, and (still and moving) images, as well as hyperlinks and sounds. Authors may add links to supplementary material, providing background information, detailed analysis, and other sources of information.

Selection of a journal should not be based on the publishing format – electronic or print. Rather, it should be based on (a) whether the manuscript is appropriate for the journal and (b) whether there is a rigorous peer-review process that maintains the integrity and quality of the publication. In reality, online journals that carry refereed articles are more highly regarded than printed publications whose articles are not peer-reviewed. A manuscript considered appropriate for a journal is one whose subject matter is congruent with topics usually covered by that journal and will likely be significant to its readers. To determine appropriateness, I browse the table of contents and skim articles in the journal. I also try to determine whether the journal has a track record of publishing qualitative studies. After determining that my manuscript will be a good “fit” for the journal, I prepare my submission using the journal’s guidelines for authors. Again, there is no guarantee that my submission will be sent to reviewers, which is why I keep a short list of alternative journals. This will help to reduce the time lag between writing a paper and getting it published.

In my early attempts to publish a paper derived from my dissertation, I felt that I should not be particularly selective about a publication with regard to its reputation or prestige. I should be more intent on ensuring that there was a good match between my research topic and publication’s topics of interest. I knew then, as I know now, that the most respectable journals have high rejection (or low acceptance) rates and that some

reviewers get their satisfaction from finding fault with what others write. Journals that pride themselves on their high rejection rates would not be a good place to start. Surely, publishing in any scholarly journal could boost my confidence as I embarked on my career as a scholar. And it did.

Three of my dissertation-derived articles (Appendix B) have been published in fully Web-based (online) journals: the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *The Qualitative Report*, and the *Qualitative Research Journal*. All are peer-reviewed journals that obviously specialize in qualitative research. Additional journals that specialize in qualitative research include *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Qualitative Health Research*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, and *Qualitative Sociology*. Various other journals, such as the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* (published online and in print), are receptive to qualitative research submissions.

Quality manuscripts should be submitted to quality journals, whether published online or in print. Even though the process of getting papers published in top-tier journals may be long and frustrating, it is well worth the effort.

#### *Lesson 7: Patience and persistence pay*

The publication path can be long and tedious, even torturous. As mentioned earlier, most papers go through at least two rounds of revisions. Such revisions can add more than five months to the publication process. Publishers who still insist on typescripts submitted via “snail mail,” rather than e-mail or an electronic tracking system, make it harder for prospective authors to begin experiencing the joys of being published.

Sometimes reviewers are slow to complete their assignments, and in many cases, the journal has a long queue of manuscripts to be reviewed. The average time for an author to receive the first editorial response is about four months, and it may take more than a year from initial submission of a manuscript to final publication. The first manuscript I submitted after I defended my dissertation did not appear on the pages of a journal until 22 months later. I found the process inordinately long and frustrating, and there were times when I thought of withdrawing the paper from consideration. Nevertheless, although I prepared and published four other articles in the interim, I did not give up on my first submission. It helped that I eventually developed rapport with the journal’s managing editor, who nurtured my patience and understanding.

Over a five-year period as an academic program administrator on a scholarly journey, I learned to be patient and persistent (notwithstanding my not being required to have a publication agenda). For faculty on a tenure track and other scholars in academia who are seeking professional advancement, “publish or perish” remains a persuasive mantra. They may need an extra dose of patience and perseverance. It will be rewarding in the long run.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this paper, I have discussed seven lessons about getting published, which I learned during the five-year period immediately after I completed my dissertation. The

lessons relate mainly to manuscript content and style, publication processes, and working relationships. These lessons may prove useful to budding scholars who have resolved to get published and who are eager to contribute to the discourse in their profession or field of endeavor.

A dissertation can yield a good harvest of articles; however, quality should be emphasized over quantity. Converting a qualitative dissertation to a quality journal article is not easy; it is not simply a matter of summarizing the dissertation. The prospective author should provide thick description of phenomena while avoiding wordiness. Newcomers could benefit from collaboration with experienced authors, who can help them navigate the publication path. As I have emphasized, aspiring authors should not ignore publication guidelines and should be responsive to manuscript reviews, both positive and negative. The peer-review process can produce quality papers that merit publication in reputable journals, whether online or in print. Because the peer-review process can be painfully slow and frustrating, the would-be author needs to cultivate patience and perseverance.

Finally, although writing for publication can be enormously frustrating, it can also be immensely fulfilling. The deepest fulfillment comes to us who publish what we write – and see others cite what we publish.

### Recommended Reading

- Chenail, R. J. (1995). Presenting qualitative data. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(3). Retrieved June 1, 2009, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-3/presenting.html>
- Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., & Anzul, M. (1997). *On writing qualitative research: Living by words*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.
- Moxley, J. M. (1992). *Publish, don't perish: The scholar's guide to academic writing and publishing*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Thyer, B. A. (1994). *Successful publishing in scholarly journals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### References

- Bergman, M. M., & Coxon, A. P. M. (2005). The quality in qualitative methods. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2), Article 34. Retrieved August 28, 2009, from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502344>
- Bowen, G. A. (2003). Social funds as a strategy for poverty reduction in Jamaica: An exploratory study. (Doctoral dissertation, Florida International University, 2003). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, A 65/04, 1557.
- Bowen, G. A. (2005). Preparing a qualitative research-based dissertation: Lessons learned. *The Qualitative Report*, 10(2), 208-222. Retrieved August 28, 2009, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR10-2/bowen.pdf>
- Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), Article 2, pp. 12-23. Retrieved August 31, 2009, from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/5\\_3/html/bowen.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/5_3/html/bowen.htm)

- Bowen, G. A. (2008a). An analysis of citizen participation in anti-poverty programmes. *Community Development Journal*, 43(1), 65-78.
- Bowen, G. A. (2008b). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 137-152.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Social capital, social funds and poor communities: An exploratory analysis. *Social Policy & Administration*, 43(3), 245-269.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dingwall, R., Murphy, E., Watson, P., Greatbatch, D., & Parker, S. (1998). Catching goldfish: Quality in qualitative research. *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, 3, 167-172.
- Fine, M. A., & Kurdek, L. A. (1993). Reflections on determining authorship credit and authorship order on faculty-student collaborations. *American Psychologist*, 48(11), 1141-1147.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Marschan-Piekkari, R., & Welch, C. (2004). Qualitative research methods in international business: The state of the art. In R. Marschan-Piekkari & C. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for international business* (pp. 5-24). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Qualitative research in health care: Assessing quality in qualitative research. *BMJ [British Medical Journal]*, 320(7226), 50-52.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), Article 2. Retrieved August 28, 2009, from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1\\_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf)
- Nolan, R., & Rocco, T. (2009). Teaching graduate students in the social sciences writing for publication. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 20(2), 267-273.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept "thick description." *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), 538-549. Retrieved August 28, 2009, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-3/ponterotto.pdf>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Sally St. George, an Editor of *The Qualitative Report*, who, during the review of my "Preparing a Qualitative Research-Based Dissertation" (Bowen, 2005) told me: "Your next article should be about getting published."

## Appendix A

### *Essential Elements of Manuscript*

---

- Conceptual or theoretical framework
  - Research paradigm/design (appropriate for addressing the research problem or answering the research question)
  - Context or setting (adequately described so the reader can relate the findings to other settings)
  - Data-collection methods and procedures (including sampling)
  - Relationship between researcher and participants (including how potential bias was handled)
  - Data analysis
  - Findings (in sufficient detail)
  - Relevance of findings (to current knowledge, policy, practice, and/or current research)
- 

## Appendix B

### *Dissertation-Derived Articles*

---

Reference	Focus	Summary
Bowen, G. A. (2003). Social funds as a strategy for poverty reduction – With special reference to Jamaica. <i>Chicago Policy Review</i> , 7(1), 31-45.	Social funds	A critical review of the social funds literature and a description of the conceptual framework for the dissertation research.
Bowen, G. A. (2004). Community capacity for social development: Examining social fund projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. <i>Social Development Issues</i> , 26(2 & 3), 71-89.	Capacity building	An assessment of the capacity-building role of social fund projects in the context of local communities as agents of social development across the Latin America/Caribbean region.
Bowen, G. A. (2005). Preparing a qualitative research-based dissertation: Lessons learned.	Qualitative dissertation	A summary of seven lessons learned during the process of preparing a



*The Qualitative Report*, 10(2), 208-222.  
Available at  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR10-2/bowen.pdf>

dissertation based on qualitative research methods, with a focus on the special challenges of employing such methods.

Bowen, G. A. (2005). Local-level stakeholder collaboration: A substantive theory of community-driven development. <i>Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society</i> , 36(2), 73-88.	Stakeholder collaboration theory	A presentation of the substantive theory of community-driven development, including the four-stage process of development-focused collaboration among community-level stakeholders.
Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i> , 5(3): Article 2 (pp. 12-23). Available at <a href="http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/5_3/html/bowen.htm">http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/5_3/html/bowen.htm</a>	Sensitizing concepts	An analysis of the relationship between sensitizing concepts and grounded theory, with an illustration of the application of sensitizing concepts in a study of community-based anti-poverty projects.
Bowen, G. A. (2007). The challenges of poverty and social welfare in the Caribbean. <i>International Journal of Social Welfare</i> , 16(2), 150-158.	Social welfare policy	A social primer on anti-poverty strategies and welfare programs established in Caribbean countries, with an outline of practical proposals for pursuing social development.
Bowen, G. A. (2008). An analysis of citizen participation in anti-poverty programmes. <i>Community Development Journal</i> , 43(1), 65-78.	Citizen participation	An exploration of citizen participation (with a description of the levels, forms, and benefits of participation), highlighting the implications for community-level approaches to economic improvement and social change.
Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. <i>Qualitative Research</i> , 8(1), 137-152.	Saturation concept	A research note that examines the saturation concept in naturalistic inquiry and the challenges it presents, with a summary of the saturation process exemplified in a grounded theory study.
Bowen, G. A. (2009). Supporting a grounded theory with an audit trail: An illustration. <i>International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory &amp; Practice</i> , 12(4), 305-316.	Audit trail	An explanation of the process of creating an audit trail as a trustworthiness technique applied to the grounded theory methodology, with an illustration of an audit trail that supports a stakeholder collaboration theory.
Bowen, G. A. (2009). Social capital, social	Social capital	A synthesis of relevant literature and an

funds and poor communities: An exploratory analysis. *Social Policy & Administration*, 43(3), 245-269.

exploration of the nexus between social capital and social funds, with a discussion of significant social policy implications.

---

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.

Document analysis

An examination of the function of documents as a data source in qualitative research, with a discussion of document analysis procedure in the context of actual research experiences.

---

### Author Note

Glenn A. Bowen, Ph.D., is Director of the Center for Service Learning at Western Carolina University. Since 2003, when he completed his doctorate at Florida International University (Miami, FL, USA), he has written exemplary articles on qualitative research methods and issues for several journals. Dr. Bowen is a member of the review boards of three scholarly journals and has also reviewed manuscripts for three other journals. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Glenn A. Bowen, Center for Service Learning, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723, USA; Telephone: 828-227-2643; E-mail: [gbowen@email.wcu.edu](mailto:gbowen@email.wcu.edu) or [glennbowen@aol.com](mailto:glennbowen@aol.com)

Copyright 2010: Glenn A. Bowen and Nova Southeastern University

### Article Citation

Bowen, G. A. (2010). From qualitative dissertation to quality articles: Seven lessons learned. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 864-879. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-4/bowen.pdf>

---