

# Preparing an article for a journal

Gail FitzSimons

Monash University

[gail.fitzsimons@education.monash.edu.au](mailto:gail.fitzsimons@education.monash.edu.au)

*In 2005 the first edition of 'Adults Learning Mathematics — An International Journal' was published online. This paper will discuss the technical and conceptual requirements for the preparation of articles for refereed journals, based on this journal's refereeing procedures.*

## Introduction

An enormous contribution has been made through the annual ALM conference proceedings and the work of individual members to making available theoretical and practical research in a field which remains under-researched and under-theorised. A refereed electronic journal has now been established to further develop the high quality work in this field. The Call for Papers on the ALM website [<http://www.alm-online.org/>] states that:

*Adults Learning Mathematics — An International Journal* is an refereed journal that provides a forum for the online publication of high quality research on the teaching and learning, knowledge and uses of numeracy/mathematics to adults at all levels in a variety of educational sectors. Submitted papers should normally be of interest to an international readership.

The Author Guidelines make the following eight points intended to help in the preparation of a manuscript suitable for publication:

1. The paper should make a significant contribution to the furtherance of knowledge. For example, the ideas in the manuscript should not be readily available elsewhere.
2. Manuscripts should not have appeared in other journals and should not be similar to ones which have appeared recently in the *Adults Learning Mathematics: An International Journal*.
3. Articles must be relevant to adult mathematics/numeracy education in that they deal with:
  - Research and theoretical perspectives in the area of adults learning mathematics/numeracy;
  - Debate on special issues in the area of adults learning mathematics/numeracy
  - Practice: critical analysis of course materials and tasks, policy developments in curriculum and assessment, or data from large-scale tests, nationally and internationally.
4. The Journal is willing to publish papers relating to all aspects of adult mathematics/numeracy education and following any research paradigm. However, the author(s) must make a case for the significance of the topic and the appropriateness of the methodology used.
5. Papers may be of any length, up to about 9000 words. However, long papers should not be long-winded and short papers should deal with a particularly important question.
6. The paper should read well, with a beginning, a middle and an end, a good “flow” and a clear and logical organisation. Arguments should be clearly and cogently expressed.
7. The paper should be clearly written, with a good paragraph structure and free of colloquialisms and unwieldy sentences. The difference between the author’s opinions or experiences and assertions or inferences based on the literature should be particularly clear, and the paper should not contain any mathematical or other technical errors.
8. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Fourth Edition) is the general guide to style.

Once the manuscript has been received a ‘blind copy’ is sent to three reviewers; normally two from the Editorial Board and one ALM member. Reviewers are requested to return two forms — a summary sheet and a more detailed report — within six weeks. Their responses are coded, then collated and summarised by the Editor, and sent via

email to the first author. Anonymous copies are also sent to each reviewer as part of the ongoing professional development process. Figure 1 below is a reproduction of the summary sheet sent to reviewers.

### Important points to consider in manuscript preparation

In this section I will elaborate on 10 of the 14 points listed in Figure 1.

#### Is this article clearly a study in mathematics of adults?

This should present no problem for ALM members or those attending ALM conferences. However, it is important to make the links to adults learning mathematics explicit. One of the problems faced by adult educators, internationally, is the definition of 'adult'. Accordingly, it may be useful for the author/s to define the kinds of learners for whom the article is intended to be of relevance (e.g., early school leavers, older workers needing retraining, parents wishing to help their children, or new immigrants and others wishing to return to study/employment). Another ongoing debate is over the definition of terms such as 'mathematics' versus 'numeracy' or 'mathematical literacy', and so forth. Authors could briefly clarify their choice of terminology, explaining why they have chosen the particular term/s and what might be included as content or learning outcomes. As noted above, the manuscript should make clear its relevance to: (a) research and theoretical perspectives in the area of adults learning mathematics/numeracy; (b) debate on special issues in the area of adults learning mathematics/numeracy; and/or (c) practice, in the form of critical analysis of course materials and tasks, policy developments in curriculum and assessment, or data from large-scale tests, nationally and internationally.

#### Referee Summary Sheet

Manuscript no. .... Reviewer: ..... date .....

Scientific Quality		Yes	No	Not relevant	See comments
1	Is this article clearly a study in mathematics of adults?				
2	Does it make an original contribution to mathematics education for adults?				
3	Is it accessible and interesting to an international readership?				
4	Does it provide a well founded and cogently argued analysis?				
5	Does it take appropriate account of previous work?				
Quality of Presentations					
6	Does the title give a clear indication of the focus of the article?				
7	Does the abstract summarize the article clearly and concisely?				
8	Is the language of the article sufficiently fluent and clear?				
9	Are the illustrations and tables necessary and acceptable?				
10	Are the references adequate and are they all necessary?				
11	Could the essential content be presented more concisely? (particularly if the article is more than 20 pages in length)				
Advice to editors					
12	I enclose further comments about the article as attached pages.				
13	I have annotated the manuscript				
14	The article is				
	a) acceptable for publication in its present form				
	b) acceptable for publication with minor revisions				
	c) worthy consideration after major revision, or				
	d) not acceptable for publication				

Figure 1. ALMIJ referee summary sheet.

### **Does it make an original contribution to mathematics education for adults?**

Within the parameters discussed above, it is expected that the article will offer new perspectives on existing research and theory through, for example, the reporting of original research by the author/s, the formulation of alternative theories, or a meta-analysis of existing research. Debates and analyses are expected to produce ideas not previously published.

### **Is it accessible and interesting to an international readership?**

The content of the article should take into account the diversity of readership, explaining basic terms and acronyms commonly used in the author's local situation but which may not be known universally. Analyses and conclusions should also be of relevance to researchers and practitioners in other countries.

### **Does it provide a well founded and cogently argued analysis?**

As with all academic writing at this level, assertions need to be supported by evidence from the literature and/or the investigation under discussion. There needs to be a logical progression from the introduction, the justification for the importance of the problem and the methodology used for its investigation, the analysis and discussion, to the conclusions/implications.

### **Does it take appropriate account of previous work?**

Although the field of adult learning mathematics has been described as under-theorised and under-researched, it is indeed developing quickly and in diverse ways, internationally. Prospective authors are recommended to search the literature from previous ALM conferences, International Congress on Mathematics Education [ICME], and other major international conferences where ALM members are likely to be represented. The ALM website [<http://www.alm-online.org>] also provides a link to relevant publications by members.

### **Does the title give a clear indication of the focus of the article?**

The title may need to be revised after the completion of the article to align more closely with what has actually been written.

### **Does the abstract summarize the article clearly and concisely?**

As for #6, the abstract may also need to be revised after the body of the article has been completed.

### **Is the language of the article sufficiently fluent and clear?**

The language should be easy to read, free of jargon, with unusual terms elaborated, and all acronyms written in full the first time they are used (e.g., vocational education and training [VET]). Authors whose first language is not English are advised to seek proof-reading support from a first-language English speaker who understands the mathematical and educational concepts involved. In fact all authors, especially novices, are recommended to have the text read by a critical friend. Although the choice of the English language *version* rests with the author/s, it must be consistent throughout, and a 'spell check' should always be used. A 'grammar check' will help with the correct use of apostrophes for the possessive case (and not simple plurals, including decades such as 1980s).

### **Are the illustrations and tables necessary and acceptable?**

The importance of these is to enhance the reader's understanding. Accordingly, they should be as simple and uncluttered as possible. Check with the style guide for formatting.

### **Are the references adequate and are they all necessary?**

References are intended to assist readers to follow up on those aspects of the article with which they may desire to become more familiar. It is also important that authors do not present other people's ideas as their own where they are able to cite the original source. If there are several possibilities, choose the ones you consider most important. It is particularly important to follow the formatting guidelines in order to ensure consistency of style in the journal (American Psychological Association [APA] in this case). References should be generally accessible to international readers, and Universal Resource Locations [URLs] given where possible.

## **Conclusion**

In the field of adults learning mathematics there is clearly a need for further development of the literature. People such as researchers, graduate or postgraduate students, and practitioners reflecting on their own teaching have much to offer ALM members and the broader education community who share our interests (to some extent at least).

It is important to make connections with relevant and up-to-date literature (although some older references may still be pertinent and therefore acceptable) in order to challenge or extend previous assumptions and findings.

All experienced authors have had to take the first step themselves, and appreciate the need to encourage newcomers. Accordingly, reviews from this journal are intended to provide constructive criticism. If you believe that you could further develop an existing conference paper or study assignment of your own, or even start afresh reflecting on an issue of significance for you and which might interest others internationally, please consider submitting an article. New reviewers are also welcome!

See <http://www.alm-online.org/> for more details.