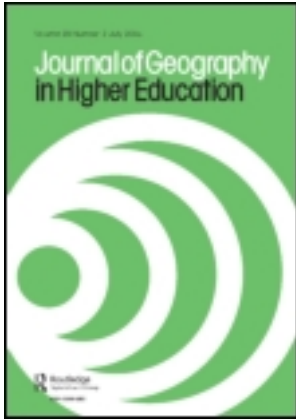


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Writing successfully for the Journal of Geography in Higher Education

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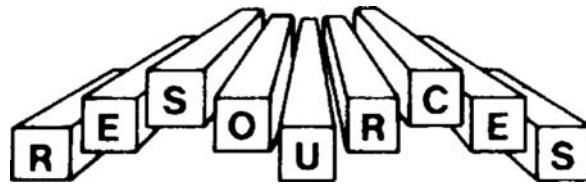
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Writing successfully for the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*

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Focusing on the peer review process, this guide for potential *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (JGHE) authors suggests 10 golden ground rules for preparing a successful contribution to the JGHE. These are (1) have something interesting to say, (2) have something useful to say, (3) address your audience, (4) write with academic rigour, (5) listen to learner feedback, (6) ensure constructive alignment in your curriculum, (7) make your paper belongs to the journal's community of discourse, (8) respect the mission of the journal, (9) expect to be set revisions and (10) deal systematically with any revisions set.

Keywords: Peer review; author guidelines; academic writing; scholarship of teaching; *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (JGHE)

Introduction

There are many texts on academic writing and on writing for academic journals (Day, 2007; Hartley, 2008; Murray, 2009), including some specific to Geography (Blunt & Souch, 2008), and even some on how to teach the subject of academic writing (Coffin et al., 2003). There is also much published guidance and also on academic writing when English is not your first language (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Belcher, 2007). Academic writing is an art that can be taught and deconstructed (Cameron, 2009; Ferguson, 2009). This article does not aim to replace these sources. The purpose of this article is only to help potential authors prepare a paper for submission to the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (JGHE) and to explain to would-be authors what happens to that paper after submission.

Of course, the basic rules of academic writing apply. Authors are advised to write a paper that looks and reads as though it has just been published in the target journal, a paper that seems to belong to the discourse of which this journal is a part, and a paper that the readership of the journal might find interesting and useful (Murray, 2009, p. 37 et seq.). The paper should acknowledge the contributions of those writers who have published similar studies in the journal previously and those who have published in sister journals. It should also acknowledge the authorities that the contributors to the journal respect, even though the new paper may move beyond this intellectual territory. The mantra of 20th century Cartography was “consider the map user”. A map should do more than display its

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author's cartographic skill. It should communicate useful information in terms that its target audience understands. The same goes for any academic pedagogic research contribution about Geography in Higher Education.

***JGHE* peer review**

The *JGHE*, like most top-rated academic journals, relies on a process of “double-blind” peer review. The editor does not decide what is published. Quality control is delegated to a panel of independent reviewers. Each reviewer is supplied with a copy of the submitted manuscript from which all “identifiers” of author names and institution are removed; a practice employed to eliminate some of the problems that may result from bias or prejudice, for or against, any particular author, nationality or school (Souder, 2011).

However, this article contains the perspective of a former *JGHE* co-editor. For 6 years, its author had the task of assigning papers to the journal's review teams, chasing up peer reviewers and subeditors and, most critically and painfully, acting as the journal's first gatekeeper. This work involved screening out all of those papers that did not seem suitable for review—because there was not the slightest chance that the comments of peer reviewers would be positive. Among those rejected at this stage were a surprisingly large number that were sent back simply because they did not address the teaching of Geography in Higher Education. (Of course, the *JGHE* has other special requirements for the papers it publishes, which will be described later). From the remainder, the 60–70 per cent of submissions allowed entry to the peer review process, even these frequently generated storms of criticism from reviewers who felt that the *JGHE* was wasting their time with obviously “unsuitable” papers. Peer reviewers are a precious resource to any journal (Hames, 2007). Editors wish to keep them on side, so the process of preliminary screening is taken very seriously.

The basic outcome of the *JGHE* peer review process is standard. It results in a decision, variously, to accept, accept with minor revisions, accept subject to major revisions, reject with an invitation to resubmit later or reject outright. Each individual decision is supported by a list of (ideally) constructive comments, an edited version of which is passed to the author. These comments aim to help authors improve and further refine their work.

Of course, most front-line academic journals do exactly the same to defend their quality and reputation. Still, it often seems to come as a deep shock to authors to find that anyone could possibly think that their article was not perfect, absolutely perfect, in every way (Murray, 2009, p. 186 et seq.). In fact, less than 5 per cent of those papers submitted to the *JGHE* peer review teams are accepted outright. The reason is obvious. The Journal uses a team of up to five academic colleagues for each peer review team. Of course, it would be unusual if, among any five randomly selected academic colleagues, there was not one who could find anything worth mentioning by way of qualification, correction, elaboration or rephrasing. Consequently, the most common advice, even for a very good paper, is “accept with revisions,” commonly major revisions.

The Journal of Geography in Higher Education

The *JGHE* has a special mission. It was founded upon the conviction that the development of better modes of learning and teaching is vitally important to both Geography and Higher Education. It is committed to promoting, enhancing and sharing Geography learning and teaching across all institutions of higher education (HE) throughout the world. It aims to

provide a forum for Geographers and others, regardless of their specialisms, to discuss common educational interests, to advocate new ideas and, especially to present the results of educational research in Geographical Higher Education. Its aim is to advance the scholarship of learning and teaching by making it public, peer-reviewed, and available for adoption, adaptation and improvement by other practitioners.

Founded more than 30 years ago at Oxford Polytechnic, England, the *JGHE* has risen to become a leader in the field of Geographical Education and, on occasions, to be ranked among the best in the world in Education/Educational Research and Geography. In 2006, its peak year so far, the Thompson *Journal Citation Reports* ranked the *JGHE* 12th in Education and 15th in Geography worldwide. However, as its citations also reveal, the *JGHE* exists within a small cluster of journals that are also concerned, in part, with teaching Geography in Higher Education. The most important is the USA's "*Journal of Geography*". However, the cluster includes: "*International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*", which emerged from Australia and now has strong links with the International Geographical Union's Commission on Geography, as well as the UK's Higher Education Academy, open access journal "*Planet*", which for many years acted as a feeder for the *JGHE*. Beyond this immediate neighbourhood, the *JGHE* links with the core generalist journals of Geography and those journals devoted to HE, including "*Higher Education Research and Development*", "*Studies in Higher Education*" and "*Teaching in Higher Education*".

Unlike some of these journals, the *JGHE* was created with a clear philosophy and a purpose. Its aim is to promote and develop learner-centred and active learning, to encourage instructors to hear their learners' voices and more generally to enhance the quality and status of research into teaching and learning in Geography and sister disciplines. The journal also considers that it has a staff development function. It expends considerable effort in supporting the work of new researchers and helping those struggling with English as a second language. This paper, of course, is a contribution to this work. It is intended to make the "hidden" processes of peer review clear to new and developing authors (and also to new *JGHE* peer reviewers).

The *JGHE* is interested in educational technologies and new technology but its overwhelming concern is people. It endorses the argument, attributed to Nelson Mandela, that "*education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*". Mandela also said that "*Education is our key to a better life for all*" calling education a path to freedom (Mandela, 1955, p. 2). With such in mind, the *JGHE* works hard to reach beyond the international community of Geography in Higher Education practitioners and make a difference on the global scale.

For example, the *JGHE* has supported the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014)* and made education for sustainability a special focus. One output was its first "spin-off" publication—a collection of papers from the *JGHE* and the American journal "*Applied Environmental Education and Communication*" (Chalkley, Haigh, & Higgitt, 2009). Of course, education for sustainability is about helping citizens realize their personal responsibilities to the future. Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan argued that "*the greatest challenge in this new Century is to make sustainable development a reality for all of the world's people*" (Annan, 2001, p. 1). The *JGHE* project reflects work being done in Geography and Environmental Education to discover ways of creating this reality through transformational learning and teaching.

However, whatever its ambitions, the *JGHE* agenda is set, to a very great extent, by those who contribute to its pages. Whatever its editorial aspirations, the journal reflects the values and beliefs of its Geography in Higher Education research community. It does not, in general,

commission articles, apart from occasional Editorials and some shorter papers for its special purpose “Resources” and “Directions” sections. Equally, it does not publish invited papers—with the exceptions of the *JGHE* Annual Lecture and the *JGHE* Biennial Prize winning paper. The *JGHE* Biennial Prize is awarded to the best paper published in a 2-year period from a list of nominations screened by its Editorial Advisory Panel. These *JGHE* prize-winning papers are worth careful study by potential authors because they provide the clearest possible guide to the values of the editorial board (*cf.* Hall, Healey, & Harrison, 2002; Healey, 2005; Livingstone & Lynch, 2000; Solem, Lee, & Sehlemper, 2009; Solem & Foote, 2004). All other papers appear because they have survived the *JGHE*’s peer review process. So, consideration of this process is probably the best place for a potential author to begin.

Selecting papers to publish

The aim of the *JGHE* has been to encourage Geography specialists to apply as much rigour and care to their research into learning and teaching as they do to their other subject-based research. Its aim is to create a vehicle and voice for pedagogic research in Geography that is as rigorous as that in any other branch of Geography or Education. This is a developmental process and part of the *JGHE*’s activity is directed to keeping this process of development on target.

As it has evolved, the *JGHE* has worked hard to move beyond parochial, trumpet blowing, reports of the “what we did on our Spring field week” variety, the “hey, you could use this new technical gismo if you like” variety and even the “hey, my students were so impressed when I told them about my X” variety, though a few such papers still slip through the peer review net and enter the *JGHE*’s pages. It has also tried to get beyond the “I used this great innovation, it was a wonderful success . . . but, of course, I could only do it once” variety . . . unless the reasons why the work was a “one-off” are explained as a lesson for others who might be tempted to follow. More recently, it has also fended off the weakest of those, often unconvincing, team reports of the “we got a grant to do this project and part of the deal was that we should publish a paper” variety. Instead, the *JGHE* strives to address the reality of learning and teaching that involves larger numbers of learners, where classes are run year on year, where the rough and the smooth can be evaluated and where something has been learnt that others can use. Education, unlike much of Geography, is an applied subject. It is not enough to write something that only evokes the response “how wonderful” because those who read it are practitioners and likely to be sceptical. What they want is to know “That’s good, I can use that . . . and thanks to paper “X”, I have reasonable faith that the approach will work.”

The peer review screen

Peer review is a terrifyingly blunt instrument and it would be wonderful if there were something less arbitrary (Campanario, 1998). Sadly, even some very respectable Geography journals base their decisions on the basis of the peer reviews of the one or two external authorities they manage to persuade to take on the task. If just one disapproves of the work for some reason, the paper may be rejected. Of course, no respectable scientist would base their argument on the results of just two empirical tests, equally, no one from the humanities would reject an idea on the basis of a single critical commentary. However, most academic journals do exactly that, which makes their peer review system part quality control and part lottery. The visible outcome is huge variability in the quality of the articles

published. What is not visible is the volume of good work, especially that containing new or controversial perspectives, that is rejected or lost (Gans & Shepherd, 1994).

Frey (2002, p. 4) expresses concern about “*the veto power of (anonymous) referees, whose interests are not aligned to those of the journal*” and about editors who, in general, accept the advice of such referees. To compensate, the *JGHE* uses a dispersed peer review system that involves up to four in-house reviewers from the *JGHE* Editorial Board plus the usual two external referees. The in-house reviewers cover the range of Geography. As stakeholders in the Journal, the in-house referees screen papers for relevance to the *JGHE*’s mission and to Geographical Higher Education. They also try to ensure that standards are comparable to, or above, those of recent *JGHE* issues. The task of the external referees is to address the inherent qualities of the paper and its relevance to the community of Geographers that created it.

One of the first surprises for a new entry to the *JGHE* Editorial Board is the range of evaluations that this peer review process generates. It is not uncommon for a single paper to receive scores that run the whole range from “accept without revision” to “reject without the possibility of resubmission” as well as all points between. As most University staff meetings demonstrate, academics are complex souls and hold wildly different viewpoints on almost every subject. The *JGHE* system tends to reduce the possibilities that a paper will be rejected purely on the whim of a single, or even two referees, and it allows work that is controversial, at least a fighting chance, to get some air.

Several of our most interesting papers have crossed this chasm, including some highly cited, landmark papers (e.g. Cook, 2000). With this in mind, in general, if more than one reviewer thinks that a paper is worthwhile, the *JGHE* will try to salvage it. However, this does mean that most papers are returned to authors with very long lists of suggestions, requests, as well as outright demands for improvements and changes. As co-editor, much time was spent advising the innocent that this “is entirely normal.”

The peer review checklist

Increasingly, HE assessment is moving towards criterion-based systems. At my own university, each learner is now provided with a checklist for what is required of each piece of coursework and those that read this, and make sure that their work covers all the bases, gain some benefit. Equally, for many years, the following checklist has been sent to *JGHE* peer reviewers. It gives some hints about the journals preoccupations and concerns. The latest version, agreed at the *JGHE* Editorial Board Meeting of September 2011, is displayed as Table 1. To pass the peer review process, author should expect that their paper allows a peer reviewer to tick most or better all of these eight boxes.

Some ground rules

Of course, a peer review checklist is a screen, a quick way of eliminating papers that are not fit for purpose. However, it reflects the fact that the *JGHE*, like almost every Journal, operates some basic ground rules. The following notes try to unpack these ground rules and highlight some of the most common pitfalls that capture many of the papers that are rejected.

Say something that’s worth hearing

The first and most important step in writing a paper that the *JGHE* will accept is to have something to say that the journal’s readers might want to know. It may be assumed that

Table 1. *JGHE* peer reviewer's checklist.

-
1. Is the paper relevant to teaching Geography in Higher Education?
 2. Does it generalize course and institution-specific material, where possible, for an international audience?
 3. Does it clarify local terms and jargon and does it avoid superficial local detail?
 4. If appropriate, does it contain practical information to guide others?
 5. If appropriate, has the learning and teaching strategy been evaluated (learner evaluations)? (Please note: this criterion is considered very important).
 6. Is the paper clearly written? (However, please note: the *JGHE* is concerned to expand the geographical reach of the journal, which means fostering an increased tolerance to English Second Language contributions and to the concerns and styles of less familiar educational traditions from Europe, CIS, the Developing World, etc.).
 7. Is the text shaped by an awareness of equal opportunity (race, gender, age, etc.) issues?
 8. Finally, does the paper demonstrate a scholarly awareness of previous work both within geographical education and within the larger arena of educational research?
-

JGHE readers are very busy people and constantly bombarded by information of all kinds. An author must be certain that they have something to say that really should claim the attention of this audience. Here, in general, readers are not interested in any particular writer, nor how well financed is their University, nor what is done within that University—unless it is very special and may be taken for a model. Papers devoted to such matters are usually rejected. However, a paper that has an interesting and important message that Geography in Higher Education practitioners either want or need to hear will be welcomed.

Say something useful

For the *JGHE*, an even more important consideration is that a paper offer useful information. Its message should be more than merely “relevant” to Geographers in Higher Education. If possible, it should offer them something that they can use in their own work. In general, when the peer review system detects papers that are merely virtuoso pieces, perhaps produced for some local research evaluation exercise, they will be rejected. Papers that try to help Geography Educators do their work better, which are based on solid, replicated, experience and that are written from the heart, are welcomed.

Address the journal's audience

When writing for a particular audience, it is an advantage to know who they are. In the case of the *JGHE*, the core readership is made up of practitioners of learning and teaching in Geography in Higher Education, albeit with a fringe in Education, Educational Development, Teacher Education and across the Social, Environmental and Earth Sciences.

The *JGHE* has international scope. However, its contents prove that, in fact, it serves three major constituencies: first, for historical reasons, the Geography lecturers of Britain's universities, second, the Geography faculty of North America and third, the Geography educators of Australasian Higher Education. The journal has aspirations to embed itself more firmly elsewhere and there is growing involvement with Southern Africa and Continental Europe. The journal aspires to a wider reach but, meanwhile, its publications aim to serve the interests of as many as possible of these communities. Papers that are too parochial and that do not address an international audience are not suitable for the *JGHE*. Papers that address the wider concerns of the international community of Geographers in Higher Education are welcomed.

Make a good case

Writing for an education journal, such as the *JGHE*, should be approached with the same rigour as writing for any other leading Geographical or Subject research journal. Part of the *JGHE*'s mission is to encourage Geographers to apply the same research skills to their learning and teaching work that they do to their subject research. The Journal wants pedagogic research into Geography in Higher Education to rank among the best, the most thorough, and the most scholarly published across both Geography and Educational Research. So, papers should be careful to ground themselves in the (up to date) research literature of both Geography and Education. Equally, papers should be substantive and have a solid database. Certainly, some parts of Geographical Technology remain in their "gee whizz—look at this" phase, but most of Geographical Education has moved on. In general, Geographers are no longer impressed by expensive, unsustainable, one-off projects, no matter how worthy their ambitions. Equally, papers that describe "my new GIS software" or "what we did with technology "X" on our field trip", unless they contain some important innovations or originality, are not especially well received. Hopefully, Geographical Higher Education has gone beyond this pioneering phase and now engages in matters with greater intellectual depth.

However, the *JGHE* is very interested to hear of experience from good practice and about conceptual or technical innovations of any kind that have prove valuable through several years and that have been fully documented, evaluated by learners and assessed. Sadly, there is far too little work in this category—but that received is greatly valued and welcomed.

Listening to the learners

Traditions vary, but most Geography is written in the third person. In Geographical Higher Education, there are good reasons why this might be encouraged. Learning, teaching and publishing in HE should be a process of communication about those processes that help others to learn (Hay, 2006). Its focus is, and should remain, the learner. Recently, the author has attempted to introduce "Invitational Theory" to Geography, which insists that the best teaching is that which invites the learner to learn (Haigh, 2011). In fact, much of the better content of the *JGHE* already concerns research into the construction of "learning invitations". However, in some papers submitted to (and usually rejected by) the *JGHE*, the learner is assigned a very minor role. The paper is about the teacher and their thoughts rather than the effects of their teaching and thoughts on learners. The nature, needs, thoughts, views and understandings of those who are the recipients of this "teaching" should never be ignored.

Interestingly, the previous paragraph has attracted much comment from this paper's own peer reviewers, who worry about discouragement of the use of "I" language and the use of the first person. They argue that sometimes "the teacher's personal perceptions are important" and not simply a sign of self-obsession or lack of consideration for the perspectives of their learners (Table 3). Certainly, those engaged in qualitative research often advocate the use of the active first person singular to demonstrate their own reflexivity and to situate themselves in the research context, which is fine (Gilgun, 2010). More interestingly, Haraway (1988, p. 581), using the language of "I" and "we", accuses those that use the third person of pulling the "*god trick*" of pretending that they are objective detached voices, which they are not. However, the use of subjective versus objective pronouns signals important differences in perspective, which in turn link to very different validity claims (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010; Wilber, 1997); these are matters that

need calculated consideration (cf. Wilber, 2000). Unfortunately, as co-editor, the author received too many papers, where the learners were invisible and the text addressed only “what I, the teacher, did . . . and what I did next”. To date, few *JGHE* papers have used the intersubjective collective, the first person, plural, “what we, the class, learnt”, which might be sound, despite its inherent “us versus them” connotation. Meanwhile, this author’s best practical advice for a new author remains to stay with the conventional, scientific and interobjective third person.

Of course, the *JGHE* prefers that learning and teaching should be a partnership between learners and instructors. It should be a two-way process of communication, where the most important facet is the understanding that develops through that communication. This can be measured in several ways, including objective testing and examinations, but as many learners report, the kind of knowledge that is swotted up for a test is often forgotten quickly afterwards. Instead, the *JGHE* envisions a kind of education that remains with learners, an education that is affective and transformative, that brings to learners something that they will remember and can use in their future lives. The best way of finding out whether this kind of learning is actually occurring is, formally, to ask the learners for their views. How this is achieved is, of itself, an important research problem that all case study, practice based, papers should address and that review papers would do well to consider.

In sum, the *JGHE* favours those innovators in learning and teaching who listen to their learners and make serious and honest efforts to understand and interpret their perspectives on their learning experience, which is a step beyond the evaluation of the learning outcomes (Fink, 1977). Of course, the real reflective practitioner in education is the one who is able to step outside their self and examine what their teaching is doing, dispassionately, from the outside (Haigh & Kilmartin, 1999). Reflective practitioners do not centre themselves and might accept the spirit of the thoughts, expressed a century ago, by Sri Aurobindo, who said: “*Nothing can be taught . . . The teacher . . . does not impart knowledge. [but] shows how to acquire knowledge . . . does not call forth knowledge [but only shows] where it lies*” (Aurobindo, 1910, p. 20).

Constructive alignment

Education and communication are complex processes and it is important that, in each submitted paper, they should be seen working together as a coherent whole. In the words of the Mahatma Gandhi “*They say, “means are after all means”. I would say, “means are after all everything”. As the means so the end . . .*” (Gandhi, 1924, pp. 236–237). Each exercise has a context, each curriculum a purpose and each innovation a function. In each case described, the logic of the whole process should be obvious. The whole system should be seen to be pulling together. There should be a constructive alignment between the subject, educational objectives, mode and means for delivery, assessment and evaluation (Biggs, 2003). Where this does not happen, the reasons need to be explored.

The important point is that no educational intervention exists in isolation. It belongs to a larger curriculum. It is part of a larger structure and it needs to know its place. Krishna Kumar, struggling with alien colonial influences in Indian curricula, wrote that:

The problem of curriculum is related to our perception of what kind of society and people we are, and to our vision of the kind of society we want to be. By taking shelter in the “received” perspective and the “principles of curriculum development” that it offers, we merely shun our responsibility and allow ourselves to be governed by choices made long ago or elsewhere under very different circumstances. (Kumar, 1992, p. 2)



In other words, constructive alignment is about more than conformity, it is also about alignments that help drive constructive change in larger curricular contexts.

Make your paper “look the part . . .”

Peer reviewers are gatekeepers. They aim to grant access only to those things that belong within the pale. They need to be convinced that what is being presented is appropriate as well as well thought through and well researched (Hay, 2006). A paper that is not presented according to house style, which does not conform to the journal’s preferences for citations, where the reference lists seem out dated or restricted, or which appears slapdash for any reason, will probably be rejected. Papers that look and feel as that they belong in the journal, that are well written, well documented, well researched, well presented and that exude care and scholarship will likely be welcomed. It is always a good idea to read through an array of recent issues and reflect upon what is happening in the journal and how it is being presented. If you are an author whose first language is not English, it is also a very good idea to have a native English speaker check through your paper ahead of submission to make sure both that your ideas come through clearly and that your text does not distract peer reviewers with technical errors of language.

Respect the mission

Many journals encapsulate a belief system. There are implicit assumptions about what is right and what is not. For example, the *JGHE* believes that deep learning is preferable to surface memorization (Marton & Saljo, 1997), that active constructive engagement is preferable to passive receptivity and that experiential learning, as through fieldwork, is vital to Geographical Education.

An author may not agree with these beliefs and may feel the need to contest some of these foundations. This is not a problem. Any writer is free to oppose or contextualize these positions and the *JGHE* would encourage such debate. However, papers that neither respect this starting point nor position themselves within or outside the scholarly frameworks of the journal will likely be rejected. By contrast, papers that say controversial things, that critically analyse a *JGHE* discourse and that ground their arguments in solid scholarship will likely be welcomed.

Expect to be sent revisions

So, an author has taken heed of everything above. Their paper was not quickly screened out by the editors but has entered the peer review process. Some months have passed and, at last, this “excellent” paper, its author’s pride and joy, is returned accompanied by a long email and even longer list of typically “very annoying” and “inane” questions and critical comments. What now?

Well, there are several options, depending on the character of these comments. Some authors simply abandon their paper and sometimes that is the correct response. Sometimes an author will protest against the decision, although such protests are commonly counterproductive—after all the journal’s editors and its review teams have already gone to great lengths to do what they believe is best for both the journal and its authors.¹ Other authors, after reading the reviewers’ comments, reflect that there is such a gulf between what the reviewers want and what they are prepared to do to meet their demands that they would be better off sending their paper to another journal. Many rejected *JGHE* papers

subsequently appear as valued and well-cited papers in other journals. This is not something about which the *JGHE* is particularly proud—but if it does not show that “no peer review system is infallible”, it might suggest that the reviewers comments helped the author restructure and retarget their work. More often, it shows only that the article was not submitted to the most appropriate publication in the first place. Different journals require different qualities in the papers that they accept.

Unfortunately, the most common response (once this author is notoriously guilty of) is merely to sit on the paper—thereby wasting everyone’s time and effort and reducing any currency the paper might have once have possessed. The problem is, as Frey (2002, p. 3) notes, that what you are faced with is

an invitation to resubmit the paper according to the demands exactly spelled out by the ... referees and the editor(s) ... [In effect, you are asked to sell your] soul to conform to the will of others, the referees and editors, in order to get one advantage, namely publication.

Further, in general, you know that persons refusing “... *to follow the demands of the system ... cannot enter ...*” (Frey, 2002, p. 3). However, “sulking” is not really a very good option. Indeed, to counter this tendency, the *JGHE* has introduced a system of deadlines for revisions that try to ensure that these delays remain within reasonable limits. Nevertheless, it remains a good idea not to attempt to respond to major criticisms immediately. When major revision is the permitted option, and this is very often the case, the best advice from this editor and author is to read those reviewers comments carefully, and yes, then put them aside—but only for a week or so. Once “composure” and “perspective” have been regained, this is the time to set to work on negotiating a “resubmission with revisions”.

Take the process of revision systematically

Revision is a process that has to be tackled systematically and carefully. A paper sent for revision is a paper on probation, it is not accepted. Those papers that are returned to the journal “after revision”, but where the revised version still contains some of those problems that first troubled the peer review team, are very commonly rejected.

The process of revision is one to take seriously and it is one that might be regarded as a process of persuasion. Author responses must always be: “in response to criticism A, section B has been adjusted as follows to resolve the problem”; “error C has been corrected as shown in D”, or more rarely, “the change suggested by critical suggestion E could not be enacted because ...”. It is a good idea to set aside a few clear days for this process and to sort out the issues and problems, one by one, changing the text and keeping a separate note of your reasons for making (or if appropriate, NOT making) each of the changes requested. If the process works, theory suggests that the end result should be a better text (Weller, 2001).

Of course, revision can be a much more protracted process, especially if the paper is placed in the “reject but with interesting ideas” or more rarely “accept with (very) major revisions” categories. Sometimes, the peer reviewers may request another year (or more) of data collection or additional information that will take months to assemble. Comments of the “bet you couldn’t do this twice or thrice”! variety are commonly levelled at papers based on a single year’s experience with a single or small group of students. Equally, comments of the “you should have asked them “X”” variety may require a new cohort of learners to resolve.

Meanwhile, the most important thing to remember is that the comments received are supposed to be helpful. Very often, the *JGHE* receives peer review comments that are

unhelpful or ill considered. Peer reviewers are exactly as flawed, stressed and intolerant as University colleagues everywhere. Sometimes, there are serious concerns and disagreements about what is written or the way something is expressed—and the *JGHE* will try and advise about such issues. The problem could be a matter of philosophy or politics, for example, or it may involve the language that is used. For example, a first, more jokey, version of this article, which has been used since 2008 as a working paper by colleagues attending “writing for the *JGHE* workshops”, deliberately (if naughtily) compared some kinds of Geographical writing, deemed purposeless, to a particular kind of “self-satisfying behaviour”.² Few of the peer review teams let this comment pass without major and fulsome protest. Of course, such small things can easily tip the balance of opinion on a paper towards rejection. Naturally, the offending term is expurgated from this version.

Ideally, each *JGHE* subeditor is expected to weed out excessive and destructively negative comments and send something constructive, something that an author can work with, even if it is accompanied by a rejection from the journal. Elsewhere, in both Geography and Education, it is not unusual for rejection letters to be callous, cryptic and unhelpful. The *JGHE* does not endorse this poor practice. The Journal may not wish to publish your article but it would hope to help you develop your work.

Responding to this article’s peer reviewers

This paper has been blessed with a plethora of peer reviewers. In addition to the five linked to its own peer review process, more than 70 others have sent in comments during successive Royal Geographical Society and Association of American Geographers’ Conference Workshops on “Writing for the *JGHE*”. Beginning in 2008, these workshops took the form of staff development sessions for would-be authors. Set into teams, participants were invited to act as peer reviewers for the original version of this paper.

True to form, these newly inducted peer reviewers produced reviewers’ comments that were exactly as contradictory, “pernickety” and perverse as those from those valued veteran reviewers that regularly assist this journal. (The fact that these new colleagues were also reproducing, exactly, the kind of comments that they themselves will find deeply disconcerting when next applied to themselves . . . well, hopefully, this message was not wasted). Here, of course, their recommendation was equally typical—“accept subject to major revisions”, a recommendation melded, naturally, with a subcurrent of those who favoured outright rejection and another minority, mainly from the *JGHE* Editorial Board, who wanted immediate publication. Similarly, these reviews followed the normal pattern of requiring the article to cover a much wider array of topics while, simultaneously, becoming much shorter.

In addition to general comments about: this writer’s use (and abuse) of English, grammatical errors (sadly, very few pointed out, exactly, where these could be found), and its use of weary irony (now much reduced), these anonymous reviewers’ comments identified the following sets of issues. The original article was too general, it needed more “do’s” to add to the “don’ts”, it needed to do more to address equal opportunity issues—not least the problems of English Second Language contributors, and it needed to be more “learner-centred”, which the teams mistakenly equated with “student centred”. (This was an interesting case of myopia. Of course, new authors are learners too, as, hopefully, are all “teachers”). In addition, reviewers commented that the paper needed better grounding in educational theory and precedent, which was certainly true. Finally, these review teams

argued that this paper needed a better structural balance between introduction and conclusion. These topics were all addressed for this revision.

From the official reviewers, one felt that potential authors should be reassured that the journal welcomed review papers as well as conceptual and critical studies of Geographical Higher Education, which is true. The journal welcomes all kinds of contributions on Geographical Higher Education although its special focus remains on research into the practical enhancement of teaching and learning. One recommended additional sources, which have been added selectively, and also worried about the validity of the *JGHE*'s research journal format compared to other modes of sharing. Attention was drawn to the "Disciplinary Commons" ideas of Fincher and Tenenber (2006, 2011), which builds upon the notion of communities of practice and the development of open educational resources. Their aim, however, was "*To establish practices for the scholarship of teaching by making it public, peer-reviewed, and amenable for future use and development by other educators: creating a teaching-appropriate document of practice equivalent to the research-appropriate journal paper*" (Fincher & Tenenber, 2006, p. 4). This contrasts with the *JGHE*, which aims to publish learning and teaching practitioner-oriented research papers that are "equal to", or "better than", those published by any other Geography constituency.

Table 2. Responding to workshop-based peer reviewer comments.

Peer reviewer's comments	Author's response
Better grounding in educational theory	This revised paper is now embedded in the theory and literature of that worthy part of Education Development that focuses on the improvement of academic writing, among other academic literacies. The list of references is greatly expanded and so is the introductory section. The sources mentioned by reviewers have been scanned and, where appropriate, included.
Better structural balance between introduction and conclusion	This is achieved by the addition of an abstract that outlines the paper's '10 golden ground rules' and an expanded introduction that gives more detailed and explicit guidance about the aims and purpose of this article.
Equal opportunity issues	Part of the purpose of this paper, which may be read by new peer reviewers and as well as would-be authors, is to set out the <i>JGHE</i> 's aim to foster both new authors and those struggling to communicate in English as a second language. These are this article's main equal opportunity goals.
More learner-centred	Hopefully, revisions to the guidance about the purpose of the paper as well as more explicit statements in text will have alerted the reader to the academic development aspect of this paper. Here, the targeted 'learners' are explicitly 'would-be' authors and new peer reviewers.
More 'do's' as well as 'don'ts'.	This was a very good point, which the revisions address by sketching out some basic 'do's' in the introduction, by hinting that readers should think about developing their teaching through issuing 'learning invitations' (Haigh, 2011), and by these last sections that demonstrate a methodology by example. These include this section on responding to peer reviewer comments and the section on title/abstract/keywords that follows.

Table 2 details this author's responses to the Workshop comments as submitted back to the journal. Table 3 details the further responses to the comments of the formal peer review team selected by the journal. Table 3 demonstrates the actual character of a typical *JGHE* peer review report. It is a live example, only slightly edited.

Title, abstract and keywords—the importance of being easily found

Most authors focus on their paper's main text. So, refining the title and abstract often slips through an author's net, at both submission and during revision. However, the most read sections of a paper and those parts most likely to generate both readers and citations are its title, followed by its abstract. One of the author's "best papers" (his opinion only) was called "The Landscape Assay". This was an early attempt to develop cross-cultural communication skills among Geography learners and to internationalize the Geography curriculum by means of a fieldwork exercise (Haigh, Revill, & Gold, 1995). However, this paper gained relatively few citations and one key reason may be the title, whose meaning is obscure. If that title contained the topic's main keywords (i.e. fieldwork, cross-cultural skills, internationalization and future employability), it might have attracted much more attention. Equally, many abstracts do little more than promise what a reader might find in a paper. More effective are those that tell the reader about what that paper discovered. Today, some publishers, notably Emerald, require authors to produce structured abstracts. These use the following headings: (1) purpose—the aims of the paper, (2) how it was done—design, methodology and approach, (3) findings—the main results and conclusions, followed by some "so what" sections that ask about the implications of the study for future practice, research and society (if applicable) and (4) a note about what is new and original in the paper and why it is important (EmeraldInsight.com, 2011). Of course, if the abstract is the first (and maybe the only) part of a paper to be read—it needs to be very good and, where appropriate, to cover these same topics.

Conclusion

So, write for the *JGHE* when there is something useful, relevant and interesting to say about learning and teaching in Geography in Higher Education. Especially, write when a researched intervention or innovation, a new idea, proven by replication, is shown to work and be useful, and when both instructor and learners fully endorse this conclusion. When writing for the *JGHE*, consider the guidance in this article and also that in the larger professional literature on the educational development of academic writing. This article has suggested 10 golden ground rules for writing for the *JGHE*, which are (1) have something interesting to say, (2) have something useful to say, (3) address your audience, (4) make sure you have a good case and write with the same rigour as for any other research journal, (5) listen to the learners—especially through course evaluation, (6) ensure constructive alignment in your curriculum, (7) make sure that your paper is "at home in the *JGHE*", i.e. that it is advised by both the journal's community of discourse, (8) respect the mission of the journal, (9) expect to be set revisions and (10) take the process of revision seriously and tackle revisions systematically. On resubmission of a revised paper, be sure to let the editors know what has been done to resolve each of the reviewers' comments (*cf.* Table 3). Finally, make sure that the title and abstract are both attractive and that the latter captures the essence of the conclusions. As for the rest: be honest, do not exaggerate; do not send the *JGHE* propaganda; do not try and impress with fancy language but write in a straightforward manner, as though all the readers were struggling to cope with a second language. Make sure that what is written has academic depth but also that it

Table 3. Responding to *JGHE* peer reviewer comments.

Editor's comments to author	Author's response
<p>The four reviewers' comments provide a wealth of suggestions and references for the author to reflect and build upon to enhance the manuscript. However, there are some areas that need a little more refinement. The author might like to provide further commentary on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 'usefulness of sharing'. 2. The rigour of peer review process? 3. The direction of <i>JGHE</i> and the need for Conceptual approaches? Does this manuscript encourage these approaches? (see Reviewer 1) 4. The third-person approach to writing manuscripts, challenged by Reviewers 1 and 4, needs further explanation? 5. The 'best' way of evaluating effective learning is through 'course evaluation' is challenged by Reviewer 3 and more context and other alternatives need to be provided. <p>Please use these views of the reviewers to enhance your manuscript.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A commentary on the Fincher 'usefulness of sharing' work has been added to the responding to peer reviewers section. 2. The article already emphasizes the rigour of the peer review process and why it exists. Further comment is included in Table 3. 3. Reviewer 1's comments are discussed in Table 3 and a new clause is added to the main text. 4. The third-person approach is addressed in a new paragraph under ground rule 5 and here in Table 3. Hopefully, readers will reflect less upon this 'rule' than the reason it is proposed. 5. This text is corrected and softened.
<p>Reviewer's comments to author</p> <p>Reviewer: 1. This paper was well written, clear, informative and somewhat to my surprise, raised some quite challenging issues about the character and future of <i>JGHE</i>.</p>	<p>Author's response</p> <p>The paper is a personal view but it reports <i>JGHE</i> received wisdom.</p>
<p>Despite the author's assurances, there are still spelling and grammatical errors (e.g. swatting/swotting; misplaced apostrophes)</p> <p>There might be value in adding key words such as scholarly writing; scholarship of teaching. Does <i>JGHE</i> need to be in the keyword list?</p>	<p>Reviewed and removed where detected.</p> <p>Done.</p>
<p>One key issue surrounds the entire question of whether the form of writing/publication supported and encouraged in this article is actually useful in the development of <i>Learning and Teaching in Higher Education</i>? In her fascinating work on 'useful sharing', Sally Fincher raises interesting questions about this that might be commented on in this article.</p>	<p>Fincher's ideas about 'Disciplinary Commons' are discussed.</p>
<p>I query the assertion that <i>Journal of Geography</i> is the most important 'sister journal' (and I'm not sure I really like that phrase. . . .) to <i>JGHE</i>. Certainly, its focus now seems to be K-12 whereas <i>JGHE</i> has a clear tertiary focus. Moreover, I question the suggestion that IRGEE is Australian. The journal has its strongest associations with the IGU and now has an international publisher.</p>	<p>The <i>Journal of Geography</i> is the most important journal in the GHE cluster based on citations. Concerning <i>IRGEE</i>, my text is changed to recognize the IGU link.</p>

In several places, the author sets out the ambitions of *JGHE*. It would be useful to know the source of these understandings or the authority we might continue to attach to them, given that they differ somewhat from the Journal's published mission; to what degree is there an unstated agenda for the journal? Certainly, as a former co-editor, the author can legitimately make some of these more nuanced statements of aim but: do they persist under new Editorship?

Given the stated rigours of the Editorial and peer review processes, *how do some questionable papers 'still sneak into the JGHE's pages'?*

One concern I have is about the 'direction' of *JGHE*. The author offers strong support for the 'applied' approach. What of more conceptual approaches to GHE? What about the very geographies of HE? What about the 'critical geographies' of HE that seem to find their way into (good) journals other than *JGHE*? Should not *JGHE*—and this paper on writing successfully for *JGHE*—be encouraging this kind of approach as well?—The argument in ground rule 2 ('say something useful') also needs to be revised. The general point is good, but as suggested above, what is useful need not be something that can be used in a scholar's own work or can be/is replicated. Surely, 'big picture' papers need to be encouraged?

The author should refer to some of the literature that queries the effectiveness of journal peer review processes—perhaps starting with Campanario (1998). The claim that, in the case of two reviewers evaluating a paper for another journal, a single negative review will lead to rejection is simply incorrect. A good deal depends on the editor's discretion and evaluation of the reviews. In ground rule 5, the author suggests that 'in principle' papers should be written in the third person. This is a flawed argument. First-person writing need not deny any emphasis on learners. Likewise, writing in the third person does not mean learning is given greater attention.

Reviewer: 2

I find this manuscript to well written and to the point. I learned a great deal that will help guide me in my interaction with manuscripts submitted to *JGHE*. I have no substantial suggestions for change and would think that this manuscript would be of great help to anyone wishing to submit to the journal.

The published mission statement is repeated near the start of this text. A current editor has been foremost among those who have used the paper at successive conference "Writing for the *JGHE*" Workshops. *JGHE* Editorial policy evolves, largely, through on-going discussion at its regular Editorial Board Meetings.

Peer reviewers and subeditors are a diverse mix of people—some are more effective gatekeepers than others.

The text has been modified to address this comment. However, the *JGHE* is about the enhancement of learning and teaching in Geography in Higher Education. "Big picture" papers that deal with this topic are welcome. Equally, the *JGHE* selectively publishes other kinds of critical commentaries, especially as Editorials, but the practical problems of Teaching and Learning remain the main focus.



Reference to Campanario (1998) and some others have been added.

Text revised to read 'may be rejected'.

When a teacher speaks only for their self, in the first person, then that individual is certainly not thinking of their learners. Discussion of this issue has been expanded into a new paragraph.

Many thanks!

(Continued)

Table 3 Continued

<p>Reviewer: 3</p> <p>This paper is clearly the product of an experienced author and has benefitted from multiple prior readers and reviewers. I appreciate its candour and straightforward messages. Its messages are clear and important and it will be helpful to have it published.</p> <p>General comments: (1) The style is still more informal than would normally be suitable for a <i>JGHE</i> publication. Its length could be reduced by 10–20 per cent, without any negative impact. Given its purpose, this is probably not a necessary thing to do, but as a ‘model’ for <i>JGHE</i> articles, it falls a bit short—or rather, falls a bit long—in this area. The informality does lend to its readability.</p> <p>(2) In the section on ‘Listening to the Learners’, I appreciate the fourth paragraph that uses the Fink ideas. However, the statement that the ‘best’ way of evaluating effective learning is through ‘course evaluation’ is often simply wrong. ‘Course evaluation’ can be a rote exercise yielding worthless information. There are many ways to measure learning besides course evaluation and the <i>JGHE</i> would welcome articles that assess geographical learning using any of the valid ways that exist.</p> <p>(3) The author states that the main <i>JGHE</i> readership is a group whose native language is English. Therefore, it is appropriate to give some additional, friendly advice to potential authors who are not native speakers of English.</p> <p>Too frequently, papers are rejected because it is too complicated for the reviewers to evaluate the content amidst the language/writing issues. Non-native speakers of English are advised to have their papers read over by a native speaker ahead of submission . . . [The reviewer emphasizes this by their next point and several subsequent queries]. (4) I found it difficult to overlook stylistic punctuation conventions that vary between British and American English.</p> <p>Reviewer: 4: Comments to the author</p> <p>An innovative paper that hits many significant developmental marks. As an author, I would find this useful, perhaps it would be better placed as a free download to interested authors who would be encouraged to read this first. Extremely helpful is the suggestion about abstract structure but I disagree with the contention about the use of third person since sound pedagogy should be based on learner’s (including teachers) reflection.</p> <p>Footnote 1 needs to be in the main body of text or expunged.</p>	<p>Ditto!</p> <p>The text has been further revised to reduce its informality while retaining any ‘readability’.</p> <p>Agreed. The relevant paragraph in the main text has been adjusted.</p> <p>The recommendation that non-native speakers should have their work read by a native speaker ahead of submission is added to the main text under ground rule 7. Of course, English is an international language and there are many, equally valid, variants. Style, in this case, is in the control of the publisher. Concerning (4) 11 minor corrections have been made at points in the text signalled by this reviewer.</p> <p>The issue about the use of third person is discussed in a new paragraph, which covers issues of reflexivity.</p> <p>The main text of the author’s favourite cautionary guide to footnotes reads “It.” For the same purpose, this footnote is retained.</p>
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is more than just academic virtuosity. Make sure that it is of practical value to learners and their education. Try to make sure that your submission belongs in the pages of the Journal. If you can succeed in all of the above, then welcome to the *JGHE* community.

What Geographers do is important, so communicating Geography more effectively is one of the more important things that a Geographer can do. The main avenue of Geography communication is through teaching, which affects many more people than any Geographical journal. In truth, education is the one sure way that Geographers can change the world, albeit one mind at a time. Geography would be better (and also better appreciated by society) if this work were done more effectively. So why not “think big”, combine those skills of teacher and researcher to make a difference through enhancing Geography learning, and when that goal is achieved, tell other Geographers about your work by publishing in the *JGHE*.

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Notes

1. The *JGHE* asks authors to keep footnotes to a minimum, mainly because it helps keep authors on topic. However, here, I mention that protest against peer reviewers’ decisions was a strategy used effectively by *JGHE* founder and pioneer of pedagogic research in Geography HE, Alan Jenkins, who used his protests to campaign on a point of principle against the, then widespread, prejudice towards the scholarship of teaching and learning within Geography.
2. Of course, the language of academic stars such as Donna Haraway (1988) is far more colourful, but subsequently, the author came across a better term for the problem. Adi Da uses the word “mummery”, which his dictionary terms “a ridiculous, hypocritical or pretentious performance”, to dismiss “the activities of ego-bound beings” (Da, 2007, p. 194).

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