


## Practice-Based Article

# **The Anatomy of a Journal: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Those working in the library and information sector are familiar with journals as readers, authors, reviewers, trainers and collection managers. In 2025, the Health Sciences Libraries Group committee of the Library Association of Ireland took the next step and became a publisher. The basic process will be familiar to anyone who has developed a new service as it involved translating ideas into practical goals, policies, workflows and other necessary tasks to create a useful, reputable product. In this article we reveal why we embarked on this project, how we dealt with challenges, and what knowledge, skills and resources were needed to fulfil our aim of creating a free forum to share our collective professional knowledge. We hope that the lessons learned along the way will be of interest to those producing similar products or services.

## **KEYWORDS**

journal publishing, journal creation, project management, knowledge sharing

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) of the Library Association of Ireland is founded on the beliefs that the application of evidence from continuing professional development (CPD) underpins excellence in practice; and that our work and profession are significantly strengthened when we capture this knowledge and share it freely with one another.

Learning through experience and additional development activity is a continual process. Every day members of our profession discover new tools, techniques and ways of improving services. The HSLG committee therefore has focused on providing opportunities for CPD through our annual conference, webinars, networking events, virtual journal club, literature-search buddy scheme and mentoring programme.

Writing promotes reflection and refinement of ideas and experiences. Sharing this enables us to support others, particularly isolated or solo librarians, and to capture our collective knowledge. Starting in 2003, the committee produced an electronic newsletter called HINT (Health Information News & Thinking). In recent years, we recognised that the quality of contributions to HINT warranted a wider readership than a newsletter could provide, and the idea of the Health Sciences Libraries Journal (HSLJ) was born.

In this article, we have presented the process as a series of steps; however, this does not suggest that we

simply followed from one to the next. Many of the actions described here overlapped and were revisited repeatedly as we learned and refined our thoughts. The process was iterative and interwoven throughout.

## JOURNAL PRODUCTION

### Step 1: Define Our Aims and Objectives

The first step was to set out what we wanted to achieve. Our purpose was to create a journal that will enhance the health library community's ability to make evidence-informed decisions; enable learning, creativity, reflective practice and change; and promote our value and professional abilities to stakeholders. We also had several objectives, which formed the foundation of our journal criteria and policies (Table 1.).

**Table 1. HSLJ Objectives and Related Rationale**

Objective	Rationale
1. To produce a journal that is freely open to everyone.	We believe that if knowledge is worth sharing then access should not be restricted. We should not limit reading access or authorship to those who can afford to pay.
2. To include articles on a broad range of topics from across the library and information sector.	Although we are a health-oriented group, we work in a variety of settings and have significant commonalities with those across our profession. We have a lot to learn from one other.
3. To be a welcoming forum for all.	Writing for publication can be daunting. We want to encourage everyone, including novice or isolated writers, to share their work and ideas with us by accepting professional, yet less academic, articles such as case studies, interesting roles and event reviews.
4. To gain a reputation as a trusted publication of quality and prestige.	To encourage the highest standards in librarianship we need to engage in and learn from research and evaluation. The journal should be a source of learning and excellence through high editorial standards, quality control and peer review of these article types.

**Key learning for step 1:** understanding why you are undertaking a project is essential as this should underpin all future decisions.

### Step 2: Situation Analysis

It's important to have ambitious goals, but they must be realistic. A scoping exercise was necessary in order to understand our context and the resources that were available and required.

**(a) Stakeholder needs** – While defining our purpose, we needed to consider what each of our key stakeholder groups would find useful:

- Authors – free to publish; variety of options (formal peer-review but also informal articles); reputable source; editorial assistance.
- Readers – free to read, easy to access; coherent, relevant articles of use in practice and of professional

interest; trusted content.

- Peer reviewers – clear guidance (expectations and timelines); possible recognition.
- Advisory board – comprehensive standards and quality control in all aspects of journal production; ability to provide input; recognition for work.
- Editorial team – ability to meet our objectives and our deadlines; clear editorial guidance, processes and workflows.

**(b) External assessment** – Policies, guidelines, layouts and submission criteria vary for each journal. We looked at the websites of large publishers to ensure we captured the important organisational and instructional elements. However, we largely focused on those, like the excellent [JEAHIL](#) and [JOHILA](#), who are very similar to us in terms of topic, scope and platinum open access status. Here there was greater consistency. For example, many publishers of professional journals, like ours, include the choice to submit either research articles for peer review or more informal articles such as case-studies or event reviews, which was the option we selected. Rather than compete with existing journals, we hope to encourage new authors among our members and wider community, while providing an additional open access space for experienced authors to publish.

**(c) Internal assessment** – The HSLG committee has always been fortunate to have extremely dedicated and active members. We chose a core editorial team of five. Because working on the journal is only part of the remit for each person, it was decided that two issues per year would be sufficient. In terms of cost, we did not identify additional financial outlays in producing our electronic journal. We already had a subscription to the design platform Canva and would use an open-source publishing platform. We discussed the benefits and drawbacks of sponsorship for the journal but decided not to seek this unless required.

**(d) Risks and challenges** – We identified several potential issues to setting up our journal.

Potential challenges included:

- attracting sufficient content of interest and value to readership
- having the time and ability to manage submissions efficiently and effectively
- creating policies and guidelines that are comprehensive yet clear and succinct
- dealing with technology such as artificial intelligence that can create plausible yet flawed material.

Potential risks included:

- suffering reputational damage due to ethical issues (e.g. from publishing misinformation, plagiarism, copyright infringement)
- encountering unforeseen financial costs
- having insufficient volunteers to manage the journal in the long term
- losing access to our chosen journal platform.

Most of these issues can be addressed and mitigated somewhat in policies, for others we need to monitor and identify alternative plans.

**Key learning from step 2:** It is essential to have conversations at the beginning about roles and risks. It's possibly too easy to focus only on immediate tasks, but assigning responsibilities, forecasting and creating contingency plans for potential issues is important.

### **Step 3. Clarify and Assign Roles, Responsibilities and Schedules**

Managing a journal requires a team with varied interests and skill sets.

- An Editor in Chief needs excellent interpersonal skills as they commission articles, select reviewers, liaise with board members, edit articles and write editorials.

- The Managing Editors have a key role in journal creation and management. We identified two main aspects, governance and technical oversight, so have two people in this position. One researched and wrote policies, procedures and guidelines and the other managed all aspects of the platform, liaising with our excellent host in University College Cork (UCC) Library. Managing editors are also responsible for ensuring that the scope of submissions meet our editorial criteria and are appropriate for our audience. They coordinate submission workflows and peer review process, manage article identifiers, edit submissions and communicate with authors.
- An electronic journal requires someone to develop the look and structure of the journal. The Operational Editor is responsible for designing templates, creating and uploading final proofs and online content.
- The Manuscript Editor needs a very keen eye for detail as they are involved in copyediting and final proofing of submissions. They ensure a consistent approach to editing style throughout.

We knew it would also be necessary to have the additional support, expertise and diverse experience of an advisory board and reviewers. We were exceptionally fortunate that volunteers from our community answered this call.

**Key learning from step 3:** Don't underestimate the amount of work involved in setting up this type of project. Recruit a team with diverse skills and set clear roles and responsibilities.

#### **Step 4. Identify a Reliable and Accessible Platform**

The availability of an existing journal publishing platform, Open Journal System (OJS) hosted by UCC Library made this part of the process easier. The OJS software developed by the Public Knowledge Project has really enhanced the infrastructure for facilitating global open access to scholarly communications. Over 52,000 journals use OJS (RPubs, 2024), which makes it "the most widely used scholarly publishing software in the world" (PKP, n.d.). With this kind of reach, it means that there are lots of resources which we were able to call on when troubleshooting minor issues, from online training, wikis and videos to community Q&A forums.

As we met the terms and conditions of hosting by UCC Library, by having an open access agenda and a member of UCC staff involved, we were able to get familiar with the system through a test journal set up for us by the Digital Library Developer at UCC Library. UCC Journals has been in operation for a number of years, so we had the benefit of experience built up through bringing numerous journals onto their platform. We also received advice on registering ISSNs, DOIs and copyright.

**Key learning from step 4:** Using existing open-source software with a wide user base makes it easier to get a journal up and running.

#### **Step 5. Understand the Management of System Processes and Technicalities**

Three of us separately undertook online training on using OJS and came together to discuss it over a period of months. We also met up in person to test out the workflow which follows the stages that authors and editors move through when article data and files are uploaded, an editor is assigned and the review and copyediting process is followed. We had to align and assign the role titles from the OJS to match our chosen editorial titles. This was important, as each editor type in the OJS has different access and notification settings. OJS has a publication workflow built into it with options for configuring different aspects of the

process. These can be a bit confusing when you're not fully familiar with publishing terminology and journal production process or not working full time on the system. Using the test system and trying out test articles has been helpful for understanding and applying the workflow but undoubtedly having expertise and support of the Digital Library Developer on hand really eased any teething problems.

**Key learning from step 5:** Applying practical examples to the test system was really helpful for getting to grips with the workflows.

### Step 6. Develop Journal Policies and Guidelines

Every service requires excellent governance, and journals need policies and guidelines that suit their goals, stakeholders and funds. For the HSLJ to be a trusted source we need clear and comprehensive policies and guidelines. Policies set out our decisions and everyone's responsibilities in relation to editing and peer review, rights and open access, privacy and consent, and quality and integrity. Guidelines outline the procedures for authors, editors and peer reviewers. They contain practical information to enable consistent decisions and style.

- **Editing guidelines:** These are instructions for editors to promote the consistent application formatting and style. Decisions of this nature are generally a matter of preference, so we needed to choose basic elements such as font and heading type, size and spacing, reference style and the overall structure of articles. We decided to use the APA style guidelines as our core source (American Psychological Association, 2024). We then discussed which elements we would adopt and include in our own guidelines.
- **Author guidelines:** It is better that authors apply style guidelines before submission, so that edited copies aren't too cluttered with minor style changes. Directions in relation to issues that could delay publication, such as copyright notices, are also required. We therefore added quite a few formatting and other directives, which we hope will make the editing process quicker and simpler for everyone. Our author guidelines were added to the [submissions webpage](#).
- **Peer reviewer guidelines:** Offering peer review for research articles requires significant time and energy for all involved. Undertaking and sharing research is incredibly important for our profession. We want to make the process as simple as possible, while having the systems and checks in place that will help build our reputation as a trusted source of reliable information. For research articles, there has to be a strong emphasis on quality. Readers must be able to trust that the items we publish in this section have gone through a quality control process so they can believe and apply study findings. Peer reviewers freely provide their time and expertise, often without public acknowledgement. We developed guidelines with instructions, examples and links to useful courses and resources; and a form with checklist which we hope will aid the process.

A common element in all policy and guideline creation was striking a balance between the needs of various stakeholders. For example, although editors may like to receive perfectly crafted, best-practice research articles, as long as authors are transparent in all aspects of their work, including discussing errors and omissions, there is generally something for readers to learn. This approach shifts the review focus from perfection to transparency.

**Key learning from step 6:** Governance involves anticipation, examining the big picture and refining elements into clear management structures and guidance. Looking at criteria boundaries so they are



strong enough to protect but flexible enough to be inclusive is important.

### **Step 7. Finding, Managing and Editing Content**

Having sufficient relevant content for future issues may be one of our greatest challenges. So much great work is being done in our profession but writing about it for a journal article may not be a priority due to time and other constraints. We hope that our journal provides a welcoming space that encourages sharing of both formal and informal experiences.

For our first issue we decided to have invited content only, which gave us time to finish setting up the website and workflows. Fortunately, in March 2025 we had held a successful conference and many of the presenters agreed to write an article, which formed the core of our content.

We found that managing editing workflows needed:

- clear division of roles among the editorial team
- deadlines for each part of the work (including consideration for potential delays)
- regular communication
- detailed editorial guidelines
- a supportive environment that enabled us to discuss topics and ask questions freely.

It can be difficult for editors to know how much editing is enough. It's essential that authors are allowed to keep their voice, so editing is primarily about ensuring that articles meet our criteria, are complete and consistent in style. However, an objective, external reader can sometimes see potential changes that might improve clarity and flow of writing, so editors are well placed to make suggestions. We hope that authors find the process to be respectful and constructive.

**Key learning from step 7:** Content is key. Establishing broad acceptance criteria, a clear workflow and editing guidelines at an early stage is essential.

### **Step 8. Website and Template Design Look and Content Assembly**

In 2024 the HSLG committee decided on a brand redesign consisting of a new HSLG logo and colour scheme, and a graphic designer was commissioned to do the work. This refresh coincided with development of the first issue of the journal. The new logo, consisting of a simple colour scheme of teal, black and white, looked well online and was adopted into the design of the journal.

Prior to designing the journal layout on Canva, templates in Word and PDF format were looked at. Canva was chosen as the eventual design tool as it lent the journal a professional look that reflected how the editorial committee wanted their profession represented. A number of draft layouts were presented before the journal design came together. A layout with an image at the bottom half of the page that changes with each issue was chosen to give the title page a sharp, distinctive appearance. Several free image sources were searched, and the image of a DNA helix spiral was chosen to complement the new DNA double helix-designed HSLG logo. Although alternative page backgrounds for the various articles were taken into consideration, it was ultimately decided to maintain a uniform background throughout the journal.

The journal's editorial guide was regularly consulted to determine the journal's style. Before a final decision was made, the editorial committee repeatedly reviewed a variety of topics, including the font size and type used on each page, the style and placement of page numbers, running titles, the journal's URL and the format of tables and figures.

**Key learning from step 8:** The style of a journal should be clear, precise and inclusive to ensure content is

legible to all readers and can be read on all devices.

### **Step 9. Launch and Communication Plan**

The first issue went live on 30 June 2025. A plan was put in place to notify groups of people in stages. This soft launch initially only advised the authors, the HSLG committee and the Advisory Board that the journal had been published. This approach meant there was an opportunity for fresh eyes to review the layout and design and allow for any tweaks or adjustments to be made before the full launch. A few days after going live, an email announcing the publication's first issue was sent to all HSLG members. This was closely followed by announcements to wider mailing lists and notifications put up on the LAI and HSLG websites. Social media posts were rolled out next on the HSLG's Bluesky, LinkedIn and X accounts. Promotion of individual articles and their authors was posted every two to three days after the initial journal post to keep the momentum going.

The HSLJ's objective is to provide a forum for those working in the library and information sector to share and showcase knowledge and experience. To secure its future, a marketing strategy must be mapped out and put into action. This strategy will include plans on how to:

- motivate people to read the journal
- recruit authors from within the library and information sector
- recruit authors from outside the sector who may be interested in contributing.

This could include social media posts, blogs on the HSLG website and other library and information sites.

**Key learning from step 9:** A soft launch allows adjustments to be made in a controlled environment before launching a publication to a wider audience.

### **CONCLUSION**

Setting up the HSLJ proved to be an intense period for the editorial team as we identified the why, where, who, what and how aspects of production, often adapting strategy as we began implementation. We had to apply a variety of knowledge and skills in areas including project management, technology, design, writing and editing. Above all, good communication was key, and we had many discussions along the way. In line with our ethos for a collaborative approach to CPD, where we reflect on our work and share what we have learned, we hope this article is of interest to readers.

We found that our core focus needed to be on what we wanted to achieve. Our purpose was not so much about creating a journal but about creating an accessible space that would encourage the free exchange of ideas and expertise. This emphasis meant that the needs of our stakeholders (authors, reviewers and readers) had to be our primary guide when making decisions.

Although there is considerable overlap in stakeholder goals, there can be tension between the needs of different groups. For example, editors need policies and guidelines to be comprehensive and protective, but authors need clarity and simplicity. Balancing these needs in decision-making proved difficult and time-consuming at times. We are likely to adjust our directives as we progress and receive feedback.

We are immensely grateful to all contributors including authors, advisory board members, the HSLG committee, our platform host at UCC Library, and members of our profession who have read and promoted the journal, supporting us in a myriad of ways. We hope that you will continue to actively engage with the HSLJ. Together we can support one other and build our reputation as a strong, evidence-driven profession.

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