

## Guest Editorial: *Asociacionismo* and the Currency of Academics

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If you are reading this editorial, it is likely that you are considering writing for publication. Professional associations such as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) help prepare graduate students to write for publication.

### **Why write and publish? Is it worth it?**

The writing process stretches you intellectually, organizationally, and emotionally. By honing your ability to develop and communicate ideas and information, you refine your expression often in multiple languages. Whether you are destined for an academic career or bound for non-traditional employment related to education and language, publication remains the undeniable currency of academics. Publication adds value to your profile outside the university too. As the definition of research broadens, academic publication becomes less insular (Fischer). Academic publication (e.g., community-based research) is increasingly relevant to the public.

Experience in publication will never hurt you. What does a publication on your resume or curriculum vitae communicate to a potential employer? Beyond its content, the published article suggests that you know how to plan and finish a project. You can write clearly and are open to constructive feedback. You can read, analyze, and formulate an argument. Publication indicates seriousness of purpose. Writing is essential to the academic community even for those in exclusively teaching positions. It will establish you as an expert. Publication skills are transferable to a wide variety of careers in administration, tech, marketing, government, etc.

While growing research and writing support from artificial intelligence is inevitable, don't count on it to replace you as a scholar-teacher-researcher-writer anytime soon.

### **How do professional associations prepare you to write and publish?**

Language-related professional associations—like the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), AATSP, formerly the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (now simply ACTFL), *Asociación para la Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera* (ASELE), Latin American Studies Association

(LASA), Modern Language Association (MLA), among others—offer follower and leadership opportunities to graduate students that can present pathways to publication. You can enhance your odds of getting published in the following ways. Association membership helps you meet people and learn about resources like grants, travel awards, and dissertation support for writing or research. No matter how cliché *networking* sounds, there is unforeseen value in meeting association colleagues that unfolds over time. Association members offer encouragement and affirmation during the writing and peer review process that goes beyond a simple *like* on social media. By sharing their publishing experiences, they provide insight into where to send your writing for consideration. For example, you might find out that the association's journal is planning a special issue on a topic in your sphere. Associations help you identify a community of educators with similar interests. Membership makes you part of a larger enterprise than your local institution.

Associations offer presentation opportunities at conferences both virtual and in person (locally, nationally, internationally) to test and develop your ideas for publication. Association colleagues have different relationships with you than those at your university. They share diverse perspectives. Associations also organize graduate student recognitions by hosting events and/or competitions. In 2021, the AATSP began a graduate student research competition at its annual conference.

*Spanish and Portuguese Review (SPR)* is the graduate student journal of the AATSP. All articles are written by graduate students. *SPR* offers opportunities to learn the publication process by participating directly in a student-run open access journal. It is designed for those that do not have prior publication experience. *SPR* offers various training opportunities online, for more information, see [spanishandportuguesereview.org](http://spanishandportuguesereview.org). These resources (e.g., webinars on copyediting, peer review, checklists) are supported by the annual association dues.

In sum, associations prepare you to publish by providing an environment in which to hone your presentational skills, develop your editing and reviewing skills, as well as a peer-reviewed journal in which to publish. Also, association colleagues can help you quell the uneasiness of submitting a manuscript for publication.

### **Do you have cold feet about publication? Are you good enough?**

It is normal to feel like you may not be good enough to publish. Publication myths abound. There are a lot of half-truths circulating about miracle publications. There is nothing magical about writing for publication. It is time-consuming work that requires planning and patience. If you hear about an article that was written in a lightning strike, it is likely an embellishment.

Even worse than the tall tales, do you feel like a fraud even trying to become a published author?

Much has been written about imposter syndrome. It does not have to be a barrier to publication. We seem to all have it in varying degrees. I have experienced this creeping feeling throughout my academic career from the early days until the day before my retirement, so just learn to ignore it. I did. If you are unable to ignore it, seek workaround strategies.

### **No content? Nothing to write about?**

No content. No way. Keep a journal of your teaching and research experiences. Later, read your journal entries. There you are likely to find the nexus of a research project. Over the decades, I have met many colleagues that say this was how they began to publish.

In 1986, I published my first article during my doctoral studies in ACTFL's journal *Foreign Language Annals (FLA)*. Back then, there was limited pressure to publish during graduate school. I had become an AATSP member and later an ACTFL member. I was a reader of both *Hispania* and *FLA*. Simply put, I thought that it would be fun to publish an article. I asked others how to go about it. At the time, I was conducting a classroom role play project rooted in identity. While my approach to role play was original, I clearly did not invent it. I built on the work of others. The goal of all research is to publish original work that pushes back the borders of knowledge. This is typically done incrementally. Most research is incremental knowledge expansion.

When writing for publication, directly state what is original about your research. What has not been done before (e.g., approach, method)? Then, summarize and cite the related prior works in your literature review. Engaged association members can help you double check that you are not overstating. You must give credit and build on the backs of those that have gone before you.

### **You can't write or publish because you do not have a mentor?**

This is another myth. Yuly Asención-Delaney stated in her *SPR* Guest Editorial, mentors are a must (5). Aptly, she points out the importance of associations in locating mentors. However, if need be, you can publish without a mentor. I did not have a mentor early in my career. In departments of Spanish and Portuguese, the then predominately male faculty members that I encountered did not mentor married female graduate students like me. No matter how serious of purpose, this was a reality due to societal bias. One can persevere mentorless. Life is about workarounds. Mentors are hard to find. In other words, you can write and publish without a mentor.

If you do not currently have a mentor, keep looking. In the meanwhile, take advantage of online resources such as how-to information about preparing presentations and manuscripts for publication. These tools were not readily available or did not exist until recently. Not-for-profit educational associations offer how-to sessions often free and at most for the price of annual graduate student membership dues (e.g., AATSP costs \$25.00). There are commercial services that offer online coaching to publication too. Be forewarned about the cost.

Currently, graduate school is a tricky environment. Graduate students now feel pressured to publish while seeking their degrees. There is keen competition for postsecondary faculty positions. News of program closings and/or downsizing make it harder to become academics. No matter the joy of teaching and the delight of academic expertise, it is hard to stay positive. Through association membership(s), or what ASELE President Javier Muñoz-Basols dubbed *asociacionismo*—if you are open to it—you will find professional support and develop relationships over time through engagement. Take advantage of association resources to help you publish and establish your academic identity. When I take stock of successful colleagues with national/international reputations that are academics and leaders in the broader educational enterprise, their commonality is their long-time membership in professional associations. Broad professional support is key to your future success, and it is especially essential for you to get a foothold into publication. Association membership is an investment in your career.

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