Scientific Writing for the Non-English Speaker is the dissemination of Lövei's lecture notes and experience gathered over two decades; it is the coursebook many have been waiting for. The book's three main sections correspond with the three main stages of a paper's journey from idea to print: planning, writing, and publishing. Within the book's chapters, complex questions such as 'How to write the introduction?' or 'How to submit a manuscript?' are broken down into smaller, more manageable problems that are then discussed in a straightforward, conversational manner, providing an easy and enjoyable reading experience.

This volume stands out from its field by targeting scientists whose first language is not English. While also touching on matters of style and grammar, the book's main goal is to advise on first principles of communication. Scientific Writing for the Non-English Speaker is an excellent resource for any student or scientist wishing to learn more about the scientific publishing process and scientific communication. It will be especially useful to those coming from outside the English-speaking world and looking for a comprehensive guide for publishing their work in English. This is the author-approved edition of this Open Access title. As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
Here, I begin with the first principle of communication: who is your expected readership? Writing is made easier when one knows the exact goal, so it is best to make some basic decisions before sitting down to write. The most important question is: what type of article do you want to write?

There are obvious differences between a short communication, a full-length primary article, a review, a book chapter, or a thesis. All have their (rigidly enforced) rules about structure and format that must be observed before a manuscript is even considered for publication. Additionally, even though there is a general structure to a scientific paper, various journals follow different formats, and these must also be adopted before an editor will subject a submitted manuscript to an assessment of its scientific quality.

A second, equally important question: who is the intended readership? Who do you want to communicate to? Are they specialists, generalists, or lay readers? Do you expect them to be colleagues in your home country, or is the expected readership more international, perhaps even from different fields? This should strongly influence the level of detail and style of the paper. In order to use the appropriate language (coding) when describing the new information, it is very important to consider the readership. Recall the general principle: the simpler the code, the easier is the decoding (or understanding).
How to Decide Where to Send a Manuscript for Publication?

A devil’s advocate might claim that it is not even worth asking this question. Why would this possibly be important in the age of extensive literature databases? Would it not be easy for everyone to find a paper, irrespective of its publication forum, using the widely available Internet-based search engines? Against this advice, I argue that it is still very important that papers are published in the most appropriate forum. The wrong choice of journal can result in one of the following things, none of them pleasant to the author:

a) Rejection without review due to the paper being “not in our scope”.

All journals have a defined scope, identifying the area in which they aim to publish scientific papers. Manuscripts that, in the judgement of the editor, fall outside the scope of the journal are simply sent back to the author as “not suitable for our journal”. This causes needless delay for the authors who are usually anxious to see their paper published as quickly as possible. They also have the additional frustration to having to re-format the manuscript before it can be sent to another journal.

b) Inappropriate review.

Another potential unwanted consequence is that, while the journal editor decides that the journal could potentially publish the paper, the topic of the manuscript is not really in the mainstream area of that journal. Consequently, the journal may not have expert reviewers in the field, and the work gets an unfair review, simply because the reviewers are not familiar with its area. A common human fault is that, if the reviewer does not understand the work, the manuscript gets the blame as incorrect or badly written. Rarely, the opposite might occur and the manuscript may be accepted even though it is faulty; more frequently, it is rejected due to unjustified criticism. Several months may pass until this becomes clear, and the authors have again lost precious time. Further, even unjustified criticism hurts, and authors would do well to avoid it.

c) Publication without effect.
Even if the manuscript is accepted and published, it may turn out that papers on this topic are so rare in that journal that people working in the relevant field have stopped regularly checking it, and thus few colleagues would see or read the paper. The publication may thus “sink without effect”. If you hope that your peers will pick the paper up anyway when it appears in the secondary (review) literature, you must consider that secondary review services usually pick the original papers up only after a delay. Moreover, do not overestimate the efficiency nor the frequency by which your peers search and read secondary literature.

Therefore, aspiring authors would do very well to carefully target their manuscript at a specific journal. Before choosing a potential forum for your manuscript, it is worth consulting:

- **Your colleagues.** Most scientists are keenly aware of the major journals in their field and can give good advice of their scope and practice. They may offer you their practical experience of the journal you are considering.

- **Secondary review journals.** These often publish their sources grouped by fields. Scanning these would indicate to any aspiring author a range of potential journal choices.

- **Mastheads of the possible journals.** This usually appears on the inside cover, stating, among other things, the purpose of the journal, the types of articles it accepts, and a host of other useful information.

- **Instructions to authors.** This section often elaborates further on scope, types of communication published in the journal, preferred or acceptable types of manuscripts, and any limitations by geography, topic, length, etc. Instructions to authors are always freely available on the journal website, and are published at least once a year in the printed journal.

- **Recent issues.** Consulting actual issues is useful, because they show how the current editorial team interprets the mandate of the journal, and what kinds of papers really do get published. Editors usually serve a finite term, and every editor will interpret the task in slightly different ways, putting emphasis on different fields, types of papers, etc. Consulting recent lists of contents can give
useful information about this — important but often unspecified — aspect of editorial policy.

Further, it is also worth checking:

- **Publication schedule.** A journal that is published more frequently will have a faster turnover, offering the possibility that a paper is published earlier.

- **Actual publication dates.** All journals have a publication schedule, but not all of them can keep to it. If, by March 2005, the November 2004 issue is still not available, there is something wrong with the journal.

- **Handling time, printing time.** Authors would like to see their work printed as soon as possible. However, the publication process can take several months. With a little calculation, aspiring authors can find out about the length of this period if they can find a number of dates. The first is the date of submission. It is worth knowing that this is also the “official date of discovery”. The date of acceptance is also usually printed. The difference between the two dates, calculated for several articles, indicates how fast (or slow) the manuscript evaluation process typically is in that journal. In biological journals, this can be 2-8 months. The time difference between the date of acceptance and the date of publication (to be found on the cover of the issue), indicates the time necessary to turn an accepted manuscript into a printed paper. It rarely takes less than 6 months, but electronic publishing is usually shorter (2-4 months). If this information is not available, treat that as a warning signal. All journals strive to be fast and, if they succeed, they certainly “publicise” it by printing the above dates. If they fail, they may not advertise their failure — and only print the date of acceptance.

- **Publication standard/quality.** The general appearance of the journal is also a useful guide. Carelessly prepared journals, with bad quality figures and printing, often indicate that the journal’s standards are not high, or the journal is not financially secure (and is not able to afford a better, costlier,
printer). Such journals are best avoided after all, you would not want your wonderful work to be ruined by careless, ugly printing, would you? Additionally, in some cases, you may have pictorial evidence, for which the quality of printing may be crucial. Bad printing can ruin evidence.

- **Circulation.** The wider the better. A journal in which all papers are Open Access will circulate your results to a larger audience. For others, one can only guess: from the affiliations of the editors, the reputation of the publisher, the affiliation of the authors, or the study locations. An international journal should not only have editors from one country, nor will all the studies come from one country or region. Look, also, for biases — many journals try to sell widely, yet they may, mostly, publish articles from one region (e.g. North America or Europe). Manuscripts from other regions may have more difficulty in getting accepted.

- **Cost of publishing.** Publishing in European journals is usually free (except for printed colour figures, see later), but many journals published in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have a system of page charges. In such journals, authors are expected to contribute to the cost of publishing their papers. Authors cannot buy the right to publish, and, in many cases, your ability to pay page charges does not influence your chances of getting published. Many journals, though, assume that by submitting your manuscript, you will be able and willing to pay publication costs in the case of acceptance. These charges are based on a printed page, and can vary from US$30/page to US$1000/page. Sometimes, members of a society can publish for free, or at reduced cost, in the society’s journal. Open access journals routinely require that the authors pay for all the processing and publication costs (article processing charge). If you do not have funds to pay for these charges, it is not impossible to publish in those forums, but your inability to pay at all, or ability to pay only partial costs, should be clearly indicated in the accompanying letter when first submitting the manuscript. The editor often has discretion over page
charges, and can allow you to publish without paying page charges, or lower the charges. The important thing is to be open and honest and indicate your inability to pay at the time of submission.

- **Access to your paper.** Once published, readers will have access to your paper in various ways. If your paper is published in an open access journal, everyone can freely access it. The same applies if you, in a subscription-only journal, paid an extra fee to make your paper open access (this option is quite expensive, though, and is known as “hybrid” open access). If the journal appears in print, you may get reprints, copies of your paper only, printed and stapled separately. Most journals will give 25-50 reprints for free; more can be ordered at the proof stage (see more about reprints later, in the chapter about proofreading (Chapter 25)). Reprints, however, are nearly extinct — today authors will more frequently be given electronic (usually pdf) files. As a rule, these can be sent to other individuals. The website https://www.howcanishareit.com/ can also be consulted for getting advice how can you share your article.

Most of the above information is available on the journal homepage. Such homepages contain at least the following:

- Editor’s name and (usually postal) address.
- Editorial Board members’ list, usually with (postal) addresses.
- Frequency of publication.
- Information on aims and scope.
- Detailed instructions to authors
- Page charges — if any — and possible exceptions.
- Information about authors’ rights to use/distribute their own paper, including the number of reprints they get for free, and any eventual restrictions for on the author’s own use.
- Addresses for correspondence (usually includes e-mail).
Additionally, the content pages are always freely available and, also, in most journals, the abstracts. Even if you have no subscription to a journal, you can still check at least some papers. Journals may run promotions, when a selection of full papers is temporarily available for free. Some — otherwise not open access — journals have a policy of making their full contents freely available after a set period (for example, all papers in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA are freely available after 6 months of publication). In such journals, many papers are freely available, because the authors have paid an extra fee for open access. These papers are indicated on the page of contents and these can be downloaded and printed for free. You do well to consult at least a few full papers — some of the above information can only be found within them.

Collecting the above information on a range of journals is made easier by consulting the Internet (e.g. see Box 4) and it takes some time on the first occasion, but you do not always have to start from scratch. Once you become a publishing scientist, you will soon develop experience of, and a feel for, these aspects. A little time invested at this stage will save you a lot more time when it comes to submission and publishing.

**Box 4. Sample Internet addresses of selected journals in the field of biology**

Ecology and Society: www.ecologyandsociety.org

American Naturalist: www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/journals/journal/an.html

Web Ecology: http://www.web-ecology.net/


Ecoscience, Canada: http://www.bioone.org/loi/ecos

Cambridge University Press journals: www.journals.cambridge.org

USA Entomological Society: http://www.entsoc.org/periodical_list

“Trends” journals: http://www.cell.com/trends