



Great jobs for bright people



Research Publications Planner

An interactive toolkit containing 3 charts to help you plan for the future

2 How to use this toolkit

1 Introduction

'Plans are worthless, but planning is everything... if you haven't been planning you can't start to work, intelligently at least.'

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Thankfully, few of us will need to plan anything to the same level of detail, and with such far-reaching consequences, as Eisenhower, the allied supreme commander for the invasion of Normandy on D-Day in 1944.

Planning can still make us all more productive. It helps us to increase the impact of our research and publications amongst all the other pressures of academic life, and encourages us to make time away from other activities such as teaching, student support and administration.

This toolkit may be especially useful for the following people:

- Early-stage research students, to help develop effective habits and to look forward to the tasks and timescales required for their first publications
- Late-stage research students, to help look beyond the PhD thesis and towards the next stage of their academic career. Well-considered research plans will help candidates to perform strongly at academic job interviews
- Early-stage post-doctoral researchers and other academic staff, to help refine their existing plans, or to develop new plans if they have limited planning experience.

Three different charts are provided in this toolkit. These are the:

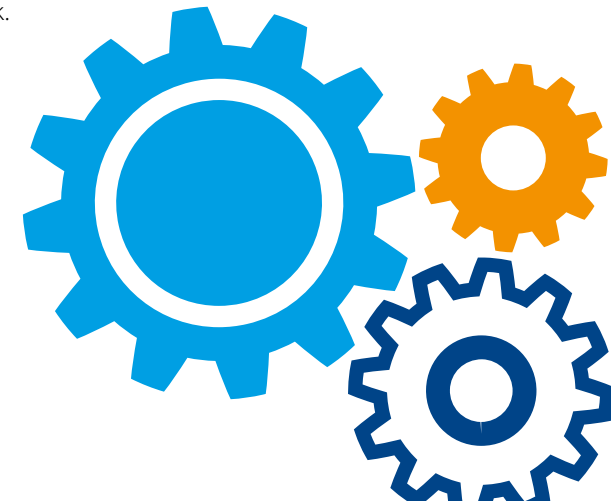
1. Long-term plan
2. Conference plan
3. Minor publications list

Start with the [long-term plan](#). Consider what major publications you would like to produce over the next three to five years. Of course, no-one expects you to know exactly what results you would publish where more than a couple of years ahead, but at least outline something such as 'journal paper' or 'conference presentation' in the plan. Details can be added nearer the time. The long-term plan should be reviewed and updated every six months or so as results develop.

For each major publication within the next year, the [conference plan](#) chart is used. This can be adapted for journal articles or book chapters as required. Produce one chart for each publication, with the relevant steps and their timescale. Check these charts weekly or fortnightly to keep things on track.

The [minor publications list](#) is used once a major publication has been planned and produced. Given the effort involved in putting together major publications, the minor publications list suggests additional outputs that can be achieved without significant additional effort. They may not carry the same prestige as major publications, but can help to make your research more widely known.

In this toolkit we have included interactive forms and also links to excel versions you can download and use separately.



3 Activity - why do you want to publish?

People publish for different reasons. Make a quick note of your reasons here:

Now have a look over your reasons. Are they mainly positive, such as 'writing helps me to better understand my research results' or 'to make people more aware of my research'? Or are they mainly negative, such as 'My department head has told me I need to publish more'?

Many people will have a mixture of both. If you can focus on the positive reasons, you will find the writing becomes much easier and more productive.



4

The long-term plan

4a

Timescale

Given the typical length of large research grants and projects, it is worth planning – at least in outline – major publications up to three years ahead.

This can be done with sophisticated project-planning software or with a pencil and the back of an envelope. The [long-term plan](#) template in this toolkit is a good compromise between these methods.

4b

What to include?

Use this chart for major publications only, not for brief progress reports and occasional incidental presentations, or it will become too cluttered. Major publications will normally be books, book chapters, significant conference publications and journal articles. Include patent applications and software or other product releases if you are working in the relevant fields.

And if you are working on a substantial research grant, the sponsors normally require an end-of-project report. This may not be a 'publication' as such, but it will require time to be set aside as for other publications, so do include it in the plan.

4c

Monthly or quarterly?

The chart is shown by three-month periods so it can be printed on one page. Choose these either by calendar year or by academic year as you prefer. The first quarter (Q1) will be either January-March or September-November, with Q2, Q3 and Q4 following as appropriate.

If you prefer a monthly rather than quarterly time breakdown, this is easy to produce on a spreadsheet, but will spread over more than one page (or will have very small font size) when printed.

Note that work for almost all major publications will spread over more than one quarter. So, when completing the template, work back from the target completion date and note when you should start the work.

And do build in some flexibility. Peer reviewers can take longer than you expect to give comments, and editors can change their minds about what they want. These things may be outside your control. A plan which includes some 'contingency time' will reduce stress!

4

The long-term plan continued:

4d

Conferences

Conferences impose their own deadlines and give structure to your plans. But journal articles can drift indefinitely if you decide to start writing that article 'when you get around to it'. So working backwards from completion dates is important.

Conference submission dates for abstracts are often three or four months before the conference itself, to allow the organisers time to review and select abstracts, allow authors time to write the full paper, and allow time for final review and selection.

4e

Books

Books may take a year or longer from start to finish, including time to negotiate with the publishers, submit drafts, make changes, and to gain approval for any photographs or extracts from other works used. The internet has speeded up this process in recent years but many authors and publishers still find it frustrating. The publishers may also delay publication so that the launch doesn't clash with other books they are publishing on similar topics.

4f

Thesis

If you are a PhD student, do include your thesis on the chart. This will take almost all of your time during the writing-up period, so it will be wise to ensure that other writing work is scheduled before or after, rather than during, this period.

4g

Key dates

The chart can be used to note other key dates and periods. These may include publication cut-off dates for the REF 2020 (Research Excellence Framework). Periods of sabbatical leave may also be noted; these may allow more time to be spent on writing than would normally be possible.

Is there a good time for that new book to land on your Vice-Chancellor's desk? He or she may actually have time to read it during the Christmas holidays or when they go on vacation. So you may wish to include other key dates in your plan.

4h

Using the plan

After completing your draft plan, look for potential overloads and quiet periods. Then bring forward or delay some journal articles or get that conference paper finished ahead of schedule, to provide a more even workload and to avoid burnout.

If you have a sympathetic head of department, you may be able to use the plan to make a case for a reduced teaching load during intense periods of writing. Good luck!

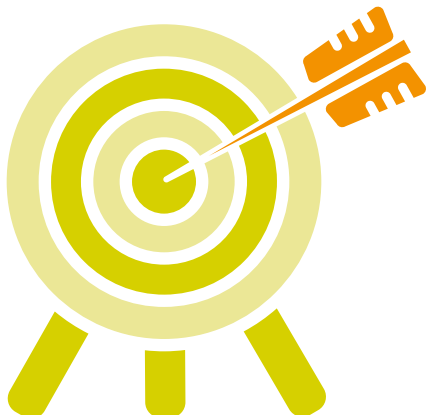
Once you have a viable long-term plan, put it on the wall of your office as a reminder. By all means review and revise it from time to time. But do avoid the temptation to spend time making a new plan every few days in response to minor changes.



4

Example:

Type of item	Details	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Years 4-5
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Conference	Poster on... X at Y		Start	Finish										
Chapter	Contribution to 'reviews of.'		Start	-->>--	Finish									
Journal	Paper 'results of...'			Start	Finish									
Conference	Presentation on...at...				Start	Finish								
Patent	Patent on...						Start	-->>--	Finish					
Book	Working title 'guide to...'						Start	-->>--	-->>--	-->>--	Finish			
Conference	Review paper on...								Start	Finish				
Conference	Presentation on...at...									Start	Finish			
Journal	Paper 'results of...'										Start	Finish		
Chapter	Contribution to 'reviews of.'											Start	-->>--	Finish



The long-term plan

Type of item	Details	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Years 4-5
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	

If you want to fill in this plan using Excel, please click here



Duplicate Plan

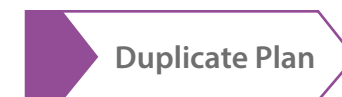
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The long-term plan

			Year 1					Year 2					Year 3				Years 4-5		
Type of item	Details	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	

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The long-term plan

Type of item	Details	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Years 4-5
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	

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5

The conference plan

Perhaps the most common form of publication in academia is the conference presentation. A chart to help plan the run-up to a conference is given. Not all items on this chart will be relevant for every conference presentation, and the format can also be used, with minor modifications, to plan a journal article.

The following numbered items relate to the numbers in the left-hand column of the conference plan:

5a

Identify a suitable conference

Birmingham or Barcelona? Hull or Helsinki? Stoke-on-Trent or San Diego? It should be an easy choice in each case – although a quick look at your available budget may cause you to change your mind.

Publications at international conferences can appear more prestigious than those at UK-based conferences. UK-based conferences may be better for contacts leading to potential employment, especially in areas such as law or social policy where there are many differences in practice between countries. So do try to publish both at international and UK-based conferences.

5b

Note submission deadlines

These are normally given on the conference website. If you've missed them, don't despair. Except for the very-highly-competitive conferences, a quick email to the organisers may well get a reply allowing you to submit an abstract after the deadline, particularly if the deadline for full papers is some way ahead.

5c

Find funding

You may be fortunate enough to have a project budget large enough to allow you to attend. If not, other sources of funding will be needed. Apply to these sources well ahead of the conference, not at the last minute.



5d

Write 'bullet points' of your proposed submission

This enables you to check whether or not your research has reached a suitable point for publication. Don't submit an abstract based solely on work you hope to complete before the conference. You will look and feel very silly if you over-anticipate and things go wrong.

5e

Choose – presentation or poster?

If you have a choice, which may depend on your subject discipline, there are arguments either way. Some academics suggest that a formal presentation carries more prestige than a poster; other suggest that this is no longer true.

Posters can be more informal and often present 'work in progress'. A conference paper and presentation is more formal and is likely to demonstrate clear conclusions from a particular stage in research. Choose whichever is most appropriate.

5f

Check for possible patents arising from your research

This is most likely if you are working in science and technology. Patent applications must be submitted before any details of the relevant invention are disclosed to a third party. Actions as apparently innocuous as submitting an abstract for a conference will invalidate a patent application.

5g

Check for commercial confidentiality

Research with commercial sponsors or partners may also need to be 'cleared' by them for publication. Check the funding agreement, and seek advice if you are unsure. Allow plenty of time for this. Large commercial organisations may have formal processes to 'clear' publications, and these can take several weeks or even longer.

5h

Check image rights for photos

If you wish to include photos – or other images – in your publication, do seek permission from the copyright owner. Universities and other research partners will normally grant permission without charge. They will often ask for an acknowledgement in the publication, and it would be courteous to offer this even if they don't ask.

5 The conference plan continued:

5i Write the paper

This may well take longer than you think. Most journals, and many conference organisers, offer 'notes for authors' with guidelines on length, format, style of references and similar matters for papers to be published in the journal or in the conference proceedings. It can take time to sort these out, but do make the effort, or your paper may well be rejected.

5j Get business cards

Most academic staff will have these already. Research students may not have business cards. If this applies to you, do get some made before the conference.

5k Make travel arrangements

Cheap flights can go quickly – often up to six months in advance – which is frustrating when you cannot book them until you know your paper has been approved. So make the arrangements as soon as you confirm your attendance at the conference. And do check the visa requirements for the host country, especially if you are not a UK citizen.

5l Arrange cover for your day job

This may not be necessary, especially outside term-time, but if you are a marine scientist with fish to feed, or even just need to someone to check that automatic equipment is still running, do arrange this before you go away. If you are going away in term-time you may also need to ask a colleague – very nicely – to cover your teaching commitments.



5m Consider using social media to let people know you are attending the conference

There may be a conference hashtag on twitter – do join in the discussion to introduce yourself. Let fellow delegates know that you are looking forward to meeting them.

5n Present your paper or poster

Make sure you practice beforehand, perhaps at a departmental lunchtime seminar or similar. And even if you have submitted the paper and presentation electronically, take a paper copy and a copy on a memory stick with you just in case.

5o Follow-up contacts after the conference

Send a quick email to any new contacts you've made; they may be future collaborators or employers.

5p Enjoy!!

This is the most important aspect of all. If you don't enjoy participating in conferences, it is time look for a job outside academia!



5

Example:

Note	Name of conference Details	Months ahead						
		6	5	4	3	2	1	0
1	Identify suitable conference	✓						
2	Note submission deadlines		✓					
3	Start search for funding to attend		✓					
4	Write 'bullet points' of research		✓					
5	Choose - presentation or poster ??			✓				
6	Check for possible patents on work			✓				
7	Check commercial confidentiality				✓			
8	Check image rights for photos				✓			
9	Write & submit full paper					✓		
10	Get business cards printed					✓		
11	Make travel arrangements					✓		
12	Arrange cover in day job if required						✓	
13	Add to social media							✓
14	Present paper or poster							✓
15	Follow-up contacts after conference						✓	
16	Enjoy !!	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Tip:

Financial support for conferences

You may be lucky enough to have a project budget sufficient to cover conference attendance. If not, here are some possible sources of funding:

1. The conference organisers - who will often give bursaries or discounts to students or young researchers
2. Your department – and if the departmental budget has all been spent already this year, ask ahead for support for next year's conference
3. Your university central funds – often handled separately from departmental research funds. Central research funds may well be handled separately from funds donated by alumni.
4. Your professional organisation
5. Your industrial sponsor or research partner
6. A charity – which could be a large charity such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation or the Leverhulme Trust, or a small charity based on a theme (Archaeology?) or on a geographical area (South-East Asia?) or even a certain type of student (student under age 25 from farming background?)
7. An international body, such as the British Council or the Association of Commonwealth Universities

The conference plan

Note	Details	Months ahead						
		6	5	4	3	2	1	0
1	Identify suitable conference							
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3	Start search for funding to attend							
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15	Follow-up contacts after conference							
16	Enjoy !!							

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Duplicate Plan

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The conference plan

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13	Add to social media							
14	Present paper or poster							
15	Follow-up contacts after conference							
16	Enjoy !!							

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6

The minor-publications list

6a

Using the media

After completing a major publication it is very tempting to sit back and relax. By all means do this for a short time, but now that you have put in all that effort do try to exploit it fully. There are many other forms of publication that can yield quick results, especially as you have already done the majority of the work required.

The [minor publications list](#) in this toolkit helps to record other ways of exploiting your results.

6b

Issue a press release

Ask your university to issue a press release on your work. Your university press officer may be willing to write the press release for you. They will at least be happy to provide examples for you to follow, and will distribute the press release to their media contacts.

6c

Local press

Press releases normally get some coverage in the local 'freebie' press. This will not add much to your academic CV, but may help to generate interest in your work amongst potential students and their families.

Articles in the local press are often picked up by the regional and national press, not necessarily immediately. These also serve as sources of information for local and national radio, which in turn contribute to coverage on the TV regional news and, occasionally, national news or other programmes. So a small press release not requiring substantial effort on your part can have considerable impact.

Keep a record of any coverage you receive. These items may be useful background material for departmental publicity materials, student open days and the like.

6d

International press

Achieving international coverage is more difficult. However, for those working on projects funded by Framework or other EU Programmes, the European Commission does produce a wide variety of newsletter and magazines covering these projects.

But does anyone seriously read these EU 'glossies'? It's true, not many people do – but the science editors and researchers for science documentaries are amongst the small number of exceptions. So a quick note or email to the editors of these EU magazines may help to raise your international profile.

6e

University media

Remember to send copies of articles to your own university's marketing department, for use on the university website, in student recruitment materials, in the university's annual review and in the alumni magazine. If your university's marketing department is active they may well be asking you for articles anyway, but many of them just rely on their 'usual sources' rather than actively seeking new input. So do let them know that you exist.

6f

Trade journals

If your research is particularly relevant to one industrial sector, especially if you have commercial partners in that sector, consider writing an article for the relevant trade magazine. This won't count for much in academic life, but it may help you to find more business sponsors for your next project, or lead to consultancy opportunities or sponsorship for PhD students.

And if you later decide to move out of academic life, such articles may help to convince an interview panel that you are 'more than just another academic'.



6

The minor-publications list continued:

6g

Other media

Arts and humanities students may find that suggesting articles to general interest magazines is also worth considering. Your historical research may be covered by countryside magazines published commercially or by organisations such as the National Trust. So when you discover a king buried under a car park...

Think also of Times Higher Education. There may be quite a bit of competition for coverage here, but it is always worth trying to get your research reported.

Some academics use social media effectively, publishing a blog with a wide readership, or perhaps having a large following on twitter. Try this for yourself; it could be an effective way to develop and widen your professional network.

6h

Keep records

Whatever outlets you try, and whatever successes you have, do keep copies of relevant articles, along with details of the publication. If you don't have an electronic copy, photographing the article, with the relevant publication date, is useful. Newspaper cuttings fade; digital images can be preserved.

6i

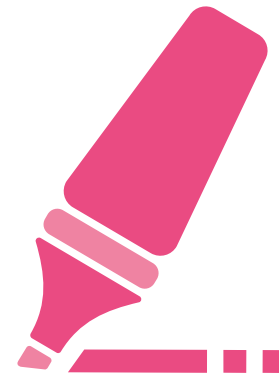
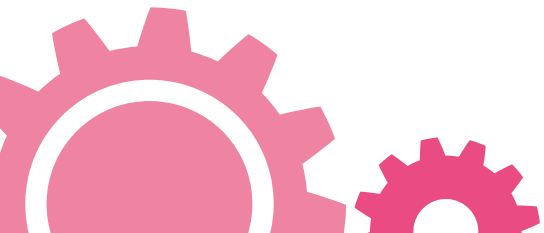
Further opportunities

Quite early in your research career you may be asked to serve on a journal editorial committee or a conference organizing committee. Such roles are useful for gaining experience as well as enhancing your reputation; do take advantage of these opportunities.

6

Example:

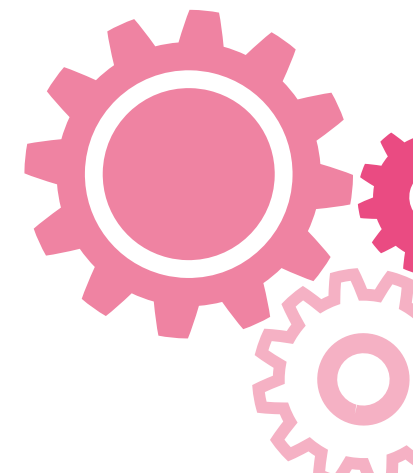
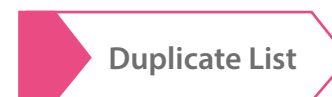
Note	Type of publication	Date	Details
1	Press release		
2	Local paper		
3	Regional paper		
4	National press		
5	Local radio		
6	National radio		
7	Regional / national TV		
8	International coverage		
9	University newsletter / magazine		
10	University website		
11	Specialist trade journal		
12	General interest magazine		
13	Times Higher Education		
14	External website		
15	Social media		



The minor-publications list

Note	Type of publication	Date	Details
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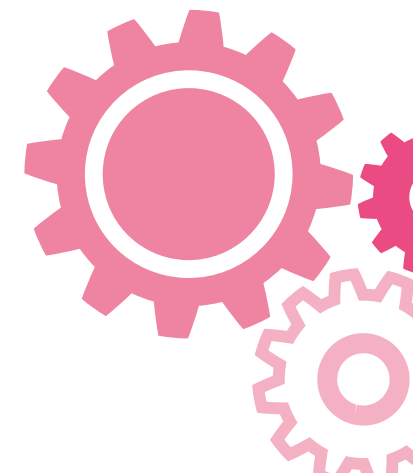
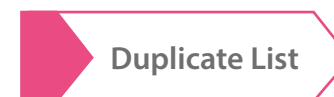
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The minor-publications list

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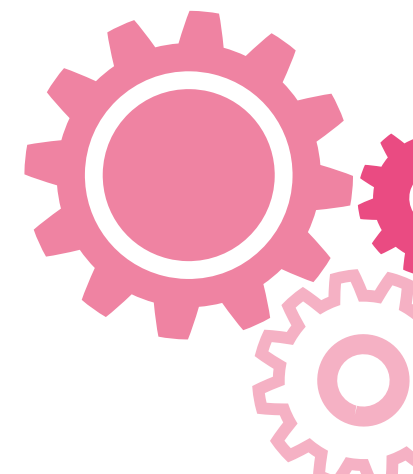
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Is it different in the arts & humanities

Most of the advice in this toolkit is valid across all subjects. Researchers in the sciences are more likely to be concerned with patent applications and commercially confidential material, so these sections of the conference plan may not apply to arts & humanities researchers.

Arts & humanities researchers may publish much more of their work as books or book chapters rather than journal articles. Some disciplines may have other specialist outputs – perhaps new musical compositions or computer programmes – which will not easily fit into the formats above. But the principles of planning apply across all disciplines, so just adapt the charts given here to the requirements of your own subject if necessary.

Summary

Publications are an important part of research. There is little point making new discoveries unless people get to know about them. Planning research publications is a great way to improve effectiveness, often by reducing the natural procrastination that comes with 'I don't need to plan; I'll just do it when I'm ready'.

The charts in this toolkit can help, but of course do not represent the *only* way to plan. Any process that helps you to think about publications is worthwhile; so either use the toolkit here or find a similar method that works for you.

About the author

Nigel Peacock is a research and training consultant with considerable experience of developing and delivering PhD workshops, including residential Grad Schools. A physicist originally, he started his career working on EU collaborative research projects at BT Labs, Martlesham, and developed an interest in R&D management. Following a mid-career MBA at Henley he moved to Bangor University, serving as Director of Business Development & Enterprise. His current interests include skills development and research into work-life balance.



Related articles:

The jobs.ac.uk website has many articles related to research publications. You may be particularly interested in the following:

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[Five Steps to Producing a Journal Article](#)

[Writing Articles Helps Your Academic Jobsearch](#)

[Getting your academic work published](#)

[Editing a Journal: How it can Benefit your Career](#)

[Marketing Yourself and Your Work as an Academic](#)



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