


Fall 12-1-2016

Staying Current in Your Field of Interest: Tips for Aspiring Students as Researchers

Dor D. Abelman

Western University, dabelman@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/healthstudiespub>

 Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Medical Education Commons](#), [Medical Sciences Commons](#), [Medicine and Health Commons](#), [Online and Distance Education Commons](#), [Other Education Commons](#), and the [Public Health Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Abelman, Dor D., "Staying Current in Your Field of Interest: Tips for Aspiring Students as Researchers" (2016). *Health Studies Publications*. 83.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/healthstudiespub/83>

Staying Current in Your Field of Interest: Tips for Aspiring Students as Researchers

In this document please find notes for enriching knowledge of current research. For more information, please feel free to reach Dory Abelman at dabelman@uwo.ca.

QUICK SUMMARY

1. **Learn:** Read books, stay up to date with journals on apps and podcasts, participate in seminars, use online training modules, learn a statistics software, and meet with your subject librarian to assist with this process
2. **Participate:** Join a professional organization, attend academic conferences, volunteer in your field, join a lab, complete your own independent project, and remember to ask for help

Part 1: Learn

I have 5 minutes	I have 30 minutes	I have hours or days
Read a scientific article on your favourite topic through the popular free app <i>Read by QxMD</i>	Listen to a podcast series such as “White Coat, Black Art” (CBC – on medicine), or “Nature Podcast” (keeps you updated on general research in Nature)	Attend a seminar or webinar. A variety of organizations frequently host webinars (ex: for public health NCCDH and NCCMT), and seminars are frequently hosted on campus throughout each faculty and UH
Follow the twitter of a popular research institute	Browse your favorite journal – the university spends a lot of money subscribing to them	Read a book. See recommendations (A) below
Google something you’re curious about	Meet with your subject librarian and ask talk to them about your research interests, they can recommend great resources (Roxanne)	Train with an online module. See section (B).

Table 1.A: These are **books** I particularly enjoy on the research process, and the cancer experience (my main research interest are cancer risk reduction):

Title	Topic
<i>How to Read a Paper</i>	On research (general). These introduce you into critiquing and critically appraising articles, essential for recognizing validity of the work you’re reading
<i>Medical Statistics from Scratch</i>	
<i>Writing for Publication in Nursing and Healthcare Research</i>	
<i>Statistics Essentials for Dummies</i>	On research (practical statistics). Helps you further assess validity and spot common errors
<i>Stats II for Dummies</i>	
<i>The Emperor of All Maladies</i>	On cancer (general, research history, plain language), and patient experiences
<i>The Wolf at My Door</i>	

Staying Current in Your Field of Interest: Tips for Aspiring Students as Researchers

<i>Essential Hematology</i>	On hematology and other cancer research
<i>Leukemias, Principles and Practices in Therapy</i>	
<i>The China Study</i>	

Table 1.B: There are a variety of great resources Western offers to help you **train** to be successful in research. See some recommendations below, which can be found online:

Title of Module	Topic
TPCS-CORE	Fantastic modules on all things research ethics and process policies in Canada, highly applicable to almost any research field, completion recognized by most major institutions
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative – N2 CITI Canada	Paid for by Western, a variety of courses on research process, effective design, and regulation. Completion can give you a better understanding of the research process and give you an edge over other applicants. Make sure to make an account and register with Western University to get free access to the rich content.
Student2Scholar (Queen’s University)	Thinking of publication? This series of modules is there to help you complete more efficient, effective, and high-quality research with less time, and better organization
MyGradSkills.ca	Similar to student2scholar, slightly different modules and perspectives
National Collaborative Centre for Methods and Tools	Paid for by the Canadian government, this online resource is filled with hours of high-quality video training courses for all things research. Learn enough here to begin your own project.

In addition to completing modules, it would be helpful for you to learn how to use a common **statistics or graphing software**. These include, but are not limited to: SPSS, R, GraphPad (Prism), NVIVO, Matlab, SAS, and STATA. Into quantitative? I recommend starting with SPSS, then R, and finishing with Graphpad. R is similar to SAS and STATA, but more affordable and widely used. Qualitative? NVIVO is used mostly in qualitative settings, and while similar to use than ATLAS, competes with it as the worlds most used qualitative program. There are a number of YouTube videos, online tutorials, and library books to help you learn these programs used in almost any lab (especially resources for R). In addition, the statistics help centre in Weldon library (see **table 2.A**) could be of great help.

Part 2: Participate

Table 2

Tip	Explanation
Join a professional organization such as the Canadian Public Health Association	Becoming active with a professional organization helps you stay current in the field by offering you a rich source of seminar opportunities, networking events, curated interesting articles, available jobs, and publication opportunities
Attend a professional, academic conference such as eHealth 2017 (June 2017 in Toronto).	Meeting with professionals helps you recognize what you like to learn about, and spark a passionate interest to learn more. In addition, you'll see what a job in the field of your conference is like, and meet future employers who you'll likely interview with shorter than you might expect. Finally, you can meet people with different degrees you're considering and ask them for advice
Work or volunteer with an organization in your field	For example, did you know the Canadian Cancer Society is seeking speakers to educate public audiences on cancer prevention? Try contacting other NGOs or Local Public Health Units and ask about opportunities – the trick is that you need to help them create a job opportunity for you, listings for students are harder to come by (ex/ Middlesex-London Health Unit)
Do your own independent research project based on secondary data Tip: Read <i>How to Read A Paper</i> and a book on statistics first.	Primary data is hard to implement due to advanced ethical regulations, financial, and time constraints. Do a literature review, or mine a publically-available database such as the cancer genome atlas or statistics Canada census information, and present your findings at a conference. Ask Google or your professors for conferences similar to your study interests, then apply before their deadline. Alternatively, preform a project for a conference, such as a review on efficacy of restorative justice programs as means of reducing drug use for Harm Reduction 2017 in Montreal, QC (May 23-25).
Join a lab	Many professors in the faculty of health sciences either have their own lab, or work closely with another lab in a public health field of interest. Ask if they're hiring, or how you could support their projects, at your professor's next office hours. Tip: many of the professors know each other's work. Asking one professor or TA about a position can lead you to discover opportunities in another more

	interesting lab you may have never heard about
Ask for help (see A for more info)	Between professors office hours, the research and statistics helpdesk at Weldon, subject librarians at Taylor, writing assistants at the student development centre, and ethics support at the student success centre, as well as thousands of effective and explanatory books on any topic (ex/performing your first meta analysis), there is a tremendous amount of help you can get in your work. You're not alone on the road to successful projects
Publish your work (see B for more info)	Great way to learn, contribute to future learning and the advancement of the field, and nice way to network while gaining reputation and exposure amongst possible future employers

Table 2.A: Link Resources to Getting Help on Campus

- Research Helpdesk: Looking for help finding an article, generating high quality search terms, and discovering the appropriate journal? (<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/taylor/researchhelp.html>)
- Research Western: Looking for help finding an appropriate grant, journal, or ethical review board to focus on? (<http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/index.html>)
- Western Data Science Solutions: Anything statistics – what software, database, or statistical method do you recommend? (<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/madgic/statisticalconsulting.html>)
- Western Institutional Repository: Here you can receive feedback on your work from anyone at the institution. Your work is hosted on their server, and accessible via a Google search (<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/>)
- Western Writing Support Centre: Need help with your manuscript, grant/ethics applications, or conference abstract? (<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/>)

Table 2.B: Thinking of Publication? Tips for Success (Psychology Example)

1. Choosing a journal - there are a number of websites that use their own formulas to calculate the effectiveness of a journal. Most important is the journal's **impact factor**, how many people see and cite its articles on average. Using this website (<http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3312>) I discovered the journal "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology," which is directed by the American Psychology Association (APA)
2. Author guidelines - Upon further looking into this journal, I found an 'author and reviewer' section (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/index.aspx>). It showed me some

very interesting and important things:

1. What articles are they looking for? See the *call for papers*, or the style of papers they are seeking to publish, here. The link I have included is for all APA journals. Think of this like a newspaper advertisement for written works. See something here you want to write about, or a style you can closely support? Add that Journal to your interested in approaching list!
(<http://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/all-papers.aspx>)
pay special attention to the dates they recommend.
2. Common questions for a first time author? Yup, they thought of that too. See here: (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/online-first-publication-faq.aspx>). You are welcome to call the journal or speak to the editors directly, they are generally happy to help you (especially students).
3. **See the "Manuscript Preparation" section for all things writing. This section will be of significant importance to your success in publication here.** The way they want you to write and format your work, as well as apply and more, can be found here. See the "manuscript submission" link as an example: (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/instructions.aspx>).
 - think of it like applying to have a TV show on Family Channel. They need you to meet their themes and style, so it flows with the other TV shows, and is good for the audience. Anyone can press record on a camera. It's the *planning* of understanding what the channel (or journal) *wants* that leads to success.
4. Looking for practice examples? Just browse through the journal. When doing your initial review, if you see an article similar in style to the one you want to produce, try considering that journal.
3. Other resources - They are a number of great books available to help you write, designed for students. I particularly enjoyed the book *Writing for Publication in Nursing and Healthcare Research: Getting it Right* by Wiley Press. It was informative, easy to understand with examples, and interesting to follow. Another book I have enjoyed on a different topic - critiquing articles if you choose to appraise them for validity - is *How To Read a Paper: The Basics of Evidence Based Medicine* by Wiley/BMJ. Although designed for medical students, its chapters on different types of articles you may come across in your review are relatively concise, informative, and effective with their checklists.

Want to present any part of your work at a conference? Applying for a **conference abstract** is exciting, and may help encourage you to complete your work. You may also meet excellent people who want to hire or help you, after seeing a wonderful project!

--- Best wishes for success in your work! ---