

Notes for first-time submitters to EEPS

The following notes are intended for would-be EEPS authors who have not had extensive experience with submitting to an international journal. They give advice on choosing a journal and submitting your article; briefly note the criteria for publication; and lay out the review process and discuss the possible decisions. The utility of explicit information on these topics has been shown by a series of EEPS workshops on 'getting your article published in an international journal' – the questions most frequently raised in these workshops form the basis of these notes, and we're grateful to the many participants.

Before submitting

Make a careful choice of journal: a good fit between your subject/approach and the journal maximizes the chances of success. Most journals lay out their remit on their home webpage. Ours does the same:

East European Politics and Societies (EEPS) is an international, interdisciplinary journal for the examination of critical issues related to Eastern Europe. It serves as a forum for current work in East Europe studies, including comparative analyses and theoretical issues with implications for other world areas. Its geographical scope is the area that lies between Germany to the west and Russia to the east, and includes the Baltic region and the Balkans.

The editorial board is composed of distinguished historians, cultural historians, literary scholars, political scientists, anthropologists, and social scientists.

As this makes clear, we don't accept articles that focus on areas outside Eastern Europe as defined above, but we are happy to look at submissions across the humanities and social science disciplines. At EEPS, we publish research articles; we don't publish opinion pieces, policy papers, reports on current events, or book reviews. Looking through recently published articles on the journal website gives good idea of the character of the journal. Ask yourself if your article sits comfortably in that company. Writing to ask if such-and-such a topic is suitable is not necessary, and may even irritate a busy editor: you should be able to determine by yourself whether your work meets the overall criteria for submission.

Having decided on the journal, look carefully at the submission guidelines on the website. These specify things such as length, format, citation style and transliteration systems. At EEPS, we are very careful with foreign language references and names, and we expect our authors to respect linguistic conventions in these languages, for instance in using the appropriate diacritics punctiliously. Following these guidelines saves time in the review and publishing process. It may be appropriate to add that because we have so many non-native English speaking authors, we don't insist on perfect English (the copy editing and language polishing an accepted article receives can smooth minor infelicities), but it's good practice to ensure that the text is reasonably fluent and readable, perhaps by asking a native English speaking colleague to check it.

Writing for a multidisciplinary area studies audience carries certain obligations that may not be necessary in a more specialized disciplinary or nationally-

focused journal. Both context and methodology may require a greater degree of explication, and terminology may need careful definition. Bear in mind that you are writing for both generalists and specialists at the same time.

The criteria for an excellent article remain the same, however: originality, significance and rigor. We will ask: what does this piece tell us that is new or surprising? Does it merely aim to fill an empirical 'gap', or does it have wider analytical, theoretical or methodological ambitions? How does it cast a different light on our existing knowledge or assumptions? How much do its conclusions matter (the 'so what' question)? Does it use methods that are appropriate to the problem, and justify the choice of focus, time frame, sources, etc.? We also look for a clear statement of the underlying question or problem, a concise summary of the way the existing literature frames or justifies this approach, a structure that proceeds logically through the argument, a balance between description and analysis, and a persuasive conclusion. Assess your work by these criteria before submission. It doesn't hurt to draw attention to the ways in which you believe that your article is original and significant.

When you are ready to submit your article, write a brief cover letter, giving your name, affiliation, and best contact address. There's no need to reproduce your abstract, but it's often helpful if you can say – concisely – why you think the article is a good fit with EEPS, and why it is significant.

Submission to EEPS implies that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere in substantially similar form or with substantially similar content, nor is it under consideration by another journal. We strongly discourage self-plagiarism or 'text recycling' and will reject articles that contain more than a minimal amount of recycled work. If a text has been published in another language, we may consider an English version if it contains substantially new material; similarly, substantially new revisions or elaborations of work published elsewhere may be acceptable: in those cases, inquire with the editors with full details before submission.

The editorial process

Once the article is submitted, it goes to our managing editor, who ensures that it is anonymized and assigns it to an editor.

The editor then reads it and makes a preliminary judgment on it. A proportion of submissions are 'desk rejected' after consultation between the two editors; usually because of a poor 'fit' or because the work doesn't meet our standards. The decision letter explains the reasoning, and sometimes recommends a different type of journal (sometimes a specific title, if we think that is appropriate).

If the article passes that preliminary scrutiny, the responsible editor then solicits external reviews, usually from two reviewers. We use the double-anonymized system, whereby both reviewers and author(s) remain posting working versions or conference versions of your article publically online

could potentially compromise the anonymization of reviews; inform the editors if this is the case. We do our best to ensure that reviewers are competent to assess the work, though given the character of the journal, we often look for disciplinary specialists working outside the area treated, or area specialists from a different discipline. We also take seriously other forms of diversity among our reviewers. It can take a while to find two reviewers who will agree to act, and this inevitably lengthens the process. We allow two months for review, but sometimes it can take longer due to unforeseen events. We chase up overdue reviewers, bearing in mind that assigning a third reviewer to substitute for a reviewer who has gone missing in action lengthens the process even more. We will sometimes make a decision informed by only one external review.

Once the reviews and recommendations are in, the editors confer and make a decision. These decisions are informed by the reviews, but they are not bound by them: the editors make their own assessments. Our criteria of quality are those discussed above, but they may also include other considerations, such as the balance of topics recently published or up-coming, or the number of submissions in a particular field or area.

The most common decision for papers that are not rejected is 'Revise and Resubmit' (R&R) – a recognition that the article has potential, but that it would benefit from revisions, restructuring, or further research. The reviewers' comments will be attached to the decision letter, to guide the revision. We usually leave the author to decide just how far to follow these recommendations, but if the reviewers' comments are mutually contradictory, we will point out what we think is the most fruitful direction. 'R&R' is a genuine request for the author to re-think aspects of the piece; it is not a polite way of making a rejection. However, it must be said that it can encompass a wide range of articles, from those that have a high prospect of publication and need only some work, to those that would require a real effort to bring them up to standard, but that we think deserve a chance. Once a revision is submitted, we return it to the same reviewers, asking if it meets their criticisms, and we also send along the author's response letter, explaining the decisions taken (and if necessary, the recommendations that the author has rejected). Some articles go through several rounds of R&R. Some are rejected even after a revision, if the editors are not convinced that the piece has improved sufficiently.

Whenever a submission is rejected, the decision letter contains an explanation (usually brief) of the reasoning, and the reviewers' comments. The decision may be disappointing, but it is also the case that a 'good' rejection can help make a piece of research better, if the criticisms are taken seriously. Do take time to digest what is said about your work, and revise before resubmission elsewhere (especially given that the same reviewers may be asked to read your work again).

Once your article is accepted, you will be asked to cooperate with the copy editing and language polishing process. There is nearly always a short turn-around time: meeting the production editors' deadlines helps to speed publication. You will also need to decide on Open Access for your article: while it

is possible to pay a fee for immediate Open Access on publication (gold OA), we strongly recommend that you publish the submitted and/or accepted manuscript version on your institutional or personal website: SAGE embargoes the accepted version for 12 months, but you are free to publish the submitted manuscript immediately. This ensure that even colleagues without institutional subscriptions will be able to access and cite your scholarship. See the guidelines for more details.