THE SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS COOKBOOK

edited by Brianna Buljung and Emily Bongiovanni
The Scholarly Communications Cookbook

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The ACRL Cookbook series was conceived of and designed by Ryan Sittler and Doug Cook.

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Cooking Up Open Access LIS Journals
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NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION
This recipe is intended to help librarians start, build, grow, and maintain an open access journal in the field of library and information science (LIS). There are many recipe variations when it comes to the creation of open access journals. Most of this recipe will use the Journal of Creative Library Practice (JCLP) as a model because the author is more familiar with recent details of the technology and procedures. In the case of JCLP, several members of the Library Society of the World (LSW) are also involved in that project.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
After reading this recipe, the cook should understand that starting an open access journal is relatively easy. However, maintaining the journal, keeping it nice and warm, and making sure that the portions and presentation are a good fit for the readership can be a challenge. Clear communication with all participants including the editors, peer reviewers, authors, readers, and other interested parties is critical.

COOKING TIME
Once the journal starts, the pot should stay in the oven for a very long time, from years to decades. People will have different ideas about the temperature of the stovetop to keep it warm and how much the pot should be stirred. You do not want the product you are preparing to get burned or undercooked. If there are multiple cooks in the kitchen, then a consensus should be made concerning policies and procedures to avoid conflicts.

NUMBERS SERVED
The journal should have three or more editors so that a variety of opinions and perspectives can shape the journal over time. However, it is possible to have too many cooks in the kitchen. If the journal has 10 or more editors at the same time, then making decisions by committee can take a long time. Since the founding of the Journal of Creative Library Practice in November 2012, it has had a total of nine people involved on the editorial board. There are four current editors, and two of the four current editors are founding editors.

DIETARY GUIDELINES
The field of librarianship could always have additional reputable outlets for librarians to publish their research and ideas. When librarians start their own open access journals, it gives others the opportunity to communicate with the community through a new scholarly channel. As the journal simmers for the first couple of years, it may have a low volume of throughput. In other words, there is not much content, and it has low usage data. However, as the journal grows over time, the expanding content will be found and used by people all over the world.

What usage data might be expected of a lean, low-budget OA journal? As of May 31, 2020, JCPL published 47 items since January 2013. Of the 47 items, there are:
- 21 peer-reviewed articles
- 17 essays
- 8 items that are from the editors
- 1 book review

The journal has had more than 1.5 million visits from more than 400,000 visitors going back to January 2013, when the first item was published. In 2019, the journal had more than 119,000 visits from more than 37,000 visitors. Since the journal is hosted on a WordPress server, that software does a good job of presenting usage statistics in a visual way. See figure 1.

INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT
It is recommended to use a WordPress installation for a journal, but other platforms and systems could be used, and they are discussed in the Chef’s Notes section. The appendix has a list of other publishing tools that could be adapted for use as desired. So, gather up the ingredients, equipment, and software needed to serve the contents of the OA journal. The editors should do the following:
- Decide where the journal should be hosted.
- Pick a WordPress theme. Some themes are free (like “Twenty Thirteen”), while others cost extra.
Figure 1. Example of usage data from WordPress.

- Decide on a license, such as CC-BY (Graf & Thatcher, 2012).
- Use some of the core plugins, such as
  - comment spam blocker,
  - backup software,
  - usage statistics gathering plugin, or
  - an SSL insecure content fxer.

**COST OF SUPPLIES**
The cost of hosting the journal could be zero if it is hosted on a university or college server, or it might be in the hundreds of dollars per year if it is hosted on a private or commercial server. For example, an organizational account with Reclaim Hosting is about $100 per year. As volunteers, the editors will probably donate their labor time to keep the journal running.

**PREPARATION**
As you prepare to whip up a new open access journal, find a good group of people to be co-editors. Many questions will need to be addressed. Answer the following preliminary questions before you truly get cooking:

- What is the scope and focus of the journal?
- What will make the journal unique from others in librarianship?
- What types of articles will be published (peer-reviewed, essays, opinion pieces, other)?
  - If you plan to have peer-reviewed content, decide on an initial process. Note that this process can be modified after the journal is started.
- What format will the articles take (HTML, PDF, other)?
- How often will the articles or issues be published?
- When should it be launched?
- Is the journal going to use a specific citation style?
- What roles do the editors play?
  - Who does article layout?
  - Who does copyediting?
  - Who leads the process of finding peer reviewers?
  - Who runs social media for the journal?
- Will the journal have DOIs?
- Who will get an ISSN or an e-ISSN for the journal?
- Will the journal be indexed in bibliographic databases?

**COOKING METHOD**
Below are the basic steps needed to publish the OA journal.

1. **Put out a call for papers.** Use social media and email discussion lists to request articles for the new journal. Tell others about the types of articles and content that will be accepted.
2. **Receive manuscripts and edit content as needed.**
3. **Implement clear and concise communications.** This is important throughout the whole journal publishing process. It is difficult to tell prospective authors that some of the editors or peer reviewers recommend significant changes to their manuscript. It is important to phrase that communication in a positive way.
The editors should tell the author(s) that the article will be much stronger (or tell a better story) after recommendations are made. Before crafting that delicate email, the editors can help each other wordsmith positive responses for tricky submissions. Use a small, private discussion list to discuss the internal business of the journal, including approaches on how to respond to some authors.

4. **Continue learning about the publishing process.** Over time, the cook can learn a great deal about journal publishing. However, if this is done as a side project with no expectation of remuneration, a small-budget OA journal operates on a completely different scale compared to large commercial OA journals. By all means, go into the project as an educational experience, not as a money-making venture.

5. **Use a peer-review process.** As noted in the preparation section, if the journal will have peer-reviewed content, then it will need a process for this step. The editors should cast a wide net of their personal networks to find good reviewers. In order to get relevant peer reviewers, the editors should ask current or past colleagues and ask colleagues of colleagues. If a prospective peer reviewer says they can’t review an article in a reasonable amount of time, ask that person who they recommend on a particular topic. Ask people new to LIS to be a peer reviewer; this is a great way to get new librarians involved in the scholarship process. Ask people who have diverse opinions and perspectives and people who work outside of libraries. Don’t limit the journal by asking only people personally known by one or more of the editors to be peer reviewers.

   Journal editors should determine what questions peer reviewers should respond to concerning the manuscripts that are submitted. The editors could create a Google Form so that peer reviewers can respond to the manuscript they have read. They can tell the editors what they think of the piece, describe strong points, and note places in the draft where it could be improved. On a dropdown menu, they could indicate if the work is accepted with no changes, minor changes, major changes, or not accepted.

6. **Publish articles and let readers know of new content.**

**CLEAN-UP**

Once a project like this is started, the editors should be in it for the long haul. While some journals have short runs, it is better to assume that the journal will last for many years or decades. Make sure that when you start cooking up your new open access journal, it has the best ingredients and that you use good cookware and tools. You will not regret making a great open access journal that everyone can enjoy consuming for years to come.

**CHEF’S NOTES**

**Concerning WordPress.** Editors and website managers can customize WordPress themes so the journal has a professional appearance. If comments are turned on, then comments will be received, and they need to be dealt with. The editors may want to limit the amount of time readers can leave comments, such as one to three months after an article is posted. The journal should have a backup plan if the website goes down for a stretch of time.

**Concerning other publishing platforms.** Other types of servers and website content management systems can also be used. The journal could be in an OA repository, such as Collaborative Librarianship. Platforms like OJS, Digital Commons, and Ubiquity Press are set up to help editors manage the content of a journal from submission through peer review to final publication (Robertson & Simser). Sometimes the software can be quite complicated to manage, and that can reduce efficiency. For smaller journals, a simpler publication system is easier to manage. Below are some other open access journals in LIS that could be used as models:

- **Collaborative Librarianship** (at the University of Denver using BEPress Digital Commons)
- **Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship** (Repository at the University of Alberta)
- **In the Library with the Lead Pipe** (WordPress)
- **Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication** (at Pacific University using Ubiquity Press)

**Staying organized.** In order to keep the editors organized with a workflow, Google Drive
can hold documents that keep track of what articles are where in the process and who is doing the reviewing. Google Drive can hold responses from peer reviewers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

References

Resources
- Reclaim Hosting. https://reclaimhosting.com