

Ten Tips for Publishing Feminist Essays and Reviews Under 3000 Words

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Publishing work in feminist philosophy can be both fun and frustrating. There is a delicate balance between staying true to one's own beliefs, motivations, and arguments in writing, and meeting all of the requirements for journals, editors, and, of course, departmental university review committees. Because our work is often personal, interdisciplinary, or both, as feminists we may feel more than the standard number of challenges as we navigate the waters in an effort to "get our stuff out there."

Most academic departments have some requirements for publishing in order to get or keep the job, get tenure, apply for promotion, obtain the occasional raise, and perhaps even earn a course reduction. But not every publication is treated equally. My own department has actually specified the "minimal approximate word count" necessary for an article to be considered relevant for review: 7000 words. Of course, some journals—including some feminist journals—also state a maximum word count; one that I have seen more than once is 6000 words. Aside from the obvious discrepancy between my department's requirements and the requirements of some journals, it is also worth asking if we do ourselves—and multiple subfields—a disservice in not considering essays and articles of, say, 3000 words. I think a good argument may be made that the shorter

articles impart an admirable discipline on one's argument and may, in fact, be more difficult to craft than the average 6000-7000 word article simply because one has to develop the argument with fewer tools—dare I say crutches—than the long articles have at their disposal.

In this short presentation, I offer ten tips for writing articles, essays, and reviews under 3000 words. In doing so, I hope both to defend the virtue of the shorter essay and to offer some practical considerations or concerns than any author, but especially a feminist author should to consider before committing oneself to the task. Of course, these latter points ought to be taken as something of a caution as I will explain.

Let me be up front here. I edit the APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy which publishes articles and reviews under 3000 words. My interest in presenting these ten tips is not only to reflect on the role or place of these shorter articles and reviews in the profession; I am also interested in encouraging you—the audience and other panelists—to submit work for consideration for publication in the Newsletter. Some of my tips present what I take to be an honest or realistic assessment of the importance of essays and reviews under 3000 words—and I hope I will not sound too pedantic or preachy in presenting them. But I also hope these tips will reveal the many positive elements not only of writing but of publishing and, importantly, some of the feminist moral obligations for reading and writing, reviews of feminist scholarship.

And so to begin:

Tip 1: Find out from your department whether interdisciplinary feminist work will be considered or included in any evaluation. (This is also a good question to ask during an interview as it shows awareness of at least part of the subfield of feminist

philosophy and demonstrates a practical knowledge of college reviews.) Articles and essays in feminist theory or feminism more broadly are often theoretical, but may also be applied or narrative or some combination thereof. Indeed, that is one of the many virtues of feminist philosophy. I start with this point about interdisciplinary work because it opens so many important, interesting, and creative venues for the publication of shorter essays and reviews.

Some subfields within philosophy regularly publish shorter pieces; in fact, in some, 3000 word articles tend to be more than the norm. Check into your college and department standards. If your department says that articles of 3000 words or less do not count for the purposes of research review, then at least two options present themselves. You could suggest that the department reconsider its review process. This might mean that all peer review articles—regardless of length—be factored into the review, or perhaps an approach similar to the one a department informally adopted might work: Count two peer reviewed 3000 word articles as equivalent to one 6000-7000 word article. Of course, this latter approach negates or ignores the virtue of concise argumentation that I mentioned earlier. It also continues a sort of demoralizing bean-counting that does not adequately fit scholarship in philosophy. The moral of the story is that feminist philosophers, like applied ethicists before us, are and ought to be open to interdisciplinary scholarship and to articles that challenge departments to examine review standards for inclusiveness. I am not unaware of the difficulties and potential political fallout of such a challenge so the other important moral of *this* story is to tread cautiously—especially if it is new ground for your department. Allocate your time somewhat defensively at least until after tenure, promotion, or review.

The second option is to 3000 word articles or book reviews with an awareness that they may not or do not count. View them as a fun challenge that may help build your connections even if they do not help build your portfolio for the purpose of tenure review. Or, of course, you could wait until after tenure and/or promotion before plunging into the world of reviews and many scholars would strongly advise doing so.

Which leads us to:

Tip 2: Do not overestimate the impact of reviews and short essays. Many departments and tenure committees, my own included, count book reviews as service to the profession and not as publications per se. As service, they may not amount to much at all in a tenure portfolio. A portfolio with only reviews and short or invited essays is not likely to go very far in a college or university that puts some sort of premium, however small, on original research. Departments and tenure committees which do count reviews and short essays or articles as research will still want to see “full length” articles (and by now I hope you see that I find the term problematic for a number of reasons).

Tip 3: Do not underestimate the importance of reviews, shorter essays, and articles. Your ability to complete invited articles and reviews on time and in the format requested may get you noticed by editors. Provocative 3000 word articles, like their longer siblings, might be recognized as ideal teaching tools or may open doors for invitations from book and journal editors for longer, expanded versions of the original. (More rare, but not out of the realm of possibility, book publishers or series editors may even notice potential for a book manuscript in the 3000 word article.)

Tip 4: Be assertive. Contact book review editors; send them your CV; look at the lists of received books in the back of some journals and offer to review one. In

particular, look for opportunities to review feminist books in all journals—even those that do not self-identify as feminist. Many journals, of course, do not want authors of reviews to self select, but asking can be a win/win/win situation: the book review editor may put you on a review list for another review; the book review editor may obtain knowledge about a book that would interest the journal’s audience; and the author of the selected book will have his or her scholarship reviewed (I say more on that later in Tip 5). Some journals do let reviewers select or suggest a book to be reviewed and will likely appreciate a slight reprieve from the effort to track down a suitable reviewer for at least one of the many books that come across a book review editor’s desk.

The other elements of my tip to be assertive pertain to articles rather than reviews. Look for out-of-the-mainstream venues like the Newsletters. I have also published short pieces in other society newsletters, campus community publications, conference proceedings, books, and encyclopedias. Look also for journals that publish discussion notes, responses, review essays, and similar articles and essays under 3000 words. Finally, be aware of encyclopedia projects and volunteer for areas in which you specialize. There is no scarcity of venues for the publication of 3000 word or fewer articles. The final aspect of being assertive is to know when to say “no.” If my experience is at all representative, the problem will not be trying to find additional opportunities; it will be trying to balance the opportunities with other commitments and scholarly goals. But this is tied with:

Tip 5: Look for opportunities to review books or write shorter articles that fit into your research projects. Many people find reviews fun and personally beneficial (even beyond the “free book” factor which is my personal favorite reason to write reviews). I

have already suggested that 3000 word articles can be useful in honing one's skill as a philosopher. Some people also find them useful in presenting early versions of ideas or arguments and/or opening the channels for feedback and dialogue in one's work.

The other side of this tip is that, as a community of feminist scholars, we do have an obligation to review each others' work. This obligation has both an instrumental side and a moral side. The instrumental side is that rank and tenure review committees often (usually?) look for scholarly reviews of a candidate's work in order to determine the impact of a candidate's scholarship in the field. (Some of you might recall a recent posting on the SWIP listserv noting the case of a highly esteemed feminist scholar who was denied promotion to full professor. Ostensibly, the reason was that there were no reviews of her book.) We owe it to ourselves and to each other to complete book reviews in a timely manner and, since feminist theory is a methodology as well as a subfield, to push journals in all of the other various subfields to publish reviews of feminist books. The moral side (for lack of a better term) of this obligation is that we also owe each other sincere, honest critique.

The flip side of my 5th tip is my 6th tip: Avoid volunteering for or taking on projects too far outside your specialty. I should note that this one falls into the "do as I say, not as I do" or the "if I had to do it all over again" category. The idea is that projects central to your research interests are ideal and tangential projects are ok; it is the projects outside of your primary research interests that can be problematic. Think of this from two different perspectives: The perspective of senior colleagues reviewing your application for the initial appointment, tenure, or promotion and the self interested perspective. According to the first, there should be a clear picture of the research plan.

According to the second, self interested perspective, consider the value of the projects for advancing your publication experience and career goals. Book reviews can help you stay informed and current in your area. Reviews and articles outside of that area may be fun and even fulfilling but will likely also detract from your research program.

To give you an overview of the homestretch, tips 7 and 8, like tips 4 and 5, offer suggestions for obtaining the opportunity to write articles and reviews of 3000 words or less. Tips 9 and 10 offer concrete suggestions about the actual writing and publication process.

Tip 7: Talk to your advisor, other faculty members, colleagues and friends. Let them know you are interested in doing reviews. We all get asked at some point in time to write something we just don't have time to write. Often, editors will allow us to recommend someone else for the project or even just hand the project on to someone else. Make sure people know your areas of interest and your willingness and availability for reviews and essay projects.

Tip 8: Participate in conferences: not only does this hone your skills in presentation, it forces you to write essays of approximately 3000 words. Often the conference will publish proceedings or other presenters will suggest an edited volume based on the conference presentations. Just as important, conferences give you some name recognition and contacts.

Tip 9: Some practical suggestions for the actual article, essay, or review: Write concisely. Hone your skills as a philosopher. One of my colleagues truly has a gift for economy in her writing. Often, I think, this is an underappreciated skill. A tight argument is a thing of beauty and, far from being unsophisticated, it keeps us

intellectually honest as we cannot rely on standard verbosity to hide what might be weak points in our work. Note that footnotes or endnotes count in the overall word count for most publications. Challenge yourself to see the argument as others see it and trim the parts that are not crucial.

Tip 10: Communicate with the editor if your review is going to be late and stick to the allotted word count. Editors often cannot diverge more than 10% from the reported word count (and sometimes cannot diverge more than 1%). A lot of back and forth with the editor asking you to cut your article can make things frustrating for both parties. An amazing number of reviews never get completed. This is problematic not only for the reasons I mentioned in my 5th tip (regarding our obligations as members of a feminist community of scholars to review each others' work) but also because editors, or at least some editors, do plan issues thematically and book reviews are often part of that planning. Deadlines are important to editors because they are keeping deadlines to copyeditors and publishing houses themselves. But there is sometimes room for flexibility. The key is good communication. If we apply at least some feminist principles to publishing practices, we would aim to maintain cooperative and respectful—and ultimately more productive—relations between authors and editors. So keep the lines of communication open.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my invitation: I hope you will consider writing and submitting an article (3000 words or less) or a book review (1500 words) to the APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy. The Newsletter, and many other feminist publications, welcomes creative, original, interdisciplinary work that might interest other feminist philosophers. Articles and reviews of 3000 words or less offer a

rewarding opportunity to present your ideas in a bold, concise, and potentially powerful manner.