

Assignment 2: Consider the requirements of formal publication, including standards for writing, editing and style, for a range of archaeological outputs

Introduction

Publication is one of the most fundamental aspects of the research process in archaeology, both in the academic and commercial worlds. Indeed, the highly influential early archaeologist General Pitt Rivers is cited (in Wheeler, 1954, p. 182) as stating 'a discovery dates only from the time of the record of it, and not from the time of its being found in the soil.' As publication is in essence the recording of archaeological findings, often through various forms of outputs, its role in research is instrumental in facilitating the transcription of a collection of objects, samples, photographs, recording sheets, and so on, arising from a site or project into a cohesive narrative that summarises not only the process of the research and its consequential results, but also the significance of the data recovered. The understanding of the nature of archaeological investigation as being inherently destructive rightly led to a want within the profession in the past to create and publish complete comprehensive records of all work undertaken, following the idea of preservation by record (Richards, 2004). However, the continuously increasing scale of and need for archaeological intervention over the last 50 years, and the coincident rise in cost of publication, has made this goal highly unattainable, resulting in an excessive backlog of unpublished (and often inaccessible) material that persists today (Richards, 2004). Over the years, many recommendations have been made as to how to combat these issues and ensure newly generated knowledge can be disseminated in appropriate yet time and cost-effective ways. The Frere report (Frere, 1975) suggested reducing disseminated material through selective publication alongside a complete archive record of all processed data, whilst Cunliffe (1983) argued for prioritisation of accessible project archives supported by publication of results in a monograph or journal, and followed by adaptation and dissemination of chosen findings to non-specialist audiences. More recently, it has been acknowledged that creating multiple forms of targeted dissemination products suitable for the intended reach of individual projects would perhaps be the best approach, rather than trying to apply a prescriptive publication model for all

archaeological research (Jones *et al.*, 2003; Richards and Hardman, 2008). With this in mind, it is clear there are many considerations archaeologists must be mindful of when planning how to effectively disseminate project findings, as well as having to recognise and abide by the varying requirements for formal publication of the different outputs they choose to utilise. This essay aims to explore these publication requirements, identifying the main conditions and components needed for formal dissemination of a range of archaeological outputs including journal articles, magazine articles, and photographs, making comparisons between them. With the knowledge that the intended final product and its publication method affect the process of output creation, standards and requirements for aspects such as style and formatting, language and detail level, as well as editorial review processes will be examined. Discussion within this essay will be restricted to formal publication of archaeological outputs, with unpublished outputs such as grey literature reports, internal project documentation, and informal public-facing dissemination products like social media posts beyond the essay's remit.

Journal Articles

Formal publication in journals has been a longstanding staple within methods of archaeological dissemination, with some currently active journals having first been established almost two centuries ago (Royal Archaeological Institute, 2025). Today, journal articles remain as one of the main ways for researchers to disseminate and incorporate their findings into active archaeological discourse, and for readers to engage with the most up-to-date results, with hundreds of journals covering specific and broad topics available to make submissions to (Scimago, 2024). Although journal issue releases are more commonly published online now, and it is estimated that alongside monographs, physical hard copies of journals are only created for 5-10% of archaeological projects (Wills, 2017), strict standards and guidelines must still be followed for articles to be approved for submission. Most journals have style guides or similar submission guideline documents that prospective articles must adhere to, and that editors will review submitted manuscripts against, returning them for revision if conventions are not met (Matthews, 2015b). These documents cover an array of required features, including manuscript length, with many journals

tending to primarily publish long-form content. However, requirements for article length can vary both in scale and unit of measurement between journals. For example, whilst the Society for Historical Archaeology specifies no maximum length within their style guide (SHA, 2024), they typically expect publication-suitable articles to be around 35,000-55,000 characters and spaces (usually equivalent to 25-35 pages, exclusive of references, figures, and tables, when text is at 12 pt font and double-spaced: Matthews, 2015a), but also reserve the right to reject or return manuscripts that are judged to be excessively long or too brief. Similarly, PLOS One, a multidisciplinary science-focused journal that has accepted many archaeological articles, does not have an established limit for word count, figures and tables, or supporting information, simply encouraging authors to be concise (PLOS One, 2025). This is in contrast to journals with much stricter and more defined rules, such as the Oxford Journal of Archaeology, which expects submitted manuscripts not to exceed 8,000 words and requires authors to contact the journal's editorial assistant in advance if their proposed article is above this limit, in order to justify why it should be considered at its current unconventional length (OJA, 2024). This variation observed within the requirements of different journals publishing the same type of research output emphasises that as aspects such as article length are essential to ensure authors can convey results of their research clearly and succinctly, close attention must be paid during product creation to the established conventions of the journals they plan to submit to, as restrictions may influence the level of detail able to be included.

In the same way an editor will review aspects of a manuscript such as formatting against a journal's submission guidelines, all submissions will also be subjected to a peer review process. This process primarily assesses the content and presentation of the article, looking closely at the formation of the project's research design, validity and accuracy of the results presented, and strengths and weaknesses of the interpretations inferred (Steer and Ernst, 2021). Peer reviewers are typically specialists within the field of archaeological research the article pertains to, being best placed to examine the significance of the new findings and how well they have been integrated within the wider research context, as well as suggest improvements and considerations the author should make to ensure the article is at the best standard possible. The aim of peer review is not to belittle or overly-criticise,

but rather to ensure that the prospective article is in a form acceptable for publication, with the process usually resulting in one of four outcomes. Very rarely, a manuscript is accepted for publication in its current form with no revisions, other times it will be accepted with minor revisions required, but most commonly it will be returned with more revisions and must be resubmitted for review when changes have been made (Matthews, 2015a). If a manuscript does not align with the prescribed topics or context of the specific journal it has been submitted to, or is poorly written and formatted, authors are at risk of it being rejected as being unsuitable for publication. A perhaps unconventional example highlighting how peer review standards encourage authors to enhance their article submissions and carefully consider their output choices for formal publication, exists in Alan Kaiser's (2015) failed attempts to have his supposedly controversial research published in journal format. After uncovering evidence that a well-known early professor in classical archaeology had plagiarised the thesis and dissertation work on the site of Olynthus, Greece of his then graduate student, Mary Ellingson, Kaiser submitted his manuscript presenting the scandal and the evidence to many journals and was rejected by 11 editors and over 24 anonymous reviewers, ultimately choosing to publish the research as a book instead. Rather than seeing this as a failure of the peer review process and a potential ethical issue however, Kaiser expressed that each rejection allowed him to take on reviewers' comments and re-write the article, improving it each time and actually finding the opportunity to integrate some of the objecting arguments into the accepted book publication thanks to its longer permissible length (Kaiser, 2015). Taking into account the nature of the widely-adopted peer review process as a quality-assurance procedure, and the additional work and reflection it can often bring for researchers planning to disseminate their project and its results as a journal article, it is evident that archaeologists must be aware of the most up-to-date style guides for the journal they submit to, and also be prepared to receive criticism and comments for revision that must be amended before their article can be recommended for formal publication. This ultimately emphasises that creation of archaeological outputs such as journal articles is not a quick process of writing, submission, acceptance, and publication, and researchers need to consider the sometimes lengthy timescales required for formal publication during product creation.

Another requirement of formal publication through the medium of journal articles lies in the use of specialist language that has come to be expected for this type of archaeological output. As articles are intended to disseminate scholarly research findings to a defined audience of researchers in related fields with similar interests, the use of specialist language within them is two-fold: firstly to demonstrate to readers that the author has a sound comprehension of disciplinary knowledge and understands the technical terminology needed to accurately convey their findings, and secondly to ensure integration of the work within the existing corpus of research by using recognised and standardised discipline-specific jargon (Woodward-Kron, 2008). For authors, understanding and correctly using the distinct language of the archaeological discipline they are writing about is essential, especially if their research concerns the use of scientific techniques. To illustrate, articles focussing on isotope analysis are expected to use correct terminology and symbols to refer to the specific isotope system and data measurements being discussed. For example, two articles investigating mobility within contemporaneous populations using oxygen isotope analysis may not be directly comparable despite using the same technique to study groups from the same period if different oxygen isotope values are presented, as they relate to measurements of different materials and have been normalised to different standards (Pederzani and Britton, 2019). This is the case for Pospieszny and colleagues' (2023) article exploring mobility at two Bronze Age cemeteries in Poland, and Price *et al.*'s (2017) study of mobility at a Bronze Age battlefield site in Germany. The former presents $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{phos}}$ values as a measure of the oxygen within the phosphate component of tooth enamel and is calculated against the VSMOW standard (Pospieszny *et al.*, 2023), and the latter uses $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{carb}}$ values measured from tooth enamel carbonate and is normalised against the VPDB standard (Price *et al.*, 2017). To non-specialist audiences, the distinction between the two oxygen isotope values may not be clear, however experts will know that to compare these value types directly without first converting the $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{carb}}$ values into $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{phos}}$ values using calibration equations (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Chenery *et al.*, 2012) would be an inaccurate use of the data and likely make the article and its findings unpublishable. Hence, this emphasises that during article creation researchers are required to not only ensure their own data is presented in the accepted standardised notation form, but also that the comparative data they choose to use is either directly comparable or has undergone the necessary conversion process to make it so. Standardised

notation is equally important for radiocarbon dates which must be expressed following recognised conventions (Millard, 2014), with due care needed to ensure all supporting information is presented for newly reported dates including laboratory code, material dated, and associated $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value, as well as correct citation of the appropriate calibration curve (e.g., Reimer *et al.*, 2020; Heaton *et al.*, 2020) and software used (OJA, 2024). However, the need for uniformity in how information is presented within and between articles is not restricted to aspects of archaeological science, as readers must also be able to clearly identify how the author defines the boundaries of chronological periods or the characteristics of certain archaeological features, for example. To achieve this, researchers may use standard vocabulary lists such as the FISH thesauri (MIDAS Heritage, 2024), which provide accepted definitions of controlled vocabulary for many different aspects of archaeology from artefacts to building materials. Overall, the use of specialist language is one of the most important requirements of journal article publication, and requires researchers to be secure in their own knowledge during the writing process, as well as being aware of the conventions and resources available to guide them.

Magazine Articles

In direct comparison to journal articles, archaeological outputs produced for formal publication in magazines typically have a much wider intended audience, which brings a different set of requirements that authors must consider. Whilst journal articles are usually produced for researchers by researchers, magazine articles traditionally target a more popular audience that may include the general public with interests in archaeology, hobbyists and amateur archaeologists who may have a greater level of understanding and perhaps involvement in archaeology as part of local societies and interest groups, and indeed professional archaeologists for whom it is essential to keep up with the latest findings and developments within their research field (Current Publishing, 2024a). This broader audience with varied levels of archaeological understanding also necessitates the use of different language to what is required of journal articles. Whilst the degree of use of specialist language may differ between magazines depending on their specific target audience, in general magazine articles are expected to have a more casual conversational tone,

engaging readers with attention-grabbing headlines that encourage them to continue reading as the author gradually develops the narrative throughout the main body of text (Fagan, 2010). Indeed, in terms of writing and stylistic choices, the magazine *Current Archaeology* (2024b) encourages contributors to separate their submitted articles from the strict and often prescriptive style of journal articles, which usually favours highly organised information dissemination under conventional sub-headings of: introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion, and conclusion. Instead, the magazine opts for a more human approach, promoting a personalised style of writing that focuses on the story of the researcher's project; how it came to be and what was hoped to be achieved, its progression over time, and how the researchers concluded the project's results (Current Archaeology, 2024b). This more informal writing style however, is not an invitation for authors to be less concise in their writing, as magazine articles usually have a lower word count than journal articles. Some longer form content, such as feature articles for *British Archaeology* can range between 3,500-5,000 words (Council for British Archaeology, 2024b), normal articles usually lie between 1,500-2,000 words (Fagan, 2010), and one-page articles can comprise as few as 400-800 words depending on image use (Current Archaeology, 2024b). In summary, considering the wide-ranging audiences magazine articles can attract with their shorter-length content highlights that formal publication within magazines requires authors to be able to summarise the research process and results of discussed projects skilfully and succinctly, whilst also maintaining an engaging narrative-based approach that appeals and is accessible to both specialist and lay readers.

As well as being mindful of requirements for the text itself, authors preparing for magazine publication must also be aware of the requirements for article submission. The editorial process for magazine publication is usually less complex than for journal articles, but is certainly not non-existent, with most national magazines requiring formal proposals to be submitted for review (Fagan, 2010). These proposals, whether submitted by a researcher involved in the project or a freelance writer, must adequately summarise the proposed article, acknowledge the author's relevant expertise in the topics discussed, and demonstrate their writing skills, as well as adhere to magazine style guides (e.g., Council for British Archaeology, 2024a). In some cases, it is essential for the proposal to be submitted

before a manuscript is sent to the magazine, as some publications such as Archaeology Magazine (2025) will reject unsolicited manuscripts. Following proposal and manuscript submissions, articles then undergo an editing and review process similar to journal requirements, where a magazine's editorial team will make comments and corrections, although these aren't as heavily enforced as they are for journal article approval (Current Archaeology, 2024b). Once approval has been granted, authors must also consider requirements for the timescale of publication as this can differ significantly between different magazines, as they also can for journals. For example, Current Archaeology (2024a) publishes magazine issues monthly, while both the British Archaeology (Council for British Archaeology, 2025) and Current World Archaeology (Current Publishing, 2024b) magazines are released bi-monthly. The method of dissemination and usual audience of the magazine chosen for publication can also have a major impact on an article's publication timescale. Online magazines such as Archaeology News Online (2024) are sometimes capable of releasing articles daily to disseminate the most up-to-date information and maintain their active status that internet algorithms use to suggest content to new viewers, compared to local magazines such as the possibly now dormant local Archaeology in Northumberland Magazine (Northumberland County Council, 2014; 2025) that published an annual in-print issue only to its paying members, whose subscriptions financially supported each issue's creation. Ultimately, these requirements of magazines' editorial processes and their varying publishing frequencies stress that while creating archaeological outputs of this kind, there are many considerations authors must take to choose a publishing body that is most appropriate for the dissemination of a project's particular findings.

Interestingly, whilst journal style guides have strict guidelines for how sources should be cited both in-text and within the bibliography (e.g., SHA, 2024), magazine articles rarely use footnotes or bibliographies. For instance, Current Archaeology's (2024b) guidance addresses the absence of footnotes within the magazine as being purposeful to both encourage authors to suitably summarise any relevant external evidence within the article, and ensure readers can garner a holistic understanding of the research presented from reading the article alone. Consequently, whilst this lack of referencing may appear less restrictive, in actuality authors of magazine articles have added responsibilities to avoid unintentional plagiarism of work that has

helped them formulate their interpretations, whilst simultaneously reflecting the project's research process accurately. This is seen in Grzybowska's (2023) feature article exploring her team's excavation of a multi-period complex of features in Ponteland, Northumberland, including a Bronze Age ring-ditch associated with a series of burials, which only references other articles published within the same magazine, despite discussing many comparative sites nearby to situate the project in its wider research context. This work also exemplifies other standards and stylistic conventions of magazine articles discussed above, particularly through the emotive and engaging language choices made. Grzybowska uses the subjective personal pronoun "we" when describing findings and interpretations to personify the team's actions and decision-making processes, alongside expressive adjectives like "remarkable" and "illuminating". Furthermore, the burials themselves are presented using emotive rather than objective language to elicit emotional responses within readers, with an adolescent female's burial described as a "young girl" who was "laid to rest". Lastly, Grzybowska's writing highlights magazine articles' requirement to be accessible to an audience with mixed levels of archaeological knowledge in the definitions it provides for technical terminology, such as the ring-ditch's penannular shape, and the basilar skull fracture observed for one individual. Ultimately, scrutinising this example emphasises the variety of requirements needed for articles to meet the standard acceptable for magazine publication.

Photographs

As an output that is used extensively throughout the archaeological dissemination process both independently and within other outputs, but for which the standards required for formal publication are often overlooked, it is also important to briefly consider photographs here. Basic recognised standards for publication of photographs intended for recording purposes necessitate the use of an appropriate and accurate scale bar, whether this is a ranging pole placed in horizontal or vertical alignment to the frame alongside a north arrow for *in-situ* photographs of features on-site (Emery, 2011), or a professional centimetre scale for close-up photography of artefacts (Fisher, 2009). It is essential that photographs for publication are as high-quality as possible, with the object or feature as the central focus of the shot. To

achieve this, photographers need to ensure lighting conditions and settings for the camera's shutter speed, aperture, and ISO sensitivity are not only appropriate for the object or feature being photographed, but also for the environment the photograph is being taken in (Fisher, 2009; Emery, 2011). Professional set-ups should be used where possible to control exposure, such as light boxes that diffuse light to provide a solid white background with minimal shadows (Fisher, 2009), or a gravel box (Figure 1) for lighter coloured objects like bone that require greater contrast with the background to make details visible. Despite already being published within a journal article (Gowland *et al.*, 2023), Figure 2 shows a relatively poor example of an archaeological photograph, in which the focal object (the patch of woven bone) is not in the centre and consequently appears slightly blurred, and the scale bar is both printed on paper (potentially making it distorted and inaccurate) and partially cut-off. Typically, these mistakes should be avoided. For inclusion within other outputs such as journal articles (both in-text and within supplementary information files), monographs, and archives, photographs are required to be submitted with an associated caption, photographer credits and proof of copyright permission, and must also adhere to style guide regulations for image size, file size, and image quality, which is typically 300 dpi for both journals and magazines (OJA, 2016; 2024; Current Archaeology, 2024b). These standards should be met regardless of whether a photograph is intended to visually illustrate a feature discussed in a publication to aid audiences' understanding, or simply to entice new readers as a cover photo (Current Archaeology, 2024b), and ultimately underscore the importance of ensuring even non-text-based aspects of outputs such as photographs are suitable for formal publication.



Figure 1: Professional set-ups can be used to photograph archaeological objects under controlled conditions. Gravel boxes are particularly useful for lighter coloured objects such as bone (left) and teeth (right) for which a lighter background would be inappropriate to pick up details and show the depth of the specimen. The set-up here has a height-adjustable digital camera, appropriate metal scale bars, interchangeable lights, and a computer screen (right) to visualise the camera's view (photos taken by author, 2024).



Figure 2: This photograph was included in a published journal article, but could be considered to be below usual publication standard. The figure in Gowland *et al.*'s (2023: Fig. 10, p. 17) article intends to provide a visual illustration of the woven bone on the rib surface, however this has not been framed in the centre of the photograph and appears blurred. The scale used appears to be paper which can be distorted during the printing process and result in inaccurate measurements. It has also been partially cropped out of the photograph which could obscure the units of measurement for readers unfamiliar with sizes of human bones.

Conclusion

Whilst other archaeological outputs such as monographs and book chapters could have been explored within this essay, by delving into the detail of the many standards and considerations surrounding journal and magazine articles, a holistic understanding of the requirements of formal publication has been developed. Differences identified within the requirements of language, formatting, and editorial processes between magazines and journals highlights researchers' need to consult style guides as well as be aware of relevant standardised vocabulary, timescales for publication, and necessary level of rigour suitable for their intended dissemination output. Though standards for magazine articles may initially appear more relaxed than for journals, the wider audience and greater focus on engagement necessitate different requirements for language choice, brevity, and review that are equally important to meet for publication. Consideration of photograph publication requirements also illustrates the variety of both technical and stylistic standards to be mindful of, especially for multi-purpose outputs that act as visualisation tools supporting key messages of written text. Ultimately, through its selective examples and focused examination, this essay serves as demonstration of both shared and specific publication requirements across different archaeological outputs.

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