

Sanity and the Article-Submission Process

So your article has been rejected. Again. Or maybe you've submitted your article and have heard nothing. From anyone. For weeks. What a horrible feeling in either case, especially if you've spent six months of your life—maybe a year—working on this particularly brilliant idea. And the more rejections you receive or the longer you have to wait, the more you have to think about what you're going to do next. Do you continue to wait, hoping that some journal will see the merit in your article? Do you finally submit to those journals of last resort? Or do you give up and retire to the Bahamas?

Before making any decisions, first remember that you're not alone. As most of the standard rejection letters today tell you, the journals you are submitting to "receive thousands of great submissions each year and can publish only a small number of the submissions received." So they are rejecting—or simply not responding to—a lot of brilliant articles just like your own. Which means that thousands of other professors are in the same position as you, disheartened by rejection or frustrated by silence. So with that in mind, here are five things to consider during the article-submission process that may help you maintain sanity:

1. The article-selection process is largely a function of journal members' subject-matter interests. Other factors matter as well, of course (e.g., quality of the writing, author prestige), but subject-matter interest is most often the first consideration. Which means that your article can be rejected or ignored because the editors did not like the topic. In other words, a rejection or a lack of response may have nothing to do with the actual quality or merit of the article. It may just mean that the editors preferred other subject areas.
2. The United States has more than 600 law reviews and those law reviews publish more than 10,000 articles each year. So the odds are in your favor of getting published somewhere. The only question is: How many journals are you willing to submit your article to? While some professors focus on submitting to journals at schools ranked highly on U.S. News & World Report (or to journals ranked highly on Washington & Lee's ranking system), some are happy to just see their articles in print. After all, all of the articles end up on Westlaw and Lexis, and if your article has merit, making it available should be the most important consideration, right?
3. Don't read too much into the language or phrasing of any particular rejection e-mail. It is a form e-mail sent to all professors being rejected by that particular journal. It will sometimes call you by the wrong name and it will sometimes reference the wrong article title. Very little thought goes into this process. So, if at all possible, don't read the rejection e-mails at all. Once you see the word "unfortunately," it's over. Delete the e-mail. Mark that journal off your list. And add that school to the list of schools that you will not allow your children to attend.
4. Don't respond to rejection e-mails (even if they get your name or article title wrong) and don't send e-mails to editors asking if they've had a chance to review your article yet (unless you're expediting, of course). Chances are, you'll be setting yourself up for more

disappointment—either in the form of a second rejection e-mail with the correct author name and article title or in the form of more silence.

5. You were once a law student. And you probably were on a journal. So remember what that was like. Remember that you once rejected someone's brilliant article. And remember that law students on journals sometimes make mistakes. Just as it's possible that you made mistakes in rejecting certain brilliant articles, it's possible that the editors who have rejected your brilliant article have made a mistake, too.

Most importantly, keep your spirits up. Everyone who submits an article to a number of journals receives multiple rejections and non-responses. You're not the first and you won't be the last. So be patient. Chances are, your article will find a good home in the end.