



*Compass Interdisciplinary
Virtual Conference
19-30 Oct 2009*

The Secret to Online Publishing Success

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Hello, my name is Vanessa Lafaye and I'm going to be talking to you about the secret to online publishing success.

If you are listening to this, then you must be an internet user. Very likely, you're a heavy user of the internet, across many different aspects of your life. It's also very likely that you have published an article in an academic journal, or hope to do so in the future.

And when you want to find journal articles on the web, chances are that you will start with a search engine, or maybe an Abstracting and Indexing service, or another database like Web of Science. You probably use Google etc. several times a day. By the way, for the purposes of this workshop I will use Google as the generic search engine.

Without search engines, how else would you ever find what you want amongst all the millions of weird and not-so-wonderful articles on the web? And isn't it frustrating when the article that you want doesn't appear on the first page of results, where it belongs? And you have to trawl through several pages of nonsense to get to it?

And yet, when you sit down to construct your title, or write your abstract, how do you imagine that people will get to find your article? Do you see an avid student, crouched amongst the library shelves with a well-thumbed copy of the issue which contains your article? Or do you see a senior professor, browsing the issue in his office, highlighting your article to read over coffee?

Publishers and authors alike cling to these nostalgic images, but the fact is that the world has changed. You know this from your own behaviour. When was the last time that you had the luxury of browsing print copies to find a particular article? Or went to a journal website to see what had been

published recently? Although most authors understand that most readers will find them through search engines or databases, they still sit down to write for a print audience. In order to succeed, you need to think like a user when you write.

The secret to success in online publishing is almost embarrassingly simple, and lies mainly in the very first part of your article. Get this right, and your odds of being read, and therefore cited, and therefore ultimately receiving the accolades which are due to you, increase enormously. The technical term for this is 'search engine optimisation', but don't be put off by that.

Your title and abstract are your keys to international academic stardom. This is because Google prioritises the words in these sections above any that appear in the body text of your article. Your title and abstract must contain the key words or phrases that tell Google what the article is really *about*.

Let's go back to your imaginary reader, this time sat at their computer, looking for an article on the very topic that you have written about. Now think very carefully, because this matters most of all: what search terms will your reader put into Google?

Whatever the answer, those are the terms which *must* appear in your title and abstract.

This is why it is terribly important that your title be descriptive. In the Humanities in particular, there is a fondness for using quotes from literature, metaphors, and lines of verse in article titles. Search engines don't understand context. If you call your article 'The Broken Mirror' – whether it's about body dysmorphic disorder or gender politics - Google will index it under housewares. If you're writing about genocide in Australia, calling your article 'Australia's Forgotten Victims' will push it far down the search results of anyone looking for that topic. If you must choose an opaque title, then be sure to get your key words into the subtitle.

It may seem a shame to use a baldly descriptive title instead of something witty which shows off your erudition, but it is necessary if you want the article to be read.

Be sure to include your search terms in the title, and repeat the key phrases in the abstract. The number of times which the terms appear will increase your search ranking - up to the point where it will actually hurt your ranking. Google will disallow excessive repetition, so don't overdo it. You've no doubt seen misleading repetition used on other websites to attract traffic.

The tricky part is to balance the need to maximise your search engine ranking, without sacrificing readability. The search engine will help the reader to discover your article, but bear in mind that you are still writing for a person, not a machine.

Another strategy is to encourage as many people as possible to link to your article because Google prioritises pages with incoming links. So when your article is published, put the link on your university page, and send it to everyone who should be keen to have it on their site. Add it to your facebook profile and write about it on twitter. But remember that talking here about only positing a link to the article not the file of the article itself.

To summarise, these are the key points to remember:

- People tend to search on phrases rather than single words, such as 'women's fiction' not 'fiction'.
- Once the key words are in the title and abstract, be sure that the writing still flows.
- Restrict yourself to a maximum of 4 key words or phrases per article.

Finally, remember that most people do not look beyond the first page of search engine results. Your goal therefore is to ensure that your article is on that page. For more information and examples, go to Blackwell Compass website and click on the author's link.

And for more strategies to get your article noticed, listen to the podcast in this workshop series on *The Online Author's Survival Guide*.

Thanks for listening.