



Publishing a special issue in an Emerald Journal

What is a special issue?

Most scholarly journals publish special issues from time to time as part of the journal volume offering. Special issues draw together a range of contributions on a given theme and allow for more in-depth treatment of a topic than is normally possible within a single journal issue. Special issues are often, though not always, devoted to investigating emerging or "hot" topics, or to exploring alternative perspectives on familiar themes.

A special issue can be edited by a Guest Editor, a subject expert who is appointed temporarily to the role by the Journal Editor. Most special issues are developed when a subject expert identifies a demand for an issue in a particular area and approaches a journal Editor to propose an issue.

Proposing a special issue

Once a need for a special issue has been identified, a proposing Guest Editor should contact the relevant journal Editor and Publisher (this information will be available on the journal homepage) with the following details:

- the scope of the proposed special issue
- an indication of how the scope of the issue fits with the remit of the journal
- evidence of demand for the special issue
- proposed timescale

The Editor and Publisher will consider proposals, taking into account:

- the "fit" of the special issue with the scope of the journal
- whether there is room in the publishing schedule for a special issue. Some journals may have already filled issues for one, or even two volumes in advance, so may not be able to accommodate a special issue.

Where a special issue proposal is not considered suitable for a particular journal, the Editor and Publisher may be able to suggest an alternative Emerald journal.

Why be a Guest Editor?

Editing special issues allows Guest Editors to gain valuable first-hand experience of editing a publication and is a good trial run for those who aspire to edit their own journal one day. Editing a special issue can also be a good way of increasing your profile amongst peers in your subject field. The key stages of guest editing a special issue for publication in an Emerald journal are as follows.

Making a start

The first step in editing a special issue is for the Guest Editor and Journal Editor to agree the scope of the issue, the likely date of publication and the Guest Editor's final copy deadline. Using this information, the Guest Editor should be able to create a Call for Papers and to draw up a project schedule which allows sufficient time for:

- authors to submit papers
- referees to review contributions
- papers to be returned to authors and revisions made
- the Guest Editor to submit final copy on the due copy date.

At this early stage, it is important that the Guest Editor understands clearly how closely the Journal Editor expects to be involved in decisions on the special issue. Some Journal Editors expect to be involved in editorial decisions on papers. They are ultimately responsible for the editorial content of their journals, whilst others are happy to delegate responsibility for special issues completely to Guest Editors. It is in the Guest Editor's interests that they clarify the extent of the Journal Editor's involvement in the special issue at this early stage. Journal Editors should see full versions of manuscripts prior to the copy delivery date but many Editors also wish to see abstracts or full papers throughout the editing process. It is helpful for all involved if the level of involvement on both sides is agreed before work on the special issue gets underway.

The Guest Editor should also:

- Familiarize themselves with the journal's "Author Guidelines". These can be found on the journal's homepage. These guidelines will indicate the required length of manuscripts and the format in which they should be submitted. These are the standard requirements for the journal and should be adhered to, unless the Guest Editor has agreed different specifications with the Journal Editor and Emerald.
- Distribute the special issue Call for Papers. Guest Editors should distribute this as widely as possible within their own networks. Emerald will also distribute Call for Papers so the Guest Editor is advised to work with the journal's Publisher.
- Understand the journal's peer review process. Most Emerald journals employ a double blind peer review process. Special issues are expected to employ a review process of equivalent rigour to that used for standard journal issues. Any change to the journal's usual peer review process must be agreed with the Journal Editor.

- Arrange for training in, and access to our online submission and peer review system.
- Ensure papers do not contain potentially libellous or defamatory material. The Guest Editor is responsible, along with the author and publisher, for ensuring that no article accepted for publication in the special issue contains material which might fall foul of current libel law. It is worth noting that libel law in the UK, where Emerald is based, is generally more restrictive than in other countries.

Handling submissions and managing the peer review process

The Guest Editor is responsible for providing clear and timely feedback throughout the editing process to authors who submit papers to the special issue. Our online submission and peer review system assists with this. Receipt of manuscripts should be acknowledged and authors should be given an indication of when they will hear of major decisions on their papers.

Special issues can, if a journal receives many submissions, take 12-18 months to come to fruition, which is a long time for an author keen to be published to wait.

Guest Editors can make the publishing process less frustrating for authors by keeping in touch and providing feedback on the progress of papers. Guest Editors are responsible for managing the peer review process for the special issue and whilst the Journal Editor may be able to help in suggesting referees, the Guest Editor is essentially responsible for gathering together a team of suitably expert referees. The peer review process is by far and away the most time consuming part of the special issue editing process. It is also the most important part of the process. An effective and thorough peer review is essential for ensuring the quality of the papers accepted for publication.

Guest Editors must ensure that authors address all the concerns raised by referees during the peer review process and modify their papers accordingly. Once authors have completed their revisions, the Guest Editor may choose to return papers to the original referees for a final check but this further stage may be dependent on the time frame for editing the issue. The peer review process may take up to six months to complete and in some cases, where substantial revisions to papers are required, may be as long as one year.

Submitting copy for publication

Once papers have been reviewed, revised and accepted for publication, the special issue is almost complete. The Guest Editor will have a few remaining tasks before submitting the special issue copy to the Journal Editor and Emerald which include:

- Writing an Editorial or Introduction to the special issue. This may either be a brief overview of the papers to be published or it may be a longer, more thematically based piece. This latter type of Editorial/Introduction may be published in the journal as an article if 75 per cent or more of its content is devoted to discussion of general themes rather than discussion of the specific articles
- Checking that final versions of papers are complete, free of errors (to the author's best knowledge) and conform to the journal's housestyle requirements, that full author affiliations and contact details have been supplied.
- Checking that article titles, abstracts and keywords are optimally descriptive, for high-quality metadata. This facilitates search engine optimization.
- Establishing and recording the Received/ Revised/ Accepted dates for all papers, for submission with the special issue copy.
- Providing a list of the referees involved in reviewing papers for the special issue if it is the journal's style to publish an acknowledgement of referees.

Once all these points have been addressed, the issue is complete and is finally ready for submission to the journal Editor and to Emerald.

Post-editing and post-publication

After your special issue has been received by Emerald, it goes through our in-house team who check the copyright forms and whether any third-party permissions are required. The journal papers then go to the typesetting team who perform quality checks and prepare the proofs. The author receives their proofs which must be returned within 10 days. Once proofs are returned and the corrections are made, the issue is published on emeraldinsight.com.

The publishing process typically takes around 8-12 weeks in total.

Once the issue has been published it is available to our global readers to download, share and cite. The journal Publisher can provide you with updates on the impact of your special issue using usage, download and citation figures.