



## From the Editor

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# How to Get an Article Accepted at *American Anthropologist* (or Anywhere)

My tenure as Editor-in-Chief of *American Anthropologist* began relatively recently, but I have already been surprised by the amount of second-guessing I have encountered regarding how manuscripts are accepted for publication. I am taken aback by how many anthropologists mystify the editorial process, worrying that an editor will only accept manuscripts from a certain methodological or theoretical perspective. Of course, I cannot speak for all editors everywhere, but my work as Editor-in-Chief thus far leads me to believe that the key to getting manuscripts accepted for publication does not lie in debates over scientific versus humanistic approaches, the four fields, or academic versus applied work. I have found that the weaknesses in manuscripts that lead reviewers and me to recommend revision or rejection have little to do with ideology or approach. Instead, in my experience, it has everything to do with the basics of analysis and evidence.

On the basis of my work thus far as Editor-in-Chief, I can provide five simple tips for getting an article accepted at *American Anthropologist* (or anywhere). These may seem obvious, but I continue to be astounded by the number of authors who fail to take the issues discussed below into consideration before submitting a manuscript. If you follow these five simple tips, I can assure you that you will greatly increase your chance of a favorable decision at *American Anthropologist* or any journal—whatever your methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, or political commitments.

### MY FIVE SIMPLE TIPS

#### 1. Professionalism Counts

You would not believe the number of manuscripts that come into *American Anthropologist* for consideration in

which the author in question has forgotten to select “accept all changes in document” after using the “track changes” function of Microsoft Word. As a result, deleted text, comments from preliminary readers, and so forth are all interspersed with the main text in a bewildering range of colors. In addition, many manuscripts are submitted to *American Anthropologist* with a shocking number of typographical and grammatical errors. These can be as minor as two spaces between a word rather than one or inconsistent use of single versus double quote marks, but they can also include blank pages, mixed fonts, strange formatting, and missing references, among others.

None of these kinds of issues in isolation are likely to sway a reviewer or myself, but in the aggregate they present the picture of an author who is not really serious about his or her work. They distract the reader and make it hard to follow the argument at hand. Put your best foot forward in any manuscript you submit, anywhere. There is no excuse for a manuscript not to be completely free of all typographical and grammatical errors prior to its submission to a journal.

#### 2. Link Your Data and Your Claims

One of the most common problems I encounter in manuscripts submitted to *American Anthropologist* (regardless of subfield or approach) involves the relationship between the argument of a manuscript and the data found in it—regardless of whether that data is ethnographic, statistical, archaeological, linguistic, or historical, or whether it takes some other form. Surprisingly often, manuscripts are structured around claims for which the author presents insufficient evidence. Often a manuscript will be concerned with Topic A, but the data presented speak to Topic B—in other words, the data and argument of the manuscript are

at cross-purposes with each other. Topic B may be very interesting, but if it does not support the theoretical claims at issue in Topic A, this is irrelevant. It is important to always weave together one's argument and one's data, so that the data truly support the theoretical claims at hand.

Obviously, this does not have to take the form of "one sentence of theory, one sentence of data": the "weaving" can take place at a broader level. But in some manner, the two must be linked to each other. You must show us what you are doing: the reader must be able to understand how you reached your conclusions based on a specific set of data and your analysis of that data. Even if the manuscript in question is a more conceptual piece, one not concerned with a body of data as such, the trajectory of the analysis needs to be clear.

Like many journals, *American Anthropologist* has a rather tight word limit for initial submissions: 8,000 words. This concision forces a helpful focus on manuscripts (and also allows me to publish more manuscripts from a broader range of anthropological research). The magic of an effective article lies in its ability to provide sufficient data to support the claims at hand within these limits of space. There are many ways to do this, but every author must find some way to make this work.

### 3. Avoid Sweeping Generalizations

Linked to the issue of the relationship between theory and data is the one of overgeneralization. Far too often, manuscripts open with—or are fundamentally structured around—sweeping claims for which sufficient supporting evidence is not provided (and could not be provided, because, say, we cannot prove that "humans throughout history have sought to create forms of community based on their spiritual beliefs"). Such sweeping generalizations invite nitpickers and quibblers and do not really serve the argument at hand. Of course, it is fine to speculate about broader implications, but this must be done in a way that builds from the data at hand and properly hedges its claims as it moves outward from that data.

### 4. Effective Use of Citations

*American Anthropologist*, like many journals (indeed, more than most), publishes work from a broad range of conversations and schools of thought. There is no requirement regarding which school of thought or intellectual conversation any particular manuscript draws on. However, every manuscript must engage with some body of relevant literature and cite that literature properly. One of the most common ways that reviewers find fault with a manuscript is to note that "six other people have been doing research on the same topic for the last ten years, but the author seems to be unaware of this body of work because the author does not cite that work in the manuscript."

Even though it takes up precious space, it is crucial to cite the relevant literatures. In general, it is most effective to avoid either long block quotes, on the one hand,

or simply name dropping, on the other hand: for example, citing "(Boellstorff 2005)." At times just mentioning names is needed, but what seems to be most effective are short citations that demonstrate the author in question actually believes what you claim she or he believes: "thus, it seems that 'flowers in springtime are pretty' (Boellstorff 2005:15)."

### 5. Craft an Effective Structure for the Manuscript

I am shocked by how many manuscripts submitted to *American Anthropologist* suffer from major structural shortcomings. These are usually fixable, but they seriously affect the ability of the manuscript to present a clear and coherent argument. For instance, many manuscripts do not contain a conclusion or will have a 100-word conclusion for 8,000 words of text. Such a short conclusion is not going to be able to wrap up the loose ends of the manuscript and remind the reader of its overall argument. Often, a manuscript will have four or five subsections, but one of these will be much, much longer than the others, taking up 50 percent or more of the manuscript. It is rarely effective to have one subsection that is, say, 3,000 words long, and then another subsection that is 400 words long. There needs to be proportionality in the flow of the argument. Often the introduction of a manuscript will make a particular set of claims, but by the end of the manuscript another topic altogether is being discussed. The thread of one's argument needs to be carried consistently through the manuscript.

### IN THIS ISSUE

I hope that these tips presented above will be useful. In this issue of *American Anthropologist*, I am pleased to present seven research articles that successfully avoid all of the pitfalls described above while bringing us a broad range of compelling new anthropological scholarship.

Three research articles in this issue examine relationships between environment, community, and power. In "Social Relations and the Green Critique of Capitalism in Melanesia," Stuart Kirsch addresses questions of knowledge production, science, and society by exploring debates over a copper and gold mine in Papua New Guinea, finding in these debates an incipient "green critique of capitalism." In "Witch Hunts, Herbal Healing, and Discourses of Indigenous Ecodevelopment in North India: Theory and Method in the Anthropology of Environmentality," Jeffrey Snodgrass and his coauthors employ a range of methods, including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. Drawing on this broad range of data, they develop a notion of "environmentality" by exploring the dynamics of indigenous and state knowledges in regard to what are seen to be "natural resources." Michelle Hegmon and her coauthors bring an archaeological perspective to these questions in "Social Transformation and Its Human Costs in the Prehispanic U.S. Southwest." Drawing on notions of resilience theory, they provide fascinating new insights regarding relationships between social form and ecological change.

An archaeological perspective on social change also informs Christina Torres-Rouff's research article, entitled "The Influence of Tiwanaku on Life in the Chilean Atacama: Mortuary and Bodily Perspectives," which explores funeral and mortuary data via a bioarchaeological framework to rethink notions of culture contact. Her analysis challenges assumptions that cultural contact is only visible in the archaeological record when involving violent conflict and also asks how, even more than a millennium ago, different social strata of a society responded differently to forms of cultural interchange. Emma Kowal's article "The Politics of the Gap: Indigenous Australians, Liberal Multiculturalism, and the End of the Self-Determination Era" might seem far removed from the questions Torres-Rouff explores in her work, but there is a fascinating link in regard to the question of culture change and culturally specific notions of human efficacy.

In "Magical Pursuits: Legitimacy and Representation in a Transnational Political Field," Beth Baker-Cristales explores questions of transnational governmentality by examining international migration with regard to El Salvador. One of her particular interests is how forms of transnational governmentality depend on "the appropriation of popular forms of organizing and expression associated with civil society as a way to mask the inequality at the heart of this relationship" (this issue). The final research article appearing in this issue of *American Anthropologist*, Matthew Liebmann's

"The Innovative Materiality of Revitalization Movements: Lessons from the Pueblo Revolt of 1680," brings a material culture perspective to the question of revitalization movements, exploring how materiality is fundamental to these movements.

In this issue you will also find four more "From the Editor" messages from editors of other AAA journals, along the lines of the four messages that appeared in the previous issue of *American Anthropologist*. As before, I have offered this space to editors of other AAA journals to help acquaint AAA members with publications of which they may not be currently aware. I noted in the previous issue that

we are lucky as an association to have a stunning range of top-notch journals, all in various ways experimental, innovative, and featuring solid, cutting-edge scholarship. I encourage you to take a look at these journals via print or AnthroSource—and if your institution's library does not subscribe to any of these journals, please urge them to do so.

I invite you to enjoy this issue of *American Anthropologist* and to consider submitting to this journal (and to other anthropological journals) in the future. To return to my themes from the opening of this editorial, and as reflected by the broad range of scholarship appearing in this issue, I encourage you to see *American Anthropologist* as a possible venue for your own work, indeed for all anthropological research.