

Publishing in Undergraduate Philosophy Journals: A Guide

1. What are undergraduate philosophy journals?

An undergraduate philosophy journal is a philosophy journal (an organization that publishes collections of papers) that only accepts submissions from undergraduates (people pursuing a bachelor's or associate's degree, or something like that). They are usually run by the students in a philosophy club at a university, sometimes with the assistance of professors, graduate students, staff members, or others. Ideally, they will put out a call for papers (CFP) each time they are getting an issue together, which often happens yearly. Details vary from journal to journal.

2. Should I publish in an undergraduate philosophy journal?

Here are some benefits of publishing in one of these journals:

- It gives you an opportunity to take a paper you worked hard on, and that you are proud of, and do something more with it (or an opportunity to write something new)
- It gives you an opportunity to improve your philosophical writing skills by polishing a paper beyond what you might normally do
- It gives you a line on your resume/CV (although whether someone will be impressed by that line varies quite widely from person to person)
- It gives you a taste of what it's like to try to get philosophy published in academia
- Some people might read your paper if it's published
- Some undergraduate journals include associated conferences where people present their papers, and these can be fun to attend if you like that sort of thing and you're able to go

The above list covers the typical benefits, I think. Notice that the list does *not* include “it makes you a more attractive candidate to graduate schools if you apply to them.” At least for philosophy graduate schools, typically your chances of admission are largely unaffected by whether you have published in an undergraduate journal. If there's any impact, it's very minor. This is because undergraduate journals typically have standards that are low enough that their acceptance of your paper doesn't communicate useful information about your philosophical skills. If the paper is a good one, you'll use it as your writing sample, and so the admissions committee will use its own judgment about its quality. Publishing in an undergraduate journal does demonstrate your interest in philosophy, but probably lots of other parts of your application will accomplish this, so the journal publication won't matter very much.¹

Of course, polishing your paper in order to submit it to the journal will make your paper better. And if you have a very good paper, that can serve as your writing sample for your application to graduate schools. But that has nothing to do with whether the paper gets published in an undergraduate journal. From the point of view of graduate school, publishing in an undergraduate journal is not helpful (or harmful).

¹ This is my view and lots of people agree with me. But, not everyone does! Graduate admission is not an exact science. Some people may be impressed that you published in an undergraduate journal in a way that helps your admission chances. I suspect these people are in the minority, especially when it comes to the people on admissions committees for philosophy graduate programs. But I am not 100% sure.

This means that unless the things in the list above sound great to you, it's probably not worth your time trying to publish in an undergraduate philosophy journal. But if those things do sound great, then go ahead! There are no downsides except from the time investment, and, if your paper is rejected, perhaps a blow to your ego. (There is *one* possible downside: if the paper is *amazing*, or it could be amazing after some more time spent working on it, and if you are thinking about pursuing graduate school, it might be better to save it so that you can publish it in a real journal.)²

3. How to publish in an undergraduate philosophy journal

Different journals will have slightly different procedures, but the process will be broadly the same for all of them:

1. You will need a paper to submit. It probably makes sense to start with a paper you wrote for a class, but you can write a brand new paper if you want.
2. Find a journal to submit to. You can submit to more than one journal, but you should not submit the same paper to more than one journal at a time. To find a list of journals, check out <https://danielweltman.com/undergradjournals.html>.
3. Read the CFP carefully to get a sense of what the journal is looking for and the deadlines. There might be a word limit or other things to keep in mind. Rarely, a journal will accept "rolling submissions," which means there will be no CFP: you can submit any time and they'll publish an issue when they feel like it.
4. Revise your paper to make it as good as possible, keeping in mind any considerations from the CFP. Even if your paper got a good grade, there are probably ways you can improve it. It would be a good idea to ask one or more of your professors to give you some comments on it which you can use to revise it.
5. Submit your paper. The journal will review it and (hopefully) get back to you at some point to tell you whether it has been accepted or rejected. In many cases you won't get any feedback, although this will vary from journal to journal. If you get rejected you can submit it to another journal.

4. What about normal journals?

In addition to undergraduate journals, there are also normal journals. Publishing in those is much harder. Almost no undergraduates are capable of writing philosophy of the sort that is publishable. If you are interested in giving it a try, though, ask your professors, since they are in a position to tell you whether your paper might be publishable and to tell you about what that process entails.

In some disciplines, it is not unusual for undergraduates to publish papers as co-authors, for instance by working in a lab which publishes a paper with many co-authors. It is very rare for philosophers to co-author papers with undergraduates.

² I thank Julia Staffel for noting this consideration.