

## **A SHORT PAPER ARGUING FOR WORKING PAPERS AS A PLATFORM FOR SCHOLARLY DEBATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Despite calls for shorter papers, many of our journals in applied linguistics still require lengthy minimum word requirements. In this short paper, we argue that departmental working papers may be the home needed for shorter scholarly opinion driven articles. We outline seven reasons for this and argue that we may benefit open science initiatives by utilizing working paper publications as such.

*Keywords:* working papers, applied linguistics, scholarly debate, opinion articles

Working papers ought to be used for scholarly debate. Some major publications in applied linguistics solicit opinion pieces and invite authors to submit shorter, opinion-based pieces on professional, pedagogical, and research-related issues. For example, ELT Journal’s *Comment* invites authors to write personal and possibly controversial essay-style pieces on professional issues in the field up to 1,000 words long, while TESOL Quarterly’s *Research and Teaching Issues* accepts submissions up to 3,400 words that discuss contemporary theoretical, technical, or pedagogical topics. Calls for shorter papers have been made in our field as a way to more effectively engage both writers and readers without draining precious intellectual energy, and in turn improve knowledge dissemination (Krashen, 2012). While some regional journals have heeded these calls (e.g., Adamson & Nunn, 2021), most major journals have yet to adopt guidelines for shorter papers.

At the same time, departmental working papers in applied linguistics are in a strange place. In this era of hyper-competitive scholarship, where publication count primarily contributes to job placement, one might be hesitant to publish in a working paper publication. This is due to the fact that most journals require the author to not have submitted their manuscript elsewhere in *any* form. Furthermore, as scholars are under pressure to produce polished research manuscripts for the highest-impact journals, less of their focus is available for producing informative written work that is accessible and relevant to the everyday realities of classroom teachers. This in turn has led to the ‘researcher-practitioner divide’, a situation exacerbated by an over-emphasis on lengthy, jargon-filled publications that may not even be physically accessible to teachers without institutional access to major research databases (McKinley, 2019). Writing a short, persuasive piece in an open-access working paper publication represents an opportunity for upcoming scholars to help bridge this gap. Thus, it is clear that working paper publications in our field are being under-utilized.

Here at SLS Working Papers, we have recently added opinion pieces to our call for submissions. There are a number of reasons why working paper publications make sense for these types of papers:

1. Working paper publications typically utilize internal reviewers. These reviewers can attest for the logical, well-written, and formatted standards that are needed for scholarly opinion pieces.
2. Working paper publications are normally in-house, which allows them to be more receptive to undergraduate and MA level work. This in turn allows for voices and arguments from a wider range of developing scholars to find a home.
3. As in-house publications, working papers can provide a unique space for departmental debates and calls for change. This gives students an opportunity to express their desires in a public and institutionally supported way, such as arguments regarding curriculum change or departmental policies.
4. An influx of articles into working paper publications can revitalize the space and encourage more lively and robust scholarly debate.

5. Working paper publications can create an environment for scholars in a department to form a ‘school’. That is, it provides an avenue for theoretical, political, or goal-oriented works that, together, are greater than the sum of their parts.
6. Working paper publications can serve as a safe space for early career scholars whose work may otherwise get picked up by predatory journals.
7. Academic publication is a capitalistic nightmare and grassroots resistance is necessary to overcome it. Working paper publications are typically open-access and are thus a viable means to support open science.

It is for these reasons that we encourage other working paper publications to send the call for short opinion pieces. We also strongly encourage both students and faculty in our own department to heed this call for shorter, thought-provoking argumentative papers that can spark the kind of lively scholarly debate that will drive our field forward.

## REFERENCES

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