

Publishing Special Issues

Special or themed issues can be a great way to focus attention on a hot topic.

A good special issue can enhance the profile of your journal, attract top authors, and potentially boost usage and citations. Many editors arrange for a guest editor to handle the entire issue on her or his behalf. This allows for a specialist to oversee the issue and bring in their contacts and networks.

Where to start?

Special issues need to be planned well in advance; it can take between 12–18 months from issuing a call for papers to publication. Taking longer than 18 months might mean that the special issue loses timeliness, although some journals plan several years in advance. There are no hard and fast rules for planning special issues, but below are some general guidelines.

- **Publish one special issue per volume.** This allows you to take advantage of the opportunities a themed issue can provide while ensuring sufficient breadth of coverage through unsolicited submissions.
- **Solicit ideas for concepts or themes that merit a special issue from your board.** You can also use usage data from publication to identify popular topics and trends. You could invite proposals for special issues from your readers.
- **Appoint a guest editor to handle the special issue on your behalf.** They should be an expert on the subject of the special issue and ideally will be sufficiently well-networked internationally to bring top authors and articles to the journal. Guest editors should be responsive and well-organized. Encourage the guest editor to develop a proposal summarizing the rationale for the issue, the approach they envision taking and the areas they wish to cover. This can be a good way of assessing the guest editor's level of commitment.
- **Ensure that your guest editor understands the nature of their commitment and their obligations under copyright and libel law.** They should understand the journal's schedule and

be aware of limits on article length and page budget. You may want to consider establishing a contract with them. Remember that as the editor, you're ultimately responsible for the content published in your journal.

- **Communicate regularly with your guest editor to assess progress.** Timely publication of journal issues is extremely important, and you may need to supply an alternate issue at short notice if a special issue is delayed.
- **Peer review.** Although articles in special issues are often commissioned, they should still be peer reviewed in order to support your journal's reputation for quality and to maintain general publishing standards (which are important to abstracting and indexing services). You should decide whether the peer review process will be handled by the guest editor or by your office. If it is to be handled by the guest editor, then you should ensure that the review process is in line with the journal's standard practice and SAGE's policies and processes. You should also liaise with the guest editor to ensure that individual board members are not being over-burdened.

A note about timing

Deadlines: It is important that the guest editor sticks to deadlines. Otherwise, late submission could affect the rest of the journal's publication schedule. Even if you choose not to put a formal contract in place with your guest editor, it is essential that he or she is aware of critical deadlines.

Publication date: Set a date for when you would like the special issue to be published. Remember that special issues have a tendency to exceed the usual page budget, so avoid publishing them in the final issue of the volume. Because special issues can help with citation activity, it is recommended to publish them earlier in the calendar year to give them a longer window in which they could be cited.

Content: Ultimately, you as the editor are responsible for the content and timely delivery of the journal, and therefore you should maintain oversight of the special issue. At the very least, you should read all the articles prior to submission. If any of the material is not up to par, you have the right to refuse publication. As the journal Editor, you have the final say on manuscript decisions.

Some special issues may attract Content Sponsorship opportunities.