

HOW TO WRITE A JOURNAL ARTICLEⁱ

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This information is informed by our own experiences and also by a paper called 'Writing an Empirical Journal Article' which you can find [here](#). Although the author is writing in Psychology journals it is applicable to writing journal articles in **any** area. It has loads of good advice and detailed examples.

We are assuming in our session today we are focusing on reporting a quantitative empirical study rather than say, a literature review although lots of the advice would be the same.

The first thing to do is some research to find a journal that you are intending to write your paper for. Think about the audience you want to write for. Check word count and the guidance that is given for authors. Then you can write from the start with this journal in mind.

1. THE FORMAT:

Good organisation of the material is critical.

Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusions (and Title and Abstract of course)

2. INTRODUCTION:

First introduce the background and nature of the problem you are investigating and why it is important. Review relevant literature/concepts/theories. Provide relevant examples. Say what it is your study adding. Finish introduction with a clear statement of research questions/hypotheses.

3. METHODS

Usual subsections are Design, Respondents, Materials, Procedure (and depending on what the study is there may be an Ethics Section)

4. RESULTS

Quantitative studies report descriptive statistics and then analyses – clearly addressing the hypotheses. Describe what you have done accurately and honestly. Use clear tables and figures.

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Discuss (not repeat) what you have found and why – and connect it to other literature. Reflect on weaknesses of the study. What are the implications for practice and/or further research? Clear conclusion.

6. REFERENCES

Have a system for storing your references – see [here](#) – lots of people use Mendeley or Zotero.

7. ABSTRACT

Go back and (re)write the abstract at the end. Do you need key words? Check required format. Words in the title matter as this is how it will be found when people search for work in your area

8. WRITING STYLE

Simply, clearly, short sentences. Proof reading – by you and others. Check the reporting conventions of the journal you are submitting to. Be prepared to rewrite sections - several times. Be concise!

Remember what Mark Twain (allegedly) said: *“I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.”*

9. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET STUCK (EVERYONE DOES!)

Work with others; Set aside 30 minutes and write without editing; Write in small regular chunks of time; Be aware of how you procrastinate!

10. FINALLY

Finally – reading helps you write better... and practice is essential!

Good writing is important no matter what – see [here](#) for an interesting and useful article about writing good grant applications.

Lots of journal papers get rejected! It feels horrible (though you do get used to it after it has happened a few times!) The most important thing is not to give up. Sometimes you get the chance to do corrections and resubmit. Take notice of the comments you get and resubmit. Or if the paper was rejected you can still use them to improve the paper and submit to another journal. Papers are always better after revision!

ⁱ Before you start thinking about writing the paper of course you need to have conducted an interesting and well-designed study. You have learned a lot about that this week. See [here](#) to learn more about well-designed studies. Another recent and growing trend is the focus on pre-registration of research studies. This is to protect against HARKing – ‘Hypothesizing After the Results are Known’. And also to encourage the publication of studies with non-significant results. Read more about pre-registration [here](#).