AuthorAID Workshop:
Writing and Publishing Journal Articles

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
Knowledge Community Editor,
AuthorAID at INASP
Professor, Texas A&M University

Topics

- Ensuring that research is publishable
- Choosing a suitable journal
- Following the instructions to authors
- Structuring a journal article
- Understanding the review and publication processes; interacting with editors
- Writing effectively in English
- Learning more: some resources

Helping Ensure That Research is Publishable

A paper can be no better than the research that it reports.

Some Questions That Editors and Peer Reviewers Consider

- Does the research address an important unanswered question?

- Is the question of broad enough interest?

- Are the methods appropriate?

- Have ethical standards been met?

- Are the results well enough documented?

- Are the conclusions reasonable?

- Is the paper well written?

When should researchers start trying to ensure that their research is publishable?

When they start planning their research!

Some Other Factors Affecting Publishability

- Appropriateness for the journal chosen
- Consistency with the journal's instructions
- Macro aspects of the writing (organization, etc)
- Micro aspects of the writing (word choice, grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc)

- (These will be topics of some parts of the workshop.)

Choosing a Suitable Journal

Identifying a Target Journal

- Decide early (before drafting the paper). Do not write the paper and then look for a journal. (Why?)

- Look for journals that have published work similar to yours.

- Consider journals that have published work you cite.

Some Factors to Consider

- Audience
- Prestige
- Access
- Impact
- Publication time
- Technical quality
- Likelihood of acceptance

Using the Journal's Instructions

- Read the instructions to authors before starting to prepare your paper.

- Consult the instructions while preparing your paper.

- Check the instructions again before submitting your paper.

Some Questions the Instructions May Answer

- What categories of article does the journal publish?

- What is the maximum length of articles?

- Does the journal include abstracts? If so, what is the maximum length?

- What sections should the article include? What are the guidelines for each?

- What guidelines for writing style should be followed?

Some Questions (cont)

- How many figures and tables are allowed? What are the requirements for them?
- In what format should references appear? Is there a maximum number of references?
- In what electronic format should the paper be prepared?
- How should the paper be submitted?

Example: Instructions from *International Journal of Business Studies*

Beyond the Instructions

- Look at some recent issues of the journal.

- In the journal, look at some papers that present research analogous to yours.

- Doing so can help you gear your paper to the journal.

Structuring a Journal Article

Preparing a journal article:

largely a matter of organization

A Common Format for Journal Articles: IMRAD

- **I**ntroduction: What was the question?
- **M**ethods: How did you try to answer it?
- **R**esults: What did you find?
- **A**nd
- **D**iscussion: What does it mean?

A More Complete View

- (Title)
- (Authors)
- (Abstract)
- **Introduction**
- **Methods**
- **Results**
- **Discussion**
- (Acknowledgments)
- (References)

Some Other Structures

- Variants of IMRAD—for example, with
  - a literature review section after the introduction,
  - a combined results and discussion section, or
  - a conclusions section added
- Essay-like format, with subheadings chosen by the author
- Other
- What have you found to be the usual structure(s) of journal articles in your research area?

Title

- The fewest possible words that adequately indicate the contents of the paper

- Important in literature searching

- Should not include extra words, such as "A Study of" or "Observations on"

- Should be specific enough

- Generally should not include abbreviations

- (Running title: short version of title—appears at tops of pages)

Authors

- Those with important intellectual contributions to the work

- Often listed from greatest contributions to least

- In some fields, head of research group often is listed last

- In some fields, listed alphabetically

- Important to list one's name the same way on every paper

The Abstract

- An important part of the paper
  - Relatively widely read
  - Used to decide whether to read the rest of the paper
  - Gives editors, reviewers, others a first impression
- Briefly summarizes the paper
- Should be organized like the paper (for example, in sort of a mini-IMRAD format)
- In some fields, there are structured abstracts (with standardized headings).

Orders of Reading and Writing Sections of a Paper

- People read the sections of journal papers in various orders. (What does that imply for how to write such papers?)

- You can write the sections of a paper in any order.

- A convenient order in which to write the sections: Methods, Results, Discussion, Introduction

The Introduction

Purposes of the Introduction

- To provide background
  - In order to help readers understand the paper
  - In order to help readers appreciate the importance of the research
- To identify the question(s) the research addressed
  - Sometimes stated as a hypothesis or hypotheses

Length of Introduction

- Articles in some fields tend to have short introductions (a few paragraphs or less)
- Articles in some other fields tend to have long introductions or to also include related sections (for example, literature review, theoretical framework)
- What about introductions in your field?

Gearing the Introduction to the Audience

- Papers in relatively general journals: Introduction must provide basic background information.

- Papers in specialized journals in your field: Introduction can assume that readers have more knowledge about the field.

Structure of the Introduction

- Introduction typically should be funnel-shaped, moving from general to specific
- A common structure:
  - Information on importance of topic
  - Highlights of relevant previous research
  - Identification of unanswered question(s)
  - Approach you used to seek the answer(s)
  - (In some fields) your main findings

Methods

Purposes of the Methods Section

- To allow others to replicate what you did
  - In order to test it
  - In order to do further research
- To allow others to evaluate what you did
  - To determine whether the conclusions seem valid
  - To determine whether the findings seem applicable to other situations

Methods: Basic Information to Include

- In most cases, overview of study design
- Identification of (if applicable)
  - Equipment, organisms, reagents, etc used (and sources thereof)
  - Populations
  - Approval of human or animal research by an appropriate committee
  - Statistical methods

Methods: Amount of Detail to Use

- For well-known methods: name of method, citation of reference

- For methods previously described but not well known: brief description of method, citation of reference

- For methods that you yourself devise: relatively detailed description

Methods: The Words and More

- Should be written in past tense
- In some journals, may include subheads (which can help readers)
- May include tables and figures—for example:
  - Flowcharts
  - Diagrams of apparatus
  - Tables of experimental conditions

A Suggestion

Look at the Methods sections of some papers in your target journal. Use them as models.

Results

The Results Section

- The core of the paper
- Often includes tables, figures, or both
- Should summarize findings rather than providing data in great detail
- Should present results but not comment on them
- (Note: Some journals combine the Results and the Discussion.)

Verb Tense for the Results Section: Past Tense

Examples:
- A total of 417 of the customers replied.
- _____ increased, but _____ decreased.
- The average temperature was _____.
- Three of the dogs died.
- This difference was not statistically significant.

Results Sections of Papers with Tables or Figures

- How much should the information in the text overlap that in the tables and figures?
  - Not extensive overlap
  - In general, text should present only the main points from the tables and figures
  - Perhaps also include a few of the most important data
- Remember to mention each table or figure. Do so as soon as readers might want to see it.

Mentioning Tables and Figures: Some Writing Advice

- In citing tables and figures, emphasize the finding, not the table or figure.

  - *Not so good*: Table 3 shows that researchers who attended the workshop published twice as many papers per year.

  - *Better*: Researchers who attended the workshop published twice as many papers per year (Table 3).

Tables: A Few Suggestions

- Use tables only if text will not suffice.
- Design tables to be understandable without the text.
- If a paper includes a series of tables, use the same format for each.
- Be sure to follow the instructions to authors.

Figures: A Few Suggestions

- Use figures (graphs, diagrams, maps, photographs, etc) only if they will help convey your information.

- Avoid including too much information in one figure.

- Make sure any lettering will be large enough once published.

- Follow the journal's instructions.

Discussion

Discussion

- One of the more difficult parts to write, because have more choice of what to say

- Often should begin with a brief summary of the main findings

- Should answer the question(s) stated in the introduction

- Sometimes is followed by a conclusions section

The Discussion:
Some Possible Content

- ## Strengths of the study

  - For example, superior methods, extensive data

- ## Limitations of the study

  - For example: small sample size, short follow-up, incomplete data, possible sources of bias, problems with experimental procedures

  - Better to mention limitations than for peer reviewers and readers to think that you're unaware of them

  - If the limitations seem unlikely to affect the conclusions, can explain why

The Discussion: Possible Content (cont)

- Relationship to findings of other research—for example:
  - Similarities to previous findings (your own, others', or both)
  - Differences from previous findings
  - Possible reasons for similarities and differences

The Discussion:
Possible Content (cont)

- Applications and implications—for example:

  - Possible uses of the findings (in business, public policy, agriculture, medicine, etc)

  - Relationship of the findings to theories or models:

    - Do the findings support them?

    - Do they refute them?

    - Do they suggest modifications?

The Discussion:
Possible Content (cont)

- Other research needed—for example:
  - To address questions still unanswered
  - To address new questions raised by the findings
- Other

The Discussion: Structure

- Typically should move from specific to general (opposite of introduction)
- Beware of excessive length

Acknowledgments

- The place to thank people who contributed to the research but whose contributions don't qualify them for authorship
- Obtain permission before listing people
- Sometimes also the place to mention sources of financial support

References

Functions of References

- To give credit to others for their work
- To add credibility to your work by showing that you used valid information sources
- To help show how your work relates to previous work
- To help readers find further information

References:
Importance of Accuracy

- Studies show that many references are inaccurate.

- For references to fulfill their functions, they must be accurate. Therefore

  - Make sure that you accurately state what the cited material says.

  - Make sure that all information in the citation (for example, author list, article title, journal title, volume, year, pages) is accurate.

Another Reason Your References Should Be Accurate

Often, authors whose work you cite will be chosen as your peer reviewers. Inaccurate references to their work will not impress them favorably.

Formats

- Various formats exist for citation in text—for example:
  - Accuracy of references is important (Day and Gastel, 2006).
  - Accuracy of references is important.[3]
- Various formats exist for items in reference lists—for example:
  - Pineda D. 2003. Communication of science in Colombia. Sci. Ed. 26:91-92.
  - Pineda D. Communication of science in Colombia. Sci Ed 2003;26:91-2.

A Reminder

Be sure to use the format used by your target journal.

- – For the citations in the text
- – For the reference list

Citation Management Software

- Examples: EndNote, Reference Manager, RefWorks

- Allows you to keep a database of references

- Provides the citations and references in the proper format for your target journal

Placement of Citations

- Ambiguous:
  - This disease has been reported in humans, dogs, rabbits, and squirrels (Tuda and Gastel, 1997; Xie and Lozano, 2008; Flores, 2002).
  - This disease has been reported in humans, dogs, rabbits, and squirrels.[1,4,7]
- Clear:
  - This disease has been reported in humans (Tuda and Gastel, 1997), dogs (Xie and Lozano, 2008), and rabbits and squirrels (Flores, 2002).
  - This disease has been reported in humans,[1] dogs,[4] rabbits,[7] and squirrels.[7]

Other Advice on References

- Cite only items that you have read.
- Check each reference against the original source.
- Carefully follow the journal's instructions to authors.
- Use other articles in the same journal as models.

Before Submitting Your Paper

- Make sure the abstract is consistent with the rest of your paper.

- Revise, revise, revise the paper.

- Show the paper to other people, and revise it some more.

- Re-check the journal's instructions to authors.

Understanding the Review and Publication Processes

And Interacting with Editors

Deciding What (or When) to Publish

- Some factors to consider: quality of the work, extent of the work, interest to others

- Suggestions:
  - Seek guidance in this regard from others in your field who are more experienced in publishing journal articles.
  - Present your work orally first. Doing so can help in deciding whether the work is publishable and in shaping the paper.

Submitting the Paper

- Submission of text (and, if applicable, tables, figures, and supplementary materials)—commonly through a website

- Inclusion of a cover letter or the equivalent (for advice and a sample cover letter, see

  www.lww.com/resources/authors/journals-submitms.html#checklist)

- Completion of required forms

Some Categories of Editors
at Journals

- Helpful to know because you might interact with each

- Main categories:
  - Editor-in-chief (and sometimes associate editors etc)—concerned mainly with content
  - Managing editor(s)—concerned mainly with administration of the journal
  - Manuscript editor(s)—improve the writing and maintain a consistent style

Initial Screening by the Journal

- For appropriateness of subject matter
- For compliance with instructions
- For overall quality (sometimes)
- For importance (sometimes)

- At this stage, paper may receive what the *Journal of International Business Studies* calls a "desk reject"

Peer Review

- Evaluation by experts in the field
- Purposes:
  - To help the editor decide whether to publish the paper
  - To help the authors improve the paper, whether or not the journal accepts it

The Editor's Decision

- Based on the peer reviewers' advice, the editor's own evaluation, the amount of space in the journal, other factors
- Options:
  - Accept as is (rare)
  - Accept if suitably revised
  - Reconsider if revised
  - Reject

Revising a Paper

- Revise and resubmit promptly.

- Indicate what revisions were made. Typically:
  - Include a letter saying what revisions were made. If you received a list of requested revisions, address each in the letter.
  - If requested, show revisions in Track Changes.

- If you disagree with a requested revision, explain why in your letter. Try to find a different way to solve the problem that the editor or reviewer identified.

Answering Queries

- Queries: questions from the manuscript editor
- Some topics of queries:
  - Inconsistencies
  - Missing information
  - Ambiguities
  - Other
- Advice: Respond promptly, politely, and completely yet concisely.

Reviewing Proofs

- Proofs: typeset material to check
- Some things to check:
  - Completeness (presence of all components)
  - Accuracy (absence of typographical errors in text and references)
  - Placement of figures and tables
  - Quality of reproduction of figures
- Note: This is not the time to rewrite the paper.

A Final Step

Celebrate Publication of Your Paper!

Writing Effectively in English

The Essentials

- The essentials are **content**, **organization**, and **clarity**.

- If a paper has excellent content, is well organized, and is clear, it is likely to be accepted even if the English is so-so.

- If a paper has poor content, is badly organized, or is unclear, it is likely to be rejected even if the English is excellent.

Cultural Differences to Consider

- Directness of expression?

- Amount of detail?

- Attitudes toward time?

- Attitudes toward using material taken from others' writing?

- Other?

Some Common Language Challenges

- Verb tenses
- Prepositions
- Articles
- Sentence structure
- Sentence length
- Other

Some Strategies

- Compiling lists of words and phrases commonly used in your field
- Writing simply
- Having people with a strong command of English review your drafts
- Using a professional editor (if possible, one familiar with your field)
- Other

Writing Readably

- In general, avoid
  - Very long paragraphs
  - Very long sentences
- Perhaps use
  - Headings
  - Bulleted or numbered lists
  - Italics and boldface (but don't overuse these)
  - Easy-to-understand graphics

Writing Readably (cont)

- Where feasible,
    - Use simple, common words.
        - attempt→   fundamental→
    - Delete needless words.
        - red in color→   totally destroyed→
    - Condense wordy phrases.
        - at this point in time→   in the event that→
    - Use verbs, not nouns made from them.
        - produce relief of→   provide an explanation→

Learning More:
Some Resources

AuthorAID at INASP (www.authoraid.info)

- A project to help researchers in developing countries to write about and publish their work

- Main components
  - Mentoring
  - Workshops
  - Openly accessible content

Additional Resources

- For research writing in general
- For writing journal articles in management and related fields

Some Resources for Research Writing in General

Some General Research-Writing Resources

- English Communication for Scientists (http://www.nature.com/scitable/ebooks/english-communication-for-scientists-14053993)

- OneLook Dictionary Search (www.onelook.com)

- Academic Phrasebank (www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk)

- Grammar Girl (grammar.quickanddirtytips.com)

- Advice on Designing Scientific Posters (www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm)

University Writing Centers
(for example, writingcenter.tamu.edu)

University Writing Centers

- Have many useful materials openly accessible online

- In many cases, can be found by searching Google using the term "university writing center"

Books on Research Writing

For example: *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*

Some Resources for Writing Journal Articles in Management and Related Fields

Main Source of the Following Suggestions (Thanks!)

Lorraine Eden

- Professor of management, Mays Business School, Texas A&M University

- Editor, *Journal of International Business Studies,* 2008–2010

Openly Accessible Presentations

To Find These Presentations

- URL for the presentation shown: cibs.tamu.edu/jibs/docs/EDEN-AOM-IMD-2009-PAPER-DEV-WRKSHOP%20Compatibility%20Mode.pdf

- Site with links to some other such presentations: http://cibs.tamu.edu/jibs/activities.html

Editorials in the *Journal of International Business Studies*

JIBS Editorials

- See www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/archive/categ_ed_012010.html?lang=en

- A particularly useful editorial: "Letter from the Editor-in-Chief: *JIBS* publication criteria and their consequences" (*JIBS* 2010;41:1093–1098); see especially pages 1096–1098

Author Resources: *Academy of Management Journal*

Author Resources: *Academy of Management Journal*

- Available at journals.aomonline.org/amj/author-resources

- "Includes articles and editorials on making a contribution, publishing laboratory or qualitative research in the journal, the review process, and journal trends"

Questions and Answers

Thank you!