

How to Get Research Articles Published in Professional Journals

Although the expression "publish or perish" has now become a cliché in academic circles, the importance of its message to faculty who desire to advance at their colleges or universities (and certainly in their disciplines) remains as strong as ever. But, even for those whose career success does not depend at all on publishing, there are considerable personal rewards of seeing one's work appear in print.

Although most researchers would like very much to publish their work, the problem for new authors is, breaking the ice by submitting their first manuscript to a journal. Some are plagued by a lack of confidence and fear of having an article rejected. These individuals spend considerable time "planning" to publish, continually put off the actual task until a "tomorrow" that never comes. For others, it is not knowing *how* to publish with regard to writing style and the selection of an appropriate journal. These individuals are willing to make a try, but often experience disappointment as a result of submitting the wrong article to the wrong journal.

When you submit a paper, a good thing that can happen is that it will be accepted, probably pending some revisions. The worst that can happen is that it will be rejected, but as part of that process, you will most likely receive invaluable, constructive criticisms on how your research and/or write-up can be improved. You will be then at liberty to submit the revised manuscript to another journal, probably with increased chances of receiving a favorable review.

If you do not know the steps to writing a research paper, then it can become an overwhelming proposition. However, if you know the steps to writing a research paper, then the task is not at all daunting. Breaking a research paper into small steps also allows you to focus on one part of the research paper at a time, which will translate into a much better finished product. Like the Olympic athlete aiming for the gold medal, you must have a positive attitude and the belief that you have the ability to achieve it. That is the real start to writing a publishable research paper.

Here are the logical steps needed to write a publishable research paper:

- Step 1 Get started
- Step 2. Choose a topic
- step 3. Find information
- step 4. State your thesis
- step 5. Make a tentative outline
- step 6. Organize your notes
- step 7. Write your first draft
- step 8. Revise your first draft
- Step 9. Write the final draft

Step 1 Get started

Give yourself enough time to work. For an average length (10-20 pgs) paper, you should give yourself a month to adequately collect the library research and materials. Write a quick schedule to help you keep track of time.

Step 2. Choose a topic

Choose a topic which is challenging to you. Your attitude towards the topic may well determine the amount of effort and enthusiasm you put into your research.

Select a subject that is interesting to you and that which you can manage.

Avoid subjects that are too technical, learned, or specialized. Avoid topics that have only a very narrow range of source materials.

Narrow down your topic into a specific title.

The title is the single most important phrase of a thesis. It tells the readers what your research is.

The title of the paper should indicate its topic and announce its scope and objective.

It indicates the limits of the subject, the specific elements within the limit to be dealt with, and an assertion about the specific elements which is the thesis to be established.

General Subject	: College Classes
Restricted Subject	: Why Students do not like large lecture classes
Subject	: Large lecture classes
Specific element	: Dislike of students

To create accurate titles, keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. **Be Specific** : Do not use general or vague terms.

The title – “*Electric Fields and Living Organisms*” –leaves the reader with important unanswered questions:

- a. What is the relationship between electric fields and living organisms?
- b. What kind of organisms does it refer to?
- c. What is the intensity of the electric field?
- d. What stage in the organism's life cycle does it discuss?

“Effect of 60-Hz Electric Fields on Embryo and Chick Development, Growth, and Behavior”

The addition of details identifies not only the topic but its scope and objective as well.

2. **Be Concise:** Eliminate words that do not contribute to accuracy.

Avoid waste words such as “Studies on . . .,” “Notes on...,” “A Report on...,” etc. These notions are self-evident to the reader.

However, annual works or feasibility studies should be identified as such in the title because this information helps define the purpose and scope.

3. **Do not indicate dates in the title of a report but put them in a subtitle.**

4. **Avoid using abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms, chemical formulas, and the like unless the work is addressed exclusively to specialists in the field.**

5. **Do not put the titles in sentence forms.**

Change

“How Residential Passive Solar Heating Could Affect Seven Electric Utilities”
to
“Potential Effects of Residential Passive Solar Heating on Seven Utilities”

Step 3. Research: Find Information

Journal articles are usually

- Reports of empirical studies— reports of original research
- Review articles—critical evaluations of material that has already been published
- Theoretical articles—papers in which the author draws on existing research literature to advance theory in any area

Although the contents of these articles are dissimilar, the manuscript should still be logically and coherently organized.

Begin your research by surfing the Net for general or background information.

Check out Public and University Libraries, government agencies, as well as contact knowledgeable people in your profession. Check out other print materials available in the Library:

- Books and journals
- Reports
- Popular media
- Computer-based materials and on-line resources
- Memos, minutes, internal reports
- Letters, diaries
- Published and unpublished papers
- Contemporary and classic works
- Introductory and overview texts
- Edited collections and literature reviews
- Methodological and confessional writings
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources
- Tertiary sources

Read and evaluate. Print out, photocopy, and take notes of relevant information.

1. Try to be as accurate as possible when you write down statistics and direct quotes.
2. It's good to have a lot of pertinent quotes when your are finished, but keep in mind that no more than 10-15% of your finished paper should be quotations.

As you gather your resources, jot down full bibliographical information—

author, title, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, page numbers, URLs, creation or modification dates on Web pages, and your date of access

--on your work sheet, printout, or enter the information on your laptop or desktop computer for later retrieval. Remember that an article without bibliographical information is useless since you cannot cite its source

Step 4. State your thesis

A thesis can be defined as a statement advancing an original point of view as a result of research—expresses the controlling idea of the paper.

Do some critical thinking and write your thesis statement down in one sentence. Your thesis

statement is like a declaration of your belief. The main portion of your article will consist of arguments to support and defend this belief.

One way to make sure that your thesis meets that basic rule is to mentally put “I THINK THAT” in front of your statement and see if it fits.

I THINK THAT studying religion in public schools would help prevent people from joining crazy cults.

T. S.: *Studying religion in schools would help prevent people from joining crazy cults.*

Guidelines for writing a Thesis Statement

1. The thesis must be a complete sentence.

Subject: “Bilingual education”—“*This paper would focus on bilingual education*” is not effective.

Thesis: (*I THINK THAT*) “*Bilingual education should be eliminated because it limits students success, burdens students unfairly, and is not cost effective.*”

2. A thesis must be an assertion, not a question.

A question may be used effectively, in your title or introduction as a way of creating interest, but a thesis is a statement that answers the question.

Question: *Why are people hooked on credit cards?*

Thesis: *Credit cards are popular not only because they are a convenient substitute for money but because consumers have been brain washed into thinking that the credit card is a status symbol.*

3. A thesis on a controversial subject should not be wishy-washy.

You may feel that there are good arguments on both sides, but you should make some assessment of the issue.

Weak: *Abortion is a controversial issue.*

Or

Women should have the right to control their bodies, but, on the other hand, abortion is murder.

Better: *The controversy over abortion stems as much from economics as from religious values.*

Or

Although abortion is not ethically desirable, it is a practical necessity in our society.

4. A thesis should make a point, not just promise to do so.

Promise: *A good nurse must have three important qualities.*

Better: *A good nurse must have intelligence, independence, and compassion.*

5. A thesis should reflect understanding of a subject based on fairly extensive reading.

In other words, it should not be so obvious that it makes your research look like a waste of time.

Obvious: *Smoking is hazardous to one's health.*

Better: *Research has linked cigarettes with a growing number of health problems.*

Writing an effective thesis statement would add a focus to your paper.

Step 5. Make a tentative outline

After gathering all of the research needed to write the paper the best thing to do next is write a tentative outline.

Writing an outline will help you to get your thoughts in order, and start to create the structure of your research paper.

Step 6. Organize your notes

Organize all the information you have gathered according to your outline.

Critically analyze your research data.

This is the most important stage in writing a research paper. Here you will analyze, synthesize, sort, and digest the information you have gathered.

Do not include any information that is not relevant to your topic, and do not include information that you do not understand.

Make sure the information that you have noted is carefully recorded and in your own words.

Plagiarism is definitely out of the question.

Document all ideas borrowed or quotes used, accurately.

As you organize your notes, jot down detailed bibliographical information for each cited paragraph and have it ready to transfer to your Works Cited page.

Step 7. Write your first draft

Your research may either be quantitative/qualitative or deskwork/field work with different approaches such as action research, case studies, experiments, or surveys using documents, interviews, observation, questionnaires as research techniques.

Humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences have their own perspectives and emphasis about academic thought and research but all subject areas interconnect and overlap.

Whatever may be your discipline, you need to

- conduct primary research and use sources for secondary research in each discipline
- select a style of documentation appropriate to each discipline
- follow manuscript format requirements in each discipline
- use specialized language as needed for each discipline

Step 8. Revise your first draft

During the next step you will want to review your rough draft and make any changes or corrections before you write the final copy of your research paper.

Double check the facts and figures.

Arrange and rearrange ideas to follow your outline.

Correct all errors that you can spot and improve the overall quality of the paper to the best of your ability.

Get someone else to read it over. Sometimes a second pair of eyes can see mistakes that you missed.

Step 9. Type your final paper

In the final step, you implement all of the changes to transform your rough draft into a final copy. All formal reports or essays should be typewritten and printed, preferably on a good quality printer.

Proofread the final paper carefully for spelling, punctuation, missing or duplicated words. Ensure that your final paper is clean, tidy, neat, and attractive.

Consult a relevant style manual

You should consult a style manual suitable for your discipline to find the correct forms of use.

Manuscript submission

The manuscript which is now ready for submission must be an original contribution not previously published (except as an abstract or preliminary report), must not be under consideration for publication elsewhere, and if accepted, must not be published elsewhere in similar form, in any language.

Review the manuscript compulsively before sending it to the journal; make sure that it fits journal specifications and that there are no embarrassing problems—forgotten tables or figures, for example.

Selecting the right journal

Your major decision now is to select an appropriate journal. Journals differ considerably in their orientations and standards for quality. No matter how well written your manuscript may be, unless it provides a good fit with the particular journal, it will probably not be accepted. In fact, the only review you may receive is from the editor informing you of inappropriateness. Successful authors learn to make good selections of publication outlets, and not waste time having their articles reviewed (and rejected) by inappropriate journals.

Here are some quick tips for making your selection:

- *Identify alternative publication outlets based on your familiarity with journals in your field, recommendations by colleagues, and journals identified in related studies.*
- *Obtain a back issue of each journal and read the "information for authors." Also, examine several articles published in the journal to obtain impressions about the styles and orientations expected.*
- *If you have any questions about a particular journal, call the editor, who will generally be happy to give further information about the journal's interests, style preferences, acceptance rates, and evaluation criteria.*

Speaking the language

Based on your review of the selected journal, write the final version of the manuscript to fit that journal's style and orientation. Determine the typical length of an article in the journal for which you are writing, and do not exceed the length. When a submitted manuscript does not conform to the specified style, the message to the reviewers is that its author

- *is not very experienced at professional writing*
- *has not carefully read the instructions for authors*
- *prepared the article originally for another journal and was rejected*

Proper etiquette in submitting the manuscript

Just as writing style makes an immediate impression, so does the way you submit the manuscript.

An editor who has to make additional photocopies because too few were sent by the author will not be pleased.

Read the guidelines in a *current* edition of the journal to determine to whom the manuscript should be mailed, how many copies are needed, whether a disk copy is required, and other procedures.

Some journals will further request that information, which could identify the authors (citations of previous work, name of university, etc.) be removed from the cover page and text in a specified number of copies.

It is appropriate protocol to enclose a brief cover letter with the manuscript. Write an informative—but not grandiose—cover letter. The cover letter is useful to editors for knowing to whom and where to send correspondence about the manuscript. A letter that is *brief* and business-like will do the trick; you do not need to provide an abstract of your article in the letter.

Journal manuscript format

Title page	With title, author's name, institutional affiliation, and running head for publication (separate page, numbered 1)
Abstract & Keywords	Separate page, numbered 2

Body of the Article (Text)	Start on a separate page, numbered page 3
References	Start on a separate page
Appendixes	Start on a separate page
Footnotes	List together, starting on a separate page
Tables	Start each on a separate page
Figures	Place each on a separate page

General format

Your article should conform to the following norms:

- *Double-space the text throughout the manuscript including quotations, footnotes, tables, and references*
- *Print on one side of the sheet only*
- *Use standard-sized paper (8.5"x11") of high quality*
- *Observe well-balanced margins of one inch on all sides*
- *Use 10-12 pt. Times New Roman or a similar font*
- *Beginning with the title page, number the pages consecutively, half an inch from the top and one inch from the right edge of the paper*
- *Use a running head for publication—an abbreviated title that is printed at the top of the pages of a published article to identify the article for readers*
- *Type no more than 27 lines of text (excluding the manuscript page header and the page number)*
- *The length of each typed line is a maximum of 6 1/2 inches*
- *Do not right justify the lines—leave the right margin uneven or ragged*
- *Do not divide words at the end of a line*
- *Indent the first line of every paragraph and the first line of every footnote five (or seven) spaces*
- *Each paragraph should be no longer than a single sentence, but not longer than one manuscript page*

Leave one space after all punctuation as follows:

- *after commas, colons, and semicolons*
- *after punctuation marks at the end of sentences*
- *after periods that separate parts of a reference citation*
- *after the periods of the initials in personal names*

Exception: Do not leave a space after internal periods in abbreviations (**e.g., a.m. i.e., U.S.**)
 When a comma or period occurs with closing quotation marks, place the period or comma before the quotation marks.

Hyphens, dashes, and minus signs are each typed differently.

- *hyphen: use no space before or after (e.g., trial-by-trial analysis)*
- *dash: type as two hyphens with no space before or after (e.g., studies—published and unpublished—are)*
- *minus: type as a hyphen with space on both sides (e.g., a – b)*

Abbreviations should be those accepted internationally, and all should be defined where they first appear in the text.

Unnecessary abbreviations need to be eliminated.

Use:

- the third person point of view rather than using the first person point of view or the passive voice
 e.g., The study showed that..., NOT I found out that....
- the active voice rather than passive voice
 e.g., The participants responded..., NOT The participants have been asked
- Use present tense to report well accepted facts - for example,
“the grass is green”
- Use past tense to describe specific results--for example, *“When weed killer was applied, the grass was brown”*
- Avoid informal wording, don't address the reader directly, and don't use jargon, slang terms, or superlatives
- Avoid use of superfluous pictures--include only those figures necessary to presenting results

Depending upon the journal, three, four, or five copies of the manuscript should be submitted. One copy must be an original; the remaining copies may be photocopies.

Title Page

The title page should carry the full title. It should also include the first name in full, middle initial, and last name of each author, including highest academic degrees and affiliations. If the work is to be attributed to a department or institution, its full name and location should be included. Individual journal requirements may vary. The title should not exceed 10 to 12 words.

Do not use all caps; instead:

- *Capitalize the first word of the title*
- *Capitalize the first letter of each word in the title except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions*
- *Center the authors' initials and last names directly below the title*

Identify each manuscript page (except the figures) with the first two or three words from the title (page header) in the upper right hand corner above or five spaces to the left of the page number. (Do not use your name)

Abstract/Keywords

The abstract is a mini-version of the paper and provides a clear and concise summary of the information in an article. It should include a hypothesis or rationale for the work, a brief description of the methods, a summary of the results, and a conclusion.

The abstract should be less than 250 words. Should not exceed 960 characters including punctuation and spaces. Never give any information or conclusion not stated in the paper. Do not include literature citations or references to tables, figures, or equations.

Begin the abstract on a new page. Type the label "Abstract" in uppercase & lowercase letters, centred at the top of the page. Type the abstract itself as a single paragraph in the block format.

A short list of keywords or phrases should be included immediately after the abstract as index words. Choose keywords that reflect the content of your article.

Text

Full papers of an experimental or observational nature should be divided into sections headed Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, and Discussion. (IMRAD).

Begin the text on a new page and identify the first text page with the manuscript page header and the page number 3 in the upper right hand corner of the page. Type the title of the paper centred at the top of the page, double space, and then type the text. Do not start a new page when a new heading occurs.

- *Type the title of the paper centered, at the top of the page*
- *Type the text double-spaced with all sections following each other without a break*
- *Identify the sources you use in the paper in parenthetical in-text citations*
- *Format tables and figures*

Introduction

The introductory section of the text should include a brief statement of why the research was conducted. It should also define the problem and present objectives (including a description of the subject, scope, and purpose) along with a plan of development of the subject matter.

The introductory section usually includes a brief survey of the relevant literature on the topic.

There are four functions to the literature review. These are:

- *To give reasons why the topic is of sufficient importance for it to be researched*
 - *To provide the reader with a brief up-to-date account and discussion of literature on the issues relevant to the topic*
 - *To provide a conceptual and theoretical context in which the topic for research can be situated*
 - *To discuss relevant research carried out on the same topic or similar topics*
1. *The reviews should generally be integrative (broad summaries) rather than detailed examinations of individual studies.*
 2. *Avoid paragraph after paragraph that start: "Smith (1993) said ...," "Jones (1989) did ...," "Raines (1990) found ...," etc.*
- In contrast,*

each section should draw on previous ones, as follows:

"Using an older group of students, Brown (1986) found ..."

"Walton (1982), however, failed to replicate those results with small classes."

"In summary, the above work shows ..."

But, remember, compared to dissertations, theses, and technical reports, literature reviews in journal articles should be brief and directed toward the key parts of your study (independent variables, dependent variables, methods).

Because the introduction is clearly identified by its position in the article, it is not labeled.

Carefully consider the hierarchy of the ideas you wish to present, and use headings to convey the sequence and levels of importance. Clearly indicate subdivisions of the main body with headings and sub-headings, but do not use more than three levels of headings. Levels of headings should accurately reflect the organization of the paper.

Materials and Methods

Clearly describe your selection of the observational or experimental subjects (human or nonhuman). Identify the methods, apparatus (include manufacturer's name and address in parentheses), and procedures in sufficient detail to allow other workers to reproduce the results.

Give the references to established methods, including statistical analyses.

Provide references and brief descriptions of methods that have been published but are not well known.

Describe new or substantially modified methods, give reasons for using them, and evaluate their limitations. Include numbers of observations and the statistical significance of findings, when appropriate.

Results

Summarize results using text, tables, and illustrations. Use a format that most concisely and clearly presents the information. Data in table or illustration form should be referenced in the text, not repeated (i.e., detailed information should not be given in text and tables). Tables and

figures supplement the text; they cannot do the entire job of communication.

Discussion

Emphasize new and important findings and aspects of the study, and the conclusions to be drawn.

Include implications of the findings and the limitations, and relate the observations to other relevant studies. Link your conclusions with the study's goals.

Avoid unqualified statements and allusions to work that has not been completed. State new hypotheses when appropriate, but clearly label them as such. Recommendations, when called for, should be included.

Conclusions

This is a summary of your results. In this section, state any conclusions that can be drawn from your data. You may also include suggestions for future research.

The conclusion may be a subsection of the Results and Discussion section, or it may be a separate section.

Data or statements cited in your conclusion must have been stated previously in the article.

Do not introduce new information in the conclusion.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are optional. Use them to thank individuals or organizations that provided assistance in materials, expertise, or financing. Acknowledgements will appear at the end of the text and should be limited to one or two sentences.

References

All sources cited in the text must be listed in the References, and all documents listed in the References must be cited in the text.

- Center the title— References-- at the top of the page

- Double-space reference entries
- Flush left the first line of the entry and indent subsequent lines
- Order entries alphabetically by the author's surnames
- Capitalize only the first letter of the first word of a title and subtitle, the first word after a colon or a dash in the title, and proper nouns.
- Do not capitalize the first letter of the second word in a hyphenated compound word
- Capitalize all major words in journal titles
- Italicize titles of longer works such as books and journals.
- Do not italicize, underline, or put quotes around the titles of shorter works such as journal articles or essays in edited collections

Appendix

Use an appendix for material that is too long to include in the text of the article. An appendix is often used to list and define the terms used in equations. In such cases, the appendix is usually called "Nomenclature."

Double space the appendixes and begin each one on a separate page. Type the word "Appendix" and the identifying capital letters—A,B,C etc. If there is only one appendix do not use an identifying letter.

Double space, and type the title of the appendix, centred in uppercase and lowercase letters.

Double-space, indent the first line five (or seven) spaces and begin the text of the appendix.

Tables

Tables are numbered consecutively in the order in which they appear. Double space each table and begin each table on a separate page.

How to Prevent and Fix Problems in Papers

A. Inappropriate Journal

The choice of the appropriate journal is crucial. Spend the necessary time to find the journals best suited to your paper. Especially if you are a less-experienced researcher, consult with more-senior researchers before you make your decision. Familiarize yourself with each journal you are considering (read several issues). Closely read the submission

guidelines and follow them exactly.

B. Poor Study Design or Methodology

Problems include inadequate or inappropriate samples, confounding factors, unclear or inappropriate endpoints, and hypotheses that are not well thought out. Once made, these problems can be very difficult to fix. Avoid them by beginning with a detailed “blueprint” for your study.

C. Problems with the Presentation of your Study

Common problems here include not structuring your paper according to the journal’s guidelines, poor organization of information, insufficient (or excessive) information, straying from the topic, mixing results and discussion, not discussing all the findings, insufficient conclusion/analysis, and conclusions that do not follow from the results.

D. Statistical Problems

If you are not well versed in statistics, have a statistician look at your study. It usually takes only 20–30 minutes per assessment. Use the services of statistics departments, which often offer free or discounted services to train their own students. If your institution does not provide such a service, consult the websites of statistical institutes at other respected universities.

E. Unsatisfactory Language Quality

Research shows that there is a correlation between unsatisfactory English and rejection. Manuscripts with a greater number of errors in grammar or style distract the reviewer and obscure the essential message of the paper. More importantly, such errors can create the impression that the research is as flawed as the presentation.

Great minds, even native English speakers, may not be excellent writers. If writing is not your strength, avail yourself of a person who can help with content, structure, presentation, and grammar.

Final Notes

- *Remember, each researcher's needs for report formats will differ depending on the type of study conducted and the journal selected. The above outline, therefore, provides guidelines to be adapted to your needs, not necessarily followed in their exact form.*

- *A common mistake for novice authors is to devote too much space to reviewing literature and too little to explaining methods and materials.*
- *Not counting references and tables, typical manuscripts run between 10 and 25 double-spaced pages in length. Reviewers especially resent reading overly long manuscripts. Make the writing tight and concise, while being sure to adequately cover the essential information.*

Unfortunately, a fact of publishing life is having a manuscript rejected. While it is typical to be disappointed, chalk the rejection up to experience, and use it constructively for the "free" advice that it provides on how to improve the paper. Carefully read the reviewers' criticisms, decide which changes are appropriate and reasonable, make those changes, and resubmit the manuscript to another journal. There is no guarantee of success, but assuming your research is of "publishable" quality, your diligence in revising and resubmitting the manuscript should pay off with this try or another.

Remember, the key elements of writing for publication are using the right presentation and writing styles, carefully proofing the manuscript, using feedback from reviews constructively, and persisting when a manuscript is not accepted the first or second time. Good luck with your writing, and we hope to "see you" in the journals!