

WRITING A PUBLISHABLE EMPIRICAL PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

Challenge for academics: “Publish or Perish” – to underscore our role as academics i.e. “to assist in advancing the discipline through research and writing” (Parasuraman, 2003: 314).

Ill-equipped academics - rat-race, game of number, poorly conceptualized and badly written journal articles.

Reports: About 80% of articles submitted to reputable academic journals are *not* publishable (Summers, 2001), “with up to 9 of every 10 manuscripts being rejected by leading journals” (McKercher, Law, Weber, Song & Hsu, 2007).

Consequences: Frustration, decline productivity, “a lower perception towards research and publishing by younger lecturers compared to the older academics” (Migosi, Muola & Maithya, 2012: 115).

Why are papers rejected?

WHY DO EDITORS REJECT EMPIRICAL PAPERS?

The research questions - not very interesting, no theoretical implications.

Contribution to literature – low or non-existent, mere replication of familiar reports.

Conceptual framework – poor conceptualisation of constructs, no compelling rationale for hypotheses/questions.

Methodology – highly flawed design, validity of measures suspect.

Write-up – confusing, unclear, unsystematized making a good revision almost impossible. (Summers, 2001)



POSERS FOR THIS PRESENTATION

What is an empirical paper?

What preparations go into a publishable empirical paper?

How does one see the paper through into an academic journal?



DEFINING EMPIRICAL PAPER

Empirical papers assign numerical values to the variables under study.

Three (3) research designs generally define quantitative papers:

- (a) Descriptive quantitative studies - observations, tests, surveys.**
- (b) Mixed method – qualitative plus quantitative, data analysed in verbal-transcribed form (qualitative) combined with survey data, tests, etc. e.g. action research, phenomenological research, case study research, ethnography, comparative historical inquiry.**
- (c) Experimental research – involving the manipulation of independent variables to answer the question of *causation* i.e. measuring the effect of the independent (or influencing) variables on the dependent (the acted upon) variables.**

PREPARING FOR EMPIRICAL PAPER

12 Guidelines for aspiring to do scholarly research (Summers, 2001):

1. Develop a broad set of methodological skills
2. Learn to be a critical reader of the Literature
3. Focus on developing hypotheses to be tested
4. Use the literature to stimulate your thinking
5. Put it on paper
6. Don't work in isolation
7. Develop precise conceptual definitions for the constructs
8. Evaluate the hypotheses
9. Identify the intended contributions
10. Design the empirical study
11. Pretest questionnaires
12. Pretest experiments

WRITING THE MANUSCRIPT

Table 1: Typical Structure of an Academic Article

Title	8 -15 words
Abstract	200 -250 words
Keywords	6 – 8 words
Literature review (Alternatively: Background, conceptual development or conceptual framework)	1,000-2000 words
Methods (Alternatively, Methodology)	500–1000 words
Sampling	
- Target population and research context	
- Sampling	
- Respondent profile	
Data collection	
- Data collection methods	
Measures (Alternatively: Measurement	

WRITING THE MANUSCRIPT-CONTD

Results (Alternatively: Findings) 1000-1500 words

Descriptive statistics

(Alternatively: Preliminary analysis)

Hypothesis testing

(Alternatively: Inferential statistics)

Discussion 1000-1500 words

Summary of findings

Managerial implications

Limitations

Recommendations for future research

Total 4000 – 7000 words

TITLE

Attract the reader's attention

Short, specific based restricted length by target journal (usually 10-15 words)

Research design + population + geographical area (e.g. *Values profiles and susceptibility to interpersonal influence: A survey of student smokers at the University of Pretoria*) (Grober, 2003)


Brings out the relationship between the independent and dependent variables of the study (*Effects of two problem-solving methods on learning outcomes of junior secondary school social studies students*)

Addresses the questions *What, How, With Whom* and *where* of the study

***N.B:* It is better to write title, keywords and abstract on the completion of the article.**

ABSTRACT

Seven (7) elements recommended (Perry *et al.*, 2003)

1. A brief theme sentence on the overall issue addressed
 2. Main aim or purpose of the study
 3. Academic and/or practical importance
 4. The methodology used
 5. The main findings of the study
 6. The contribution made
 7. Implications of findings for future research
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KEYWORDS

Central concepts and terms that arouse the interest of the reader

Provide links to your article in the electronic database

Should «reflect the discipline, sub-discipline, theme, research design and context» (Kotze, 2007)


Usually between 5 and 8 words

Present in sentence case and in italics



INTRODUCTION

Like an executive summary with four (4) goals:

- 1. To establish the importance of the general area of interest.**
 - 2. To indicate in general terms what has been done in this broad area.**
 - 3. To identify important gaps, inconsistencies, and/or controversies in the relevant literature.**
 - 4. To provide a concise statement of the manuscript's purpose(s), the contributions the manuscript makes to the literature.**
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LIT. REV/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An essential guide-post to meaningful research.

Done with six (6) goals in mind (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005):

- 1. To find the relationships among the various reports that you read (e.g. definition of constructs and variables).**
- 2. To find out differences in existing reports.**
- 3. To identify gaps to be filled.**
- 4. To examine the relevance of the methodology which others have used.**
- 5. To highlight the findings and limitations of previous study.**
- 6. To draw a link between what was done and yours (ANOTHER BLOCK ON THE WALL?)**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES

Questions that serve as posers based on the *purpose* of the study.

Formulate major and minor RQs.

Descriptive and mixed-methods can make do with RQs

Experimental studies aim at testing hypotheses.

Hypothesis – tentative explanation for the relationship between the variables of under investigation.

Null hypotheses – Stating no «effect» or «relationship»; *Reject* or *do not reject*.

Formulate major (e.g. main effect) and minor (effect of moderator variables) in empirical research.

METHODOLOGY

Describe in detail how the research was conducted

The research design - the paradigm for conducting the study – descriptive, mixed method, experimental?

Sampling – describe the target population, research context and units of analysis; sample and sampling technique; and profiles of the respondents.

Instrumentation – survey questionnaire, achievement test, attitude scale, IDI protocol, FGD guide, etc.

Data Collection – What procedure – personal, field assistants, etc.

Procedure for data analysis – Chi-square, t-test, ANOVA, ANCOVA, etc.



RESULTS

General guidelines (Kotze, 2007):

1. **Be concise, yet provide enough detail to justify conclusions.**
2. **Explain advanced multivariate statistical methods (e.g. repeated measures ANOVA, two or one-way ANOVA, multiple regression analysis and factor analysis) in non-technical terms.**
3. **Use figures and tables to summarise information. *Golden rule:* If you can say it in a sentence or paragraph, do so. Reserve figures for the really important stuff that has to be portrayed visually.**
4. **Interprete all research findings for the reader.**
5. **Use acceptable statistical abbreviations e.g. ANOVA, df, f, Ho, etc**

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

This can have a large impact on the impressions the reader have of your manuscript.

Should be done with a view to (Summers, 2001):

1. Building on the Introduction section.
2. Reaffirming the importance of the study by showing how the study reported fits into the literature.
3. Communicating the study implications for theory and practice.
4. Supporting conclusions with data-evidence.
5. Identifying new issues raised by the study findings and or providing insightful (nonobvious) directions for future research.

REFERENCING/DOCUMENTATION

- Generate a list of all materials – published, unpublished, electronic, archival, etc. – consulted in the course of the research.
- Don't include materials not used within the body under Reference List.
- Follow stipulated guidelines on citing reports/writings and other forms of documentation by the target journal e. g. APA, Chicago Manual of Style.
- Track all materials from body to the list to avoid any omission

FROM CONCEPTION TO PUBLISHING

Hints for success:

1. Research can be learned, it can also be unlearned – to be a good writer, keep writing!
2. Master the requirements for your target journal to reduce tension and frustration.
3. The good writer is a good reader; so continue to read what others have done.
4. To improve skill, do not work in isolation – embrace dyadic, triadic interactions for critique.
5. Do personal criticism of your research reports.
6. Learn to be mentored

PUBLISH AND FLOURISH

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!!!

