



## Guidelines for Social Science Journal Publications

### Getting Started:

Before you begin writing your article, it is always best to review the submission criteria for your desired journal(s). This information is typically accessible online. Most peer-review journals have strict submission guidelines so it is important to research their requirements before you begin writing. It is also helpful to review recent articles published by the journal(s) so you can become familiar with the preferred writing mechanics and style of the publisher.

To find the most appropriate journal to publish your work, identify the most critical articles from your literature review. The publishers of these articles are a good place to start when developing a list. Make sure to review the most recent issues of these journals online. If you find they are publishing articles within your topic's discipline or complementary areas to your study, it is likely they will be interested in your work as well. Once you've identified a journal(s), and reviewed the submission criteria, you can begin drafting your article. The sections below present general guidelines for writing a social science research journal article. Depending on the journal, some of these sections may be combined, have a different title, or be excluded entirely from your writing (heading sections are most often determined by the epistemological stance of your research).

### Introduction:

This section introduces the topic to the reader. It should clearly state a research problem that is theoretical and/or practical in nature as well as a purpose as to how your research will contribute to the existing knowledge base. This could take on many forms such as contributing to an existing theory or research study; developing a new theory or line of empirical research; providing pragmatic applications to the community, or filling a gap in the existing literature.

### Literature Review/Background:

In some journals, the introduction and literature review are combined into one section. Refer to the submission guidelines as well as published articles within your selected journal(s) for guidance. Your review of literature should provide a succinct overview of the pertinent scholarship on your topic of study. It should include criteria as to why these articles are relevant and how your study will extend or build upon the current knowledge base. Your writing should start broad and then narrow down to your unique area of inquiry (think of an inverted triangle). In addition to providing a rationale for your study, this section should also include the conceptual or theoretical framework for your research.

### Methods/Measurement/Protocols:

The methods section will vary depending on your type of research. If conducting a quantitative study, your methods and research questions may focus on identifying significant differences or similarities among variable groups. If conducting qualitative research, your methods and research questions may focus on capturing an experience and the meaning people place on those experiences. Regardless of how your study is structured, the design of data collection needs to be clearly stated and the logic of these choices should be rationalized. Those reading your article should be able to retrace your steps and easily replicate the procedures in your study.



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Your research design should include several pieces of evidence. It should clearly define, and fully describe, the variables of study (groups, participants, events, treatments, etc.)--how you gained access to the variables, how they were selected, and how you ensured proper consent. If utilizing treatment/control groups, key features of the group and intervention should be outlined so they can be easily understood in regards to the outcome of the study.

In addition to defining the variables, your research design should clearly state the data collection procedures of your study--where the data was collected, how it was collected, who collected it, over how long a period it was collected, and why it was collected. Information on any instruments, surveys, protocols, or inventories utilized in the study should also be detailed in this section.

The final part of this section should describe your methods of analysis. The decision to group, modify, or process segments of data should be clearly outlined to the reader. Justification should also be provided for each analysis method(s) utilized in the study; these justifications should tie back to your research objectives/questions.

## Findings/Analysis/Results:

This section should highlight the significant outcomes of the research. The findings should be clearly stated, articulate the processes and assumptions for each analysis method utilized, and should relate back to the research questions of the study. For quantitative studies, this would include reporting statistical procedures and providing relevant descriptive and inferential statistics for the data. For qualitative studies, a description of the evidence and support of the claim(s) must be provided; this is achieved by detailing the organization of the data, explaining coding procedures, and identifying the process by which patterns emerged.

## Conclusions:

The conclusion is often the first section people read in an article; therefore think of this section as your “elevator pitch”. It should be a space where you concisely highlight the study’s most pertinent findings. Include outcomes that are most critical to your study’s design, of interest to the research community, and/or useful for professional practice. Ensure that any claims are supported by concrete examples and/or statistically significant results. This section should also detail how your results confirm or contradict findings or theories in the literature.

## Discussion/Implications:

In some journals, the conclusion and implications are combined into one section. Refer to the submission guidelines as well as published articles within your selected journal(s) for guidance. This is the section where you highlight the applicability of what you found. Your implications could focus on practical applications, how your results confirm or extend an existing theory, or detail how your findings warrant a completely new line of research. It’s a discussion about how your results could move a particular area of research forward.



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## Citations:

If you are writing an article for a social science journal, you will more than likely be asked to provide your citations in APA format. The 6th edition APA manual offers extensive examples of how to format content, figures, tables, and references. It also provides guidance on grammar and writing conventions. If you are unable to purchase or rent the manual, you can utilize Perdue University's online OWL system (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). While this is a helpful resource, please note that some sections do not reflect the formatting changes made in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the APA manual.

## Title:

It should explain who and/or what you are studying. Your goal is to get your article read, and hopefully cited, by as many people as possible; therefore, strive to make your title clear and concise.

## Abstract:

Length limits will vary depending on the journal. Your abstract should be a miniature version of your article. It should include your research question/problem, variables of the study, methods of collection, procedures for analysis, conclusions, and implications. Remember, most people decide on whether to read your article from the abstract--so chose your words carefully!

## Keywords:

Some publishers ask for keywords. Identify up to 5 keywords that summarize the content of your article and can be used in literature search engines.

## About the Author:

Some publishers ask for a short paragraph about the author. This section could include a summary of your education, work experience, awards or contributions to the field, and your areas of research interest.

## Headings:

These enable to the reader to easily follow the logic of your writing. They should be clear and representative of the underlying narrative in your writing.

## Side Notes:

Depending on your research, there may be some special considerations that should be included in your article:

If engaging in research involving human or animal subjects, it may be appropriate to provide a short description of any ethical considerations utilized in your research. Most specifically, you should outline any considerations that would be relevant to the analysis and findings of your study. When reporting your findings, it's important to present the information as outlined by your IRB agreement with the University.

If the research has the potential to create biases or conflicts of interest, it is important to detail any steps that were taken, as part of the research design, to control for these biases.



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If the research study was supported by external funding, it is appropriate to name the source and provide a brief description of the funding entity.

If your manuscript will have more than one author, you should discuss authorship responsibilities early in the process. It is important to appropriately recognize the efforts of everyone involved in the research and its subsequent publication.

## Timeline/Process for Publication:

It is not uncommon for the publication process to take a year, or more, from submission to confirmation that the article will be published. Once an article is confirmed for publication, your manuscript will be scheduled for release. The editor will often provide you with a rough timeline for publication.

The process for submission will vary depending on the journal. In general, for peer reviewed journals, your article will be evaluated by at least two individuals. For journals that publish more frequently, this process is typically streamlined and you may receive feedback in a few months. For smaller, discipline-specific journals, the review process could take up to 6 months or longer to complete. Once the reviewers have provided their feedback, the editor of the journal will typically send you a copy of their comments and provide you with one of three outcomes.

*Acceptance as submitted* – If this is your first time submitting an article, or if the journal you are submitting to adheres to rigorous evaluation standards, it is unlikely you will receive this outcome.

*Tentative acceptance, pending revisions* – The journal will provide you with specific feedback on areas in need of improvement. Often a timeline will be provided for submitting the revised draft. Once the manuscript is resubmitted, it goes through the peer review process again. Typically a revised submission does not take as long to review. To ensure acceptance, it is important that you address all the areas of concern in your new draft.

*Rejected* – Do not get discouraged if you receive a rejection. Sometimes journals reject a manuscript because they feel your topic is not representative of the journal. Other times, reviewers feel there are too many required edits. When you receive a rejection, you should first address the feedback received from the journal. Once the edits are made, you can consider resubmitting to the same journal or a new one. If the journal editor does not encourage you to rewrite and resubmit, it may be more worthwhile to submit the revised manuscript to a completely new journal.

## Helpful Resources:

- **AERA, 2006** | Overview of reporting standards for writing social science publications. [Highly recommend you read this article before you begin writing.](#)
- **American Psychological Association. 2010. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed).** Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. | Comprehensive manual for citing APA formatting. . Can be checked out at the USF library or purchased inexpensively through [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com) or other sites.



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- **APA Science Student Council, 2006** | Overview of authorship guidelines and how to navigate authorship issues. Highly recommend you read this article before you begin writing.
- **Committee on publication ethics, 2003** | Overview of authorship guidelines. Highly recommend you read this article before you begin writing.
- **Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.** | Overview of the research design and academic writing process. Can be checked out at the USF library or purchased inexpensively through [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com) or other sites.
- **Crotty, 1998** | Highlights the four basic foundations of social science research.
- **Dellinger and Leech, 2007** | Discusses validity in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research.
- **Harries, 2014** | Overview of the publication process. Highly recommend you review this PowerPoint before you begin writing.
- **Hatch, 2002** | Overview of qualitative research methods.
- **Huck, S. W. (2011). Reading statistics and research (6th ed). Boston, MA: Pearson.** | User-friendly manual on how to read statistics. Can be checked out at the USF library or purchased inexpensively through [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com) or other sites.
- **Johnson and Turner, 2002** | Discusses data collection methods for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research.
- **Locke et al., 2007** | Tips for writing your literature review.
- **Maxwell, 2012** | Overview of the research design process for qualitative studies.
- **Merriam, 2009** | Strategies for analyzing qualitative data.
- **Paul et al., 2005** | Overview of the philosophical perspectives in social science research.
- **Reporting results, 2010** | Provides examples of how to write statistical findings in APA format.
- **Ryan and Bernard, 2003** | Techniques to identify themes in qualitative research.
- **Shadish et al., 2002** | Overview of validity as well as techniques to improve the validity of your study.
- **Teddlie and Yu, 2007** | Synopsis of sampling techniques.