

Writing your paper

Everything you need to know to prepare
and write an effective research paper



Guidance, developments, news, and ideas for Taylor & Francis authors



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/ INTRODUCTION

No matter which subject area you specialize in, publishing the results of your research is a critical part of your academic career. But writing an academic paper can feel like a daunting task – there's nothing worse than staring at a blank screen after all.

This guide will take you through all the stages of writing your paper, from preparation and structure, through to writing each section of the paper, and beyond.

By following the advice and guidance here, you'll be able to produce a paper that's a great fit for your chosen journal.



WRITING YOUR PAPER CHECKLIST

Work your way through this checklist, using the contents of this guide, to help you find the best journal for your work:

- ☐ Choose your target journal
- ☐ Understand the journal's instructions for authors
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with editorial policies and standards of reporting
- ☐ Consider the four A's: aims, audience, awareness, and articulation
- ☐ Determine your article structure
- ☐ Choose your keywords and learn how to write for SEO
- ☐ Write up your manuscript:
 - ☐ Prepare tables and figures (if required)
 - ☐ Write up the literature review (if required)
 - ☐ Write the method
 - ☐ Write up your results
 - ☐ Write the discussion and conclusions
 - ☐ Write the introduction
 - ☐ Write the abstract
 - ☐ Create a compelling title
- ☐ Edit and refine your completed manuscript
- ☐ Check the editorial policies and instructions for authors to ensure you've included everything required by the journal



/ WHERE TO START

You've completed your research and now it's time to write it up. But where do you start? Here we've laid out the first four critical steps to help you begin your write-up the right way.

1 Make sure you've selected the journal you want to submit to

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to start writing up your research without first choosing the journal you want it to be published in.

How you write your paper, from the style and structure to the audience you should have in mind while writing, and even the article length, will depend on which journal you're targeting. Choosing the journal before you start writing also means you can tailor your work to build on research that's already been published there. This can help editors to see how a paper adds to the 'conversation' in their journal.

To help you with this crucial step, take a look at our [guide on selecting the right journal for your research](#).



2 Understand your target journal's instructions for authors

Once you've chosen your target journal, you need to understand what they're looking for in papers submitted to them. And the first place to look is the instructions for authors (IFAs). These are an individual set of requirements for a journal that help guide potential authors to construct their article in the correct way and prepare it for submission.

They will tell you exactly what the journal's editorial board expects to see in articles submitted to the journal. And the IFAs will also include details of specific processes to follow to ensure there are no problems during production should your article be accepted.



What information is included in the instructions for authors?

The instructions for authors include all the essential information you'll need to know before you submit your article, for example:

- ▲ General guidelines, like which online submission system you need to use, and which languages the journal publishes in
- ▲ Word count
- ▲ Formatting and whether article templates can be used
- ▲ Style guides
- ▲ Specific policies relating to the journal, such as clinical trial registry or ethics compliance
- ▲ Open access options

By following these guidelines you'll know your article is in exactly the right format for submission and includes everything the editorial board would like to see.

You can find the IFAs for any Taylor & Francis journal on the journal's home page via [Taylor & Francis Online](#).

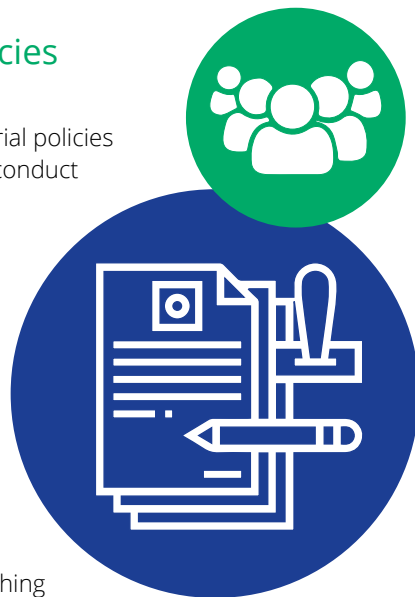
3 Understand the editorial policies and standards of reporting

Individual journals will have their own editorial policies which can cover everything from how they conduct peer review to the process for submitting your article.

It's important to familiarize yourself with the journal's own policies, but in addition, you may need to review the policies of the publishing group. For example, at Taylor & Francis, we have [a number of editorial policies](#) that apply across our whole portfolio of journals.

Editorial policies will clearly lay out the [standards of reporting](#) expected by the journal/publisher, as well as covering everything from ethics standards to use of third-party material. We'll go into some of the key ones in more depth later.

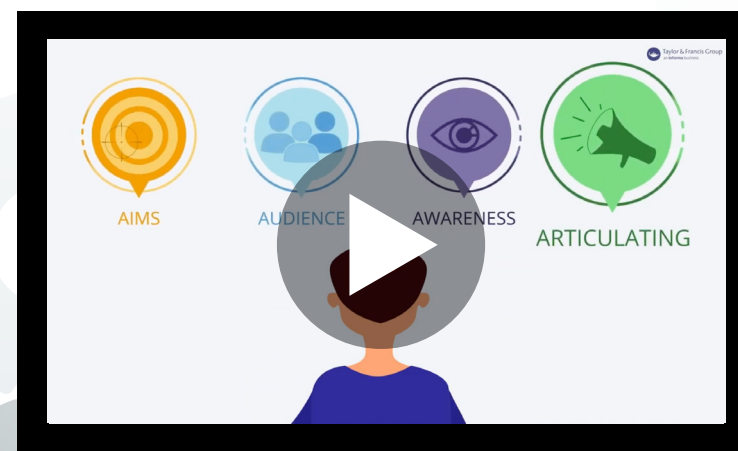
By understanding what's expected by both the journal and publisher, you'll be able to write your paper to meet those standards from the outset.



4 Think about the four A's: aims, audience, awareness, and articulation

It's important to consider these four areas right at the start of the writing process:

- ▶ **Aims** – Your published article may help attract funding for your next research project, boost your profile and the reputation of your institution, and importantly, help to further knowledge in your field and have a wider societal impact. Identify your aims and keep them in mind when writing your paper and use them to guide your decisions.
- ▶ **Audience** – You need to have a clear idea of your target audience – for example, fellow researchers, practitioners, policymakers – so you can tailor your paper to meet their needs and expectations. This might influence your decisions on the type of article you choose to write, the language you use, and which journal you choose to publish in.
- ▶ **Awareness** – Being aware of existing research, political debates, and current policy issues will help you ground your work in the context of the wider landscape. It'll also help you with referencing other work wherever appropriate.
- ▶ **Articulation** – Plan out a logical structure for your article, so you can develop your ideas clearly and concisely. Consider writing your introduction and conclusion last, once your key points have become clear. (We've got more tips on article structure and a step-by-step writing process coming up.)



/ ARTICLE STRUCTURES AND FORMATTING

Depending on your subject, research focus, journal choice, and any number of other considerations, the type of article you write could vary widely.

STEM research articles tend to follow a similar structure, while Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) articles vary. You could also be considering writing a review article, case study, technical note, or case report.

Given this variation, there's no set formula for structuring your article. But we've provided some hints and tips here to get you started.

Study your target journal

The best way to determine how to structure your article is to study your target journal. Look through the journal's instructions for authors, as discussed above, but also read through back issues of the journal. This will enable you to review how other articles like the one you intend to write are structured.

Structuring review articles

A review article, also called a literature review, is a survey of previously published research on a topic. A good review article will give an overview of current thinking on the chosen topic and, unlike an original research article, won't present new experimental results. As a result, review article structure is a little different.

While review articles can vary, a typical review article will include:

- ▲ Abstract
- ▲ Introduction
- ▲ Literature review
- ▲ Critical discussion
- ▲ Conclusions

For some in depth tips on writing review articles take a look at the [dedicated page on our website](#).



IMRAD: Standard structure for a STEM journal

If you're writing a STEM article, the chances are that the journal will use the 'IMRAD' structure for standard research articles. IMRAD covers the structure of the body of the research manuscript (after the Title and Abstract). This consists of:

The aims and scope statement includes:

- ▲ Introduction
- ▲ Method
- ▲ Results
- ▲ And
- ▲ Discussion and Conclusions

Not all journals use these section titles in this order, but most published STEM articles have a structure similar to IMRAD.

Using standard article templates

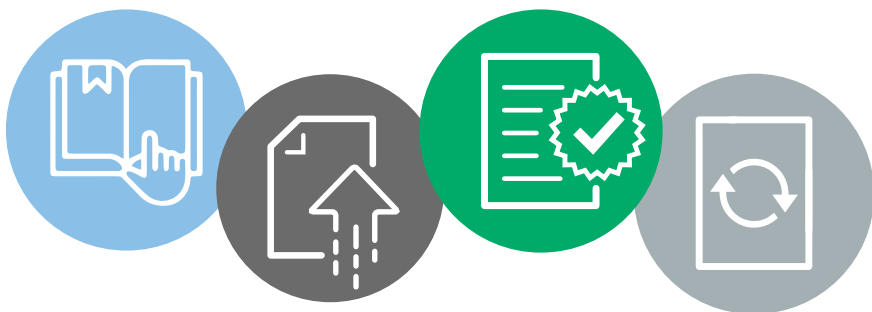
Although many journals have basic elements of style in common, each journal can have its own specific formatting. This defines how an article will look when it is published online or in print.

To make this easier, journals often provide templates (for example in Word or LaTeX). Using a template will immediately help you determine how to structure your article correctly. Many of our journals have templates you can simply download. You can find links to these on your chosen journal's homepage on [Taylor & Francis Online](#) under the instructions for authors. Each version of the template has its own instructions file, which explains how to save and use it.



Format-free submission

An increasing number of Taylor & Francis journals allow format-free submission. This means that, as long as you use a consistent citation format and include everything necessary for review, you can submit work without needing to worry about formatting your manuscript to meet that journal's requirements. The instructions for authors for your chosen journal will tell you whether it operates format-free submission.



/ CHOOSING KEYWORDS AND WRITING FOR SEO

Using keywords

When you submit your article you'll often need to include keywords. These will be used to index your article on the journal or publisher's website, as well as on search engines like Google Scholar.

These keywords will help others find your article quickly and accurately – think of them as the labels for your article. And keywords aren't just about improving your article's discoverability, a strong correlation exists between the online hits an article receives and the subsequent number of citations it receives. So picking your keywords wisely is worth your while.

But how do you choose your keywords?

- ▲ Think about how you search for articles yourself and what words or phrases you put in.
- ▲ Think about your own article and what keywords are most relevant to the focus of your work.
- ▲ Once you've drawn up a shortlist, try searching with them, to ensure the results fit with your article and so you can see how useful they would be to others.
- ▲ You can also check and compare specific keywords on Google Trends to see which are the most used.
- ▲ If you're still unsure, check the keywords used in your field's major papers.



Not all journals use these section titles in this order, but most published STEM articles have a structure similar to IMRAD.

Writing your article with search engine optimization in mind

Google, Google Scholar, and other search engines drive a huge amount of traffic to journal articles. Journals and their publishers do a lot of work behind the scenes on search engine optimization (SEO), but you can also play a crucial role in optimizing the search results for your article. Ultimately, this will help more people to find, read, and cite your work.

But how can you write for SEO? Here are some tips...

1 Create a search engine friendly title

It's vital to incorporate your most relevant keywords in your title. This will mean your article is more likely to be included in the results for relevant online searches. Ideally, it should include 1-2 keywords related to your topic, and these keywords should be within the first 65 characters of your title so that they're visible in the search engine results.



2 Optimize your abstract

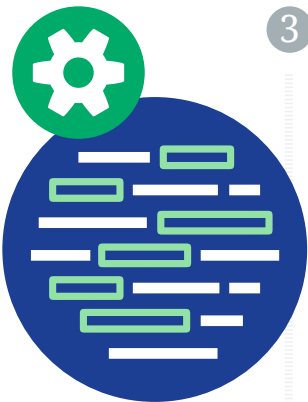
To have the maximum impact in search engines, you should aim to place essential findings and keywords in the first two sentences of your abstract. Only the first two sentences normally display in search engine results, so if you make them enticing and keyword relevant, it should encourage people to click through and read further.

In addition, you should aim to repeat your keywords 3-6 times within your abstract. But try to do this naturally, as the purpose of your abstract is to express the key points of your research, clearly and concisely.

3 Use keywords throughout your article

Keywords aren't just important in your title and abstract. You should aim to ensure you use them consistently throughout your article. In particular, if you're able to incorporate keywords into headings, this will help search engines to understand the content and structure of your article.

However, make sure you let keywords flow naturally and in a contextual way. Search engines dislike too much keyword repetition, known as keyword stuffing, and may 'un-index' your article if it seems keywords are being repeated without context.



Clear and concise title
built around keywords.

Modelling malaria dynamics with partial immunity and protected travellers: optimal control and cost-effectiveness analysis

ABSTRACT

Abstract

A mathematical **model of malaria** dynamics with naturally acquired **transient immunity** in the presence of **protected travellers** is presented. The qualitative analysis carried out on the autonomous model reveals the existence of backward bifurcation, where the locally asymptotically stable malaria-free and malaria-present equilibria coexist as the basic reproduction number crosses unity. The increased fraction of **protected travellers** is shown to reduce the basic reproduction number significantly. Particularly, **optimal control** theory is used to analyse the non-autonomous model, which incorporates four control variables. The existence result for the **optimal control** quadruple, which minimizes malaria infection and costs of implementation, is explicitly proved. Effects of combining at least any three of the control variables on the malaria dynamics are illustrated. Furthermore, the **cost-effectiveness analysis** is carried out to reveal the most cost-effective strategy that could be implemented to prevent and control the spread of malaria with limited resources.

Keywords used throughout the abstract in a natural way, without affecting readability.

KEYWORDS: **Malaria model** **temporary immunity** **protected travellers** **optimal control** **cost-effective analysis**

Five keywords highlighting the main points covered in the article

Modelling malaria dynamics with partial immunity and protected travellers: optimal control and cost-effectiveness analysis by S. Olaniyi, K. O. Okosun, S. O. Adesanya & R. S. Lebelo is licensed under CC BY 4.0

/ HOW TO WRITE YOUR MANUSCRIPT – A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Every article is unique – and as discussed, the structure of your article and the sections it includes will depend on both the type of article you're writing and the subject of study. For example, Humanities and Social Sciences articles may be less likely to include tables and figures or materials.

However, there are several standard sections that many researchers need to tackle when writing a manuscript. We've laid these out below – in the order in which you would normally write them – with hints and tips for making the most of each section.

1 Prepare tables and figures (if required)

They say a picture is worth a thousand words – and you could say the same for a table or figure in a manuscript. They are often the most impactful and efficient way to present your results.

Tables and figures should present new information rather than duplicating what is in the text. And readers should be able to interpret them without reference to the text (although you will need to refer to them in the text).

When creating tables and figures for your article, make sure to check the journal's instructions for authors and editorial policies, which may stipulate on layouts, use of color, and a number of other formatting points.



In particular, it's important to consider the size of each table or figure and whether it will fit on a single journal page. If the table is cramped in a Microsoft Word document, it will undoubtedly be difficult to represent it clearly on a journal page. If this is the case, you could consider splitting the data into two or more tables.

Take a look at our [guidance on creating tables](#), for more information on layouts in Taylor & Francis journals.

2 Write up the literature review (if required)

Literature reviews aren't always required, but often form an important part of Humanities and Social Sciences manuscripts. Typically, you would expect a literature review to:

- Discuss what's already known about the topic of the article
- Identify gaps in current knowledge
- Present your approach to addressing those gaps

As you write, make sure to follow these tips:

- **Summarize and synthesize:** give an overview of the main points of each source and combine them into a coherent whole.
- **Analyze and interpret:** don't just paraphrase other researchers – add your own interpretations, discussing the significance of findings in relation to the literature as a whole.
- **Critically evaluate:** mention the strengths and weaknesses of your sources.
- **Bring it all together:** draw connections, comparisons, and contrasts.



3 Write the method

The method section (often 'methods and materials' in STEM) provides the reader with all the details of how you conducted your research.

A good way to start this section is to check the instructions for authors for your target journal to see whether they state any requirements on how it should be presented. It's also worth reviewing previously published papers in the journal or sample reports on the journal website.

When you come to write your method section, you should:

- Use subheadings to separate different methodologies
- Describe what you did in the past tense
- Describe new methods in enough detail that another researcher could reproduce what you've done
- Describe established methods briefly and include a reference where readers can find more detail
- State any statistical tests and parameters



Writing a review article?

Don't forget that as well as the advice below we also have some [specific tips for review article writing on our website](#).

4 Write up your results

In the results section, you're ultimately responding to the question 'what have you found?'

To write an effective results section, follow these tips:

- ▲ Simply state what you found, but do not interpret the results or discuss their implications.
- ▲ Only include representative results that are essential for your discussion points. However, remember that many journals offer the possibility of adding supporting or supplemental materials, so use them freely for data or findings of secondary importance.
- ▲ Use subheadings to separate the results of different experiments/methods.
- ▲ Present your results in a logical order – this will usually be in order of importance, not necessarily the order in which you carried out the research.
- ▲ Use the past tense to describe your results, but refer to any figures and tables in the present tense.
- ▲ Don't duplicate data among figures, tables, and text. As mentioned earlier, you don't need to repeat the information contained in a figure or table. Simply use the text to summarize what the reader will find in the table, or mention one or two of the most important data points.



5 Write the discussion and conclusions

These sections are aimed at answering the question: what do your results mean? In other words, they should be an interpretation of your results.

To write an effective discussion and conclusion, follow these tips:

- ▲ Discuss your conclusions in order of most to least important.
- ▲ Compare your results with those from other studies – for example, are they consistent with other findings? And if not, you should also discuss why that might be the case.
- ▲ Talk about any inconclusive results and explain them as best you can. You can also suggest additional experiments needed to clarify the results further.
- ▲ While it may seem counterintuitive, it's important to briefly describe any limitations of your study. This shows reviewers and readers that you have considered the weaknesses of your research. Doing this will make a positive impression with editors and reviewers, as it makes it clear that you have an in-depth understanding of your topic and can think objectively about your research.
- ▲ Discuss what your results may mean for researchers in the same field as you, researchers in other fields, and the general public. How could your findings be applied?
- ▲ Explain how your results extend the findings of previous studies.
- ▲ If your findings are preliminary, suggest future studies that need to be carried out.

At the end, state your main conclusions once again.



6 Write the introduction

It's simpler to introduce and summarize something you've already written than something that doesn't exist yet. So, while you may be tempted to write the introduction first – after all, it's the start of your article – you'll actually find it much easier to write it once the main body of your article is complete.

Your introduction should provide readers with the background information needed to understand your study and the reasons why you conducted your experiments.

A good introduction should answer the following questions:

- ▲ What is the problem to be solved?
- ▲ Are there any existing solutions?
- ▲ Which is the best?
- ▲ What is its main limitation?
- ▲ What do you hope to achieve?



First, write the background and follow the below tips for including appropriate citations. Citations should be:

- ▲ **Well balanced:** If experiments have found conflicting results on a question, make sure you cite studies with both kinds of results.
- ▲ **Current:** Every field is different, but you should aim to cite references that are not more than 10 years old if possible. Although be sure to cite the first discovery or mention in the literature even if it was more than 10 years ago.
- ▲ **Relevant:** This is the most important requirement. The studies you cite should be strongly related to your research question.

Once you have provided background material and stated the problem or question for your study, tell the reader the purpose of your study. Usually, the reason is to fill a gap in the knowledge base or to answer a previously unanswered question.

The final thing to include at the end of your introduction is a clear and exact statement of your study aims. And a brief sentence or two on how you conducted the study.

7 Write the abstract

Your abstract is the selling pitch of your article. This is where researchers can get a quick insight into your research and decide whether to read and cite your content or look elsewhere. So it's worth spending time to get it right.

Think about abstracts for other researchers' articles that you have read in the past. What qualities would encourage you to read the full article? What would put you off? Consider these factors when creating your own.

An abstract should focus on:

- ▲ What your research is about
- ▲ What methods have been used
- ▲ What your main findings are

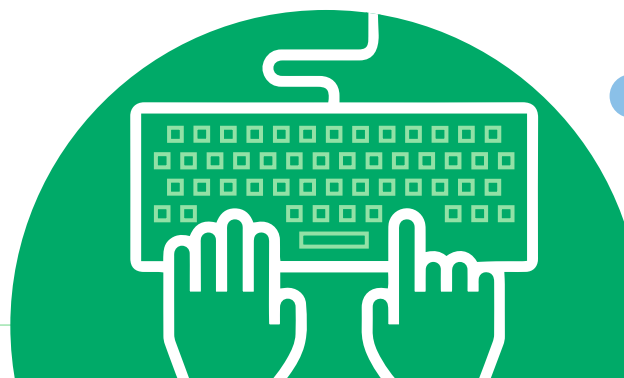
Each journal will have its own word limit for abstracts which you'll find in the instructions for authors, but approximately 100–200 words are what you'll have to work with. Check the guidelines before you start writing.

The key rules for writing your abstract are:

- ▲ **Accuracy is crucial.** Whatever you argue or claim in the abstract must reflect what is in the main body of your article. There's no room for hyperbole.
- ▲ **The abstract must be self-contained,** without abbreviations, footnotes, or incomplete references. It needs to make sense on its own.

Finally, it's important to note that there's a significant difference between original research papers and review papers when it comes to abstracts:

- ▲ **For original papers,** you should introduce your research, describe your methods and procedures, and summarize your findings.
- ▲ **For reviews,** you must first state the primary objective of the review, the reasoning behind your choice, the main outcomes, and results of your review. Then cover the conclusions that might be drawn, including their implications for further research, application, or practice.



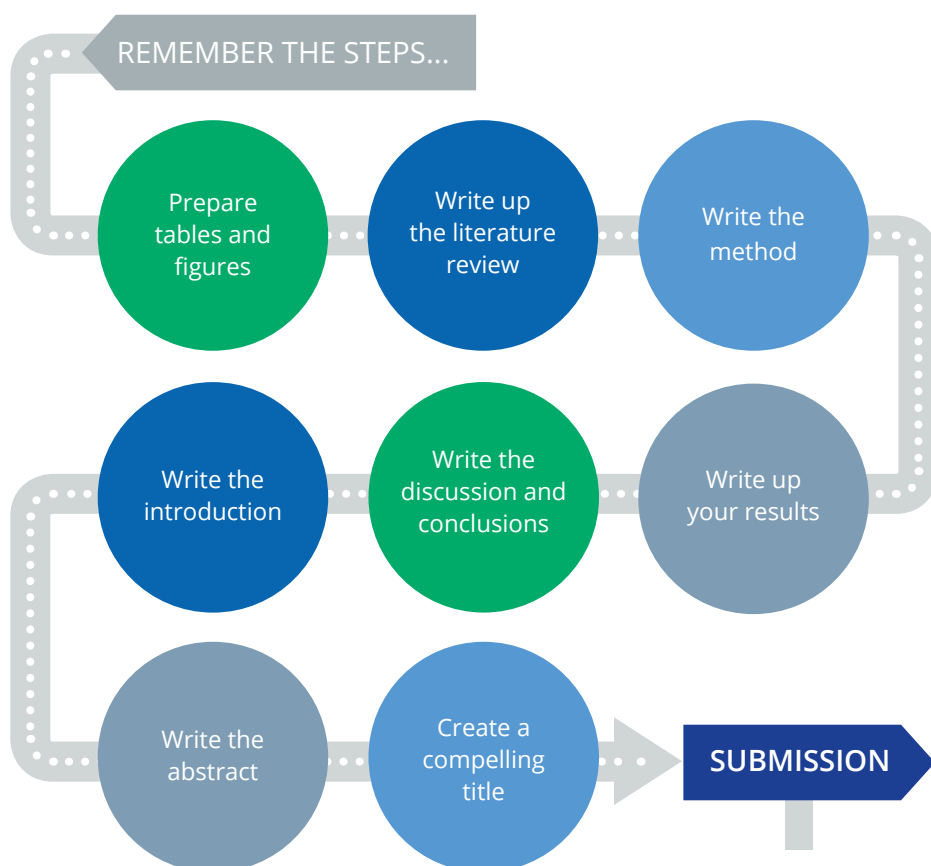
Reminder: Don't forget about keywords when writing your title and abstract. See the keywords and SEO section on page 13 for more information.

8 Create a compelling title

Your title is your first (and possibly only) opportunity to attract a reader's attention. And don't forget that the first readers are the editors – it needs to capture their attention too.

A good title should be concise, accurate, and informative. It should tell the reader exactly what the article is about and it should also help make your article more discoverable.

It's also important to try to make your title understandable to readers from outside your field and avoid abbreviations, formulae, and numbers. This will help increase the potential audience for your article and make it more accessible to readers with a different native language.



/ REFINING YOUR WRITING: HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE, COMPELLING PAPER

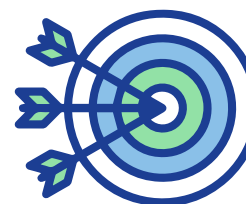
Completing the first draft of your manuscript is a big milestone. But it's certainly not the finish point. The making of a really good article is effective reviewing and editing, to ensure your ideas and findings are communicated clearly throughout.

In this section, we're going to take you through a whole host of tips on refining and editing your paper to ensure you're communicating effectively and your paper is written in a way that enables it to reach the widest possible audience.

Communicating your ideas effectively

First drafts often tend to be written in quite a 'train of thought' manner. This is no bad thing – it helps to get everything down on paper (so to speak). But it's important to then review everything you've written to ensure that the core messages of your research aren't getting lost.

Here are our key tips for ensuring your core ideas and findings are clear:



1. Make sure you've stuck to the point

The strongest papers usually have one point to make. They make that point powerfully, back it up with evidence, and position it within the field. Review your article with this in mind and make changes if you feel that point has got lost along the way.

2. Don't be afraid to explain further

You're so familiar with your area of research that some things which may seem obvious to you, might not seem so to your reader. Review your paper and consider whether you've fully explained yourself – particularly when describing your methods. Even better, you could ask a colleague who isn't directly involved with your research to give it a once over so they can point out anything they don't understand.



3. Ensure you've included your unique standpoint

Have you communicated your unique point of view to stand out? You may be building on a concept already in existence, but you still need to have something new to say. Make sure you've said it convincingly, and that you've made it clear you fully understand – and have referenced – what has gone before.



4. State your case with confidence

It's easy to add caveats to your work – for example, to fend off imagined criticism – but this can make your case less impactful unnecessarily. Review what you've written and ensure you've put across your key points confidently and unambiguously.

Refining your language and grammar

The way you write your article can make all the difference to how it will be received, both by your target journal editors, reviewers, and – hopefully – readers. And it's important to think about all your potential audiences when reviewing your writing.

For example, if researchers or practitioners outside your field may read your article, it's worth reviewing it with them in mind. Will they understand the terms you've used, the references you've made? If not, you'll need to explain them further.

It's also important to remember that not everyone reading the paper will be a native English speaker, so using 'flowery language' or overcomplicated sentences could make things very difficult for them to understand. We've put together the following tips to help you refine your writing...



- ▲ Keep sentences short and simple – if you find yourself using comma, after comma, after comma, your sentence is too long. Ideally, you should be able to read a sentence out loud without having to pause for breath.
- ▲ Express one main point per sentence – more ideas mean more complex sentences. Don't get sidetracked.
- ▲ Front-load your sentences – put the most important information at the beginning of your sentence, where scanning readers are likely to see it.
- ▲ Build every paragraph on one idea or topic – when you change to another idea or topic, start a new paragraph. (It's also worth bearing in mind that shorter paragraphs are generally easier to read, especially online.)
- ▲ Check your use of technical language – ask yourself whether someone unfamiliar with your research would understand the technical terms you're using.
- ▲ Avoid using initials and acronyms, and always explain them if you do use them – unless an acronym is so commonly used that it's likely to be understood by a wide range of audiences (e.g. DNA), don't use it without explaining it first.
- ▲ Clear out the 'deadwood' – 'deadwood' refers to a word or phrase that can be omitted or simplified without a loss of meaning. Removing it shortens and clarifies your copy. Some examples:
 - ~~very~~ unique
 - ~~added~~ bonus
 - ~~currently~~ underway
 - ~~a large number of studies~~ many studies
 - ~~adequate number of measurements~~ enough measurements

Need help? Contact our Editing Services

Let us help you maximize the impact of your research and improve the quality of your manuscript with our full range of pre-submission manuscript preparation services. These include English language editing, translation with editing, manuscript formatting, plagiarism check, and technical review.

Visit our [Editing Services website](#) to find out more.

/ FINALIZING THE DETAILS – FROM AUTHORSHIP TO COMPETING INTERESTS

You should be familiar with the editorial processes and policies of your target journal at this point. But when you've completed the final draft of your manuscript, it's important to check it back against these processes and policies.

While every journal and publisher may have varying guidance, below we've highlighted a few key areas that you need to pay particular attention to.

(For reference, you can find Taylor & Francis' portfolio-wide [Editorial Policies on our website](#).)



Authorship

Prior to submission, the authorship list and order on your article must be agreed between all listed authors. And you must also agree on who will take on the role of the corresponding author. It's the responsibility of the corresponding author to reach a consensus with all co-authors regarding all aspects of the article, including the authorship order, and to ensure all correct affiliations have been listed.

Find out more about [our authorship policies](#).

Competing interests

A competing interest, also known as a 'conflict of interest', can occur when you (or your employer or sponsor) have a financial, commercial, legal, or professional relationship with other organizations, or with the people working with them, that could influence your research. Full disclosure of any competing interests is required when you submit your paper to a journal.

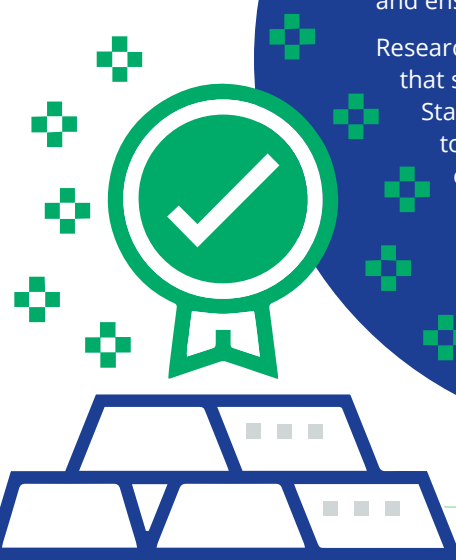


Standards of reporting

We mentioned these right at the start as something you'd need to adhere to while writing up your research. Now's the time to revisit them and ensure you've covered off all requirements.

Research should be communicated in a way that supports verification and reproducibility. Standards of reporting encourage researchers to provide comprehensive descriptions of their research rationale, protocol, methodology, and analysis.

Find out more about [our standards of reporting](#).



What is categorized as a competing interest?

Competing interests can be financial or non-financial in nature.

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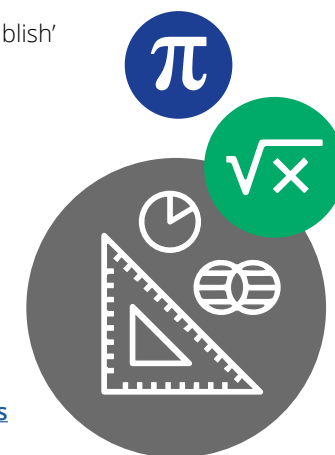
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/ GLOSSARY

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<i>Google Trends</i>	Google Trends is a website by Google that analyzes the popularity of top search queries in Google Search across various regions and languages.
<i>HSS</i>	Humanities and Social Sciences
<i>IFAs</i>	see 'instructions for authors'
<i>instructions for authors</i>	An individual set of requirements for a journal that help guide potential authors to construct their article in the correct way and prepare it for submission. Also abbreviated to IFAs.
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