A Template and Guide to Writing Academic Papers

Preprint · April 2020

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TEMPLATE AND GUIDE TO WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS

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VIEWPOINT

TEMPLATE AND GUIDE TO WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS

Purpose. This is a guide for designing a scholarly manuscript, illustrated in the context of business and management related research with guidance also applicable to other fields.

Design/methodology/approach. I use the example of a literature review for illustration, as overviewing what we know about a specific topic is a challenge that many new to academic writing will face at some point.

Findings. Instead of writing a classic "how to"-guide this paper provides readers with a template that is designed in an instant "guide-whilst-you-write"-format. Presented as a dialogue with the readers, the text addresses typical barriers that prevent the dissemination of new knowledge and is presented and formatted as a practical template.

Practical implications. Readers will learn about how they can structure their work, hook the reader in their own introductions, illustrate their methods, report their findings, and close the loop in their conclusion chapters. The paper can be used as a template in which readers can start replacing the existing text with their own ideas, building up their own draft of a review paper.

Originality/value. The paper contains examples on making good use of the scholarly apparatus and shares observations on typical flaws in submissions I received in various roles associated with doctoral supervision, reviewing academic work and organizing review processes.

Keywords.

Academic Writing, Contribution, Literature Review, Template

INTRODUCTION

Understanding writing as a transaction between (two) people, in this paper, I interpret Zinsser's (2016) notion of an intimate exchange literally and will address you more directly than readers might be used to in most scholarly publications. Far from claiming that there is a one best way for writing an academic paper, I did observe some typical obstacles to writing in my own work and also in my work with postgraduate students, which I share in this paper in a format that should allow you to better navigate these challenges. The difficulty of writing often starts with the blank sheet in front of you and the question where to begin and how to introduce your work. A first sentence or paragraph could simply contextualise the problem to which you contribute. For instance, this could be on an observation that is illustrating the phenomenon under study. In the context of this work, an observation to share is that many PhD students at times tend to struggle with their writing and report that they find introducing the reader to their ideas and insights challenging. The latter can certainly be a demanding task, particularly for novices to scholarly research. A potential explanation for this observation is that the academic audience communicates differently from what we might be used to in personal communication or exchange amongst business practitioners (Kittler, 2018)[1]. A frequent question asked by students in this context is what I would recommend on the timing to write an introduction. I usually suggest (for the main body of the document) to write the introduction first and to revise it last. I also feel that writing the introduction forces you to reflect on what the paper is about, how it will flow and what it will contain (and what it will not contain). This initial draft needs to be revised again towards the end as academic work usually develops while writing and sometimes shifts its focus. Hence, revising a paper towards the end means that changes during

[1]You usually will not find many footnotes like this one in most management-related research papers. Hence, use them carefully and only if required. Check whether your format guidelines suggest the use of footnotes placed on their respective pages or as endnotes (not to be mixed up with the referencing software here). It might be worthwhile to point out that all your referencing should be done in one format and—once chosen—should be done correctly and consistently.

the paper development and revision stages are adequately considered in the final version and that the introduction then does not propose what the paper eventually will not deliver. After reading this (rather long) paragraph, you can now reflect on your paper and report your own observation or contextualisation leading towards the actual problem statement (also cite the key sources of the information you use).

Once the reader is interested in the context provided, I would then recommend blending directly into your problem statement in a second paragraph. You could also use one or two paragraphs more to position your topic, particularly when writing a longer paper or a full thesis document. However, quite often, the introduction then becomes too long and complex and does a poor job in obtaining and focusing the readers' attention on answering the following question(s) concisely: What seems to be the problem in this given context, and what part of this problem do you set out to resolve? It might commonly help to think about an 'ideal' or desirable state, the 'reality' or current state and the difference between both as well as the consequences this difference might have and to whom (already identifying key stakeholders). For instance, the problem statement in this paper template could be that barriers exist, which thus prevent the dissemination of new knowledge. Whilst working towards a PhD (or a conference or journal submission), papers must be written in a scholarly manner adhering to the formal guidelines of the target of submission to become a part in the academic debate (desirable state). However, quite a few papers are rejected mainly because of the lack of ability by the authors to craft such a paper—often despite possibly having a good idea that would merit acceptance. The consequence is that ideas that would advance our knowledge could be withheld from the academic debate or enter it with a delay for revising such work. This difference between the desirable and current state should be reduced. Typical stakeholders in this context could be PhD students or early career academics (or academics who generally struggle to get their ideas on

paper independent of their stage in the academic career) by not being heard, the academic community by not being exposed to potentially interesting findings or the relevant practitioner community. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) presented some widely cited reflection on identifying stakeholders. If research is understood as a project, there are additional perspectives in the project management literature on additionally interpreting the project environment and corresponding stakeholder analysis phases. Now reflect and write about the problem your paper intends to solve and for whom this might be relevant.

You could also decide to add another paragraph in relation to your problem statement or expand on axiological concerns or—particularly when starting with a grand challenge (e.g. climate change)—narrow it down to a smaller part of the problem (e.g. malfunctioning energy policies). When choosing a topic, students are commonly highly ambitious at the start but are then confronted with their own 'real' rather than 'ideal' research world, finding out that the initial topic might be a bit too big to capture in full and select specific areas within a wider topic to focus on. I admit that providing a clear problem statement is also a considerably challenging task, particularly when the topic choice is not determined by external forces, e.g. by a sponsor. Sponsors might have a clear idea on what they want to know, which then at least tells us what to do in our research and shifts the challenge from making a decision about research to communicating the decision. When canvassing the problem you plan to contribute to in the paragraph above (being consistent with the context in which the problem emerges or persists and with the phenomenon or observation you described above in your first paragraph), I found the Academy of Management Journal (AMJ) editorial of Colquitt and George (2011) quite helpful. They argued that the criteria of effective topics are significance, novelty, curiosity, scope and actionability. The problem statement for this paper (taken from a broader problem of barriers to knowledge exchange above) could for instance be narrowed down to PhD students

who start their PhDs but struggle to write it (and hence to infuse their work into the academic debate). We could focus further on the initial engagement with the literature and the challenge to produce a first overview of the literature to be discussed with (potential) supervisors. The paper hence might be interesting to the reader because of its significance to a critical population of PhD or ambitious master students. Whilst writing a thesis might rather be a challenge at the micro level for the individual student, I like this idea of topics contributing to 'grand challenges' as many research projects are somehow related to such a challenge. I remember well when one of my former PhD students used reference to the 'grand challenge'-aspect in their viva when asked about the relevance of the contribution. What is your own effective topic? Write your own paragraph, possibly with your own narrow problem statement in the wider challenge and position yourself if you feel this helps to clarify your research idea.[2]

You could now make the reader yet more convinced about the merit in your topic choice (as all recommendations in this section, this is guidance rather than the one-best way of writing-up your ideas). I would recommend reading the merely four pages on which Colquitt and George (2011) discussed the issue of topic choice as this could give you a good idea on whether you might be onto something. I also argue that my earlier work (Kittler, 2018) has some ideas to offer in how to select a topic that appears relevant to the academic and the practitioner community. One short excursus that might be worthwhile here is to illustrate how to use a direct quote on something that would help to better 'sell' your work to the reader but is quite long

[2]Did you notice that the previous paragraphs appear to be rather long? Fair point. When writing your own work, you may consider providing the reader with shorter units. Whilst sometimes a paragraph might need to be longer (or shorter) think about how paragraphs should carry the structure of your paper and give the reader some help in following and digesting your argument.

(over 40 words). In my view the quote of Colquitt and George (2011, p.432)[3] is quite helpful for illustration here, suggesting that few topics

> 'will deal with topics as globally significant as reducing poverty or combating hunger. What [..] submissions can do is deal with large, unresolved problems in a particular literature or area of inquiry and tackle those problems in bold and unconventional way that leaps beyond existing explanations'.

This section is now crucial in 'setting the hook' (Grant & Pollock, 2011), and I like their initial admission that a really strong and convincing introduction is rewritten quite a few times until it is considered to satisfy the authors (if it does achieve this target ever) and more importantly communicates well with the target audience. By the way, who is *your* target audience? Whilst there usually is no perfect introduction, there must still be a first draft, and this is the intention of this template, so simply start to write. Do not wait for the magic moment that lets you write the perfect text in on go. I predict that this will be a very long wait. At least it would be for me.

With some time available, check the perspective of Grant and Pollock (2011) on research as a product responding to the three sets of questions around (1) who cares, (2) what we know and what we do not know (i.e. 'what theoretical perspectives and empirical findings have already informed the topic or question', p.873) and (3) what will we learn? The latter part will follow up the aim of the research, but before that, we should probably convince the reader of the relevance of our topic or question, anticipating the 'so what?'-question possibly raised by

[3]Have you noted? I think that I have used reference to Colquitt and George (2011) quite a bit. Whilst technically not a bad thing, you might get to the point where the reader feels that you over-rely on a single source or set of sources. This is something you in my view should avoid. I have an apology here that allows me to overuse it at this point. This is not a typical academic paper. This is rather a template showing you how you could write one. However, if I write outside this specific context, e.g. for a journal submission of my research, then I would try not to give the reader the impression that I over-rely on a handful of works, which also might suggest that I do not have 'done my reading'.

examiners or readers anyway. We could do this by briefly discussing relevance to the practitioner and relevance to the scholarly community.

Following the ideas outlined above, it might not be too difficult to reflect on what makes your topic an effective or in my terms a relevant topic. For relevance, you might add a paragraph or two highlighting the relevance to the practitioner and then pointing out the relevance to the scholarly community. The first one, relevance to the practitioner, could be done by highlighting the considerations of use, e.g. that the topic is appreciating actionability, explaining interesting situations, showing the inconsistencies of current practices, highlighting their consequences or offering potential for counterintuitive insights (Kittler, 2018).

With the practical relevance captured above, the relevance to the scholarly audience is also essential for a strong introduction. When considering the academic world as a constant debate over what we know and what we do not know about a specific topic, a contribution is when we learn a bit more on something we did not know or did not look at it in a similar way before your research. This means that relevance to the scholar could be considered your (eventually successful but in the early stages of research merely assumed to be successful) efforts in extending our frontiers of understanding and contributing to knowledge, e.g. by doing the following:

- addressing gaps or limitations of prior research,
- changing, challenging, or advancing understanding and/or
- creating, destructing, or shifting consensus.

The relevance to the scholarly community could be added by reference to key papers or seminal work, theoretical perspectives and/or most recent empirical insights associated with

research responding to the problem/topic addressed above telling the reader what prior work has achieved and what still needs to or could be done. Linking your argument to the literature in an early paragraph would benefit from cross-references within the paper to underpin your argument with evidence but without making the text too long and clunky (e.g. 'see in more detail the discussion on X in chapter Y/the main body/page Z')[4]

Now that the reader is convinced that the topic you raised is important and relevant to study, you must clarify the overall aim of the research in your paper and introduce more narrow research objectives and/or research questions. This paper primarily aims to understand how an academic paper should be designed to find acceptance within the community of business and management scholars. More specifically, this paper will (1) identify what key components are expected in a scholarly publication and why, (2) help you to understand how these components are typically structured and communicated and (3) illustrate how consistency in format and citations can be achieved. In this paper with a more instructive rather than research intention, the objectives could be considered 'learning outcomes' rather than research objectives. However, I am sure that you will obtain the basic idea of pointing out what your paper sets out to achieve in this substantially important paragraph of your paper. Reflecting on this, a good exercise is to look at works within your area of interest and get a feel for how they address research gaps, specifically how they communicate what they want to research. Possibly create a table with typical aims, objectives and/or research questions taken from 5 to 10 papers that take a similar direction or pursue objectives related to what you have in mind.

[4] This could be nicely done with captions in your text-processing software and when embedding reference to tables or figures in the text. Without using this helpful automation, I would always be wary of using page numbers (or table or figure numbers) in an early draft as the revisions of text or format usually make the initial numbering obsolete and give room for errors in the final manuscript.

Particularly when writing a literature review, look at the aims, objectives and/or research questions in literature reviews coming as close as possible to your own potential topic. Identifying them will also enhance your understanding in the topic area. If you find works doing exactly what you plan to do, then revisit your topic choice as you might then have little to contribute to knowledge unless you apply another theoretical lens, examine a phenomenon in a different context or find another explanation on how your work makes a contribution that others do not make. For instance, within a PhD, if a published literature review nicely captures the research in your area, but is over 5 years old, there might still be room to contribute. This could be done by synthesising the research following the published review you see as identical to what you had in mind. Your work could link to the previous publication and illustrate what is new; query what has happened over these past years; inquire whether there is new evidence or identify a shift in paradigm, new theoretical perspectives, the destruction of existing consensus or the creation of consensus were there was disagreement before. All these insights might be potential areas for contribution.

Following the section above telling the reader what you plan to do, usually papers contain a short section on how you plan to do it and how the rest of the paper is structured. This section usually should well engage with the actual content of a paper and not merely say ‘after this introduction, there will be a main body and a conclusion’ but rather guide the reader through the structural logic of your paper and create an anticipation for what is going to happen in the following sections. When you write what is going to happen in your paper in the early stages of your work, I find that this a great exercise to advance your thinking because you have to plan the manuscript, and once this is done, the whole task of writing a paper becomes far less ‘daunting’. I would now reflect on what you plan to do in the main body of the paper. Think about (and then report) on how you plan do your research about the anticipated findings and

contributions you make and how and (most important in this section) where in the paper. Whilst this part is on the structure of your work, fill the structural grid by illustrating it with context-specific insights, e.g. what theoretical explanations are used, what empirical studies exist and how much of the gap is likely to be filled. Many studies typically finish on highlighting key findings or insights in a conclusion chapter not omitting but rather openly discussing (but usually also excusing) potential limitations and revisiting the 'so what?' question that stresses the contributions made to the practitioner and the scholarly community, thereby inviting further research that seems a consequence of the research conducted in your paper. If you struggle with this paragraph, then simply write something quite simple like 'This paper is structured as follows. Firstly,…' This is not highly original but does a good job in the early stage of a manuscript with room for improvement in future revisions. Reflect on the structure of your paper and write it up parallel to the text in this (for instructive reasons rather lengthy) introduction chapter, making it your own (possibly shorter, topic-specific) introduction.

MAIN BODY (CHANGE THIS TO TOPIC SPECIFIC HEADING)

When starting the main body, there is room to pick up the ball from the structural guidance at the end of the introduction chapter and dive into the topic. Firstly, change the heading to something that is better capturing what happens in the main body of your work than merely calling it 'main body'. You could consider the essence of your topic in one line or, as an alternative, use a different system where you 'upgrade' the second level headings in the main body to the first level. In this alternative approach, the heading could initially be called 'Literature Review' (if this is what you plan to report here). However, I would also see 'literature review' more as a working title and adjust to a heading that is more concise in relation to your specific topic. In the case where the full paper is a literature review, you could possibly provide an overview on the key works, position some key definitions, and eventually narrow

down to what specific aspects your review will look at more closely. This is a place to give the reader a brief orientation where your work sits in the bigger picture[5] and where you can highlight areas that are central to the topic but do not need a more specific introduction or separate subchapters as they sit outside the actual focus of the paper.

In the context of this paper (being about constructing an academic paper), it might for instance be a good idea to talk about different types of papers, thereby distinguishing empirical and conceptual papers (or even theoretical papers; for a differentiation, see e.g. Shapira, 2011). I could now narrow further down with the idea to categorise the literature review as a paper that might sit between both categories depending on the aim of your paper. If I use the literature to inform and develop a framework that helps organising observations from the literature by making sense of a field and understanding its boundaries, the major findings of prior research and persisting challenges, then we could see the literature review paper more on the conceptual side. However, we could also claim that a literature review is not too dissimilar from an empirical paper if we treat the literature as data collected for and rigorously analysed within our study. Thus, a literature review could be considered a hybrid format. It depends on the aim you propose whether it would sit closer to a conceptual paper type or if it will be following similar analytical procedures as empirical papers (e.g. containing a section on research design and methods of data collection and analyses). When considering literature as the 'data' of your study, you might again distinguish whether this will ask for a structure more typical for

[5]In some instances, it might be easier to position your work if you also tell the reader what your work will not do. Writing what your work will focus on and what it will not focus on could be helpful in making the reader understand what will happen in your paper. I see this quite often, and those negative definitions can be quite helpful. The danger is that students might spend too much space, time, and effort in writing what the research is not about. For instance, if you tell the reader that your work on recent explanations for firms gaining competitive advantages will exclude the more traditional lens of the resource-based view (RBV), then you might still refer to Barney (1991). You could for instance tell the reader that this is because your work will look beyond resources as then bundles of firm attributes serving to implement their strategies (that additionally are rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable) and justify the exclusion from your work. However, remain wary of diverting too far from the actual scope of your research e.g. by using examples you found in relation to the RBV for something that will not play a role in the remainder of the paper. The reader might then ask why there is this information and might be less able to follow the actual direction of your paper. It can be quite tempting to present information that you already have, but it will be important for every bit you include to think why this is needed in the first place. Whilst there seems to be ample manuscript space at the beginning of your writing and possibly an anxiety whether the pages will be eventually filled, this should not pave the way for the inclusion of details that are not required to respond to your research questions or to meet your research objectives.

qualitative papers (when analysing the literature in systematic reviews) or for quantitative papers (when conducting meta-analyses on mainly quantitative empirical studies condensing the results across these works). I could now finish this paragraph with some additional guidance to the reader and position the paper flow by informing you that the rest of this chapter will tell us more about a systematic review in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter.

This could now start to look at the key ideas of reviews, often referring to guidance found in the work of Denyer, Tranfield and Smart (2003). For a more recent paper on systematically reviewing the literature, I would also point at the work of some of my former colleagues providing a well-organised overview on systematic approaches to existing evidence (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). For a quick read, I also think that it is not a bad idea to have a look at Short (2009) and his neat 'checklist' on 'ideal' and 'less than ideal' reviews.

Whilst this chapter was mainly about positioning the literature review as possible research paper and something you are likely to report in your academic work, this was certainly just meant as an example that fits with the topic of this paper template. I now encourage you to reflect on the structural logic in this chapter and decide whether it might fit for your own work. What are the key theories and concepts that are pivotal to your research, what are the seminal empirical works and/or what is the lens that you will use to identify more about the topic you are interested in according to the introduction? The answer to these questions would make this chapter usually a bit longer and would expand it by a few paragraphs compared with the length of this chapter in my paper. At the end of this chapter in your draft, you could also narrow down your own research question a bit further or clarify what your paper precisely intends to find and – blending over to the next chapter – the methods in how you intend to do so.

METHOD

This is the bit where you must report how you (plan to) come to conclusions in relation to your research question. The best guidance in my view is to look at previous works in the area pursuing a similar method as the one you have in mind to guide your own data collection and analytical procedures. How do these works report this section? Do not plagiarise but get a feel for how others report similar approaches to your intended work. If your reporting becomes rather similar to these works, then it might be a good idea to inform the reader: 'Similar to the approach used by Faeth and Kittler (2020), this study uses …' or 'This study will adopt the approach taken by Faeth and Kittler (2020) …'. If doing this also highlights potential differences, e.g. 'However, regarding the regional context, this paper looks at…'. For the task to review the literature on a specific topic, I recommend that you look at existing systematic reviews in your area and then adopt their way of reporting (also giving credit to the papers via adequate in-text referencing). In this brief guide, I take examples from my own prior work and – for the intention to guide your writing rather than reporting my own research – I slightly bend the rules of consistent referencing as otherwise the following section would contain too many direct quotations from Faeth and Kittler (2020) spoiling the format and idea of this paper. The next paragraph begins how we started to introduce our review method.

For a rigorous review, the paper followed a three-stage approach suggested by Tranfield et al. (2003). In the planning stage, a review panel was formed. Its members (refer to appendix and provide a list of participants and also record what you did and when) carried out an iterative process of scoping the literature[6]. Thus, the research objectives, the research question and the

[6]You can conduct a first draft of a review entirely by yourself. However, if you plan to publish your work, then it might be a good idea to organise meetings with colleagues or to use some joint spare time around doctoral seminars (or simply ask like-minded researchers to spend a bit of time for an online-exchange with you) to discuss where your work could go and how you plan to do it. Feedback in the early stages of your work is important, but this also ensures that you do actually write the first draft you can share and discuss to collect meaningful feedback.

inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as a concise review protocol, were established. A comprehensive search aimed to identify all relevant studies within the boundaries of the inclusion criteria that investigated the impact of (a) XXX1 or (b) XXX2 or (c) XXX3 on (d) YYY. This objective is reflected in the overall review question: ZZZ (the Xs, Ys and Zs will be specific to your topic and should refer to your own question(s), the ones you intend to answer in this review).

Appropriate keywords and search strings were derived from the scoping search, resulting in ## keywords in total. Clustered into ## subgroups, these keywords yielded in ## possible keyword combinations for which the titles, abstracts and subject terms of documents were searched (Table 1). Here, you can now add a table caption in word and a cross-reference in the text. The table below is just for the sake of an example of how it could be inserted and look like.

Table 1
Clusters and keywords informing the search strings

Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Keyword 1-1	Keyword 2-1
Keyword 1-2	Keyword 2-2
Keyword 1-3	

Legend providing additional information to understand materials in the table. Possibly adding a source if date is related to or taken from a third party, e.g. Kittler (2018).

Inserting a table should allow for a brief excursus as working with tables and figures in manuscripts is something I have seen done quite poorly in many past works (including my own). I would always recommend creating tables (and similarly also figures) from scratch or duplicate a table that is clearly built on an existing template. I would not try to copy and paste such elements from other works as this will often create conflicts with your template and could

keep looking quite awkward to the reader. Do not use tables that you cut and pasted as graphic images (e.g. from a screenshot unless your intention is to illustrate the screenshot that then however would be introduced as a figure even though it might show a table). If you are uncertain about all these format aspects and keen to keep your format pure, then you could also indicate the position of tables and figures like the note in the text below and put all your tables and figures in an appendix document.

===
Insert Table 1 around here.
===

Many journals still might expect manuscripts at the time of submission to contain only text references to tables and figures and their provision in separate files. Whilst this practice is not unusual it makes it in my view harder to work with captions and cross-references and to follow the paper but makes it easier to format tables and figures outside the main document. The above procedure is usually recommended for manuscript submissions in leading management journals such as the AMJ. It might be helpful to look at the AMJ style guide (2014, p.2, using the template for long quotes for the second time in this manuscript), suggesting the following:

> 'Tables should be formatted as follows. Arrange the data so that columns of like material read down, not across. The headings should be sufficiently clear so that the meaning of the data is understandable without reference to the text. Tables should have titles and sufficient experimental detail in a legend immediately following the title to be understandable without reference to the text. Each column in a table must have a heading, and abbreviations, when necessary, should be defined in the legend or footnote. Number tables and figures consecutively (one series for tables, one for figures). [..] Each table or figure needs an introductory sentence [at least one] in your text'.

When working with references to tables or figures, work consider working with captions, i.e. dynamic fields in your text processing software. This means that table and figure numbers in the text can be automatically updated which saves a lot of manual nit-picking in the later stages of your manuscript development. Whilst it usually also works to cut and paste these format elements in the document, it might make your life in future research efforts considerably easier if you develop your command of your text-processor—no matter what type or make you use. Moreover, ensure that your table is 100% of the text width (or if you decide for another setting, then use this consistently for the tables you present).

Returning to reporting the method, you would follow the table probably with additional information on how you retrieved information or collected the data for your research. For a review paper, you can be quite precise without much effort. You simply could inform the reader what you did, using a format similar to the following sentences (simply replacing the text in capitals with your own focus and data in a very early draft): In MONTH YEAR, the libraries of the following online databases XXX, YYY and ZZZ[7] were systematically searched for relevant documents. Titles, abstracts and subject terms that met the inclusion criteria were transferred to the reference management software 'endnotes'[8]. To be considered for further analysis, the studies had to meet a set of inclusion criteria. They had to (1) be peer-reviewed articles, (2) be in the English language, (3) have full text available (including requested articles), (4) be published/accessible at DATE YEAR, (5) focus on YOUR TOPIC and (6) investigate the impact of XXX or YYY on ZZZ.

[7]I would choose databases that fit with the topic you plan to research. Depending on the discipline, you will usually find search engines like Scopus, Web of Knowledge or EBSCO, here mentioned as prominent examples for business and management research. Increasingly, scholar.google is gaining popularity but is criticised for not fully disclosing its search mechanism and sources it does access. Hence, scholars criticise this search engine for a lack of transparency and not being able to fully explain how they got to their results. Thus, depending on the plans you have with your review, you should discuss with your supervisors, peers and/or co-authors where to search.

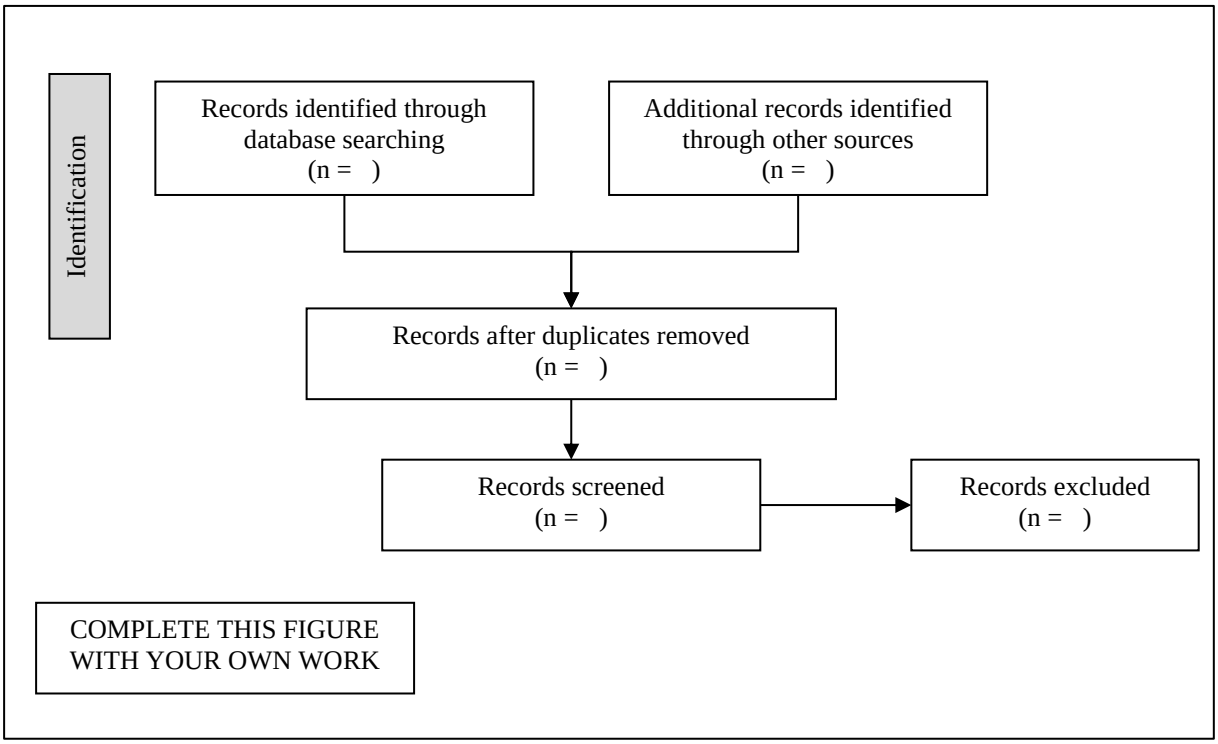
[8]You might also think about using NVivo, which is gaining popularity for the qualitative analyses of extant literature.

The initial search resulted in XXX records of which YYY records had to be dismissed. The reasons for excluding papers were the following: (1) non peer-reviewed articles (n = aaa), (2) not in English (n = bbb), (3) did not investigate the XXX/YYY/ZZZ (n = ccc) or (4) generally had no relation to YOUR TOPIC (n = ddd). Further reasons for the exclusion were OTHER REASONS. This resulted in the eligibility of n = xxx records after also removing duplicates. As suggested by Thorpe et al. (2005), the authors set up a relevance assessment in 'endnotes' to organise further analysis and separated all transferred records into the A, B and C lists. The A list compromised of HERE DISCUSS WHAT YOU DID. All records in the A and B lists were retrieved for more detailed evaluation (full text), resulting in some records moving into the A list, and vice versa. The manual analysis ended up with zzz relevant articles in the A list.

For the enhancement of rigour in the literature review and the reduction of the omission of relevant work, a group of academics relevant to this research area was contacted for comments and asked to provide a list of what they would consider influential works in the field of YOUR TOPIC. The previous text is just an example on how to report how you got to the literature for your analysis. You could add details that are more specific on your search procedures. Many scholars use (and of course cite) Moher et al. (2009) or its more recent updates. If you now think 'Ahh, PRISMA', then you are already in a systematic review mind, and if you think 'Who are Moher et al?', then have a quick look in your search engine and also check how frequently the work by David Moher and his colleagues is cited[9]. You might then see that the preferred reporting items might give widely accepted guidance you could also follow in your own work, and you will find out that quite a few authors of systematic review papers have adopted their suggested procedures. There is a nice example on how this then looks in Figure 1.

[9] You might even find that there is an updated version from 2015 that could be used in your work. Checking for the latest developments around topics you discuss and techniques you use prior submission enhances the chances that your work is accepted or well received. It should not omit more recent developments in the literature you work with, particularly if these go beyond a mere reprint at a later date.

Figure 1[10]
PRISMA flow chart



Source: Moher et al. (2009)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After having informed the reader on your review design and on what materials you have found and included in your review, the toughest bit is to synthesise your findings. You will need to condense your findings rather than only sequentially report them. The latter should only

[10] Parallel to the excursus on adequately using tables in manuscripts above, I often see authors struggle with the use of figures and I see room for improvement in many submissions I receive. As for the tables, you will also need at least one sentence introducing your figures in the text. Again, I would recommend working with captions and cross-references. You could for instance simply state that Figure 1 illustrates the process of identifying the xx papers included in your review. For getting accustomed to the, in my view, awkward way of working with figures in MS Word or other text processing software, I suggest working with the drawing canvas. I know quite a few authors inserting shapes outside a drawing canvas, not making use of automated tools like connecting arrows and not using the layout option boxes (right click on your shapes in MS Word) which then might massively spoil the way your document looks when some shapes move with the text and others do not.

be the first step, and this might be done by collecting the data and (unless the number of papers is rather high) providing a table with the papers analysed and some possible criteria for the first distinction of your findings. A typical first overview could look like what I present in Table 2[11].

Table 2
Studies included in this review

Author(s) A-Z	**Year**	**Type of study**[1]	**Theoretical lens**[2]	**Sample**[3]
Authors 1	2016	QUAL	RBV	28 managers in a US based MNC
Author 2	2018	CT	INST	N/A
Author 3	2004	QUANT	RBV, INST	221 German R&D managers
Authors 4	2015	QUANT	N/A (unclear)	…
…				
Author n	…	…	…	…

Legend: [1]C/T = Conceptual paper, QUANT = Quantitative study, QUAL = Qualitative study; [2]INST = Institutional theory, RBV = Resource based view, MODIFY AND EXPAND THIS TO FIT YOUR WORK; [3]Only for empirical papers.

Usually, you will cite the papers shown in Table 2 also in your reference list. Often in systematic reviews, these papers are included with an asterisk in the reference list, showing that they were the ones resulting from your search and applied filters. Depending on how you plan to present your findings, you might work with some or all of the papers in your review. Sometimes, it might be a good idea to number the papers in Table 2 and then add numbers to the characteristics or findings you report. This is done to inform the reader from which papers you draw these conclusions (e.g. quoting '(1, 2, 4)', rather than parentheses with lengthy quotations). Whilst this is quite a bit of work, it does add transparency to your work, which might be helpful not only for the reader but also for yourself. This might proof particularly worthwhile when revising the work at a later stage. This is particularly helpful when your

[11]Bear in mind that you must insert the caption first before you can cross-reference to it. Check your software's tool for cross-referencing as you will also be able to refer the reader to specific pages or also sections in your headings if you use templates with adequately formatted headings or (depending on the type of work or target of submission) also numbered headings. Using cross-references meaningfully will make structural links within your document better visible and will keep them more resistant to omissions when the document is revised as flaws like links to missing tables in the text or to sections that have been removed can then be easily spotted, even in a rather superficial proofread.

number of studies will not allow keeping a comprehensive overview of all papers in your mind whilst working.

The discussion of your findings should certainly be guided by the initial objectives of your research. Additionally, it should link back (and possibly cross-reference) to the earlier literature chapter. This will help in identifying where there is consensus with extant research or where we have changed our previous understanding of a phenomenon. It might also illustrate conflicting findings and identify the need for additional (empirical) research. The discussion will allow for a clear illustration of what we know but also what we do not know yet, hence yielding way for your own relevant contributions in further work.

CONCLUSION

After presenting your findings, providing a synopsis or identifying a pattern in the literature (or the data in an empirical paper), the conclusion is meant to highlight the key insights of your research and their consequences in relation to what you intended to find out. A simple start into the conclusion section is a short link to the introduction and the initial idea of your research ('The overall aim of this paper was to …'). Following what you did intend to achieve, you then should highlight the key findings in response to your objectives. I aimed to enhance your understanding on how an academic paper could be designed (I am closing the loop to the introduction here). I used the example of a systematic literature review to illustrate how a paper could be crafted and I developed a template you could use for your own ideas (I am telling you what I did).

In the context of a genuine research paper, we would probably add an additional bit that is more specific in highlighting the results of our research and/or insights stemming from our data.

In the context of this paper, I would condense the key issues illustrated above that I see challenging for those who are rather new to or feel challenged with academic writing. The underlying message that you will have noticed is that to craft an academic paper successfully, an important antecedent is to start writing. It is similarly important to start reading and developing a good sense of what we know, what we do not know and where to look to find out about that (e.g. using a systematic approach to reviewing literature). You might also have learned that you should develop a good command of the 'tools' you use in the research process, your bibliographic databases and your text-processing software.

After telling the reader about how you contribute to our understanding of the subject under study, you usually also remind us about limitations the study might have. 'Does it not make my research look poor when I tell the reader about its shortcomings?' you may ask and feel tempted to omit that your study has limitations. However, documenting trustworthiness and being clear about limitations (as long as they can be justified and are not a result of the laziness of a researcher) are usually considered an important ingredient of 'good' research. You might follow up the idea of research goodness highlighted by Morrow (2005)[12] for more insight. Regarding the limitations of your work, it might not be a bad idea to not only inform the reader that they exist but also to explain why they might be inevitable and/or not highly problematic in the context of your project. For instance, we could admit a file-drawer bias in our review but also suggest that we reduced this potential limitation by engaging with experts in the field, allowing them to comment on our findings and inform us about influential works missing in our results. We could also refer readers to well-published or cited works sharing similar limitations.

[12]This is just to remind us that your readers could see it critical if you introduce completely new ideas in a conclusion. Whilst I really do like Morrow's (2005) paper on research quality, I should have highlighted this earlier in the paper rather than introducing it out of nowhere in one of the last paragraphs of my work. I think that on this occasion, we could consider the novel reference this late in this paper to be acceptable as it does not divert our attention outside the initial scope of the paper and remains more of a side note. However, if you have read this far, you might also find it helpful that I guide you to the appendix of Morrow's paper which contains helpful recommendations for conducting and writing qualitative research. Ideas you can also easily transfer into a format template like this one.

Once the limitations are discussed, it makes good sense to not leave the reader on a weak impression of your work but argue that ‘Despite these limitations, this research contributes…’. Starting your penultimate paragraph with some contributions relevant to practitioners should leave the reader more likely to remember the positives of your research. I could pick up the ball from the introduction and point at how discussing challenges towards the dissemination of new knowledge and providing advice might improve the chances for newcomers getting published.

The contribution to the scholarly community will be about how much of the gap identified above has been narrowed by this research. What is the new knowledge? What has been answered, and what remains to be found out? This is associated with implications for future research. These should not be merely a very generic ‘More research is generally needed...’ but be clearly derived from what your study has achieved (and what it did not achieve). Now start to write your own draft. Good luck with your research.

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*[13]Author 1 (2016)

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[13]It might be simplest to add the asterisks manually after the reference list is generated and finally formatted and sorted A–Z. Apart from the hypothetical authors 1-n, I tried to stick quite consistently with APA, with at least one (small) inconsistency. If you enjoy spotting such formal errors, then check the APA manual for more detail and precision. If you are conscious about your time, then we could both agree that the reference list seems roughly OK and should possibly survive the first submission.

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*Studies included in the systematic review results

[14]Above Tranfield et al. (2003), we miss Thorpe et al. (2005). This source is cited in the text but is missing in the reference list. I did this with the purpose of reminding you to avoid such inconsistencies in your own work. Particularly, if you are not using some referencing software, then ensure that you have full consistency between what you reference in text and what you present in your reference list. Just for the record, the missing source here is Thorpe, R., Holt, R., Macpherson, A., & Pittaway, L. (2005). Using knowledge within small- and medium-sized firms: A systematic review of the evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7(4), 257–281.