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## Reporting health information systems research in peer-reviewed publications

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### Abstract

Writing up health information systems research for publication draws selectively on the scholarly conventions of both health sciences and information sciences. This chapter outlines what it means to be an author of a health information systems paper. It gives pointers to appropriate peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, book publishers, and preprint servers. It identifies the most pertinent research reporting guidelines from both disciplines. It mentions selected style guides and generic writing tools that are useful in preparing reports of health information systems research.

### Keywords

Authorship, guidelines, open publishing, preprints, scholarly rankings, writing aids

### The responsibilities of authorship

An essential part of being a health information systems researcher is writing up your work for scholarly publication. Publishing peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and book chapters gives scientific credibility to your health information systems research and academic legitimacy to you as a researcher. Exposing your research to constructive criticism by others in the field guides you toward the intellectual standards of the research community. It guides you away from publishing untenable claims, unacceptable interpretations and unwarranted personal views (Kelly et al., 2014). Research reporting in health information systems crosses the boundaries of health sciences and information sciences, and it needs to draw from both to make a distinctive contribution. The following paragraphs outline some key experiences that you are likely to encounter as an author in this field – co-authorship, peer review, and open publishing.

Authorship teams are the norm in health information systems research reporting. Each author is expected to: contribute substantially to the paper's conception, design, data acquisition, analysis or interpretation; produce written drafts or critically review them; give final approval of the version to be published; and share the responsibility for its accuracy and integrity. Coordination is required to manage the process among co-authors whose backgrounds may be in disciplines with differing research reporting cultures (for example, the meaning of the order of authors on a paper is different in different research cultures). Co-authors firstly must agree about which aspects of the research project will be published and where. Secondly, it must be clear who is leading the writing up of each paper and what contributions are expected from others. Increasingly publishers require each author to have an Open Researcher and Contributor identity number and profile (ORCID <https://orcid.org/>), and to make a written statement of their exact role in producing the paper (Vasilevsky et al., 2020).

Scholarly publications are peer reviewed. It is in your best interests to ensure that your work is as finished and polished as possible before you submit it for review; this will minimise the time that reviewers have to spend to explain their extensive criticisms of your work. When you submit your own health information systems research reports for peer review, you have an intellectual obligation to reciprocate by undertaking peer review of others' work in this field – whether in the same publication outlet which has published your work or elsewhere. “The peer review process depends to a large extent on the trust and willing participation of the scholarly community and requires that everyone involved behaves responsibly and ethically.” (COPE Council on Publication Ethics, 2017, p.2). Acting with a sense of collegiality is helpful for you and for others, amid the variety of models and many inconsistencies in scholarly peer-reviewing and editing processes (Tennant & Hellauer, 2020).

Scholarly publishing is constantly evolving due to social and economic pressures to make research reporting more effective (Eglen et al., 2018). The kinds of innovation that now figure in planning to report your research include the open publishing philosophy. Open publishing entails not only giving free public access to your accepted paper, but also openly sharing your study design protocols, data collection instruments, datasets and code, and even may entail open peer review. (Thibault et al., 2023)

The rest of this chapter gives pointers to a range of reputable peer-reviewed outlets that will communicate your research to appropriate audiences. This includes discussion of preprint servers and research registries. This chapter also notes established reporting guidelines for structuring the details in a research paper; following these will make it more likely to be accepted and to make a sound contribution. The chapter finishes by mentioning selected style guides and aids to accelerate some of the work of writing up health information systems research reporting, including the use of artificial intelligence as an authoring tool.

### Publishing in peer reviewed forums

Choosing the scholarly outlets where you want to report your research is a strategic decision. Intellectual considerations include: where does your research community publish and where is the already published work that is influencing your own work? Consulting meta-analyses and bibliometric analyses can give you an overview of publishing patterns - for example, Davidson et al. (2018) and Gu et al. (2019). Pragmatic considerations include: what outlets will accept your work in your preferred format (short, long, multimedia, etc.), charge affordable article processing fees, and possibly allow you to retain copyright?

Scholarly rankings of one publication outlet or another weigh heavily in such decision-making. There is increasing recognition that better ways exist to assess research impact generally, as articulated in the 2010 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (Gagliardi et al., 2023; van der Aalst et al., 2023) and the Leiden Manifesto (Hicks et al., 2015). Further, health information systems research is reported in multiple disciplines, across which it is not meaningful to compare rankings directly. As well, reporting health information systems research in journals versus conference proceedings versus edited books is valued differently in different research communities.

Nevertheless, health information systems research reporting continues to occur in the context of impact factors, citation scores and similar metrics. Major sources of such metrics for relevant journals and conferences are:

- Association for Information Systems (AIS) Senior Scholars' list of premier journals (their “Basket of Eight”) and AIS Special Interest Groups' recommended lists of journals, include health information systems <https://aisnet.org/page/SeniorScholarListofPremierJournals>

- CiteScore (CS) can be searched specifically for “health Informatics” and “health information management” subject categories, to compare journals indexed in the Scopus database <https://www.scopus.com/sources.uri>
- Journal Impact Factor (JIF) of journals indexed in the Web of Science database can be compared by searching the category “health care sciences & services” <https://wos-journal.info/filter>
- SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) can be searched specifically for “health Informatics” and “health information management” subject categories, to compare journal and conference proceedings <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>
- Journal Author / Name Estimator (JANE) can be searched on a variety of titles, abstracts and keywords, to find relevant journals that are indexed in PubMed <https://jane.biosemantics.org/>

Publishing your work as a chapter in an edited, peer-reviewed multi-author book may not be ranked as highly as a journal publication but it has the advantages of allowing for a longer report, and adding your work to a collection that is focused on a specific health information systems topic. Well-regarded publishing houses that have a special series of works in this field are best to showcase your book chapter, for example: Chapman & Hall CRC Press (<https://www.routledge.com/Chapman--HallCRC-Healthcare-Informatics-Series/book-series/HEALTHINF>); Sage IOS Press (<https://www.iospress.com/catalog/book-series/studies-in-health-technology-and-informatics>); Springer Nature Health Informatics series (<https://www.springer.com/series/1114>).

Preprints can speed up dissemination of research reports given that scholarly publishing is a slow process; typically, months of responding to editorial and peer reviews and revising and resubmitting manuscripts precede acceptance for publication. Preprints are “open and accessible scientific manuscripts that are shared publicly, through a preprint server, before being submitted to a journal (or at the time of submission to a journal, as part of the submission process of the journal)”. (Blatch-Jones et al., 2023, p.2) It is important to doublecheck with your research stakeholders whether they accept work that has appeared as a preprint; not all publishers, funders and employers do. However, most encourage it and some even expect you to use the preprint service that they provide.

Among the many open preprint services available, those most suited for health information systems research reports are:

- ArXiv <https://arxiv.org/>
- Figshare <https://figshare.com/>
- MedRxiv <https://www.medrxiv.org/>
- OSF preprints <https://osf.io/preprints/>
- Preprints.org <https://www.preprints.org/>
- Research Square <https://www.researchsquare.com/>
- SciELO preprints <https://preprints.scielo.org/>
- ScienceOpen <https://www.scienceopen.com/>
- TechRxiv <https://www.techrxiv.org/>
- Zenodo <https://zenodo.org/>

Some forms of research findings are more likely to be accepted for publication if the study design protocol has been published first, particularly clinical trials and literature reviews. But there is growing regard in a range of other science and social science disciplines for the practice of pre-registering study protocols. Some preprint platforms allow you to register your research protocol; there are various options for publishing at this preliminary stage (Nosek et al., 2018).

Apart from preprints and protocols, reporting substantial details of your research elsewhere before publication is not acceptable to most scholarly publishers. Releasing your results via broadcast news media, or posting them on social media platforms, or presenting them in non-refereed conference talks, may jeopardise your chances of ever having this work accepted for peer-reviewed publication. However, there are times when this risk is outweighed by the benefits of disseminating your research rapidly and widely; an authorship team must make this judgement. (O'Sullivan et al., 2021)

### Guidelines for reporting research

When writing up research for publication in a health sciences journal, there are overarching conventions to observe. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE; <https://www.icmje.org/>) maintains a guide that is used by mainstream health and biomedical journal publishers around the world and is influential in many other disciplines. Its recommendations (ICMJE, 2023) cover the roles and responsibilities of authors, contributors, reviewers, editors, publishers and owners of medical journals; as well as publishing and editorial issues related to publication in medical journals. Central to the theme of this chapter, the ICMJE recommendations provide detailed advice on how to prepare and submit a manuscript to a journal in the health sciences. They explain in general terms how to structure a research report into Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections (also known as IMRaD or IMRD format). They also give advice on how to organise supporting documentation such as appendices, copyright clearances and conflict of interest statements. Not all health sciences journals or conference proceedings adhere to these recommendations, but they represent international good practice. If a specific health science publisher's instructions for authors diverge greatly from them, then you should consider whether or not publishing there will be to your advantage.

Editors of information sciences journals have no equivalent set of overarching recommendations. So it is important to attend to the particular instructions for authors given for the outlet where you plan to submit your research report. The Association for Computing Machinery provides general guidance for its numerous journals and conference proceedings, including authorship policies and formatting templates (ACM, 2023). The Association for Information Systems offers guidance on some fundamentals of research reporting, as part of the research code of conduct that applies to its individual members, its journals and its conferences (AIS, 2014). It proscribes specific forms of scholarly misconduct such as plagiarism; it recommends ethical behaviours such as permission from and acknowledgement to contributors of source materials; and it suggests ways to guard against disputes over authorship or data ownership.

Structured reporting guidelines for particular kinds of research have been developed by researchers and espoused by editors and publishers to help authors improve the completeness and transparency and usefulness of their reports. (They can help peer reviewers to give consistent and comprehensive feedback too). These guidelines provide a standard way to describe the important details of a research study; they enable logical description of the study, explanation of unanticipated and innovative aspects of the study, and comparison with other studies of the same kind.

Numerous reporting guidelines developed for health care research are catalogued by the EQUATOR Network (<https://www.equator-network.org/>). Those that are most pertinent to health information systems research are:

- Artificial intelligence based decision support systems evaluations (Vasey et al., 2022)
- Artificial intelligence based health interventions (Hernandez-Boussard et al., 2020)
- Artificial intelligence based health interventions (Liu et al., 2020)
- Biomarker sensor technology evaluations (Manta et al., 2021)

- Digital health implementations (Perrin Franck et al., 2023)
- E-health and mobile health interventions (Eysenbach et al., 2011)
- E-health interventions (Baker et al., 2010)
- Health informatics evaluations (Talmon et al., 2009)
- Health informatics qualitative studies (Ancker et al., 2021)
- Health simulations (Cheng et al., 2016)
- Health social media data analysis (Roland et al., 2018)
- Healthcare database data analysis (Wang et al., 2017)
- Machine learning predictive model development (Luo et al., 2016)
- Mobile health interventions (Agarwal et al., 2016)
- Online health surveys (Eysenbach, 2012)
- Patient decision aid evaluations (Sepucha et al., 2018)
- Remotely collected mood data analysis (Faurholt-Jepsen et al., 2019)
- Routinely collected health data analysis (Benchimol et al., 2015)
- Routinely collected health data quality assessments (Khan et al., 2015)
- Telehealth effectiveness studies (Khanal et al., 2015)
- Telehealth interventions (Rhon et al., 2022)

EQUATOR also provides reporting guidelines specifically for different types of literature reviews; these are described elsewhere in this Handbook and omitted here. Other health information systems research reporting guidelines, not (yet) catalogued in EQUATOR, appear when new information and communication technologies inspire new research areas. Examples are:

- N=1 experiments based on data from personal health self-monitoring devices (Lopez Campos et al., 2014)
- Social media health interventions (Kaushal et al., 2022)
- Social network analysis research in health care (Luke et al., 2023)
- Stakeholder analysis research in health innovations, including digital innovations (Franco Trigo et al., 2022)

In the information sciences more broadly, research reporting guidelines of equivalent breadth and depth are scarce, however a few that are useful for health information systems are noted here:

- Action research in software engineering: Staron (2020) sets out 5 key sections in this type of research report.
- Case study research in software engineering: Runeson and Host (2008) synthesise 11 recommendations for reporting.
- Cross-sectional research in information systems: Maier et al. (2023) make recommendations on how to improve detail and transparency.
- Survey research in information systems: Hui et al. (2019) offer guidance on 9 major considerations in describing this type of research.

In computer science broadly, Hyppönen and Paganuzzi (2010) make 7 recommendations. These are based on their observation that well-formed papers tend to use the CARS model (Create A Research Space) in their introductions, and to be structured according to five major patterns (Problem–Algorithm–Experiment; Methods–Results–Discussion; Model–System or Architecture; System or Architecture–Implementation; Model–Implementation).

### Good writing guidance

Good scholarly writing is clear, concise and compelling. Research reporting quality is shaped by deliberation about: word count, setting, narrator, conjunctions, signposts, punctuation marks,

consistent language, parallel phrasing, hedging, acronyms, and noun chunks (Ryba et al., 2019). Improving the general style and structure of health information systems research reports can benefit from worthy advice found in many articles, textbooks, workshops, blogs and online resource collections. Example textbooks include Sahni and Aggarwal (2018) focusing on health and biomedical sciences, and Zobel (2014) focusing on computer science. Free online resources are offered by major publishers, such as Biomed Central (<https://www.biomedcentral.com/getpublished/writing-resources>) and Public Library of Science (<https://plos.org/resources/writing-center/>), and academic interest groups, such as University of British Columbia Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication (<https://writing.library.ubc.ca/writing-resources/guides-to-writing-and-research/>) and Early Career Higher Education Researchers (<https://echer.org/academic-writing-resources/>). For a fee, you can engage the services of a qualified and skilled scientific editor, findable through directories of professional freelancers (for example, ACES <https://aceseditors.org/>; CIEP <https://www.ciep.uk/>; IPEd <https://www.iped-editors.org>), or through companies' internet advertisements (Editage, Enago, PaperTrue, Scribbr, Scribendi are rated highly in science communication blogs) or through mainstream publishing houses (for example, Elsevier, Nature and Taylor & Francis offer such services).

Aids to automate some of the effort of writing well are expanding in variety and sophistication (Dale & Viethen, 2021; Lin, 2023). Besides ChatGPT, many other tools that use large language models to generate output may be suited to academic writing, for example: ContentatScale (<https://contentatscale.ai/>), Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>), Hemingway Editor (<https://hemingwayapp.com/>), Quillbot (<https://quillbot.com/>), and WordTune (<https://www.wordtune.com/>). Generative AI is showing its applicability not only to produce scholarly papers, but at further stages in the publishing process - to recommend journals to authors, for initial quality checking of manuscripts, to suggest appropriate human reviewers for them, and to streamline review reports. (Kousha & Thelwall, 2023) The spectrum of automating research reporting ranges from assistance with the language of the paper and with short form input, through searching and summarising literature, to generating new ideas and new text, according to the Association for Computational Linguistics (<https://2023.aclweb.org/blog/ACL-2023-policy/>). It is important to refer to specific guidance from academic publishers, funders, employers and other stakeholders, on what is considered ethical and how it should be acknowledged in this evolving situation (Lund et al., 2023).

Exemplars of good writing in health information systems research are found among the selections made by senior scholars and presented annually in conferences, journals and annual reviews in cognate fields, for example:

- The “best paper award” of the Association for Information Systems Health Special Interest Group (<http://www.aissighealth.com/wordpress/best-paper-award-winners/>)
- The “best paper selection” in the annual Yearbook of Medical Informatics <https://www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/journal/10.1055/s-00034612>

## Conclusion

The way you report your research can make a difference to your research reputation and to recognition for your research field. Reporting health information systems research needs planning and management that is complex compared to less interdisciplinary fields. There is a wide variety of scholarly outlets for publishing, but also a lot of variation in their reputations and their requirements. It is important to be aware of the editorial standards in both health sciences and information sciences publishing, in order to be able to compose research reports that are accepted readily and read widely. Building this awareness may influence your research design and research project management, well before your project starts to generate publications – for example, giving

you prompts to review and refine research questions, research ethics applications, and research data management approaches. When health information systems researchers collectively engage with good research reporting practices, the net effect is to improve the quality and value of research and enhance its theoretical and practical contributions.

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