

The nuts and bolts of writing a theory paper: A practical guide to getting started

EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Paths to making a theoretical contribution

Identify the primary path that you intend to use to make a theory contribution

- ☐ Developing new theory
- ☐ Challenging or enhancing existing theory
- ☐ Synthesizing divergent ideas or literatures into fresh theory
- ☐ Improving the process of theory development

Explain:

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Search for at least two published AMR articles that have used the same path that you intend to use and are similar to what you intend to do such that they may serve as exemplar articles to guide your theory development process.

Carefully examine the two exemplar articles and identify elements of each that are relevant to what you intend to do.

Exemplar 1	Exemplar 2
Relevant elements, lessons, insights and conventions	Relevant elements, lessons, insights and conventions

Exercise 2: Theory building apparatus

This exercise draws on key ideas conveyed in the following article:

Makadok, R., Burton, R., & Barney, J. (2018). A practical guide for making theory contributions in strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(6), 1530-1545.

Please refer to this article if you need guidance in responding to the prompts below.

Complete the following statements as best you can:

The <u>research question</u> I seek to address is ...
The primary <u>modes</u> of theorizing I will adopt are ...
The primary <u>level of analysis</u> for my theorizing is ...
The <u>phenomenon</u> that I am interested in is ...
The primary <u>causal mechanisms</u> underlying relationships in my theorizing are ...
The <u>core constructs or variables</u> in my theorizing include ...
The <u>boundary conditions</u> of my proposed theory are ...
The <u>output</u> of my theorizing will be ...

Exercise 3: Theoretical background and foundation

1. Identify 2 to 4 foundational literatures for your theorizing
2. For each foundational literature, identify 3 to 5 critical references
3. For each foundational literature, identify the key insights from that literature that serve as input for your theorizing

Foundational Literature 1	Foundational Literature 2
Critical References	Critical References
Key Insights	Key Insights

Foundational Literature 3	Foundational Literature 4
Critical References	Critical References
Key Insights	Key Insights

This exercise draws on key ideas conveyed in the following article:

Please refer to this article if you need guidance in responding to the prompts below.

1. Identify your intended primary style of theorizing and briefly explain your choice:

- | |
|----------------|
| Explain |
| |

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Draw | |
|-------------|--|

3. Share your figure (table) with someone else and see if they can grasp the essence of your theory from your drawing

Exercise 5A: Theory paper introduction

This exercise draws on key ideas conveyed in the following article:

Lange, D., & Pfarrer, M. D. 2017. Editor's comments: Sense and structure – the core building blocks of an AMR article. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(3): 407-416

Please refer to this article if you need guidance in responding to the prompts below.

Jot down some bullet point notes in response to the following:

<i>Para 1</i> Common Ground: <i>From prior research we know that...</i>
<i>Para 2</i> Complication: <i>Yet a complication comes about because...</i>
<i>Para 3</i> Concern: <i>This complication is of concern because...</i>
<i>Para 4</i> Course of Action: <i>The course of action to address this concern entails...</i>
<i>Para 5</i> Contribution: <i>This paper contributes to the literature by...</i>

Exercise 5B: Theory paper introduction

This exercise draws on key ideas conveyed in the following article:

Barney, J. 2018. Editor's comments: Positioning a theory paper for publication. *Academy of Management Review*, 43(3): 345-348.

Please make reference to this article if you need guidance in responding to the prompts below.

Jot down some bullet point notes in response to the following:

Para 1	Line 1: <i>This is the conversation I want to join...</i>	
Para 1	rest of paragraph: <i>I have been listening to this conversation and these are its main elements...</i>	
Para 2	Line 1: <i>However an unresolved theoretical issue in the conversation is...</i>	
Para 2	rest of paragraph: <i>The reasons for writing a new theory paper include...</i>	
Para 3	Line 1: <i>The purpose of this paper is to...</i>	
Para 3	rest of paragraph: <i>The paper will pursue this purpose as follows...</i>	

Exercise 6: Discussion and conclusion

1. Map out key elements of your discussion
- Summary
 - Theoretical contributions
 - Practical contributions
 - Opportunities for future research
 - Conclusion

Summary	Theoretical Contributions
Practical Contributions	Opportunities for Future Research
Conclusion	

Exercise 7: Abstract and paper title development

Create a 5-sentence abstract using the prompts below:

Sentence 1 - Common Ground: *From prior research we know that...*

Sentence 2 - Complication: *Yet a complication comes about because...*

Sentence 3 - Concern: *This complication is of concern because...*

Sentence 4 - Course of Action: *The course of action to address this concern entails...*

Sentence 5 - Contribution: *This paper contributes to the literature by...*

Abstract

Create a paper title:

- Draw inspiration from prior titles that have captured your attention
- Will a reader see your title and be curious enough to read the abstract?
- Does your title make sense given your abstract and theory paper?
- Will search engines connect your paper to the types of readers you want to attract?

Title