How to publish a paper in international journals?

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and

Dr Adam Potts

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What we know?

- **there are *no guaranteed paths to getting your paper accepted* for publication in a refereed journal**

- ***'no such a thing as perfect research'* but research needs**

  - **to have clearly stated aims related to existing knowledge and investigated within limitations**

  - **to contribute something novel, using precise and valid data, collected and used in a justifiable way**

  - **to produce findings from which generalisations can be made**

Main sections

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Research methodology
- Results/Main findings
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- Reference list

Abstract

- A short and concise description of the entire piece of work
- It details the beginning, middle and end of the article
- Length: depending on the journal … a maximum of 300 - 350 words

Introduction: What is it all about?

- **What** are you writing about? (your topic)
- **Why** are you writing about this topic?
- **How** will you do it?
- **Why** is it important?

Introduction

- Specifies area of concern/your topic (sets up the scene)
- Arouses interest (e.g. indication of the importance of the study to theory or practice)
- Identifies and defines key concepts
- It clearly sets out the aim/s and the research questions (*what do you hope to achieve, and how*) and *why* is the proposed issue/aim/question of any interest
- Concludes with the structure of your article

Introduction: Relevance

The research:

- contributes to the existing knowledge about the topic (theories, ideas, information)
- addresses specific needs (practical, policy, recommendations, personal agenda)
- is timely in respect of current issues

Things to be considered

- Why is your idea so interesting and important?
- What makes your idea unique?
- Consider both questions from a theoretical and an empirical perspective

Introduction: Originality

- **Research per se means '*doing something new*'**
- **It provides a challenge to the researcher as concerns 'contribution to knowledge'**
- **It tends to concern 'difference' rather than 'contribution to knowledge'**

- **From where can originality be derived:**
  - **choosing a new topic (something which has not been studied before)**
  - **bringing a twist (something new) to the methods of investigation/analysis**
  - **new conclusions/information (useful facts)**

Introduction: Originality

- **Things to be considered:**
  - **To what extent do the findings build upon what was already known?**
  - **In what respect is the research different from previous studies of the topic?**
  - **Does the research explain something in a new way?**
  - **Is there some new test or critique of existing knowledge?**
  - **Does the research provide new information on a topic?**

What is a literature review ?

- **A selection of *relevant/significant* material, documents, sources on a research topic;**

- **It summarises and *evaluates* effectively the state of knowledge on a research topic/particular subject, and shows the *relationships* between different works & *how they relate to your research*;**

- **It presents your judgement on what's right, what's wrong, what's inconclusive/debatable & what's missing in the existing literature**

- **May form an essential part of a research process or constitute an article in itself (e.g. systematic review)**

Purposes of a literature review

- It provides a background to your research by placing it into a larger context
- It demonstrates your understanding/familiarity with state-of-the-art existing knowledge
- It identifies methodologies and techniques that have been used
- It distinguishes between what has already been done and what needs to be done
- It helps identifying problems/flaws in the existing literature & rationalising the significance of a problem
- It helps to address how the current research 'fills in the gaps' or 'takes things further' ('expected contribution to knowledge')

The literature review

- A literature review is NOT …
  - a description of all the work published in your field
  - a chronological account of all the work published in your field

Methodology

- **How** you carried out the research, **where** (issues of access) and **why** you conducted it in a certain way
- Link this to the research methods' literature
- It should also indicate **how data was analysed**, e.g. indicating data coding and interpretation, statistical methods employed, variables

Methodology: What to include

- Overview of the study
- Sample
- Location
- Restrictions on sample
- Sampling technique
- Materials
- Procedure
- Variables
- Statistical treatment
- Ethical considerations

- Reference must be made to the relevant theory analysed in the literature review to justify your approach.

- Clear focus on research topic.

Results and analysis: Quantitative data

- Presentation and analysis of results
  - Figures and tables present the data
  - The text describes what the data are showing by summarising the **key observations** and the **main trends**
  - Comment briefly on the results where necessary, but leave detailed interpretation for the Discussion section

- Achieving clarity of presentation
  - Aim for clarity, accuracy and simplicity
  - Divide the results into sub-sections, each with its own heading
  - Use textual signposts in the body of the text
  - Label tables and figures clearly
  - Link tables and figures to text (e.g.: Table 1 shows…)

Analysing qualitative data

- Group data into categories for ease of assimilation and comparisons
- Summarise data if answers are similar
- Quote individual speakers if answers vary (but point may be lost if there are too many quotes)
- Respect confidentiality
- Include commentary to indicate context, make comparisons and relate data to your research questions

Source: Thody (2006)

Discussion and conclusions

- A restatement of the main hypotheses/aims of the study
- An overview of the main findings
- A consideration of the findings in relation to existing research (this links back to the literature review)
- An explanation of the findings, particularly those that do not support or only partially support the hypothesis
- Limitations of the study that may affect the validity or extent to which the results can be generalised
- Implications or practical applications of the study, or generalisations that can be made from the results
- Recommendations for future research

Ten Tips on how to get published provided by Prof. Nick Hanley

T1: Make sure your research is publishable.

- Whether theoretical or empirical, is it robust?
- Is it original in some way? Is this stated clearly?
- Does your article demonstrate a good awareness and understanding of the recent literature on the subject, and show where your work fits into this?

T2: Try the paper out with others before you submit.

- Other students/your supervisor/staff at your university/people elsewhere who are experts in your field
- Present it in a seminar within your department/school/faculty

T3. Make sure you tell a good story.

- Make sure there is a logical order and good flow to the narrative
- Abstract and conclusions especially important
- Don’t repeat yourself, apart from the key message, which you should repeat in the abstract, introduction and the conclusions.

T4: Your title is a potential selling point

- Look at other titles across the most recent issues of the journal
- … don’t try to be too clever

T5: Be realistic about the journal you submit to

- Better to have 2 papers published in 2* journals than 4 rejection letters from 4* journals.
- But aim high as feasible (feedback is important)
- Make sure you know the areas/themes that the journal seems to be interested in publishing.

T6: Joining with people more experienced

- Most PhD students publish with their supervisors … they probably already told you about the previous 5 tips

- If on your own … then think about going as a visiting PhD or post doc to another university to work with an expert in your field/ join their research group, and see if they/others in their group are interested in writing with you

T7: present your research as often as possible

- Great for feedback and making contacts
- Go to as many seminars as you can, even if not in your precise area
- Learn the skills/techniques on how to conduct (good) research and how to present from others

T8: Fewer words, shorter papers preferable.

- Obviously, do not omit anything *important* or *vital*
- But remember that
  - referees are busy people
  - journal editors are pressed for space
- Writing style is important

T9: Look for findings that can be generalised

- What can other people learn from your work? What are the wider implications? How does it extend what we know about a set of problems, rather than a precise issue?

- But don’t push this too far – it’s easy to claim too much, which is as bad if not worse.

T10:Don’t cite your own unpublished work!

- …since no-one will have read it.
- …but do cite a couple of papers by leading authors in “heavyweight” journals in the filed, so long as they are somewhat relevant.
- cite some articles previously published in the journal to which you are submitting

Concluding thoughts

- The more papers you write, the better you get at writing papers.
- The more you publish, the better you become at getting them published.
- Starting out is the hardest thing.