

Intensive Course in Research Writing

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
Texas A&M University
Summer 2016

Intensive Course in Research Writing: Session 6 (5 July 2016)

Today

- Presentation/discussion: writing the introduction
- Presentation/discussion: publishing a paper
- Discussion: annotated journal article
- Workshop: drafts of results section

Writing the Introduction

Purposes of the Introduction

- To provide background
 - In order to help readers understand the paper
 - In order to help readers appreciate the importance of the research
- To do one or both of the following:
 - Identify the question or questions that the research addressed
 - State the hypothesis or hypotheses that the research tested

Length of Introduction

- Articles in biomedical journals: tend to have a short introduction (a few paragraphs or less)
- Articles in some other journals: tend to have a long introduction (or an introduction and a literature review section)
- How about introductions to articles in your research area?

Gearing the Introduction to the Audience

- Papers in relatively general journals: Introduction must provide basic background information.
- Papers in specialized journals: Introduction can assume that readers have more knowledge about the research topic.

Structure of the Introduction

- Introduction typically should be funnel-shaped, moving from general to specific
- A common structure:
 - Information on importance of topic
 - Highlights of relevant previous research
 - Identification of unanswered question(s)— in other words, the gap in existing knowledge
 - Approach you used to seek the answer(s)
 - (In some cases, the main findings)

Overall Structure of a Paper: Like an Hourglass

Mini-Workshop

- Look at the instructions to authors from your target journal. Notice what, if anything, it says about writing the introduction.
- Look at the introduction to your model paper. Notice items such as the following:
 - Length
 - Types of content
 - Organization
 - Citation of references
- Be ready to report to the full group.

When to Write the Introduction

- Sometimes good to write the introduction last
 - “Until you know what you’re introducing, you can’t introduce it.”
- Sometimes good to write it first, to help provide focus
- After writing all the sections of the paper, revise the paper as a whole (typically several times).

Publishing a Paper

Note: A managing editor’s [presentation](#) on this topic is available in the [AuthorAID Resource Library](#).

Submitting the Paper

- Traditional submission (by mail)—now rare
- Electronic submission
 - Commonly via online submission system
 - Sometimes as e-mail attachment
- Inclusion of a cover letter (conventional or electronic)
- Completion of required forms, if any

Some Items a Cover Letter May Do

- Identify the article (by title and authors)
- Note that journal requirements are followed
- State the article category or intended journal section
- Provide context—for example, previous presentation of the work at a conference
- Describe importance
- Explain suitability for the journal
- Recommend reviewers
- Request exclusion of certain potential reviewers

Some Resources: Cover Letters

- a [list](#) of items for potential inclusion
- a set of [pointers](#)
- a [video](#)
- an [editorial](#)
- some [templates](#)

Some Categories of Editors at Journals

- Helpful to know because you might interact with each
- Main categories:
 - Editor-in-chief (and sometimes associate editors etc)—concerned mainly with content
 - Managing editor(s)—concerned mainly with administration of the journal
 - Manuscript editor(s)—improve the writing and maintain a consistent style

Initial Screening by the Journal

- For appropriateness of subject matter
- For completeness
- For compliance with instructions
- For overall quality (sometimes)
- For importance and breadth of appeal (sometimes)

Peer Review

- Evaluation by experts in the field
- Purposes
 - To help the editor decide whether to publish the paper
 - To help the authors improve the paper, whether or not the journal accepts it
- Discussion questions
 - What are some benefits of peer review?
 - What can be some drawbacks of peer review?

A Recent Article

[What reviewers want: how to make your article more appealing to peer reviewers](#), by Martin S. Hagger. *Health Psychology Review*, 7:sup1, S1-S7. Published online 28 May 2013.

Of Possible Interest

International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publishing

- Held every 4 years
- Next congress: September 2017 in Chicago
- For more information, including information from previous congresses in this series, see <http://www.peerreviewcongress.org/index.html>.

The Editor's Decision

- Based on the peer reviewers' advice, the editor's own evaluation, the amount of space in the journal, other factors
- Options:
 - Accept as is (rare)
 - Accept if suitably revised
 - Reconsider if revised
 - Reject

Revising a Paper

- Revise and resubmit promptly.
- Indicate what revisions were made.
 - Include a letter noting the revisions made. If you received a list of requested revisions, address each in the letter.
 - If requested, show revisions in Track Changes.
- What should you do if you don't understand a revision request?
- What should you do if you disagree with a requested revision?

What Should You Do?

- If you don't understand a revision request, politely request clarification.
- If you disagree with a requested revision, politely explain why in your letter. Try to find a different way to solve the problem that the editor or reviewer identified.

Answering Queries

- Queries: questions from the manuscript editor
- Some topics of queries:
 - Inconsistencies
 - Missing information
 - Ambiguities
 - Other
- Advice: Respond promptly, politely, and completely yet concisely.

Reviewing Proofs

- Proofs: typeset material to check
- Review the proofs promptly.
- Some things to check:
 - Completeness (presence of all components)
 - Accuracy (absence of typographical errors in text and references)
 - Placement of figures and tables
 - Quality of reproduction of figures
- Note: This is not the time to rewrite the paper.

*A Final Step: Celebrate
Publication of Your Paper!*

Discussion:

Annotated Journal Article

- General comments
- Annotations of interest
- Similar observations about your model article
- Assignment for tomorrow: set of at least 10 annotations

Annotation Assignment

- At least 10 annotations of your model paper
- Please see instructions in syllabus
- General model: annotated journal article assigned for class
- Can be in any reasonable format—for example:
 - Printout with clearly handwritten annotations
 - Printout with self-adhesive (Post-it) notes
 - Printout with numbering, plus numbered list
 - PDF with annotations in “comment bubbles”
- May either email it or hand it in

Tomorrow

- The first two presentations by class members; classmates will complete a feedback form after each presentation in this course
- Reading: chapters listed
- Writing: annotations
- Also, please be working on
 - Drafting your discussion (due Thursday)
 - Revising your results section (revised version due Friday)
 - Drafting your introduction (due next Monday)

Reminder: Oral Presentations

- 15 minutes each
 - 10–12 minutes of presentation
 - 3–5 minutes of questions and answers
- On a professionally related topic (your research or something in your field)
- For an educated general audience (this class)
- Can rehearse, get feedback beforehand
- If you email me your presentation by 8:30 a.m., I'll upload it

Workshop: Drafts of Results Sections

- Read your group members' writing fairly quickly, to get the general meaning.
- Read the writing more carefully, and write comments on it.
- Discuss each group members' piece of writing, noting strengths and then providing suggestions.
- Give each commented-on piece of writing to the author.