

Facilitator Notes

# The Structure of Journal Articles

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

This module normally would be followed by the modules about the various parts of a journal article.

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| Module Title | The Structure of Journal Articles |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module normally would be part of a workshop or course focusing largely on writing and publishing journal articles on research. It generally would precede a series of modules about the individual parts of an article. |
| Unit Title | Not applicable |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 30 to 40 minutes, depending in part on the amount of discussion. |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to increase participants’ awareness of standard structures for journal articles. It helps prepare participants for modules on preparing individual components of a journal article reporting research. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to (1) explain the value of having standard structures for journal articles, (2) state the components of the IMRAD structure, (3) describe some other journal-article structures, and (4) explain the value of making each section of an article understandable on its own. |
| Facilitator Profile | Ideally, this workshop would be facilitated by someone who has experience with research writing (for example, as an author of journal articles or as an editor), because such an individual can enrich the content with examples from his or her experience. However, a less experienced facilitator also can present the module, as the combination of PowerPoint slides and facilitator notes provides sufficient information to do so. Also, the module can be presented jointly by a facilitator and a co-facilitator who provides additional commentary. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers who are starting to publish their work. It also may be useful to mid-career researchers who wish to improve their approach to writing or increase their ability to mentor others in research writing. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | If possible, each participant should bring a journal article reporting research in his or her field. Ideally, the article should report research related to the participant’s and should be in a journal in which the participant hopes to publish. If at least some participants will not or might not bring articles, the facilitator should, if possible, bring some articles or some links to articles. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants.  |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 07\_The Structure of Journal Articles |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation; Internet connection if possible |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, decorative images can be inserted between sections to signal a change of subtopic and provide visual relief. Also, relevant images can be added to selected slides if desired. Also, it can be helpful to insert slides containing links to journal articles in one or more formats. If Internet will not or might not be available, slides containing images of articles in one or more formats may be advisable to insert instead.  |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. In the PowerPoint presentation, similar notes appear in the notes sections below the respective slides.* (Slide 1 is a title slide.)
* Slide 2 (“Overview”)
	+ Note the topics that the module will address.
	+ Note the module’s overall aim, which is stated earlier in this facilitator’s guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame the purpose in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.)
* Slide 3 (“Standard Structures: The Norm”)
	+ Note the existence of standard structures for journal articles. Present the ideas in the first two bullet points.
	+ Ask the group why it is useful to have a standard structure for journal articles reporting research. Perhaps have pairs of participants discuss this question and then open up discussion to the full group. Some points to make if participants do not make them are the following: (1) A standard structure helps readers know where to look for which information. (2) A standard structure makes writing easier, as the author has guidance in organizing the article. (3) A standard structure helps ensure that all the needed information is included.
* Slide 4 (“A Common Structure: IMRAD”)
	+ Note that many journals, especially in the sciences and related fields, use the IMRAD format or a variation of it. Using the material on the slide, state the main sections of an IMRAD article and the question that each addresses.
	+ At this point, it can be helpful to show an article in IMRAD format and point out the various sections. (Commonly, each section has a heading identifying it. The introduction, however, might not have such a heading, as its identity tends to be obvious because of its location.) One possibility is to follow this slide with a slide containing links to one or more articles in the IMRAD format. If Internet will not or might not be available, slides containing images of parts of a journal article can be a good alternative.
* Slide 5 (“A More Complete View”)
	+ Note that IMRAD articles also contain other parts, as shown in the slide.
	+ If later sections of the workshop or course will discuss writing various parts of an article, now can be a good time to say so.
* Slide 6 (“Some Other Article Structures”)
	+ Note the article structures listed on this slide. For each, ask the participants whether they have encountered articles in them.
	+ Ask the participants whether they have encountered journal articles in any other structures and, if so, what the structures were. If you know of other structures for journal articles presenting research, perhaps note them as well.
	+ Perhaps note that some types of journal articles other than usual reports of original research (for example, review articles, case reports, and editorials) tend to have different structures.
* Slide 7 (“Discussion Question”)
	+ Ask each participant to each identify which structure is most common for articles reporting research in his or her field.
	+ This exercise can work well in the pyramid format: For example, groups of two or three participants can discuss their answers with each other, then pairs of small groups can share their answers with each other, and then the full group can be surveyed.
* Slide 8 (“Note”)
	+ Ask the participants in what order they tend to read the sections of a journal article. Some points that are likely to emerge, and that can be worth emphasizing, are the following: (1) Different people read the sections of a journal article in different orders. (2) The same person may read the sections of different articles in different orders, depending on factors such as how familiar the person is with the topic and what main type of information the person is seeking from the article.
	+ Ask what the fact that the parts of an article may be read in different orders implies about how a paper should be written. If the following point doesn’t emerge from the discussion, make it: A paper should be written such that each part (including each table and figure) is understandable without reading previous parts.
* Slide 9 (“Exercise”)
	+ Have groups of about three or four participants look at the articles that they brought (or that you provided) and note the articles’ structure.
	+ Encourage participants to note differences in articles with even the same overall structure. Examples may include differences in the relative lengths of the various sections. They may also include the presence of sub-sections.
	+ Bring the group as a whole together, and have participants mention some items that they noticed. Note that because articles in different journals often differ somewhat in structure even if they have the same overall structure, looking at examples of articles in one’s target journal can be important.
* Slide 10 (“In Conclusion”)
	+ If time permits, include a question-and-answer session before ending.
	+ Perhaps do one or both of the following:
		- Have participants note points to remember.
		- Summarize the session.
	+ If later parts of the workshop or course will provide advice on writing the various parts of a journal article, note that fact.
	+ Perhaps encourage group members to share points from this session with others.
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