



# **Planning the writing – outline sections of the paper/main messages**

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# Titles

- Conveys clearly and concisely what the paper is about
  - Should indicate narrow focus of the paper
- Should be unambiguous in plain English
- What do you most want to convey?
  - a challenge to current thinking?
  - a new methodology?
- Can include the population, study design and intervention and/or outcomes.
- A question may be a way to summarise purpose

# Abstract

- A brief description of a larger document
- Start with an abstract for a research centred journal article
- Usually scientific abstracts but lay abstracts for a wider audience
- Always read the instructions for authors when writing abstracts.
- Includes only relevant information to get the **key messages** across
- Make interesting – usually first (and only) part that some researchers read!

# Purpose

- Help reader decide whether to read text or not
- Summarises the findings of the text
- Helps scholars find your article

# Qualities of an abstract

- One or more well-developed paragraphs
- Short (100-300 words)
- Stands alone
- Includes all major elements of the larger text (in same order)
- No new information

# Structure of an abstract

- Topic/Background
- Research Question
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion
- BUT social science journals rarely ask for structured abstracts, even if the same principles apply

# Planning what to write: An outline

What did I do in a nutshell?

- Abstract

What is the problem?

- Introduction

How did I solve the problem?

- Materials and Methods

What did I find out?

- Results

What does it mean?

- Discussion

Who helped me out?

- Acknowledgments (optional)

Whose work did I refer to?

- Literature Cited

Extra Information

- Appendices (optional)

# Planning

- Do not start with the abstract (unless you had one prepared for a conference)!
- **Literature review** the area thoroughly – for known and unknown information – leading into your question
- Write out the **research questions/aims** and **main messages** from the research
- What do you **conclude**?



# Planning

- RESEARCH QUESTION
- What is interesting about this question? Hook your readers with an interesting fact that might make them curious about this topic.

# Planning

- LITERATURE REVIEW
- Find articles that support or refute your findings. List the main points from these and any strengths and limitations of these

# Planning

- ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE
- List the main ideas, findings from these studies. What makes them the same or different to what you propose?, and why are they important?
  - What is known about the area
  - What is unknown, where are the gaps?

# Planning

- ORIGINAL RESEARCH
- What is original about your research? Why is better than what has gone before?
- List the main findings and messages that you would like to get across?

# Planning

- CONCLUSION
- What is the answer to your research question posed at the start?
- What is the most likely explanation?
- What are the implications of this?

# Writing an Outline for Yourself

- Consider the following questions:
- What is the topic?
- Why is it significant?
- What background material is relevant?
- What is my purpose statement?
- What organizational plan will best support my purpose?

# Writing the Introduction

- In the introduction you will need to do the following things:
  - present relevant background or contextual material
  - define terms or concepts when necessary
  - explain the focus of the paper and your specific purpose
- Think about how you would plan the paragraphs in the introduction

# Writing the body

- Use your outline as flexible guides
- Build your paper around points you want to make
- Integrate your sources into your discussion
- Summarize, analyze, explain, and evaluate published work rather than merely reporting it
- Move up and down the "ladder of abstraction" from generalization to varying levels of detail back to generalization



# Writing the introduction

- **What is known** – state the general topic of the paper, background & motivation
- **What is unknown** – Important to:
  - Indicate your work is new
  - Links the known to the research question
  - Example, ‘it is not yet known how obesity is linked to cancer....’ ‘To answer this question we conducted a cohort study of .....
- **Your research question** – Specific topic, follows known and unknown. Importance of research should be evident

# Writing the methods

- Probably easiest place to start
  - How did you do the study? Plan out and describe what you did in detail. Order using subheadings (Design, setting, participants, etc..)
  - Include interventions used, instruments and measurements
  - Get assistance with writing the statistical methods section if not familiar, or other expertise

# Writing the results

- Plan what tables and/or figures to include
  - Only those pertinent to answering your research question
  - Not too many, many journals have an upper limit
  - If only few data in a table then include in the text
- Use sub-headings to plan results

# Writing the discussion/conclusion

- Plan the paragraphs/subheadings of the discussion. Guidelines are available
  - Start with summary with reference to objectives; strengths & limitations, interpretation, implications
- Move from a detailed to a general level of consideration in concluding that returns the topic to the context provided by the introduction.
- Perhaps suggest further research that is required.

# Pyramid process

- Using each section and each paragraph to support the main argument
- Drafting ; re-read what you have written
  - Do all sections link to the objectives of the research?
  - Does it tell a coherent story?
  - Is there anything missing? Are you fully up-to-date with the literature?
- You need to start from sound **foundations**