**Tips for Greater Success in Writing Journal Articles**

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The purpose of this site is to provide a collage of material selected from resources I provide in my graduate workshops on professional writing and publishing. I hope you gain several ideas, tips, and suggestions that are helpful as you consider writing journal articles. The Hiemstra and Brier (2004) book serves as a major resource for this material.

**Why Write Journal Articles?**

          1. There is declining financial resources for professional travel at most institutions, so publications are a way to communicate, stay abreast, exchange ideas, etc.

          2. There often is increasing pressure from administrators and others that you push yourself to publish your work.

          3. Personal growth, enhanced self-discipline, personal lifelong learning, and career enhancement come from the publication process by knowing others will benefit from your work and that you can feel connected to the profession.

          4. It is important to your discipline that you help create new ideas, advance theory, describe your emerging techniques, challenge widely held views, and influence others with your growing knowledge base.

          5. You serve your profession, your field, and knowledge in general by adding to it.

**Tips for Writing Journal Articles**

          1. In order to get an article published you first must write one (the biggest stumbling block for many prospective authors).

          2. Study the most timely topics in the field – uniqueness, future minded­ness, and current interests are usually the best bet.

          3. Study the periodicals. All provide clues to the type of content areas or topics being accepted. **Main point**: Select the one seemingly best suited for your manuscript.

          4. Use a **short**, dynamic cover letter – point out the value of the article to readers of that journal, but do it professionally, and ­mention adherence to their stylistic guidelines.

          5. Study the techniques of writing and the writing techniques ex­pected for a specific journal. Note, too, that wordiness is not appreciated in this day of rising printing and postage costs.

          6. Get it written!  My suggestion is to write a first draft without worry about correctness and exact wording, let it rest for a few days, ­then rewrite and polish it. Also remember to ask others to read it – seek feedback, especially at first.

          7. The lead to an article is very important – it needs to grab a reader’s attention, ­so spend lots of time in the development process.

          8. Submit a perfect copy to the journal; it should be word-processed, clean, appropriate stylistically, etc.

          9. Never submit a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time; however, remember my 3x3 rule – three articles or more are possible on each major idea and if you receive a rejection, submit each manuscript to at least two more journals before abandoning that particular idea.

          10. Keep writing, keep trying!

**Adhering to Stylistic Guidelines**

It is crucial that you understand and adhere to the stylistic guidelines required by any periodical to which you intend to submit a manuscript. Many editors will simply return a manuscript and request that it be redone according to their stylistic requirements before resubmitting it. In addition, some reviewers will question the overall care with which you completed your writing effort if you violate the style expectations. Most periodicals publish their stylistic requirements regularly, make them available upon request, or display them online. Other periodicals simply note that authors need to utilize published guidelines such as the American Psychological Association’s current stylistic manual, the Chicago Manual of Style, etc.

It also is possible to create your own stylistic guidelines by examining several issues of a journal. Look for those clues necessary to understand what is expected, such as the type of articles published, any statements about submission expectations, the types of headings used, how references are formatted, etc. Figures 1 and 2 provide some templates that could be used in this process.

Journal/Magazine Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information:

Editor's name        \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Submission Guideline Information (Postal or Online Possibilities):

          Style used             \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Publication Information:

          Frequency             \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

          Deadlines              \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Review Information:

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Legal Requirements:

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Other Needs                    \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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\*Typically a written and signed statement guaranteeing that you have not submitted the manuscript to another periodical, that your work is original, and that you have received all necessary approvals for tables, charts, etc.

*Figure 1.  Periodical Summary Information*.

(Adapted from Hiemstra & Brier, 1994)

Journal/Magazine Name:            \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Examination Topic** | **Article No. 1** | **Article No. 2** | **Article No. 3** |
| Title: |  |  |  |
| Seriation Style: |  |  |  |
| Type of Heading:      1st Order      2nd Order      3rd Order |  |  |  |
| Quoting Format: |  |  |  |
| Word Count Estimate: |  |  |  |
| References:      No. used      Style used |  |  |  |
| Table Format: |  |  |  |
| Figures Format: |  |  |  |
| Other Visuals Used: |  |  |  |
| Citations:      No. used      Style used |  |  |  |
| Special/Peculiar Info.: |  |  |  |
| Misc. Comments |  |  |  |

*Figure 2.  Creating a Journal's Stylistic Guidelines*.

(Adapted from Hiemstra & Brier, 1994)

**Several Writing Tips**

          1. There are four stages to a successful writing process: Prewriting, text development, revising, and editing (see the next section).

          2. The three most important characteristics of a successful writer are personal commitment to hard work, self-discipline, and perseverance.

          3. Always seek comments about your manuscript from at least two people who will provide honest feedback; then utilize such feedback to improve your work.

          4. A successful writer acquires and uses a variety of writing resources.

          5. You should visualize yourself both as a writer and as involved in the process of writing an article.

          6. Identify the kinds of writing you like to do and that you do well. Use this understanding as a foundation on which you build your publication efforts.

          7. You need to determine the tone, mood, and emphasis that your article will take.

          8. Think about a subject for your writing in various ways to fully explore an article’s possibilities.

          9. You should determine who is your primary audience. A journal's stylistic guidelines often provides such information.

          10. Have a clear purpose for your article. Write this purpose down if you can.

          11. Be a critic of your own writing, be as objective as possible, but be fair with yourself.

          12. Designate a regular part of each week for your writing and establish deadlines for completing aspects of the writing process. **Discipline yourself** to meet your schedule of deadlines.

          13. Design an environment for your normal writing that is compatible and conducive to success.

          14. You should understand well the manuscript submission process that is expected by the journal to which you will send your article.

          15. The paragraph is the primary organizing unit from which most writing evolves.

          16. The basic structural elements of your writing include phrases within sentences.

          17. An introductory section should grab the reader's attention while establishing writing authority.

          18. Edit your article by looking for problems in word usage, grammar, spelling, and clarity.

          19. Believe in the value of what you are writing about in terms of making a difference for readers.

          20. Timeliness of the subject matter about which you are writing is important to most journals.

          21. Be sure to match the perspective you are taking with the appropriate journal. Many journals restrict their articles to only a few perspectives.

          22. Two important references for technical support are a dictionary (hard copy or online) and appropriate stylistic manual.

          23. Pay special attention to subject-verb agreement, as the most common grammatical problem is lack of agreement.

          24. Over time you need to develop a style of writing that is your own.

          25. Avoid the over use of jargon or technical language in your article unless the audience level dictates such use.

          26. There are several text effectiveness criteria you should apply to each article, ranging from the value or timeliness of content to the tone or readability of your word.

**Four Stages of Good Writing**

The following four stages are emphasized in Hiemstra and Brier (1994). Most authors of books and articles on professional publishing and writing usually omit step one, but we believe this step is crucial in creating a successful finished product.

          1. **Prewriting**

·        Find ideas, reviewing appropriate literature, brainstorming with colleagues, and thinking about your daily work problems

·        Analyze prospective periodicals and understanding their stylistic requirements and expectations

·        Determine who is your audience

·        Establish your purpose in writing

·        Make good use of information or data

·        Commit to carrying out appropriate planning activities.

          2. **Text Development**

·        Determine a good introduction or lead

·        Work on the body (heart) of the article

·        Write in paragraphs and sections and including good transitions between sections

·        Develop convincing conclusions, making appropriate recommendations, and creating a stimulating ending

3. **Revising as Appropriate**

·        Revise as needed

·        Seek critiques from at least two colleagues

·        Reread and rework your own writing

·        Always think about communicating with your reader clearly and precisely

4. **Final Editing**

·        Carry out appropriate editing and proofing (see the section on careful proofing)

·        Ensure there is technical correctness

·        Use your spell checking and grammar checking software (some software possibilities are listed the “Reading Suggestions” section, although most word processing software provides some related help here)

·        Look for consistency throughout

**Obtaining a Better Manuscript at Stage Four**

          1. Write it!

·        Don’t worry about tight editing initially

·        “Let it flow out” (Stages one to three)

                  2. Let it sit for at least two days after finishing that first draft

            3. Then do the first of perhaps several sweeps: For example, check for spelling errors, then check for grammar errors, look for good transitions between sections, look for consistency in style and word use throughout, etc.

            4. Print out this second draft or work with it on screen

            5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 as necessary

            6. Then use Roger’s tally method (described in a later section) to remove 15 to 20% of the words

            7. Print out for submission or email to the editor what usually will be a much improved manuscript

**The Importance of Careful Proofing**

It is very important that you spend adequate time proofing your final copy before you submit it. Because the journal is operated primarily through the volunteer time of reviewers, editors, and support people, the responsibility for a well written, well crafted, and carefully proofread article falls on authors. Articles that clearly fall outside these three responsibilities will need to be returned to authors for their further work.

          1. An article with many stylistic problems (especially APA 5th violations) frequently will be returned to the author for changes before it ever enters the review process. This action obviously means a time delay and more work for the author.

          2. An article that is circulated to reviewers may still received less than glowing commentary if they feel that stylistic problems or lack of adherence to stylistic guidelines get in the way of effective communication.

          3. The author’s proof reading of a manuscript (of the next to final draft) before submitting it to the editors usually will result in a better finished product. You may be able to proofread during the recommended tally reduction process described below, or you may desire to do it with an earlier draft.

          4. Learning proofing, copy editing, and tally reduction skills, and thoroughly understanding APA 5th stylistic requirements, frequently results in an improved manuscript. This will be a manuscript that typically has a better chance of acceptance.

**Roger’s Tally Method**

I make the assumption that most authors write too many words in developing their manuscripts. A careful control of the words used and using various techniques for reducing the number of words usually results in a better manuscript. Here are the steps I recommend for shortening your manuscript.

          1. Count the number of words on one page (or use your word processing software to determine the number of actual words in your next to final version – if you use your software skip to step three).

          2. Multiply that number by the total number of pages (estimate for figures, tables, etc.).

          3. Multiply the total by some target percentage for reduction (I recommend at least 15%). For example, if you initially had 2500 words and wanted to reduce that by 20%, you would have a final target reduction of 500 words.

          4. Divide that target figure (e.g., 500 words) by the number of pages to achieve a target average for each page (for example, 500 words divided by 10 pages would equal a reduction target of 50 words per page).

          5. Use the “tally” method to average a reduction of 50 words per page. I recommend printing out a hard copy on which you carry out the tally method of reduction. The tally methods is actually “counting” the number of words as you reduce them with a series of tally marks, or vertical lines, one at a time, up to four (i.e., four vertical lines). Then place a diagonal line through the four lines to indicate five:

http://www-distance.syr.edu/writingtips_files/image002.jpg

Thus, at the top of the page you might have ten of these five tally count symbols. You keep working over the pages until you “average” a reduction of 50 words if that is your target. Almost always this will result in a manuscript that reads better, is more clear, and that makes editors looking for tightly written manuscripts very happy.

**Common Problems Among Manuscripts**

Following is a summary of several problems that are common among manuscripts submitted for possible publication. Many of them are related to APA (American Psychological Association, 2001) expectations or requirements as that is the default styles utilized by many periodicals.

          1. Sentences with incorrect grammatical structure.

          2. The use of incorrect punctuation marks or grammatical protocols.

          3. Sentences that are too long or overly complicated.

          4. The use of incorrect or inconsistent heading styles.

          5. Incorrect or inconsistent seriation marks.

          6. Using stylistically incorrect or inadequate citational information.

          7. Using inadequate transitional words or sentences at the beginning or concluding paragraphs in a section.

          8. Overusing articles (a, an, the) in a sentence or even a paragraph (see the next section).

          9. Lack of parallelism (plural/singular inconsistencies, lack of verb integrity, etc.).

          10. Changing the tense periodically (must maintain the established tense).

          11. Unclear antecedents for pronouns that are used (too far away from antecedent, another noun in-between, etc.).

          12. Too many superfluous adjectives and adverbs.

I have developed a “primer” (Hiemstra, 2006) for writing a journal article in the APA 5th (their fifth version and most current) style. It should be helpful as you develop your manuscript, especially if you do not have a copy of the guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2001). Note, too, that there is a pdf version of the primer (http://www-distance. syr.edu/apa5th.html).

**Common Writing Mistakes**

          1. Lack of agreement between noun and verb.

                   Wrong: The older adults seems capable of learning throughout life

                   Better: The older adult seems . . . –or–

                             Older adults seem . . .

          2. Incorrect or inconsistent headings

                   Wrong: Major headings centered one time but left justified the next time

                   Better: Be consistent – APA 5th edition, has specific rules on 1st order, 2nd order, 3rd, etc.

          3. Using too many articles (a, an, the, etc.) in a sentence.

                   Wrong: The sample size and the methods used to assure the correct sample size suggest that, with caution, the findings may serve as the basis for understanding the level of participation by the older adults.

                   Better: The sample size and selection method suggest that, with caution, study findings may serve as a basis for understanding older adult participation levels.

          4. Incorrect pronoun and noun agreement

                   Wrong: Jones and Smith (1990) found disagreement among the subjects. He noticed, for     example, that older adults spent more time with expressive ideas.

                   Better: Jones and Smith . . . subjects. They observed that older adults . . .

          5. Too many prepositional phrases in a sentence.

                   Wrong: These findings contribute to an understanding of the participation of older adults in education by identifying differences and demonstrating an awareness of learning needs.

                   Better: These findings contribute to an understanding of older adult participation in education by identifying differences and potential learning needs.

**A Title, A Title, What's In a Title!**

        Any article's title should identify the contents as clearly and as concisely as possible. Titles usually are stated in the form of a phrase, although it is not unusual for a colon to separate two phrases. Following are some normal things to avoid in selecting your title:

        1. Don't trivialize your main problem, question, or thesis.

                   Trivial: Better ethics for higher education

                   Better: An interdisciplinary code of ethics for higher education

        2. Don't oversell the methodology used if it was primarily a means to a greater end.

                   Weaker: Survey of public education in Syracuse, New York

                   Better: Need for reorganization of public education in Syracuse, New York [could add something like the following if necessary: Results from a survey of teachers and administrators]

        3. Use descriptive titles that reveal appropriate information and attract interest in the article.

                   Weaker: Change in older adults

                   Better: A framework for describing change among older adults

        4. Avoid including useless or nonessential words. Use what is necessary to peak the reader's interest.

                   Clumsy: The history of the Perry movement's impact on American education

                   Better: History of the Perry movement in U. S. education

                   Clumsy: The relationship of athletic participation to male violence in society

                   Better: Athletic participation and male violence [could add something like the following if necessary: Impact on society]

        5. Don't use words that are or could be taken as synonyms for each other.

                   Wrong: Growth and development of computer technology in science and technology education

                   Better: Growth of computer technology in science education

        6. Avoid the use of boastful words or terms that beg readers to believe in the writer's credentials.

                   Clumsy: A critical analysis of the teaching techniques used in teaching reading to elementary children

                   Better: Effective techniques for teaching elementary children to read

                   Clumsy: A professional study of the instructional design requirements for nuclear energy training

                   Better: Nuclear energy training's instructional design requirements

        7. Avoid using time or place locators that are too specific unless absolutely necessary for depicting a study within some little understood context.

                   Clumsy: History of African-American and White race relations in several southern states during the sixties

                   Better: History of race relations in the South [could add something like the following if necessary : A "sixties" retrospective -or- something like : The sixties]

        8. Avoid catchy titles that seem to imply the article will lead eventually to a best selling novel or trade book.

                   Catchy: The Salt City shakers: Computer enhancement of the Central New York fault line [“Salt City” is a nickname for Syracuse, NY]

                   Better: Earthquake potential in Central New York: Computer enhancements

        9. Resist wordy titles, the temptation to oversell an idea, or the desire to serve as a missionary for your passion.

                   Clumsy: A study of the effectiveness of Pro Literacy's Learning Place with undereducated adults in Syracuse, New York

                   Better: The Learning Place in Syracuse, New York: A Pro Literacy initiative

        10. Avoid misleading words or terminology with a double meaning.

                   Wrong:  Reliable procedures for collecting information concerning socio-economic levels of rural adults [here it is not known if reliable means accurate or consistent]

                   Better: Procedures for gathering socio-economic information in rural areas

**Reading/Reference Suggestions**

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February 17, 2007