

Writing Research Articles for Academic Journals: A Guide for Novice Researchers

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Article Info

Keywords: structuring abstracts, crafting introductions, designing methods, presenting results, analytical discussions

Received: 10 July 2024

Reviewed: 15 September 2024

Accepted: 2 November 2024

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/snprcj.v5i1.83466>

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Abstract

Research articles are essential outputs of academic work. They represent intensive and detailed studies on specific topics or issues within a particular academic discipline. Usually grounded in primary data, they offer structured, evidence-driven insights that help expand current knowledge or introduce new viewpoints. Research articles are commonly structured using the IMRD format: Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion which ensures clarity, coherence, and scientific rigor. The purpose of writing such articles is not only to share findings with the academic community but also to stimulate further research and critical discussion. For emerging scholars, a clear understanding of the research article writing process is essential. Nevertheless, many novice researchers often experience confusion and face challenges when attempting to write and publish their work in academic journals. In this light, the present study aims to examine both the theoretical and practical aspects of research articles, along with their types. Moreover, it discusses the fundamental elements of a research article, supported by relevant examples and illustrative explanations.

Introduction

Research articles enable scholars support evidence-based practices, share findings, and contribute to the development of theories and methodologies across disciplines. In education, for example, they inform curriculum design, teaching strategies, and policy decisions through empirical evidence and critical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Moreover, research articles foster academic dialogue, promote critical thinking, and help practitioners stay informed about

recent advancements (Mertens, 2019). They also lay the groundwork for future research by allowing scholars to build on existing studies and explore new areas of inquiry. Thus, research articles not only advance academic knowledge but also bridge the gap between theory and practice, making them essential in both scholarly and professional settings (Burns, 2010).

Research as a systematic and critical investigation, it involves formulating relevant questions and collecting meaningful data to address specific problems or explore phenomena (Hatch & Faraday, 1982; Nunan, 2010). Research articles embody this process by presenting structured inquiries that construct theoretical or analytical frameworks through which findings are evaluated, validated, and disseminated to the scholarly community. The integrity of any research article largely hinges on the quality of its research questions and the robustness of its data collection and analysis procedures. Data may be gathered from primary sources, such as observations, questionnaires, interviews, and tests or from secondary sources like documents and archival materials. In addition, the sampling method plays a crucial role in determining the reliability and generalizability of the research findings. Researchers may employ random, non-random, or mixed sampling strategies, each chosen based on the research purpose and design. Furthermore, a thorough review of existing literature is foundational to the development of any research article. It not only situates the current study within a broader academic context but also helps identify knowledge gaps, refine research objectives, and guide methodological choices, thereby ensuring that the article contributes meaningfully to ongoing scholarly conversations.

Despite the recognized importance of research and scholarly publications in advancing academic knowledge and professional development, many early-career researchers remain hesitant to engage in writing research articles. This reluctance often stems from the perception that research article writing is a complex and demanding process, particularly for novice researchers who may lack sufficient guidance, experience, or confidence. The challenges they face include difficulties in structuring their work, articulating research problems clearly, selecting appropriate methodologies, and adhering to disciplinary conventions in academic writing. In response to these concerns, the present study seeks to explore and explain the fundamental strategies of writing a research article. By providing detailed examples and discussions of research article components such as the abstract, introduction, methodology, results, and discussion, it aims to demystify the process of academic writing and offer practical insights to support novice researchers in developing their scholarly writing skills.

Literature Review

A journal is a scholarly publication that presents a collection of articles released at regular intervals, typically quarterly, biannually, or annually. These journals provide a platform for the dissemination of the most recent research findings and are authored by experts in the field, primarily targeting an audience of fellow scholars, researchers, and professionals (APA, 2020). Each academic

discipline has its own set of specialized journals, such as the *Journal of Science and Technology*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Journal of Medical Science*, and the *Journal of NELTA*. While some journals are discipline-specific, others adopt a multidisciplinary approach, promoting cross-disciplinary understanding and collaboration (Day & Gastel, 2012).

Journals may be published in print, online, or both, allowing greater accessibility and global reach. Local journals often include diverse contributions across fields, supporting regional research dissemination. Importantly, journal articles function as permanent and credible sources for scholarly communication. They typically offer detailed analyses of specific issues or topics within a discipline and follow rigorous academic standards, including full referencing and formal structures (Swales, 1990).

A significant feature of reputable journals is the peer-review or refereeing process. Peer-reviewed journals have editorial boards comprising subject experts who critically evaluate the submitted manuscripts for quality, originality, clarity, and scholarly value before accepting them for publication (Booth et al., 2008). This process ensures academic integrity and enhances the credibility of published research. Most journals are published by universities, research institutions, or professional organizations committed to academic excellence and knowledge advancement.

There are various types of journal articles, including research articles, methodological articles, theoretical articles, and others, each differing in purpose and structure. The number and types of article varies across disciplines; for instance, original research articles are commonly produced in the natural and social sciences, while review articles are more frequently emphasized in the humanities and related fields. The main types of journal articles are as follows:

Research Articles

Research articles are comprehensive reports of original research based on the collection and analysis of primary data. They follow the standard IMRD structure: *Introduction*, which outlines the research problem and objectives; *Methods*, detailing how the study was conducted; *Results*, presenting the findings; and *Discussion*, interpreting the results and relating them to existing literature (APA, 2020). These articles typically range from 3,000 to 7,000 words, though some journals allow up to 12,000 words, depending on the complexity of the study (Neupane & Joshi, 2021). Writing a research article requires careful planning, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as well as clarity in presentation. Before publication, research articles undergo rigorous peer review by subject experts. Authors must often revise their manuscripts based on reviewers' and editors' feedback to improve quality, clarity, and scholarly rigor (Day & Gastel, 2012).

Theoretical Articles

Like empirical research articles, theoretical articles are usually subjected to peer review prior to publication in academic and scientific journals, ensuring

scholarly rigor and quality. However, unlike empirical articles, they do not involve the collection and analysis of original data. Instead, theoretical articles critically examine, compare, and interpret existing theories to propose new conceptual frameworks or perspectives (APA, 2020). These articles are vital for advancing academic discourse, as they synthesize established knowledge and offer fresh insights or reinterpretations of key issues (Neupane & Joshi, 2021). A central aim of theoretical writing is often the application of theories to practical contexts, such as education, health, or social systems, thus bridging the gap between theory and real-world phenomena (Swales, 1990).

Review Articles

Review articles offer a critical, integrative, and constructive evaluation of previously published literature within a particular field. Through careful summary, synthesis, and comparison, they highlight prevailing trends, theoretical frameworks, and key findings while also identifying gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the existing body of work (Neupane & Joshi, 2021). Unlike primary research articles, review articles are considered secondary literature, as they typically do not include new empirical data collected by the author. Instead, they build upon existing studies to provide a broader understanding of a specific topic or issue (APA, 2020). There are three primary types of review articles: literature reviews, which offer a general overview and critique of the current state of knowledge; systematic reviews, which follow a structured methodology to comprehensively collect and assess relevant studies; and meta-analyses, which statistically combine data from multiple studies to determine overall trends or effects (Gough et al, 2017). Each type serves different academic purposes and varies in complexity and scope. The length and structure of a review article may differ depending on the discipline, journal requirements, and depth of coverage. Regardless of type, review articles play an essential role in guiding future research by clarifying what is known and what remains to be explored.

Methodological Articles

Methodological articles are a special type of academic writing that introduce new research methods, improve existing ones, or explain research techniques in detail. These articles are useful for researchers because they offer practical tools that can be used in many fields (APA, 2020). Although they may include some data, the main goal is not to present new findings but to show how the method works in practice (Mertens, 2014). Such articles help researchers choose the best methods for their own studies by comparing the new or improved method with current practices. They often contain complex technical or statistical details, which are usually placed in appendices or supplementary sections to keep the main text clear and easy to follow (APA, 2020). Overall, methodological articles play an important role in improving how research is done and shared.

Case Studies

Case study articles report detailed accounts of unique, rare, or significant events, conditions, or phenomena. They are often used to illustrate complex

problems, propose potential solutions, and point out areas needing further research or theoretical investigation (APA, 2020). Commonly found in fields like medicine, psychology, and education, case studies help document previously unrecognized conditions, treatment outcomes, or unusual clinical presentations (Yin, 2018). These articles serve as valuable tools for generating hypotheses, refining existing theories, and informing practice. While based on specific cases, they often have broader implications for research, policy, or clinical application.

Other Types of Articles

In addition to the article types mentioned above, academic journals may also publish brief reports, comments and replies on previously published articles, book reviews, letters to the editor, and monographs. These formats serve various purposes, such as sharing concise findings, engaging in scholarly dialogue, reviewing academic publications, or presenting comprehensive studies on a single topic.

The aforementioned classification underscores the existence of diverse types of journal articles, each characterized by distinct purposes, structures, and scholarly functions. Among these, the research article stands out as the most widely recognized and frequently published form across academic disciplines. Consequently, the primary focus of this discussion is on research articles, given their central role in disseminating original findings, advancing disciplinary knowledge, and contributing to ongoing scholarly conversations.

Methodology

The present study employed a document analysis approach within the broader framework of qualitative research. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with generating rich, in-depth descriptions rather than quantifying data through numerical measures such as frequencies or scores (Mackey & Gass, 2005). It operates on a logical framework that connects the data collection process to the initial research questions (Yin, 2009). In this context, a document is understood as any written, drawn, presented, or recorded representation of ideas, and document analysis refers to a systematic method of reviewing and interpreting such materials, whether in printed or electronic form. Similar to other qualitative research techniques, document analysis involves the careful examination and interpretation of data to derive meaning, deepen understanding, and contribute to the development of empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Accordingly, this study involved the collection and systematic analysis of relevant books, scholarly articles, and previous theses pertaining to the research domain.

Results and Discussion

Research articles normally have a standard format to facilitate communication. The scholars of research articles follow introduction, method, results and discussion (IMRD) as a basic format for their journal articles. However, many modern academic journal articles are organized in the following components.

Title

Every article begins with a title, which summarizes the main idea of the manuscript. It should be a concise statement of the central topic and designed to capture the reader's interest (Hartley, 2008). A good title should both attract and inform readers, accurately reflecting the content of the article. If readers find the title appealing, they are more likely to continue reading. Therefore, a title should not only draw attention but also clearly indicate what the article will discuss (Leki, 2010). It should reflect the nature, scope, and focus of the study and be fully explanatory when standing alone. In other words, a good title should ideally answer the following questions:

- **What** will be researched?
- **How** will the topic be researched?
- **With whom?**-describe the research population and units of measurements.
- **Where/ in what context** will the study be conducted?

Abbreviations are generally avoided in research titles. A well-crafted title may also hint at how the paper is organized. Titles are typically limited to 8 to 15 substantive words. Phrases like "*a study of*" or "*an analysis of*" should be avoided, as they add unnecessary length without contributing meaning. While titles are usually written as phrases, they can also take the form of questions. In academic writing, it is rare for titles to include exclamation marks. A good title is typically short, often a phrase rather than a full sentence, though it may also take the form of a question or include brief explanations when appropriate (Kirsznner & Mandell, 2008); Leki, 2010). In terms of capitalization, the first word and all major words should be capitalized, while articles (a, an, the), coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or), and short prepositions (in, at, on, of) remain in lowercase unless they appear at the beginning or end of the title. Titles should not be followed by a period, nor should they be underlined or placed in quotation marks. For formatting, the title must be centered at the top of the first page, typed using both uppercase and lowercase letters, and followed by a double space before the beginning of the main text.

Author's Name (Byline)

Listing the name of a single author poses no problem. However, when two authors are involved, a decision must be made regarding whose name appears first. This becomes more complex as the number of authors increases. In all cases, titles (e.g., *Dr.*, *Professor*) and academic degrees (e.g., *PhD*, *EdD*) should be omitted.

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010) provides clear guidelines for assigning credit for authorship in academic publications. It emphasizes that the order of authors should reflect the actual professional contributions of each individual, regardless of their academic rank or institutional status. Typically, the principal contributor is listed first, followed by co-authors in descending order of their involvement. Merely holding a title or position, such as being the Head of a Research Team does not in itself warrant

authorship. Furthermore, if a student's thesis or dissertation forms the basis of a multi-authored article, the student should be recognized as the principal author. Overall, the literature underscores that authorship should be based on substantive contributions, not on hierarchy, titles, or degrees.

Abstract

Most scholarly journals require an abstract, which provides a brief yet comprehensive summary of the article's content. It allows readers to quickly grasp the study's purpose, methods, findings, and significance. Importantly, abstracts should not include any information not already discussed in the main text (Neupane & Joshi, 2021). A well-crafted abstract is often considered the most important paragraph in a scholarly article, as it helps readers decide whether to read the full paper (APA, 2020). There are two common types of abstracts: structured and unstructured. Structured abstracts, which originated in medical journals during the 1980s, are now widely used in scientific and technical disciplines. They are typically organized under specific subheadings such as *Background*, *Objectives*, *Methods*, *Results*, and *Conclusion* (Hartley, 2008). This format enhances clarity and readability, especially for empirical research. In contrast, unstructured abstracts are more typical in the humanities and social sciences. These abstracts include the same essential components but are written as a single paragraph without subheadings. For articles ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 words, abstracts are usually limited to 150–250 words.

To write an effective abstract, several key principles should be followed (APA, 2010). First, it must be accurate, meaning it should clearly reflect the purpose, methods, and findings of the article without introducing any content that does not appear in the main body. Second, the abstract should be nonevaluative; it must present the information objectively, without personal opinions or judgments. Third, it should be coherent and readable, using clear and concise language. This includes favoring verbs over nominalizations, using the active voice when possible, employing the present tense for conclusions and the past tense for reported results. Lastly, the abstract must be concise—brief yet informative. It should highlight only the four or five most important concepts, findings, or implications, with each sentence contributing essential information.

Keywords

Keywords are an essential component of a journal article, typically placed directly after the abstract. Authors are usually advised to list 5 to 8 keywords that accurately represent the content of the article. These should ideally reflect the discipline, sub-discipline, theme, research design, and context of the study. Keywords play a crucial role in helping potential readers discover the article in electronic databases. Keywords help readers determine whether an article is relevant to their interests and provide useful terms for conducting web-based searches on related topics. Keywords also assist indexers and editors in grouping together related materials, such as those compiled in year-end journal issues or

conference proceedings (Hartely, 2008). In addition, they allow editors and researchers to monitor developments and trends within a specific subject area over time. Furthermore, keywords can link particular issues to broader, more abstract academic or disciplinary themes, thereby enhancing the article's accessibility and scholarly relevance.

Gbur and Trumbo (1995) suggest several strategies for producing effective keywords and phrases in academic writings (cited in Hartley, 2008). They recommend using simple and specific noun phrases, for instance, "variance estimation" instead of "estimate of variance." It's important to avoid overly common terms and not to repeat keywords already present in the title, as these will be indexed automatically. Writers should also eliminate unnecessary prepositions, particularly "in" and "of," by opting for more concise forms like "data quality" rather than "quality of data." Moreover, acronyms should be avoided, as they may become outdated or confuse readers unfamiliar with them, especially international audiences. The names of individuals should only be included if they are part of widely recognized terminology, such as "Skinner box" or "Poisson distribution." In essence, effective keywords are specific, discipline-relevant, clearly phrased, and free from redundancy and obscure abbreviations, helping both readers and databases efficiently locate relevant academic materials.

Introduction

The introduction is the first main body section of a journal article. It clearly presents the research problem or question under investigation, along with the background needed to understand it. A strong introduction outlines the purpose, scope, and significance of the study, allowing readers to judge the relevance of the article to their interests and decide whether to continue reading (APA, 2020). To make the introduction engaging and informative, writers often employ rhetorical strategies such as using a thought-provoking question, a surprising statistic, or a review of key literature to capture attention and provide context. Introductions are typically concise; around 10 percent of the article's total length (Bailey, 2012). However, their length may vary depending on the complexity and scope of the study. A well-written introduction should answer several essential questions: What is the topic? Why is it important? What is already known? What gap does this research aim to fill? And how will the study achieve its goals? As noted in the *APA Publication Manual* (2020), answering these questions helps ensure that the introduction is focused, coherent, and aligned with the rest of the article:

- Why is this problem important?
- How does the study relate to or differ from previous work in the area?
- What are the primary or secondary hypotheses or objectives of the study?
- How do the hypotheses and research design relate to one another?
- What are the theoretical or practical implications of the study?

Swales and Feak (2004) outline a widely accepted model for structuring the introduction section of academic articles, which consists of three essential moves

(cited in Hartley, 2008). **Move 1** involves establishing a research territory by emphasizing the significance, relevance, or interest of the general research area and by reviewing previous studies. **Move 2** focuses on identifying a niche. **Move 3** consists of occupying the niche, where authors explain how their research addresses the identified gap. This includes stating the purpose of the study, and optionally, listing research questions or hypotheses, and announcing principal findings. In essence, a well-structured introduction sets the background, defines the research problem, and clarifies the purpose and significance of the study by progressing through these three strategic moves.

Method

Methods refer to the techniques or procedures used to gather and collect data related to the research questions. Research methods encompass all the systematic and scientific techniques employed by a researcher throughout a study (Kothari, 2004). A solid understanding of research methods is essential because it guides the researcher in achieving the study's objectives. The structure of the methods section can vary across journal articles. Most often, it is divided into three main subsections: Participants, Measures, and Procedure(s). In addition, some scholars include discussions on the study's philosophy and design of the study, population and sampling, research instruments, data analysis procedures and research ethics as the integral components of the method. The length of the methods section depends on the familiarity of the techniques used: it may be brief and concise when using standardized methods but more detailed and elaborate when novel or complex methods require thorough explanation (Hartley, 2008). Researchers are expected to describe their methods clearly enough so that readers can replicate the study based on the information provided.

Results

The results of a study involve the presentation and description of collected data. In qualitative research, the results section typically begins with the study's themes, which should directly reflect the research objectives or questions. In contrast, the results section of quantitative research usually follows the sequence of data. Quantitative studies often use tables, graphs, diagrams, and statistics to present findings, whereas qualitative studies rely on narratives and stories to describe results. Furthermore, the results should be interpreted and discussed in relation to relevant theories connected to the study. Results section in scientific research articles typically follows a two-stage structure (Hartley, 2008). **Move 1** involves presenting the main findings in a logical sequence, clearly linking them to the hypotheses and methods employed in the study. **Move 2** then addresses the subsidiary or secondary findings, again connecting them to the initial research questions and methodological framework. This structured approach ensures clarity and coherence in reporting outcomes. It is also common for the results section to begin with phrases such as "Table 1 shows that...", indicating a direct reference to visual data presentations that support the findings.

Discussion

The discussion section involves the analysis and interpretation of the study's data. Here, the researcher restates the findings in relation to previous studies and offers explanations and insights. In other words, the author examines, interprets, and qualifies the results, drawing inferences and conclusions from them (APA, 2020). The discussion should begin with a clear statement indicating whether the original hypotheses; both primary and secondary are supported or not. Comparing and contrasting your results with those of other researchers helps to conceptualize, confirm, or clarify your conclusions. There are five common 'moves' typically found in the discussion sections of academic research papers, each serving a distinct rhetorical function (Hartley, 2008). **Move 1** involves restating the main findings and accomplishments of the study to remind readers of its key contributions. **Move 2** evaluates how these findings align with or differ from previous research, indicating whether they support, contradict, extend, or refine existing knowledge. **Move 3** highlights potential limitations of the study, acknowledging any constraints in methodology, scope, or generalizability. **Move 4** provides an interpretation or explanation of the results, offering insights into their meaning and relevance. Finally, **Move 5** discusses the broader implications of the findings and often includes recommendations for future research, suggesting how the work can be extended or applied in other contexts. Together, these moves help to contextualize the research and guide readers in understanding its significance.

Conclusion

The conclusion should appropriately answer the specific questions raised in the introduction section. A conclusion is not just a summary of the results; it is a personal and critical reflection on the entire research process. It also highlights the broader significance of the findings. The conclusion should be written in relation to the introduction, methods, results and discussion sections of your research.

References/ Works Cited

References constitute a systematic list of sources cited within an academic paper, serving to acknowledge the contributions of previous authors and to provide readers with the means to locate the original materials. Various referencing styles exist, among which APA (American Psychological Association) and MLA (Modern Language Association) are widely used. APA style is predominantly employed in social science research, whereas MLA style is commonly applied within the humanities. Both APA and MLA share the following basic conventions for formatting, in-text citation, and referencing a research paper.

- Use a legible font size (i.e. Times New Roman with 12 font size)
- Double space entire the paper.
- Leave one inch margin at top, bottom and sides of the text.
- Do not justify the text, instead, leave right margin uneven.
- Indent the first line of every paragraph and footnote

- Place the page number in the upper right hand corner
- Alphabetize the "References" or "Work Cited" by author's last name.
- Use hanging indent for the reference/ cited list.
- Use parenthetical in-text citations.

Despite sharing fundamental formatting principles, APA and MLA styles exhibit several differences. These include variations in disciplinary focus, citation structure, title page requirements, author name formatting, emphasis on publication date, and the use of abstracts. Such differences reflect their adaptation to the specific conventions of social sciences versus humanities.

Conclusion

Since research is an indispensable aspect of all academic disciplines, this study aims to explore and explain effective strategies for writing a research article. The research articles follow a standardized structure intended to promote clarity, logical flow, and efficient communication within the scholarly community. While the IMRD model (Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion) serves as a foundational framework, modern research articles also incorporate essential elements such as the title, author's byline, abstract, keywords, conclusion, and references. Each component serves a specific rhetorical and functional purpose, from capturing the reader's interest to presenting empirical findings and situating them within existing literature. Effective research writing requires not only adherence to structural conventions but also attention to clarity, accuracy, objectivity, and relevance. Furthermore, understanding citation styles such as APA and MLA is vital for academic integrity and consistency. Ultimately, mastering the components and conventions of research article writing empowers scholars to contribute meaningfully to their fields, engage in critical academic discourse, and advance knowledge within their disciplines.

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