

## **Tips For a Successful Article Submission**

Submitting a research article for publication is a stressful time, but also an important process for disseminating one's research, placing one's research into a conversation with the broader literature, and, importantly, eliciting the reactions of reviewers and readers. These reactions can be immensely helpful for one's thesis or dissertation as well.

Although the process is, by its nature, uncertain and stressful because you need to rely on external readers to make critical decisions about your manuscript's chances, there are some steps you can take that will increase the likelihood that your paper will be successful.

### **Have a Clear Research Question**

A research paper cannot be just an exploration of a specific topic. After all, there are virtually unlimited things one could say or write about any topic, regardless of how narrow it might be. Instead, the data you collect, the analysis you perform, the results you report are all things you have chosen presumably to answer a question. Making that question explicit at the outset, or at least in the first couple of pages, will help the reader understand what you are writing and why. Remember that a research question is something that can be answered with research; a research paper cannot be about the future, because we cannot research that which has not yet happened. Even if you are primarily interested in prediction, you need to ask your question in a way that allows you to draw conclusions from existing data, and then use your discussion or conclusion to gesture toward prediction if you would like.

### **Use Your Research Question to Write and Organize Your Literature Review**

A literature review informs the reader about the scholarly conversation in which you see your own work. For this reason, it cannot and should not be just a chronological summary of everything already written on a subject, but rather a focused engagement with existing theory and scholarship that both articulates the current state of your research field and notes the major intellectual/theoretical traditions that have motivated the broader research field as well as your own. A literature review cannot cover every piece of work in a field, though you should make sure that you note the most important and consequential studies as well as the most recent contributions that are directly related to your question. And you should be very careful in how you treat that work. You should think critically about the existing research, but be careful to be fair about what other authors are professing to do, and be modest in your statements about the state of the field. Saying that "Kenneth Waltz's theory of neorealism does not provide sufficient explanation for Japan's use of educational exchange programs" is pretty unconvincing unless you can show that Waltz was trying to explain something like Japan's educational exchange programs. Additionally, avoid blanket statements about what the field does not cover (e.g., "the international relations literature has not paid sufficient attention to transnational migration") because there might well be a set of scholars who view themselves as doing exactly this. They might even be your

reviewers. A literature review that notes existing debates and is modest about gaps to be filled is more likely to be persuasive.

### **Justify Your Research Project**

Your explanation for your article's contribution should reflect on the research question and the literature review. By answering your own research question, how did you add something valuable to the literature you have just covered? Please note that "no one has studied Case X" is usually insufficient to justify a project. After all, the theory of gravity has not been tested on each and every case in existence, but dropping a plate on the floor to demonstrate that, yes, it works in the case of this plate too is probably not going to give readers much reason to publish it. Instead, think about what your research case(s) represents. Does your research resolve a tension between two well-developed theoretical positions that typically predict different outcomes? Does it tell us something new about the relationships/identities/connections between actors that are usually assumed to be something quite different? Does it allow one to extend a theoretical claim beyond its usual terrain into an unexpected category or set of cases? The issue should not be that "My research adds knowledge about Case X," but rather, "my research allows us to see patterns, connections, relationships, outcomes that are typically missed or misunderstood in the existing literature."

### **Methods and Analysis**

A successful article must explain and justify its research methods and selection of data, as well as make careful, thoughtful use of the material collected and analyzed. In practice, this means that you ought to include at least a substantial paragraph and preferably an entire section on your research methods and your data, explaining what has been collected and why.

Your paper should also make careful and judicial use of your data and analysis, meaning that the material you depict must be connected meaningfully to the contribution you claim to make. If, for example, you decide to break up a process into four phases and treat them chronologically (e.g., "I analyze US-Japan relations in four phases: 1945-1952, 1952-1980, 1980-2008, 2008-present"), make sure that that representation of the data is connected closely to the argument you want to make, or that each phase is necessary for understanding a distinct component of your argument. An article is short, and you help the reader immensely by ensuring that each section of your paper is closely and logically connected to your initial research question.

And make sure that the data you provide actually fit your argument! If you argue that "international reconciliation over historical issues is essential for smooth international relations" and then later note strong US relations with Vietnam, people will wonder how that happened when the US government has never apologized to Vietnam for its prosecution of the Vietnam War. The answer here is not to avoid the data, but rather be able to think about how to bring nuance to your argument to make sure that you can account for the material you discuss.

## **Remember Your Genre**

A research article is not a mystery novel. While you can include surprising information, your paper will be more successful if you state at the outset what you are going to do and how you are going to do it, and then follow through. A surprise conclusion rarely helps you. To the contrary, being logical and consistent all the way through will make it much easier to read, understand, and evaluate.

## **Proofread and Proofread Again**

Good writing is, of course, essential to crafting a successful paper. You should leave sufficient time after drafting your paper to proofread it carefully at least twice. Even if you are a native speaker of the language in which you are writing, it can be helpful to have another person read it as well, but this is far more important when you are writing in a foreign language. Frequent mistakes can make a paper's meaning or contribution unclear, which is of course a *prima facie* justification of its rejection. But even if the meaning can largely be understood, weak or ineffective writing will make its claims and argument less persuasive to readers. Your job as an author is to persuade your readers that your argument is correct, and good writing will help immeasurably with this.