

Questions for Writing the First Draft of a Journal Article

Introduction: *Why did you undertake the study?*

- What was the purpose of the study?
- Why is the study important, why is it needed?
- What did the study involve?

Methods: *What did you do?*

[what was done, the study design, the materials/subjects, the procedures]

- What resources (of all kinds) were used in conducting the study?
- Who were the participants/subjects and how were they chosen?
- What permissions were required and/or considered appropriate for the study (e.g., by the medical center, university, funder, professional society, ethics of the research field, et al.) and was it obtained?
- For human participants, was recognized and appropriate informed consent obtained (appropriate for the type of subject/participant), and how was it obtained? For non-human subjects, what standards were met in their care?
- What was the overall design of the study?
- How well known are the methods and analytical approaches used in the design? Will readers need more than brief mention and reference citations?
- What was done in the study? Specifically, what was done to subjects/participants/materials?
- What measures were used? What equipment/tools, were used, if needed?
- What type of analysis was used on the collected data/information?

Results: *What happened?*

- What data/information was produced by the study/intervention and/or analysis of it?
- What findings are complicated enough to need a table, chart, or figure to present the information clearly?
- Did the original design for the study/intervention work? What information shows this?

Discussion: *Why are the results/outcomes important?*

- Why are the findings important and to whom?
- How do the findings compare with what is already known on this topic?
 - What is similar?
 - What is different?
 - Why?
 - Which differences are important? [If findings from other studies were referred to in the Introduction, have the new study results been directly related to the information in the Introduction?]
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of
 - the study itself?
 - the study (the intervention? hypothesis? method? analysis? etc.)
- Where and to what extent is the study/intervention likely to be appropriate and or applicable?

Conclusion: *What can be said briefly and with emphasis about*

- what was found?
- why it is important?

Abstract:

(written after the first draft is done; some authors write an early draft as an aid to writing.)

- Is the abstract supposed to be “structured” or may it be unstructured?
- Does the abstract contain a sentence presenting the most important information from each major section of the paper (Methods, Results, etc.)?
- Does the abstract fit the journal’s length requirements?
- Does the abstract give all necessary information within the length limits of the databases in the field? (For example, the 250-word limit for Medline.)
- If the abstract falls short of the length limits, how can the space best be used?
- If the abstract is too long, how can wordiness be eliminated and sentence structure changed to save space?
- Will readers understand the most important points about the study if they read only the abstract but not the whole paper?

Title

[to be written once the draft is done]

- Does the title fit the style/approach used by the journal?
 - ‘indicative’ (about the general nature of the content)
 - ‘informative’ (about the specifics of the study)
- Does the title emphasize the part of the study that you consider most important?
 - emphasis on method?
 - emphasis on findings?
 - emphasis on implications?
- Is the title clear and easily understood by the core target readers? By wider audiences, cross-disciplinary audiences?

Reference Citations

- Do the citations follow the journal’s approach to references
- Use essential references only
- Extensive references are allowed
 - Do the references fit the journal’s limits, if any, on total number allowed?

Tables and Graphs

- Do the tables or graphs duplicate data presented in detail in the text?
- Are the tables/graphs clear without reference to the text? (That is, can they stand independently?)
- Are the data presented in the text and tables consistent?
- Are the graphs or illustrations a fair and accurate presentation of the study findings?
- Do digital images meet the journal’s restrictions on revising the original image?