

How to Get Published in International Journals: Part III

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Source Material

- ***Getting Published in International Journals: Writing Strategies for European Social Scientists***

by Natalie Reid, (NOVA, 2010; Oslo)

www.nova.no/reid

www.amazon.com

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Journal Analysis

Why?

When an editor receives your paper, it should look exactly like a paper that the journal has already published.

Consider this submission guideline from the American Economic Review:

“PAPERS WILL NOT BE REVIEWED IF THEY DO NOT FOLLOW OUR STYLE GUIDELINES.”

And from the prestigious British Journal of Sociology:

“Please note that overly long papers will be returned without review at the Editors’ discretion.”

Scope of Analysis

The most recent year's worth of issues of each journal under consideration. However, if an issue comes out monthly, then the most recent four months will do.

While you will need all of these issues for your submission analysis, you are unlikely to need as many for your first analysis—the elimination analysis.

Phase 1: Elimination Analysis

- What is the journal's primary focus? That is, is it focused more on the *subject matter* or on the *discipline* itself?
- Does the proportion of theory to data in your paper fit the average proportion in the journal? [The same question applies to the average number of graphs and tables.]
- Are the articles in the journal primarily theoretical or empirical? That is, do the articles
 - (a) mainly discuss theoretical issues, develop or compare different theoretical approaches, or attempt to synthesize different theories, or
 - (b) mainly present and analyze empirical material (data)?

Elimination Analysis, cont.

- Does the journal usually take papers focusing on a *small* question or a *large* question?
- Has the journal published a similar paper in the past two years? If so, is it likely to publish another one soon?
- Does your paper amplify, contradict, or rebut either data, methodology, or theorizing in a paper that the journal has published within the past year or two?
- Do the article titles indicate that your subject matter—and breadth or narrowness of focus—is compatible with the journal?

Elimination Analysis, cont.

- From what countries do most of the authors come, and from which universities? If your country is underrepresented, does your paper have a better or worse chance of being published?
A corollary question: Does the journal take most of its articles from professors at highly ranked universities? Will you be able to compete in such a market?
- Are the references and citations from all over the world or from a specific country—or from specific theorists? And will your paper, if it involves research in your country (or another country) alone, cite mostly national and regional references (e.g., Iberian)?

Elimination Analysis, cont.

- Has the journal published a paper about your region (e.g., Benelux, North Africa, Southeast Asia) in the past two years? If so, does your paper tie your country's data into much larger regional or world issues? Can you compare your country's data to that of other countries?
- If you are using statistical analyses such as regression analyses, factor analyses, principal component analyses, or cluster analyses, to what extent does the journal publish articles with similar types of analyses?
- Does your paper have the depth of content, and do you have the sophistication of writing style, to match the papers that the journal publishes?

Phase 2: Submission Analysis

- Analyze your journal of choice for content, organization, linguistic cues (e.g., choice of words), length of sections, presentation of sections, etc.
- Analyze its abstracts for style, and apply the most common style to your abstract.

Basis for Submission Analysis

- Use the most recent year's worth of issues.
- Use more if necessary, if some of the issues are “guest editor” or “special” issues.
- Don't rely heavily on older issues, as editorial preferences tend to change with new editors.

Some Indicators for Analysis

- paper length (with and without references)
- footnotes or endnotes?
- average number of footnotes/length of footnotes
- average section/introduction/conclusion length
- average sentence/paragraph length
- average abstract length
- UK, US, CAN English (which does the journal prefer, or which is most common?) (If you have a choice, use the one with which you are most familiar.)
- vocabulary: “paper”? “article”? “study”? Both “article” and “study”?
- vocabulary: “teenagers”? “adolescents”? “young people”?
[Always use the term that the journal uses, not necessarily the one that is the most direct translation from your first language.]

Indicators for Analysis, cont.

- vocabulary: use of “I” or “we”
- language: mostly active or passive?
- names of scholars, scientists, or papers most commonly cited—be sure to cite them as well
- average number of citations (i.e., a lot of quotations or few)—and where they tend to occur (e.g., mostly in Introduction)
- average # of articles from your country or region
- titles: Are they serious or clever? Do they have subtitles? If so, which are longer? Do they show a linguistic pattern (e.g., series of 3 nouns, short title/long subtitle)?
- order of sections (e.g., does theory precede methodology or vice versa)
- names of sections (e.g., Conclusions, Discussion, Concluding Remarks)

Indicators for Analysis, cont.

- types of headings and subheadings: how many, how often, what kind of language (words, phrases? long, short?)
- absence or presence of a contextualizing paragraph (“Section 1 does this, Section 2 does that”)
- type of sentence length (i.e., fairly direct short sentences, with added length coming from lists rather than from grammatical complexity, or long sentences with great structural complexity)
- both content and linguistic patterns in Introductions and Conclusions (e.g., 1st paragraph does X, 2nd paragraph does Y, 3rd paragraph does Z) (e.g., Conclusions paragraphs all begin with short first sentences)

Indicators for Analysis, cont.

- language: do Conclusions use weak verbs (“indicate”) or strong ones (“show/demonstrate”)?
- Do articles tend to use “I/we” or not in the purpose statement?
 - This article presents and discusses recent developments in (this) and analyzes their effectiveness in terms of the theory of (that).
 - In this paper we argue and present evidence that recent developments in (this) have a significant effect on (that).

Guidelines from “Childhood”

“The Introduction (no heading) should clearly state the purpose of the article, give only strictly pertinent references, and not review the subject extensively. Material, Methods and Results must be presented in logical sequence in the text, with text and illustrations emphasizing only important observations. The Discussion should emphasize new and important observations of the study and conclusions therefrom. Do not repeat in detail data from results. Include implications of the findings and their limitations, and relate observations to other relevant studies.”

Short Submission Analysis

[Adapted from *Getting Published in International Journals* by Natalie Reid (NOVA, Oslo: 2010), p. 224.]

- Writers: Almost exclusively American (tough luck)
- Titles: Very spunky—if you can find a good pun, they will like it. Quite long, loaded with concepts in the subtitle.
- Abstracts: They foreground the empirical work. Often they supply details on the concrete empirical material and the main structure of the analysis, and they outline the conclusion and contribution. They may do so through positioning the study in relation to the existing field.

Submission Analysis, cont.

- Introduction: Regardless of the substantial topic of investigation, they often talk about “sociology.” They often bring in some “grand old man” in the very beginning—e.g., Goffman or Durkheim.
- General layout: After a shorter or longer introduction and theoretical part, there is always a part termed “methods and data,” where they often give quite fine details about their fieldwork. Then comes an empirical section, where they analyze this material, and here they use most of their space. They end with a rather brief discussion and conclusion.

Other Observations from Various Journal Analyses

- The personal pronouns “I” and “we” were seldom used, but “this ‘study’ or ‘analysis’ does [so-and-so]” is common.
- Both male and female contributors.
- Heavy on theory, but the articles are almost always based on empirical stuff.
- Most contributors are professors, but there are occasional Ph.D. students.
- Editorial board, friend or foe? I know enough about the work of half the editors and associate editors to know that my theoretical orientation is similar to theirs.
- Abstracts often end with future research recommendations—some explicit, others very implicit—or policy recommendations.

Sample Introduction Analysis

Introduction: 6-9 paragraphs (but sometimes as few as 4),
500-1200 words (mostly on longer side)

Often begins with a research question, contention, or empirical phenomenon (first sentence):

—How can A do B?

—The questions XYZ are a central topic in literature ABC.

—Relationship between A & B has gained increased attention in recent literature.

—A contention of theory XYZ is that factors A & B can best explain Result C.

—A is much more frequent than B.

Sample Analysis, cont.

The rest of the paragraphs, except the last, follow the “territory-niche-occupy niche” structure:

—First 1-3 paragraphs usually cover literature strands (territory)

- Old literature has highlighted the importance of A, B, & C.
- New literature has explored D, E, & F.

—Next 1-3 paragraphs show what remain unclear theoretically/ methodologically or econometrically (establish niche)

- Literature 1 + 2 draw critical attention to....
- Relationship between A + B and A + C (or B + C) remains unclear. (theoretical argument)
- Furthermore, methodological problems are not resolved.

Sample Analysis, cont.

- Final 1-3 paragraphs (except last) explain how this paper solves the problem (occupies niche) and includes description of data, definitions, etc.
 - We emphasize A, B, C....
 - Building on these perspectives, I explore A + B + C.
 - I define term XYZ as....
 - I test data ABC with....
 - The current study responds to challenges with theoretical and empirical contributions. We argue that Theoretical Argument 1, Methodological Argument 2, Data 3....

Sample Analysis, cont.

—The last paragraph names contributions of the paper (2 to 4-5 arguments):

- By examining XYZ..., I make several contributions: 1, 2, 3....
- Our findings indicate...Contribution 1, 2, 3....
- This article makes several contributions to the literature:
First.... Second....

This paragraph often ends with very short overall conclusions/lessons learned:

- Overall RESULTS foster research discussion.
- RESULTS help to solve practical problems.

Abstract Analysis

Why? Editor's/reviewers' first impression!

- It contains the essence of the entire paper.
- Both online and in some fields, only few people read the entire paper.
- “A concise abstract should briefly state the purpose of the research and the main results.” [Journal of Health Economics, submission guidelines]

Journal of Biomedical Science

Abstract:

“The Abstract of the manuscript should not exceed 350 words and must be structured into separate sections: **Background**, the context and purpose of the study; **Results**, the main findings; and **Conclusions**, brief summary and potential implications. Please minimize the use of abbreviations and do not cite references....”



Analyzing Abstracts for Both Phases of Journal Analysis

- First, consider sentence information:
What does each sentence tell you in terms of the purpose, theory, method, data, findings, or conclusions of the paper?
- Second, consider sentence purpose:
What is each sentence doing in its particular position in the abstract, what purpose does it serve, and how does it do so?

Sample Abstract Analysis

Almost always 4 sentences (sometimes 3), about 100 words

—First sentence: (Data + question) typically is:

- Using...DATA, we found...RESULTS.
- With...DATA, we examine...QUESTION.
- Based on...DATA, we examine how A and B are related.

—Second & third sentences (Results 1 & 2) typically are:

- We discover...RESULT 1 (most important). We also found...RESULT 2 (corollary or secondary result).
- Findings of this study demonstrate RESULT 1 (negative relationship between X & Y). Variable Z...RESULT 2 (Var. Z moderated this effect).

Sample Analysis, cont.

- We found that...RESULT 1 (Var. X is positively related to Var. Y). Both Var. X and Var. Y moderate Var. Z.

—Fourth sentence (conclusion/consequence/lesson learned/additional result) typically is:

- These findings illustrate the benefits of applying Method A.
- Variable ZZ did not make a difference.
- We develop a theoretical framework and empirical approach for understanding how X and Y are related.
- We present a model based on two data sets that demonstrate how X reduces Y.

Sample Abstract Analysis

“Ethics, Problem Framing, and Training in Qualitative Inquiry” by Jan Nesor and Susan L. Groenke (*Qualitative Inquiry*, 2009):

This article examines the ethical issues bound up in the ways research problems are initially framed: the questions asked, the temporal and spatial frames of the study, the ways participants are defined. It explores the consequences of thinking through ethical issues using recent reconceptualizations of *agency* and suggests extensions of the ways researchers define *participants* for ethical purposes. The article concludes by examining some of the reasons for the relative neglect of such issues in graduate research preparation.

Nespor & Groenke, cont.

Using **A**, **B**, **C** Method:

This [article] [examines] **A** kind of [issues] [bound up in/connected to/intrinsic to] **B** kinds of problems: 1, 2, and 3. [It] uses [new/recent] understandings of **D** to explore the “consequences of” [thinking through/considering] **A** issues through **C**, and suggests [extensions] of the ways in which researchers define **E** people for **A** [purposes/reasons]. [The article] concludes by examining [some] reasons for the [relative/general] neglect of **A** issues in [a specific process or context within the field].

Shorter Version

Using **A**, **B**, **C** Method:

This article examines **A** issues in **B** problems. It uses new understandings of **D** to explore the consequences of considering **A** issues through **C**, and suggests extending the ways in which researchers define **E** people. The article concludes by examining some reasons for the neglect of **A** issues.

[Some scholars prefer this shorter form. I prefer the more detailed form, because it forces me to pay attention to the *writing style* of the abstracts in a particular journal.]

Sample “alphabetical symbol” (i.e., A, B, C) abstract

- The literature on **A** has focused attention on **B** processes....
(tells reader that writer will do something different)
- Even with the influence of **B**, the “literature remains imprecise....”
(sets up reason for creating new niche)
- We use **C** to examine **D**. (identifies niche)
- Our analysis shows.... (gives findings)
- Despite **E**, we find no evidence of **F**. (conclusions about findings)
- We argue **G** and consider its implications.
(makes point, looks towards future research)

Nespor & Groenke, cont.

Using **Purpose Phrases** Method:

- Purpose (This article examines **A** issues in framing three **B** problems: 1, 2, 3.)
- Refining of purpose/methodology (It explores the consequences of thinking through **A** issues using **C** methodology.)
- Conclusions (“The article concludes....”)

Sample “Purpose Phrase” Abstract

- Abstract for presenting a new model (3-4 sentences)
 - Purpose (We present a model of....)
 - Explanation of model (Model exhibits # of features that....)
 - Conclusion (Model sheds light on **A**, as well as on **B**.)

Another “Purpose Phrase” Abstract

- Classic abstract for just about any paper, depending on journal [5 sentences]
 - Background (“Until the early 1990s....”)
 - Territory (“At that time, **X** was happening”)
 - Niche (“As conventional explanations of **X** have failed,” the authors use **Y** approach)
 - Occupying niche (**Y** “clearly explains” what happened in these instances of **X**)
 - Results/conclusions (“This analysis suggests....”)