

Effective Academic Writing

Going from Idea to Published Article

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Outline of the Workshop

Introductions (10 min)

1. Writing habits, schedules, & tips (25 min)

2. Academic writing and style (20 min)

3. Articles, Briefs, Books, & Chapters (15 min)

4. Academic publishing (15 min)

Questions?

Wait a Minute!

Question: “Why are you discussing ‘academic publishing’ at the end, when that seems to be the main goal of most academic writing?”

Answer: Because academic publishing doesn’t exist in a vacuum!

- Without a solid manuscript *to* publish, there *is* no ‘academic publishing’
- A solid manuscript is created from good writing (about your research)
- Good writing forms with good writing style + solid writing habits
- **That** is why most of this workshop focuses on ‘pre-publishing’ issues like organization and writing.

A Disclaimer

The following information is all based on my own experiences, anecdotes, advice (given, received, and ignored), and my research on these topics. Your mileage may vary!

Introductions and Brief Discussion

Answer in the chat box

Who are you?

What do you
hope to learn?

Prior academic
publishing experiences?

Publishing expectations
in your current position?

Part 1: Writing Habits, Schedules, and Tips

- Writing Habits
- Writing Schedules
- Drafting and Editing
- Self Reflection/Goal Building



Writing Habits



- Writing habits can be very useful for many reasons
 - Forces you to 'get words on the page'
 - Provides consistency for yourself, and reliability for coauthors
 - Allows for more control over your day-to-day schedule
 - Easier to plan your projects and deadlines (...maybe)
 - E.g., If you can write 250 words per day, 4 days per week, promising a 5000-word book chapter draft in 4 weeks is not very realistic
 - Make sure to build in buffer time to any deadline estimates!

Writing Habits



- Writing habits are not *just* about writing words on a consistent schedule
- There are many types of writing habits to consider
 - Location/Environment (Office? Couch? Café?)
 - Time(s) of the day
 - Silence vs. Environmental noise (café) vs. Music (Classical? Rock?)
 - Use of outlines and notes
 - Multiple monitors vs. one monitor vs. pen-and-paper vs. tablet
 - One paper/project at a time vs. multiple at once
 - Regular breaks, getting enough sleep, preventing burnout

Writing Schedules



- Some people write better first thing in the morning, some write better at night
- “Write drunk, edit sober” and “Write on alcohol, edit on coffee” are both bad advice
- Structured time techniques/apps
 - Ex: Pomodoro Technique - 25 mins writing, 5 min break, repeat
 - Phone/PC app/browser ‘blocker’ to stop you from checking email/social media/etc.
- Writing groups
 - Consistent group ‘schedule’ to write together
 - Can be in person or virtual
 - A way to stay motivated and accountable
 - Are not for everyone

Drafting and Editing



- Embrace your 'bad writing' in whatever way works for you
 - Some people 'barf on the page' and then edit later
 - A quick, messy draft followed by a slow, careful edit/rewrite
 - Some people write detailed outlines first, and then fill in the gaps
 - Slow, careful outline followed by a quicker draft
 - Some people write a 'final draft' the first time, lightly editing later
 - A slow draft followed by light editing
- Important to get stuff down on the paper somehow to move forward

Finding *Your* Style

- Example: Kelly's style of writing...
- Keep a record of what is working/not working for you
- Build actual 'writing blocks' into your schedule
 - Keep these writing blocks sacred!
 - Treat them like appointments that you cannot miss ("Busy")
- Set aside separate times for writing, reading, and planning

Self Reflection/Goal Building

A grayscale background image of a desk setup. It includes a laptop, a keyboard, a pair of glasses, and a cup of coffee on a saucer.

- What comes easy for your writing/work?
 - *Why* does it feel easy?
- What is challenging about writing?
 - What could you do to make it less challenging?
- Feel free to put your answers in the chat

Part 2: Academic Writing and Style

- Moving from 'student' to 'scholar', or from 'novice' to 'expert'
- Writing flow
 - Within a sentence
 - Sentence to sentence
 - Paragraph to paragraph
 - Section to section
- Editing Exercise!
- Managing references



Moving from 'student' writing...

- Question: What is the goal of *student* writing?
 - Show the instructor that *you* understand the topic/content/argument
- How is this accomplished?
 - Extensive and comprehensive literature reviews ("Look at how much I read!")
 - Detailed explanations of all the concepts ("Look at how much I understand!")
 - Writing for a grade on the paper or exam ("Give me an A+ for this!")

...to 'scholar' writing

- Question: What is the goal of a *scholar's* writing?
 - Inform and/or change the mind of the reader!
- How is this accomplished?
 - Clear statement of the value/contribution ("This is why you should care!")
 - Focused literature reviews ("This is what you need to know to understand my study")
 - Writing to address a problem ("This study solves this problem in these ways.")

Tips – Writing better sentences

- Read it out loud
 - When you instinctively pause → Need a comma
 - Run out of breath/Get lost halfway through → Sentence is too long
 - Stumble over the words → Awkward/Overly complicated wording or phrasing
- You must “Kill your darlings”
 - Don't be afraid to delete (kill) excess words/sentences (your 'darlings')
 - May help if you have a separate 'graveyard' document for the darlings you kill
- Stay concise and focused
 - Every word must do something
 - Be aware of the many easy ways you can use to cut down the excessive wordiness in your own writing
 - There are many ways to cut down your own wordiness.

Tips – Writing better sentences, 2

- Be careful of stringing nouns together
- Sometimes this is useful: sex offender* residence restriction policies
- Sometimes this can be distracting:
 - This report explains our [therapeutic client's] [personal growth] [stimulation] [treatment programming] [efforts].
 - This report explains our efforts to stimulate personal growth in our therapy clients.

Tips – Writing better paragraphs

- Use topic sentences to keep the narrative moving forward
 - Build paragraphs around one topic sentence
- Every sentence should be moving the point forward
 - Take a given sentence and ask, 'why is this here?' and 'what if I deleted it?'
- Keep the ordering of things consistent from one sentence to the next
 - Ex: *People often choose jackets based on appearance, fit, and weight. A jacket that doesn't fit well won't be worn often. A jacket that is too heavy won't be used in the summer. A jacket that is ugly won't be taken out of the closet.*

Tips – Writing better paragraphs, 2

- Go from 'old' to 'new' information

- 'Old' information the reader already knows, which gives a foothold to understand the 'new' information, which in turn becomes 'old' information once the reader understands it.

- Bad Example:

- Reading authors who are great at clear and concise writing is one way to develop this skill.

- Writing in a clear and concise manner is an important skill for academic writers.

- This is a skill that is not innate – it takes practice and effort to master it.

- Good Example:

- Writing in a clear and concise manner is an important skill for academic writers.

- This is a skill that is not innate – it takes practice and effort to master it.

- One method for developing this skill is to read authors who are great at clear and concise writing.

Tips – Writing better sections

- Use hooks to transition between sentences and paragraphs
 - Similarly, However, Alternatively, On one hand/On the other hand, etc.
 - Ex: “There are two main theories that can explain...”
 - “Perhaps the most widely accepted theory is...”
 - “An alternative theory is...”
- Keep a consistent presentation order (again) throughout the paper
 - Ex: “Explanations for X focus on differences by gender, race, and neighborhood...”
 - > Keep that same order in the literature review, methods, and results/tables

Quiz: Which proposal will get funded?

Example 1:

As a consequence of the "cost of sex," the theoretical probability of clonal and sexual co-existence is low; observation of co-existence in vertebrate taxa has been reported. Within the frozen niche-variation (FNV) model, the relevant parameter is difference in overall niche breadth. A wider niche breadth for the sexuals than for the clones is predicted in performance in monocultures; performances in mixtures do not indicate such a relationship. Switching of behaviors or resource use patterns between mixed and pure cultures may be the cause. The proposed study will examine this prediction of the FNV model.

Example 2:

As a consequence of the "cost of sex," the theoretical probability of clonal and sexual co-existence is low. Nonetheless, observation of co-existence in vertebrate taxa has been widely reported. Within the accepted model of frozen niche-variation (FNV), co-existence is explained by difference in overall niche breadth. However, although the FNV model correctly predicts wider niche breadth for the sexuals than for the clones, its predictions are inconsistent with reported performances in mixtures. The proposed study will examine whether the anomaly may be explained by the switching of behaviors or resource-use patterns between mixed and pure cultures.

Editing Exercise!



- When editing, the aims are to:
 - a) Ensure economy and clarity
 - *Usually* involves reducing the number of words
 - Sometimes it's necessary to *add* text to improve the clarity
 - b) Produce text that can be read aloud easily (better 'flow')
 - c) Not change the meaning.
 - This includes not eliminating important content!

When editing, the aims are to:

- a) ensure economy and clarity (usually by reducing the number of words, but sometimes adding words can improve the writing clarity);
- b) produce text that can be read aloud easily; and
- c) not change the meaning. This includes not eliminating any important content!

Edit the below sentences in a way that meets the requirements above.

1. The Self-Assessment System has shifted the emphasis of the Environmental Protection Authority of Taiwan (EPAT) from direct environmental monitoring towards intensive audit and investigation activities. Therefore, with the implementation of the Self-Assessment System, the environmental audit and investigation rate is expected to increase in order to ensure an effective level of deterrence for licensees. [2 sentences, 54 words.]
2. The problems and complexities of the duality of doing postgraduate research that is applied but also attempts to make conceptual breakthroughs, as discussed by Albert (2000) who recognized that industry and academia can have different values, are evident within this project. [1 sentence, 41 words.]
3. A common strategy used by young homebuyers is to borrow the deposit but not inform the financial institution from which they want to borrow the rest of the money. Unfortunately, this strategy can lead to young homebuyers borrowing too much money and losing their properties if interest rates rise. [2 sentences, 49 words]
4. If there was no independence problem, three other types of statistical assumptions would have been pertinent to this stomach content analysis strategy, and which relate to normality, uniformity of variance, and fixed variables (Stanley, 1980). [1 sentence, 35 words]
5. A key challenge when teaching effective writing within this university to postgraduate research students, who need to be able to communicate in two conflicting styles, academic and popular, is evident in the paper by Conrad (2006). She recognized that having only a complex thesis title can inhibit communication with those outside the student's specialized field, because of the problem of jargon. [2 sentences, 61 words]

Potential Answers

1. The implementation of the Self-Monitoring System for licensees has allowed the Environmental Protection Authority of Taiwan (EPAT) to do less environmental monitoring and focus more on intensive audit and investigation activities that deter non-compliance. [1 sentence and 34 words.]
2. This applied postgraduate research reflects the dual challenges of being useful to industry and making the conceptual breakthroughs valued by academia (Albert, 2000). [1 sentence and 23 words]

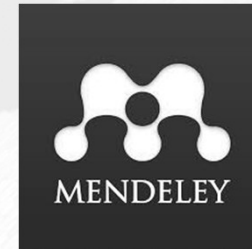
Potential Answers

3. Unfortunately, many young homebuyers can lose their properties if interest rates rise and they had borrowed all of the purchase cost, including secretly obtaining a loan for the deposit. [1 sentence and 29 words.]
4. The independence problem aside, three other types of statistical assumptions are pertinent to this content analysis strategy; normality, uniformity of variance, and fixed variables (Stanley, 1980). [1 sentence and 26 words.]
5. A key challenge in teaching effective writing styles to postgraduate research students at ECU is highlighted by their need for two contrasting thesis titles (Conrad, 2006); one is academic while the other allows broader communication by avoiding jargon. [1 sentence and 38 words]

Tips – Managing references

- Use a reference manager!
 - Keeps a record of what you've read (PDF and notes)
 - Search your own database of articles
 - Easily 'import' citations from Google Scholar and similar
 - Generates reference list as you write
 - Instantly change the format (e.g., APA to MLA) as needed

Tips – Managing references, 2



- Things to consider about reference managers
 - Find one that works and stick with it
 - Endnote, Zotero, Mendeley
 - Make regular backups of your reference database
 - Sometimes can be hard to integrate across systems

Tips – Managing references, 3

- Start saving all articles you read (get the full text PDF)
- Develop a file naming convention and stick with it
 - Author et al – Year – Title
 - 'Socia et al – 2018 – Public Perceptions of Sex Crimes.pdf'
- Sign up for journal table of contents/online first notifications
- Look for browser extensions or website export options*

Part 3: Articles, Briefs, Books, & Chapters

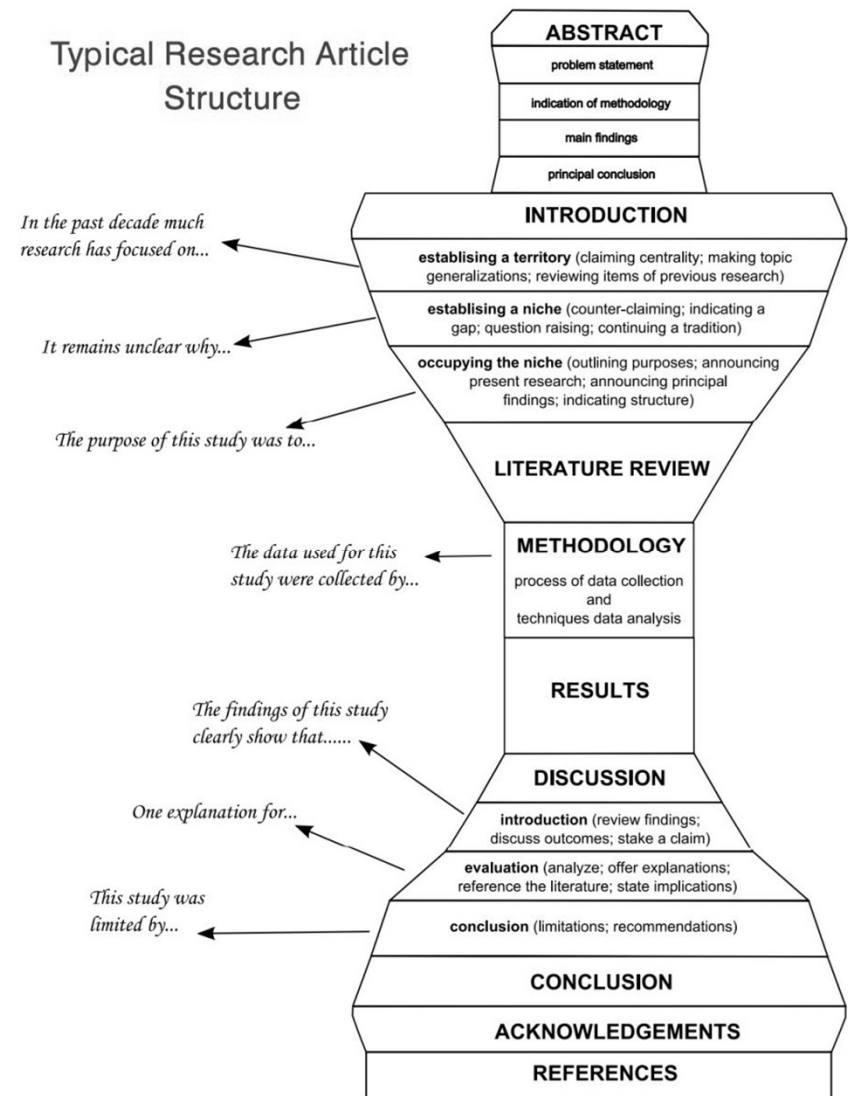
- Outline of an academic article
 - Individual sections of an article
- Briefs
- Books
- Book Chapters
 - Book Chapter vs. Thesis Chapter



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The typical academic article outline

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methods
- Results (including tables and figures)
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendices



Abstract

- Typically ranges from 150-250 words, but is journal dependent
- **Briefly** explains the following:
 - What is the research question(s) or problem(s) being studied
 - Why are these important?
 - What did the study do to answer the research question?
 - What did the study find?
 - What are the overall takeaways from this study? (If there's room)

Introduction

- Usually the first page or two of the article (250-500 words?)
- 'Bootstraps' the reader into the overall topic and problem
 - What is the problem being studied
 - Why should the reader care about it?
 - Assume the reader is intelligent, but not a subject matter expert on this specific issue
- Sometimes ends with a 'The present study...' paragraph
 - Quick preview of what this study did before the literature review section

Literature Review

- This reviews the prior research on this specific topic/problem
 - What do we already know? Any gaps?
 - Only discuss what is directly relevant to the *current* study
- Most paragraphs should be discussing multiple studies
 - Writing study-after-study-after-study is an annotated bibliography!
- Every citation needs a reference; every reference a citation
- End with a quick wrap up, and a 'hook' into the next section

Methods

- Explain how the present study was conducted
 - Data sources, instruments, measures (IV, DV, controls), models/analysis plan, and data corrections (missing data, recoded data, etc.)
- Detailed enough for someone to replicate the study (maybe)
- Can use appendices for things like survey instruments
- Does *not* discuss the results

Results

- Report what you found in the study
- Does not put the findings into a broader context usually
 - Straightforward reporting of the model results
- Can include tables and charts/figures
 - Make sure those can be interpreted when printed/copied in black and white
- Can report various 'sensitivity' checks to show findings are robust
 - E.g., Rerunning models without outliers, recoding the DV, etc.

Discussion

- Places the results in the broader context of what we already know about the topic (as discussed in the literature review).
- Describes how prior knowledge is supported/changed by findings
- Discusses future research that is needed for remaining issues/questions
- Presents the study's limitations (and tries to minimize them!)
- Don't introduce *new* theories/ideas in this section

Conclusion

- Usually less than a page long, after the discussion section.
 - Can be as short as one paragraph. More than a page and it is probably not a 'conclusion' of the study.
- If you only had a couple paragraphs to summarize the main ideas/findings of the present study, what would you say to the reader?
- End on a strong note – what's the most important takeaway(s)?

References

- If you refer to it, cite it. If you cite it, list it in the references. Everything in the references needs to have been cited in the text somewhere.
 - References is not the same as a 'sources consulted' list
- Formatting varies by journal (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago).
- Some types of journals (e.g., law reviews) use footnotes instead of a references page at the end (e.g., 'Blue Book' citations).
- When peer reviewing a 'blind' manuscript, this section can give a hint as to who the author(s) of the current study are. Most cites = probably them.

Appendices

- Whether appendices are appropriate depends on the journal
- Can put extra things here that some people might find interesting, but that don't need to be part of the 'main' writing sections
- Can put survey instruments, advanced methodological explanations, and other detailed things in this section
 - Good to have in when first submitting. Reviews might like these, but easy to cut out
- Some journals have 'online appendices' that don't count for page limits

Academic Briefs

- A way to *briefly* explain the most important parts of an academic study to a more general audience (e.g., the public, policymakers, practitioners)
- If a regular academic article is 30-40 pages, a brief might be 1-3 pages
- Help bridge the gap between publishing findings for other researchers/academics and others who are not subject matter experts but could still use the findings.
- More detail than an abstract (~250 words), but still just as focused
- Can be similar to a press release or short news article
- Will be covered in more detail later in this workshop

Academic Books

- Writing an academic book can be a daunting task... because it is!
- Typical academic book is 60k-90k words, but depends on topic/field
- An academic book is just a series of coherently-linked chapters
- To prepare to write your own book, read *other* well written books
- **Question: When in your career is the right time to write a book?**

Academic Book Chapters

- An academic book chapter is focused on a specific subtopic that is relevant to the overall theme of the book.
 - e.g., *SORN's Collateral Consequences* chapter in a book on Sex Offense Legislation
- Citation expectations are typically looser than an academic journal article
- If a typical academic book is **roughly** 60k-90k words (+/-), then a typical book chapter could be **roughly** 3.5k - 7k words (+/-)
 - Presenting cohesive content is arguably more important than the length!
- The 'value' of a book chapter vs. article depends on field/department

Steps to writing a book chapter

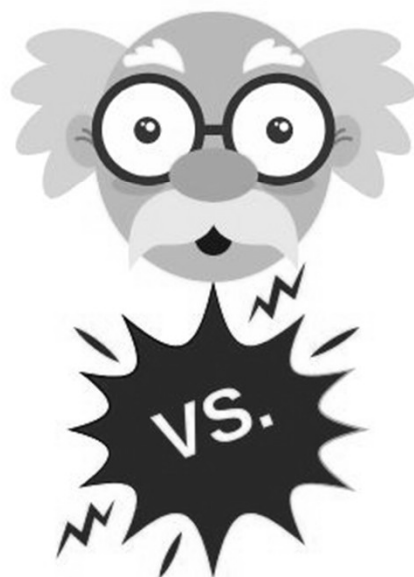
- Review and collate relevant information
- Design the chapter structure
 - Exciting title or heading; Engaging introduction; Main body of informative paragraphs; Summary of the chapter; Smooth transition to the next chapter
- Build an engaging introduction
 - This should be clearly linked to the main book theme
 - Can use anecdotes; create a dialogue/conversation; include quotations
- Elaborate on key points of the chapter with more details
- Summarize the chapter's key takeaway(s)
- End with a call-to-action and a transition to the next chapter

Book Chapters vs. Thesis Chapters

Thesis Chapter



- The reader is generally your thesis examiner.
- A thesis chapter often deals with more than one idea at a time.
- Thesis chapters are not standalone and can depend on other chapters of the thesis to make sense.
- Typically, thesis chapters are 10,000 to 12,000 words long.



Book Chapter



- The reader is anybody who is interested in the topic of your book.
- A book chapter generally deals with only one idea.
- Book chapters are standalone and must establish relevance in the book.
- A book chapter is written between 3500 and 7000 words.



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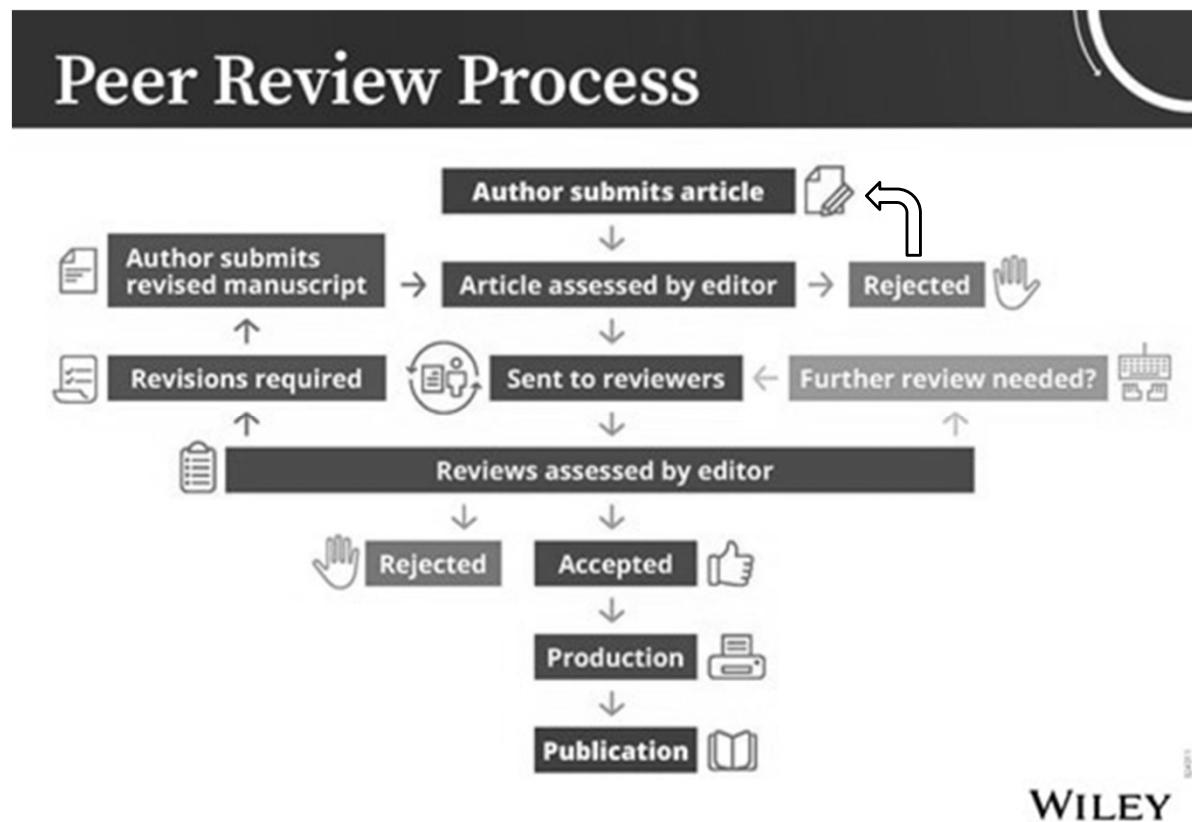
Part 4: Academic Publishing

- The peer review process
- Sources of ideas
- Collaboration tips
- Finding journals
- Submission and resubmission tips
- Juggling multiple projects/timelines



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The peer review process



Sources of ideas

- Prior research (look in the 'future directions' section of existing studies)
- Dissertation research, course papers/projects
- New avenues/extensions from your own existing projects
- Networking with colleagues
- The news/social media
- Grants
 - Requests for proposals
 - Submitted/unfunded applications
- Keep a journal/file of research ideas

Assessing the potential of ideas

- “Is my research idea good for an academic manuscript?”
 - Does it address a ‘gap’ in the existing research?
 - See the ‘limitations’ and ‘future directions’ sections in prior studies
 - What is the hook of the research idea?
 - New research questions
 - New datasets
 - New methods/statistical models
 - Has your field/subfield/‘target journals’ published this research?

Collaboration tips

- Finding co-authors
 - Look to your circles (grad school peers, research community, field)
 - Introduce yourself to scholars in your field
- Building good relationships
 - Practice open communication
 - Be reliable, dedicated, and kind (review friends' drafts!)
 - Discuss author order and expectations early in the process
- Sharing documents
 - Dropbox, Onedrive, Google Docs, email-back-and-forth

Finding Journals

- Who are your readers?
 - Where are your *citations* coming from? (Google Scholar shows this!)
 - What journals are you citing in your work?
- Where do the “leaders” of your field/subfield publish?
- Journal finder websites
 - <https://journalfinder.wiley.com/>
- Look for ‘special issue’ calls for papers
 - These can make for a more friendly, less cutthroat review process

Submission and Resubmission tips

- Submission tips
 - Format carefully, especially for word count/length
- Revision (R&R) tips
 - Pay careful attention to the editor's feedback
 - Plot out comments based on 'ease' and 'importance'
 - Write a response letter that is detailed and NOT combative/insulting
- Rejection tips
 - It happens to everyone. It always hurts. Have a 'cool down' period if needed
 - The "two-envelope" process: Horrible advice for successful publishing
 - Revise from the 'good' feedback

Juggling multiple projects/timelines

- The tenure track typically requires working on multiple projects at a time
- Stagger projects to have things at different stages in the process
 - Idea, proposal, data collection, drafting, under review, revision, 'in press'
- Tracking projects/papers/due dates
 - Whiteboarding/task lists/bullet journaling
 - Calendar appointments/reminders
- Alerts for journal table of contents, grants, etc.
- Know what is a 'salami' and what is a 'slice'

Miscellaneous tips

- Make a Google Scholar profile (easy and useful!)
 - Other sites to consider: ResearchGate, Academia.edu
- Make a professional website (or fix up your university profile page)
- Keep an updated version of your CV handy
 - Two files: CV with and without under review papers
- Keep a folder and/or email 'label' for 'tenure/promotion' items

Questions?

- Specific challenges in academic writing/publishing?
- Next steps for your writing?



Effective Academic Writing

Going from Idea to Published Article

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