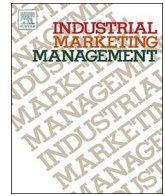




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## How to write really good articles for premier academic journals

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## ABSTRACT

Most of the leading journals in all fields routinely have rejection rates of 80%, 95%, or higher. All journals prefer articles that make significant contributions to the field. This article discusses ways of how authors can improve their publishing success. We discuss the up-front end of an article (title, abstract, keywords). Specifically, three types of abstracts are considered: the indicative (descriptive) abstract, the informative abstract, and the structured abstract. Subsequently, we discuss the article's introduction that serves three purposes: to focus the reader on the research question or purpose; to establish the proper frame of reference for the reader; to demonstrate the gap in knowledge that the research will fill; and to convince the reader that there is justification for undertaking the research. Then we discuss hypotheses and methodology. Regarding the methodology, we consider methodological considerations and analysis considerations. The final part of the article considers the research findings section and the discussion of these findings, as well as limitations to the research and opportunities for future research. Specifically, the discussion links back to the article's introduction. Dos and don'ts are offered for each of the article's sections. Throughout the article we present means of doing research of the manuscript to improve the manuscript and its probability of acceptance.

## 1. Introduction

Since its inaugural issue, *Industrial Marketing Management* has grown substantially in both qualitative and quantitative metrics. With the introduction of the Google Scholar search engine, new citation counts offer an alternative measure of journal impact and thus additional insights to those offered by the Thomson ISI Impact Factor. In 2009 and again in 2010, articles ranking marketing journals according to Google Scholar citations placed *Industrial Marketing Management* 5th out of 69 journals (Soutar & Murphy, 2009; Touzani & Moussa, 2010); its Google Scholar ranking was third among all marketing journals in 2015. Leonidou, Barnes, Spyropoulou, and Katsikeas (2010) show IMM as making the largest contribution of leading mainstream marketing journals to the international marketing discipline.

Three reasons for the continued increase in quality and influence of *Industrial Marketing Management* have been proposed (Touzani & Moussa, 2010):

(1) *Industrial Marketing Management* is read by, and is of interest to, academics in related fields.

- (2) The quality of articles published in *Industrial Marketing Management* has increased.
- (3) Research topics covered by *Industrial Marketing Management* have grown in importance.

In this article, we discuss how to improve one's success rate when submitting manuscripts to major journals. (A later article will discuss the review and revision process that submitted manuscripts go through.) These helpful hints can make the journey to a successful author easier with more acceptances and fewer rejections, albeit there are no guarantees. Clearly, the most critical factor in having one's research results published is the contribution(s) to the field. However, most of the leading journals in all fields routinely have rejection rates of 80%, 95%, or higher. All journals prefer articles that make significant contributions to the field. Seminal articles are highly cited thereby increasing a journal's impact factor. Many manuscripts routinely are sent to journal after journal after being rejected. Many potentially good manuscripts are rejected simply due to poor presentation. It is to combat this problem that we have put together this manuscript highlighting the dos and don'ts for preparing better manuscripts thereby

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significantly increasing the likelihood of manuscript acceptance.

Before beginning any research project, it is therefore wise to do a small bit of research about the proposed topic. Ask a dozen or so people about the topic and the likelihood of citation should a manuscript eventually be published. Also look at various calls for manuscripts from journals; these calls for papers state specifically what types of papers journals are interested in publishing. Likewise, talk with companies to find out what their most important marketing problems and top priorities are. Occasionally, research centers such as the Marketing Science Institute or the Institute for the Study of Business Markets will issue statements on research needs. There are numerous videos available on the Internet discussing methods to find research topics; simply Google “Finding research topics” and articles, publishers’ hints, and YouTube videos will be easily identified. Conducting timely and interesting research topics, will increase the chances of a manuscript being accepted for publication because, with potential for citation being a top factor in manuscript acceptance, editors are increasingly checking manuscripts on their originality and relevance. Before beginning any research project, ask yourself the following questions: 1. Is the proposed research new and interesting? 2. Is it challenging? 3. Is the work directly related to a current hot topic? And 4. Will it provide solutions to any difficult problems? Researchers clearly must delineate the type of contribution being claimed in the article.

Following the general format of typical academic journal articles, we structure the remainder of this article in the following six sections. First, we consider an article’s title, abstract, and keywords. Second, we focus on the introduction and literature review of an article. Following that, while not all manuscripts deal with hypothesis testing such as exploratory research or descriptive case studies, manuscripts that do include hypothesis testing are frequently rejected due to the poor quality of the hypotheses themselves. We therefore discuss an article’s hypotheses. The fourth section deals with the research methodology behind an article and the subsequent analysis. Finally, we discuss an article’s findings and conclusions in the fifth and sixth sections.

## 2. An article’s title

A published manuscript usually begins with a general introduction and proceeds through literature review, then hypotheses, research propositions, or research objective, then research methodology and analysis, then findings, and, finally, discussion and conclusions. However, when writing the actual manuscript, we usually start with the body of the manuscript, that is, conceptual framework and data (quantitative or qualitative) that serve as the foundation of the manuscript. Once this is complete, we can move forward to the introduction and backward to the conclusions. In fact, the last thing we should settle on is the title. In doing this, the research topic should not be confused with the title of the manuscript. The purpose of the title is to get the reader excited about the manuscript, and to invite the reader into the manuscript. The title provides an opportunity for the author to research their manuscript (as opposed to research for their manuscript, which they already have completed at this time).

We suggest that authors send their proposed title (nothing more) to six people who have not been involved with the research and ask them the following two questions:

- 1) If you saw this title, what would you expect in the manuscript?
- 2) Does this title make you excited to read the manuscript?

The first question is important because if authors get multiple responses then their title is poor because it is too ambiguous; if authors get six similar responses but these responses are not what the authors intended, then the title is poor because it is misleading. The answers to the second question will tell the authors if the published manuscript will stand out in the increasingly congested world of academic research. Once authors have received the responses from the six people, they can

call the people to discuss why they responded so. The title of a manuscript creates the first impression with the reader and sets expectations of what will be in the manuscript. One should always write for the reader and remember that the very first reader is the reviewer. Unless one makes a good impression with this first reader, there is no second reader.

We suggest that a good title should contain the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the manuscript and captures the reader’s attention. As a general rule, effective titles identify the *main issue* of the manuscript; distinguish the subject of the manuscript; are accurate, unambiguous, specific, avoid unnecessary details, and complete; and do not contain infrequently used abbreviations. A good title attracts readers.

## 3. An article’s abstract

The abstract serves as an advertisement for the article. Although on many journal websites only subscribers to the journal (either individually or through their university or company) can access the entire article without charge, anyone can access the article’s abstract. Therefore, the abstract must create sufficient interest in the article to justify its purchase, for example, the research question, the framework of the research, the research methodology, and/or the findings. Prices for individual article downloads can range from \$25 to \$75 dollars depending on the journal and its policies. It is therefore a good idea to do some research on the abstract before submitting a manuscript to a journal because, just as the abstract can interest a reader to purchase the article, the abstract can influence a reviewer to develop a favorable bias toward the manuscript.

There are three main types of abstracts. The indicative (descriptive) abstract outlines the topics covered in a manuscript so that the reader can decide whether or not to read the entire manuscript. The informative abstract summarizes the manuscript based on the so-called IMRaD structure (i.e., introduction, methods, results, and discussion) but without these words explicitly presented in the abstract. Finally, the structured abstract follows headings required by the journal. For example, Emerald Publishing requires an abstract to be divided up into the following headings: purpose, design/methodology/approach, findings, research limitations/implications (if applicable), practical implications (if applicable), social implications (if applicable), and originality/value. One should check carefully which type of abstract fits the journal where one wants to submit.

We suggest that you again identify six people who are not involved with the research (and are not at your own institution) and send them just the abstract asking them the following questions:

- 1) Is the abstract written clearly, and is it jargon free?
- 2) Does the research described in this abstract interest you?
- 3) Does the research make a significant contribution to the field of study?
- 4) Would you pay \$50 or €50 to download the article described in this abstract?

To create favorable answers to these questions, the abstract must emphasize the research’s findings and its contributions to conceptual perspectives, methodological considerations, and/or managerial practices, among others. The abstract is the only place where authors can summarize their research, but they are typically only allocated 150–200 words to accomplish this. So what should be contained in this short space? We believe that, first and foremost, authors should state the research question or the focus of the research: what did they set out to accomplish? and why the research is relevant, interesting, and/or important. Then the abstract should give a one- or two-sentence summary of the research methodology (case study, survey, and/or experiment) and the research setting (industry). The rest of the abstract should focus on the research findings. After all, this is why the authors did the

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