

# Becoming a Published Author

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*The purpose of this paper is to help authors succeed in preparing and submitting their manuscripts for publication. First, the characteristics that distinguish qualitative and quantitative research are reviewed. Then, suggestions for developing research skills are presented. This is followed by specific comments about manuscript preparation and submission.*

**Keywords:** *qualitative study; quantitative study; institutional review board*

The purpose of this short article is to help authors get their research published. First, I would like to call attention to two excellent articles in the September 2011 issue of the *Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal* (FCSRJ). First, Robert Nielsen (2011) describes *cues for quality* in quantitative research. Second, Nancy Hodges (2011) explains five *frequently articulated qualms* (FAQs) about qualitative research.

Nielsen (2011) identifies the *cues for quality* in quantitative research as scientific contribution, structural clarity, and citizenship. Nielsen (2011, p. 86) states, "Indeed, whether a manuscript makes a *new or significant contribution* to a particular literature is the most important criterion to consider when assessing the quality of a manuscript." *Structural clarity* refers to the structure of the manuscript (e.g., abstract, introduction, methodology, results, and discussion) and the clarity of the written and tabular content. *Citizenship* refers to replication and ethical obligation. Replication means that the author reports the research process in full so that others may repeat the study and test alternative or competing hypotheses. Ethical obligation involves securing institutional permission for the study, the treatment of participants, and the responsibility to report results accurately and fully.

The five *qualms relating to qualitative research* as described by Hodges (2011) include the aim, the sample size, reliability and validity, generalizing from the findings, and assessing quality. The aim of qualitative research should be to *understand* rather than to *generalize or predict*. Samples will be small relative to quantitative research because size of the sample is about saturation instead of representation. Reliability is often confirmed by participant confirmation (e.g.,

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Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, Vol. 41, No. 4, June 2013 438-441

DOI: 10.1111/fcsr.12029

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member checking) of the interpretation of data from interviews or focus groups. Validity is illustrated when the researcher shows that the data collection was guided by the research objectives and also that the objectives were reflected in the interpretation of the data. Findings from qualitative research can be used to *expand existing theory or help in the creation of new theory*. Reviewers of qualitative research can assess quality by examining the selection of participants and the process of collecting data, and by reflecting on the interpretation of the findings.

Now I will offer some suggestions that may be more applicable to new researchers. You need to read the research in your field on a regular basis so that you can cite the results of recent studies and to be aware of emerging topics. Some researchers belong to study groups or they form study groups to help stay abreast of current research. Another method would be to attend seminars in your department or college. If regular seminars do not exist, ask your department head if you can start a seminar series.

I recommend volunteering to review for conferences and one or more journals. You will be able to observe how other researchers present their findings. When you write a review, be sure that you provide thorough and unbiased advice to the author. I believe that graduate students should be asked to participate as reviewers for conferences and journals. Also, I believe that faculty should involve students in volunteering to review manuscripts as soon as they have taken some statistics and methodology courses.

Referring to the September 2011 issue of FCSRJ again, I want to point out that Viramontez Anguiano offered suggestions for reviewing. He said that reviewers should start by mentioning the strengths of the manuscript and then the reviewer should discuss his or her recommendation (revise, accept, or reject). Then, the reviewer should provide detailed suggestions including page numbers. He said that he thinks it is an honor to be asked to review. As a courtesy to the editor of a journal, I believe that you should reply to an invitation to review within a week. If you do not have the appropriate skills or cannot make the deadline, it is acceptable to decline. However, in most instances, I think you should make the effort to review because it is a learning experience.

When you are ready to submit a manuscript, you should review articles in several journals to find the best fit in terms of your research question. It is all right to email an editor and ask if your topic would be appropriate for their journal. You need to provide enough information (e.g., an abstract) to help the editor make a recommendation.

Next, you should review the manuscript submission guidelines for the journal you have selected (DeVaney, 2013). Then you should prepare your manuscript following the guidelines. This means following the journal's requirements for submitting the Institutional Review Board permission, preparing a title page, removing identifying information from the manuscript, and preparing tables as directed by the guidelines.

You will need to submit an abstract of your study. Before you write the abstract, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition* (2010). The APA guide has specific instructions for writing abstracts for empirical studies, literature review or meta-analysis, theory-oriented paper, methodological paper, and a case study. If you are submitting a revised version of your manuscript, be sure that you have made revisions to the abstract if you have made changes to the manuscript.

The title of your manuscript should be informative, but not wordy. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010, p. 23) suggests that titles of articles should be no longer than 12 words. Also, the titles of tables should be brief, but clear and explanatory. The APA manual says that footnotes should not be used to clarify an element of the title of a table.

You should state the purpose of your research near the beginning of your manuscript. You need to justify why your topic is important and this should take place in the first couple of pages. The review of literature should include the seminal studies in your field and the current research on the topic. You need to explain the theoretical or conceptual background for the study and link it to your research question. Be careful about stating that you are the first person to examine the topic. It is possible that someone has already investigated the topic and your literature search did not locate their study.

If your research is quantitative, I assume that you will conclude the review of literature with a set of hypotheses. If you have conducted qualitative research, I assume that you will state one or more research questions. The hypotheses or research questions will focus the reader's attention as he or she reads the methodology and the results sections.

The methodology should explain in detail the instruments, the sample, the data collection, and the method of statistical analysis. Each of these items should be appropriately cited. Many journals prefer that you mention in the Methodology section that institutional permission for the study was obtained. If you need to acknowledge a grant, that information can be added after the manuscript has been accepted for publication.

The results should be explained in detail. The information in tables should stand alone. A reader should be able to learn from the tables what the study was intended to accomplish and the results of the analysis. Every table that is included must be described.

The manuscript should conclude with a brief summary of results and implications from the results. There is a temptation to overstate the implications arising from the results. Be careful about this. Remember to explain how your results were related to the theory that guided your research. Be straightforward about the limitations of your research. Explain how you think the limitations could be managed in future research.

Headings lead the reader through the manuscript. Using the manuscript submission guidelines and a recent issue of the journal, prepare your manuscript as if it was being published in the journal. This will show the editor and the reviewers that you are familiar with the journal and its format. The APA guide provides detailed instructions for headings, but journals often vary slightly from the guide. Refer to the journal if in doubt. See Yang and DeVaney (2012) for an example of headings throughout the manuscript and the titles of tables.

After you have finished writing, set the manuscript aside for a few days. Then read the manuscript again and make changes, if needed. Ask two or three colleagues to read your manuscript before you submit to a journal. Thank them for their honest assessment and make changes if they have been suggested.

If you are conducting research with colleagues, you should determine at the beginning of a study how authorship will be recognized. I think it is especially important to include graduate students as co-authors when they have contributed to the research. It shows that you value their contribution and it will help them in their job search.

Observe the length requirement suggested by the journal. Finally, if you receive an invitation from the editor to revise and resubmit, respond in detail to each suggestion by the reviewers and thank them for their guidance. If your manuscript is rejected, read the comments carefully and think about how you can incorporate the suggestions in your next study. If your manuscript is accepted, you may smile for the rest of the week. Then it is time to begin writing your next manuscript.

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