



# Writing Academic Papers: Advice from Journal Editors

This set of guidelines and hints was developed by the members of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism who are chief editors of leading journals in our field.

The booklet offers a series of suggestions about what authors need to consider and common mistakes to avoid when preparing a manuscript.

Keep this set of suggestions handy and refer to it when drafting papers.

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## Journal Selection

### Do:

- Follow author guidelines and conform to the submission format of the journal
- Ensure the paper matches the scope and objectives of the journal
- Ensure the method is acceptable to the journal

### Avoid:

- Submitting the same paper to different journals simultaneously
- Resubmitting papers rejected by one journal to other journals without first revising them

## Quality of Presentation

### Do:

- Craft the paper to perfection to ensure a single, coherent story is told well
- Make sure the manuscript is internally consistent - the argument is well developed, no gaps in logic, etc.
- Proof read, re-read and rewrite many times
- Have the manuscript proofread by a native speaker to ensure there are no typographical and grammatical errors

### Avoid:

- Sloppy spelling and grammar, poor sentence construction, mix of US and British English spelling
- Cutting and pasting computer generated tables (such as SPSS tables), without editing them in a suitable format
- Plagiarism
- Giving the impression that you do not respect the journal; desk rejection is almost always guaranteed if:
  - the paper reads like a draft
  - the abstract contains many sloppy errors
  - citations and references are poorly written, incomplete, have many errors or are clearly cut and pasted without close editing

## Topic Selection

### Do:

- Focus on the originality of the topic
- Choose topics that have a strong impact that others will find interesting
- Ensure the 'gap' being filled is real and not just a function of a selective literature review
- Choose topics that can make a real contribution to theory, methodology and/or knowledge
- Ask and answer a specific research question
- Ensure the 'so what' question is clear

### Avoid:

- Simple case studies that are not designed to answer clearly defined conceptual, theoretical problems or questions
- Topics that have already been covered extensively; they may be publishable in lower tier journals but will rarely be accepted in top tier journals
- Studies that are too focused on the research context or a specific location
- Consulting projects unless they can be framed well conceptually

## Abstract

### Do:

- State a research question
- Indicate the research method, state numbers and which population is represented
- State key findings
- State why the research finding is important
- Keep to 150 words or less

### Avoid:

- Writing the abstract as an after thought
- Repeating the first paragraph of the paper
- Misrepresenting the actual manuscript

## Context and Literature Review

### Do:

- Demonstrate theoretical sophistication and ensure the paper is conceptually strong by:
  - framing the study well in existing literature, theory or concepts
  - making sure the theory being used matches the actual study being undertaken
  - relating the context to the theme of the journal (i.e. if the journal has a social science focus, ensure the context is based on social sciences)
- Ensure the literature review is current and includes all core readings
- Build a story from the literature by integrating sources in a logical way that informs the reader of what is known and not known about the research question
- Read widely

### Avoid:

- Deficient literature reviews that have few references, use old or outdated references
- Selective use of references that omit key references or studies that either replicate your study or come to different conclusions
- Sequential writing without synthesis i.e. "Author 1 states...", "Author 2 found..."
- 'Kitchen Sink' writing that includes many irrelevant sources
- Reference stacking – including large numbers of references to make a single point

## Method

### Do:

- Explain the method fully, limitations and all - no method is perfect
- Make sure you understand the method used and apply it correctly
- Ensure method and sample are appropriate to answer the research question
- Ensure you understand the analytical techniques being used and use them properly

### Avoid:

- Trying to hide weaknesses in the method - it is impossible to hide a weak method
- Providing insufficient detail of the method so that the referee cannot judge its validity

## Discussion / Conclusions

### Do:

- Summarize briefly the goal of the study and the key findings
- Ensure the 'so what' question is answered – explain the broader implications or significance of the study

### Avoid:

- Repeating the Findings section
- Conclusions that only talk about the case and do not discuss the broader theoretical contributions of the results
- Drawing implications that cannot be supported by the data
- Mission creep – starting the paper by asking one question and finishing it by answering another question
- Making outrageous or unsupported statements about the significance of the findings

## Other Components of the Paper

### Do:

- Have a good Title – be concise, capture the essence of the paper and give the impression that the paper is unique or important
- Ensure references are complete and written correctly
- Limit the number of Tables and Figures
- Include a well written cover letter that explains what is genuinely new, unique, significant or important about the paper
- Make sure that the contributions and innovations of the research are both real and stated clearly

## Responding to Referees' Comments

### Do:

- Remember, referees are doing you a favor by reviewing your paper, respect them.
- Remember, referees are selected because they have some expertise in the topic area and therefore are familiar with the literature
- Appreciate that almost no paper is ever accepted as is. In some cases, 'Major Revision' is a good outcome

### Avoid:

- Trying to please reviewers by agreeing with every comment if you genuinely disagree with them or if they are wrong; instead, write a considered response indicating why you do not agree
- Antagonizing referees by failing to consider their input