

Writing Empirical Research Papers

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Abstract:

Writing is a common activity in academia for students and professionals alike. Below are a number of the considerations that many journal reviewers and professors have in mind when reviewing empirical manuscripts. This checklist is by no means comprehensive and is directed at helping to shape student writing activities so as to generate quality empirical research papers.

Details:

Resource Types	Class Activity
Authors	DaShanne Stokes University of Pittsburgh
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Subject Area	Teaching and Learning in Sociology
Class Level	Any
Class Size	Any
Language	English

Usage Notes:

This document works as a stand-alone writing activity accompaniment, but can also be easily used as a checklist for students to use in their writing activities or as a checklist faculty members can use to critique student work.

Learning Goals and Assessments:

Goal	Students learn how to write quality empirical research papers.
Assessment	Instructors review student manuscripts and evaluate them using the points listed.
Goal	
Assessment	
Goal	
Assessment	

Resource Files:

StokesAcademicWriting.docx

Writing Empirical Research Papers

by DaShanne Stokes

Writing is a common activity in academia for students and professionals alike. Below are a number of the considerations that many journal reviewers and professors have in mind when reviewing empirical manuscripts. This checklist is by no means comprehensive and is directed at helping to shape student writing activities so as to generate quality empirical research papers.

ABSTRACT

- ___ Do you provide a clear and concise abstract that captures the reader's attention?
- ___ Does your abstract briefly describe the methods and sample used in your study?
- ___ Does your abstract briefly indicate the most significant of your study's findings and/or implications?

INTRODUCTION

- ___ What is your central research question(s)? How is this question *original* and worth pursuing?
- ___ Does your work seek to make a specific and concrete contribution to the general literature, or a contribution to a tighter and more focused portion of the literature? In other words, what *specifically* does your work contribute, and why should other scholars be interested in your work? If you study a particular case, do you demonstrate how it is important theoretically and relates to others? Do you illustrate the larger important and applications of your work, how your work connects to and advances the field more generally? Major journals may take your paper if it focuses on a single case, but only if your contribution is generalizable well beyond that particular case. Major journals typically want empirical papers with large theoretical payouts.
- ___ Do you make a clear argument?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- ___ Does your manuscript present a solid review of the relevant literature? Your review should be focused and logically organized so as to lead into the major questions your work addresses. Your literature review should be *more than just a summary*; it should serve to set-up the importance of your work. It should also give the reader a sense of where the review is going in terms of answering your research questions and should point to a gap in the literature that your work will substantively help to fill in.
- ___ Does your paper lay out the issues or problems addressed dispassionately, allowing the readers to come to their own conclusions?
- ___ Does your work sufficiently detail different concepts or theories that you use in your work? Are these concepts and theories defined and integrated throughout the body of your work? Are you clear and concrete about the similarities and the differences between your terms, concepts, and theories?

- ___ If you critique other works, do you also demonstrate how this critique fits into some central theoretical contribution that you are making? Critiques should do more than criticize others; they should be used to construct new knowledge and new methods. Also, does your critique clearly fit into the research questions you address?
- ___ Does your work draw upon primary sources? Reliance upon secondary sources subjects your interpretations and contributions to the potential misreading and misinterpretation of others.

METHODS

- ___ Are your methods clear and appropriate to address your research question(s)?
- ___ What are your data sources and how and why were they selected? Are they comprehensive, and if not, why not (and what are the implications for your larger project)?
- ___ If you choose to focus on one or more particular variables, do you explain why? Show what is to be gained from doing so, but also be sure to connect your variables with others that you may not be focusing on and show how they inter-relate.
- ___ In formulating hypotheses, do you focus on and develop those that are most important and innovative? Rather than providing a long list of hypotheses, it might be best not only to focus on the most useful among them, but to also integrate them into a coherent framework, as in an overarching theory or model.
- ___ If you make theories, hypotheses, or predictions, are they concrete and specific about the conditions in which they will or will not be produced or operate a particular way (etc.)? Are your theories empirically testable?
- ___ Does the data you have allow you to make the claims, arguments, or theories you present? Be careful not to over-extend the scope or generalizability of your data or evidence. Typically, the larger your claims, the more data and evidence you will need to support it (e.g., in terms of quantity, quality, and types or methods you use, etc.).
- ___ Are your variables clearly operationalized?

RESULTS

- ___ Do you present your results in a manner that is clear and easy to understand?
- ___ If you use tables or graphs, are they clearly organized and logically presented so as to support your main argument?
- ___ Do you discuss your main findings and their importance relative to your research question(s) and/or hypotheses?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- ___ Does your work adequately address any contradictory evidence? Does your work explore alternative explanations?
- ___ Do you discuss the larger implications of your findings?
- ___ Do you suggest substantive research questions to guide future research in light of your findings?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- ___ Is there a strong alignment and integration from the beginning to end of your article? This includes the scope of your paper, your research question(s), your literature review, your variables, your theories and concepts used, your overall argument, alternative explanations, contradictory evidence drawn upon, your conclusions, and suggestions for future research.
- ___ Do you avoid false dichotomies and dualistic logic when appropriate?
- ___ Do you avoid technical language and jargon?
- ___ Is your manuscript properly formatted?

References and Further Reading

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