

Nuts & Bolts of Writing for Publication

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Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research

The following information is intended to assist in writing and organizing a manuscript for publication. Where appropriate, questions are raised that are often considered by reviewers when reviewing manuscripts and editorial comments are included in italics addressing common pitfalls encountered in manuscripts submitted for publication. New guidelines related to qualitative research are highlighted.

MANUSCRIPT CATEGORIES

The *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* is the official peer-reviewed publication of Dietitians of Canada. The *Journal* considers manuscripts for publication that focus on applied food and nutrition research and other contributions to *best practices* in dietetics. Manuscripts may be in English or French. The *Journal* accepts manuscripts in the following four peer-reviewed categories: Original Research, Review, Perspectives in Practice, Reports/Case Studies.

Upon submission of a manuscript to the *Journal*, the manuscripts are sent to peer reviewers who are experts in their fields. The editorial procedure maintains the anonymity of the reviewer. The reviewers evaluate each manuscript on a number of factors:

Role of the Reviewer

The primary task of the reviewer is to determine the acceptability of the paper, considering its soundness, intrinsic merit, interest, value, clarity and readability. To the extent possible, the reviewer is providing feedback to authors for the purpose of improving the quality of research and publications.

Preparation of a Manuscript

The following headings help to organize and focus a research article and a similar structure should be used. The points listed under each heading should be included if applicable to the scope of the article. Consider each point individually and if it will strengthen the article, include related information. As well, the points are often addressed in the order presented below. However, every paper is unique; the list is not exhaustive and/or some points may be unnecessary. Generally a flexible approach works best.

Note: The principles relating to clarity, precision of language and logic apply to all articles. The organization will depend on whether the manuscript has been prepared as an Original Research, Report, Review, Perspectives in Practice or Case Study article. For the latter three categories, specific sections on Methods, Results and Discussion may not apply and the writer should focus on logical development of the text.

- **Topic**

Question: Is the paper suitable for DC readership? Does the topic contribute to the body of professional knowledge? Has the material been published previously in the same or similar form? Do all parts warrant publication? Has the significance of the work been made clear?

- **Title**

Clear and informative.

Question: Does the title describe the topic?

- **Abstract**

Question: Is the abstract intelligible by itself? Does the abstract state: 1) the purpose of the study, 2) the basic procedures, 3) the main findings, 4) the principal conclusions and application? Is it 200 words or less?

- **Introduction**

Definition of the problem

Prevalence of the problem

Review of the literature (brief).

Question: Is the literature review confined to development of the conceptual framework for the article?

Purpose and rationale of the current project.

Question: Is the purpose clearly stated? Is the rationale clearly and concisely summarized? Are the statements of fact referenced? Are generalities avoided?

Answer: Common pitfalls when writing an introduction are to neglect to include the purpose of the study and its rationale. For example if you are describing previous work in the area of your research, be sure to provide justification for why you are doing this project. Think clearly about the purpose or objectives of the study as these provide a framework upon which the entire manuscript relies.

- **Methods –**

Objectives/Hypotheses.

Question: Is the study design clear and appropriate for the objectives?

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria (e.g. no mental illness, blood values)

Sample description (metropolitan, hospital clinic, random, exhaustive, convenience, # of respondents, # not meeting inclusion criteria)

Ethics approval

Description of instruments (questionnaire, standardized instruments, anthropometric measurements)

Data collection procedure (telephone, dietitian, location, time frame)

Data processing and analysis (food record analysis, statistical tests used)

Question: Are the methods and procedures (including test instruments, parameters measured, selection of subjects or target audience, analytical techniques, statistical methods) adequately described or referenced? Are the test instruments examined for validity and reliability?

For qualitative research:

New!

Provide contextual information on the participants. Describe and give the rationale for the sampling strategy and sample size. Describe data collection procedures and sample questions if using an interview guide. Describe the appropriateness of the data collection procedures. Describe the process of analysis in detail, emergence and evolution of themes, use of qualitative analysis software. Describe the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Describe the author's perspective, theoretical orientations, values, interests, assumptions and how these may have been changed during the research process.

Answer: Often this is the section that is much too brief and lacks the information necessary to determine the soundness of the study. It is better to include too much rather than too little detail here – don't make assumptions about what methods were utilized, write it all down. Include any and all information available regarding validity of the test instruments.

- **Results**

Demographics of final sample (age/gender etc., # of dropouts)

Data should generally be presented as mean \pm SEM or SD and/or range

Figures and tables should be used to enhance presentation of the data (avoid excessive numbers of these)

Question: Are the results presented in a logical sequence? Are the tables and figures cited at appropriate points in the text? Does the text avoid repetition of data presented in the tables and figures? Is the statistical analysis appropriate and complete?

New!

For qualitative research:

Use examples from the material gathered to illustrate the meaning. Present the findings in a way that is coherent and integrated while preserving the nuances of the data. Examples should allow readers to form alternative meanings and understanding. Describe negative cases.

Answer: The findings should be clear, objective and detailed. A common failing is to interpret the results as they are presented. Report only the results here and leave the interpretation for the discussion.

- **Discussion**

Discuss findings

Relationship to other study findings

Applicability of study findings to larger population

Quality of data collected

Study limitations

Question: Does the discussion interpret rather than repeat the results section? Are the implications discussed and properly qualified? Are the limitations discussed? Are the findings related to other studies? Are the conclusions logical?

New!

For qualitative research:

Specify considerations for extending the findings to other contexts and informants. May include questions and/or hypotheses generated by the study or emerging theories.

Answer: The discussion ties the whole project together. Consistency is important here. If you have a clear purpose and/or objectives stated at the outset, your measurements (methods) should be appropriate to achieve this purpose. Complete the circle by relating/interpreting your findings to the purpose stated at the outset. Nothing is so confusing as reporting too much extraneous information that does not relate to your study objectives and then trying to interpret it in your Discussion. The reader is left with too many questions and no clear idea of what you set out to discover. Don't be afraid to address the limitations of your study here.

- **Conclusions**

Summarize major findings

Direction for future investigation

Question: Are the conclusions justified by the findings of the study?

Answer: This section may be combined with the Discussion. Be careful not to extrapolate too much beyond what was reported in the results. The conclusions should be relevant to the purpose of the study.

- **Relevance to Practice**

Clinical relevance / implications

Question: Are the applications to best practice in dietetics logical, well considered and pertinent, yet farsighted?

Answer: Avoid repetition of information in the conclusion. Look beyond your results to how this study affects dietetic practice.

- **References**

Should be sufficient to reflect the knowledge level of the topic in the literature.

Question: Are the references cited current and appropriate in scope? Are they all necessary? Are appropriate references omitted? Does the reference format follow the Guide for Authors?

- **Tables and Figures**

Question: Are all of the tables necessary/non-repetitious of information provided in the text? Could some be incorporated in the text? Are they understandable without referring to the text? Could the data be presented more concisely? Are the table titles and figure legends clear and succinct? Are column headings and units clear and appropriate? Are the formats of similar tables consistent? Would a different format of presentation be clearer? Do the numbers add up?

Answer: Check previous issues of the Journal for format of tables and figures, use of titles, legends and superscripts.

- **Overall**

Question: Considering each of the above sections, is each presented concisely? Is the information relevant and non-repetitious?

RESOURCE FOR WRITING MANUSCRIPTS

Day RA. How to write and publish a scientific paper. 4th edition. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1994.