



## Perspectives: A Cheat Sheet for Submitting Authors: Tips for Writing a Great Article

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**Academic writing is not easy, but it is perfected** with practice, time, and of course, reading research to see how it is done. Yet, researchers sometimes flounder because they lack writing experience. They may have good analytical skills, but writing to communicate research is a key skill, which differs from writing a novel for instance. Even if the research conducted is important, without the ability to communicate it properly through writing, the paper not only loses its value, but the significance of the findings fails to be shared at a great loss to the scientific community as well as the general populace it purports to represent. It is not by obtaining a PhD that academics become good writers. Thus, what follows are tips for university students, young graduates, and budding researchers who want to improve their writing, communicate more effectively, and embark on a stellar academic research career.

### Tip 1: Limit Wordiness

“Indeed, much is known about the individual benefits of exercise (Wood et al., 2016; Barrett-Cheetham et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2010), but it must be noted that a disproportionate amount of research has focused on adults, with studies focusing on children’s exercise lagging behind the existing, robust, adult-focused literature, especially in the social sciences (Bausert et al., 2018; Hussong et al., 2019; Liauw et al., 2018).”

Better: “While much is known about the individual benefits of exercise (Wood et al., 2016; Barrett-Cheetham et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2010), most research has focused on adults (Bausert et al., 2018; Hussong et al., 2019; Liauw et al., 2018).”

Why? Many writers fall victim to wordiness. When you over-explain the obvious, it detracts from the very point being made and disregards your reader's existing level of understanding. For example, it is logical to conclude that if much research has focused on adults, there has been less on children. Thus, it is not necessary to mention. This is critical if you are trying to cut down on your word count and need to focus on more significant parts in your paper.



عندما تفرط في شرح ما هو واضح فإن ذلك يخسر من النقطة التي يتم إبدائها ويتجاهل مستوى فهم القارئ الحالي. فمثلا من المنطقي أن نستنتج أن إذا ركزت الكثير من الأبحاث على البالغين فهناك نقص في البحث الذي يمثل الأطفال. هذا يعني أن هناك تركيزاً أقل على الأطفال ، فلا داعي لذكر ذلك. يعد هذا أمراً بالغ الأهمية إذا كنت تحاول تقليل عدد كلماتك وتحتاج إلى التركيز على أجزاء أكثر أهمية في ورقتك.

### Tip 2: Avoid Steering

“If mindfulness can improve academic engagement, then surely it will also have a positive effect on participants' academic attainment; the logical prediction to make would be that the more a pupil engages in their learning, the more they will learn, therefore increasing achievement in their academic assessments.”

Better: “If mindfulness can improve academic engagement, might it also have a positive effect on the academic attainment of this study’s participants?”

Why? In this example, the writer wants to explore the idea that mindfulness may have a positive impact on academic attainment, but is forcing us towards a foregone and assumed conclusion that it is “surely” already the case. In science, hypotheses must be tested and are never assumed, even if they seem obvious. The research literature helps guide the hypothesis, while the findings support the conclusion, not the assumptions made by the writer.

غالباً ما يذكر الكاتب صراحةً الاتصالات المنطقية غير الضرورية. في هذا المثال يريد الكاتب التركيز على فكرة أن الامتنان قد يكون له تأثير إيجابي على التحصيل الأكاديمي ولكن استخدام الأسئلة الخطابية قد يكون صعباً. في مثل هذه الأسئلة يمكن أن تكون مفيدة في إشرارك القراء في التفكير في الموضوعات دون توجيه عملية تفكيرهم بشكل صريح. فيجب أن توضح الأدبيات البحثية الأمور للقراء وليس للكاتب.

### Tip 3: Remove Yourself

“Individuals in my surroundings, whether in reality or on social media, I see that they suffer from anxiety during quarantine and it is a very difficult period for them, including myself.”

Better: Many people report suffering from anxiety during periods of quarantine.

Why? You are presenting research, not an autobiography. Academic writing should be objective, avoiding all personal pronouns (I, my, us, etc.). Personal pronouns implicate the writer and become subjective. Research is about the examination of data, not the opinions of the writer.

أنت تقدم بحثاً ولا تكتب سيرة ذاتية. يجب أن يكون أي شكل من أشكال الكتابة الأكاديمية موضوعياً متجنباً جميع الضمائر الشخصية. الضمائر الشخصية تضمن الكاتب وتصبح ذاتية. يتعلق البحث بفحص البيانات وليس بمشاعر أو آراء الكاتب.

### Tip 4: No Kitchen Sinking!

“Savoring has well documented associations with life satisfaction (Mankhool et al., 2016), stress (Kerney et al., 2015), materialism (Linton, 2012), and ultimately an overall increase in happiness (Michaels, 2012). By also applying these emotional states into Maslow’s (1962) original Hierarchy of Needs, a concept that is still widely used in education, it could be argued that savoring, an activity that fosters so many positive emotions, must be achieved if learners are to fulfill their academic potential at any level. If stress is considered a limiting factor to learners’ safety



and security, and it is shown to decrease stress levels (Kerney et al., 2015), learners would not rise above the 4th tier of Maslow's hierarchy.

Better: "Indeed, savoring has associations with life satisfaction (Mankhool et al., 2016) and stress (Kerney et al., 2015)."

Why? Novice researchers often include 'everything but the kitchen sink' as the expression goes. "Kitchen sinking" happens when new models or concepts suddenly appear late in the manuscript. There is no need to connect your findings to every existing model or study, especially if it is neither relevant, nor part of your main hypothesis. Here, Maslow's model appeared in the "Discussion" section, but not earlier. If you have a sound hypothesis that is justified based on the research literature you have provided, you should not, nor need to introduce anything new.

يحدث "Kitchen sinking" عندما تظهر فجأة نماذج أو مفاهيم جديدة في وقت متأخر في البحث. ليست هناك حاجة لربط نتائجك بكل نموذج أو دراسة موجودة خاصة إذا لم تكن ذات صلة إلى فرضيتك الرئيسية. في المثال ظهر نموذج ماسلو في قسم "Discussion" لكنه لم يظهر من قبل. إذا كانت لديك فرضية صحيحة مبررة بناءً على الأدبيات البحثية التي قدمتها فلا يجب عليك ولا تحتاج إلى تقديم أي شيء جديد.

#### Tip 5: Don't Narrate

"It goes without saying that there is certainly plenty of research to link positive psychology to a range of benefits, one of which is an increase in not just mental but also physical health, which the positive psychology movement seems to regard as one of its most impressive lines of research (Larsen et al., 2003)...."

Better: "Much research links the positive psychology movement with a range of benefits, including an increase in physical and mental health (Larsen et al., 2003)...."

Why? Including words like "certainly", "impressive", and "it goes without saying" add no value and position the author as a personal narrator. As a rule, if words can be removed from a sentence and there is no change in clarity or meaning, they should be removed.

الكتابة الأكاديمية بطبيعتها جافة ومملة وفي صلب الموضوع. إن تضمين كلمات مثل "بالتأكيد" و "مثير للإعجاب" لا يضيف أي قيمة ويضع المؤلف في مرتبة الراوي الشخصي. كقاعدة عامة إذا كان من الممكن إزالة الكلمات من الجملة ولم تغير وضوحها أو معناها بأي شكل من الأشكال فيجب إزالتها.

#### Tip 6: Say it Once: Keep it Organized

"It should be noted that our findings be considered in light of the small sample size, which acts as a limitation in this regard. Because of the small size, future studies should include larger sample sizes. More will be discussed in the limitations section, coming next."

Better: "As the sample size is small, future studies are advised to include larger samples."

Why? First, remain succinct and direct in your writing. If it can be written in one sentence, why do it in two? Second, all studies follow the scientific method and are outlined in the same way. Readers know where to look for information, so do not confuse them by mixing information from one section into another, i.e., putting "Limitations" in the "Discussion" section. As such, there is no need to introduce future sections; such previews merely waste word count.



أولاً كن مباشراً في كتاباتك. إذا كان من الممكن كتابتها في جملة واحدة فلماذا تكتبها في جملتين؟ ثانياً تتبع جميع الدراسات المنهج العلمي ويتم تحديدها بنفس الطريقة. يعرف القراء أين يبحثون عن المعلومات ولكن فقط إذا تم وضعها في المكان المناسب. لا تربكهم عن طريق خلط المعلومات من قسم إلى آخر في سبيل المثال وضع "Limitations" في قسم "Discussion". ليست هناك حاجة أيضاً لتقديم الأقسام المستقبلية. يجب أن تكون كل عبارة تكتبها مهمة فلا تضيعوا كلمات على أمور غير مهمة.

#### Tip 7. So...What, now?

“In sum, our findings showed that a broad range of positive psychology interventions were effective in boosting life satisfaction relative to a control group.”

Better: “In sum, our findings showed that a broad range of positive psychology interventions were effective in boosting life satisfaction relative to a control group. This is especially important in the current national context where young people...”

Why? Keep your findings clear and succinct, but don't stop there. Findings exist in a larger body of research in addition to a real life context. Unless it is theoretical work, findings should matter practically, and it is up to the writer to tell readers how they matter. This is extrapolated from other domains and knowledge of the current context. For instance, finding that positive education intervention programs work is great, but they generally always do. What more can be done with that knowledge? Can this be useful in an early graduate employment sphere; how? If research does not answer a problem, it is not useful (see junk publications below). Written in one or two paragraphs, put this information into 'Future Directions', or a subheading for Implications.

توجد النتائج في مجموعة أكبر من الأبحاث بالإضافة إلى الحياة الواقعية. ما لم يكن هذا عملاً نظرياً يجب أن تكون النتائج مهمة عملياً والأمر متروك للكاتب ليخبر القراء كيف يتم استقراء هذا من المجالات الأخرى ومعرفة القراء بالسياق الحالي. على سبيل المثال، العثور على أن برامج التدخل التربوي الإيجابي تعمل أمراً رائعاً لكنها تفعل ذلك دائماً. ما الذي يمكن فعله أكثر بهذه المعرفة؟ هل يمكن أن يكون هذا مفيداً في مجال توظيف الخريجين، كيف؟ ساعد القراء على رؤية القيمة الحقيقية للنتائج. إذا لم يجيب البحث على مشكلة، فلن يكون مفيداً (انظر المنشورات غير المرغوب فيها أدناه). مكتوبة في فقرة واحدة أو فقرتين، ضع هذه المعلومات في "الاتجاهات المستقبلية" أو عنوان فرعي للتأثيرات.

#### Tip 8: Don't Be Lazy

“Several authors (McAculey, 2012 as cited in Wilson, 2018; Bedding, 2017 as cited in Smith & Long, 2018) have noted that interventions are in need of stronger replication....”

Better: “Researchers (Bedding, 2017; McAculey, 2012) have noted that interventions are in need of stronger replication....”

Why? If Wilson (2018) and Smith and Long (2018) found those references, you can too. Always refer to primary resources. Otherwise, it becomes confusing as to who said what, but also the reader does not know if you actually read that study or not. It may seem easier to cite others, but this is akin to hearsay and amounts to taking someone else's word over your own.

إذا عثر (Wilson 2018) و (Smith and Long 2018) على هذه المراجع فيمكنك ذلك أيضاً. دائماً أرجع إلى الموارد الأولية. إذا لم تفعل ذلك يصبح الأمر محيراً بالنسبة لمن قال ماذا. والقارئ أيضاً لا يعرف إذا كنت قد قرأت هذه الدراسة بالفعل



أم لا. قد يبدو من الأسهل الاستشهاد بالآخرين ولكن هذا أقرب إلى الإشاعات ويصل إلى اعتبار كلمة شخص آخر بمثابة حقيقة على نفسك.

### Tip 9. Use Your Words

“Agentic level approaches to strengthening wellbeing infer it is determined by self-directed actions and behaviours that are influenced through “intentionality and forethought, self-regulation and self-reflective-ness” (Bandura, 2001, pg. 55). In contrast, structural level approaches to wellbeing tend to infer wellbeing is determined by contextual or environmental factors rather than individual behaviours “and tend to view individual agency as constrained or shaped by structures. They presume a certain degree of social causation of...social, economic, political, or physical environments that shape...or otherwise affect outcomes” (Blankenship, 2006, pg. 178). Fisher (2008) argues that “discourses of governance restrict definitions of wellbeing and empowerment to those consistent with a neoliberalism of the dominant symbolic order” (pg. 221). Concurrently the mobilisation of neoliberal representations of wellbeing mean lay conceptualisations of wellbeing are “undermined by their contact with the health and social care services where they are confronted with oppressive frameworks of meaning” (pg. 181).

What and why? Researchers rely on quotes to avoid summarizing and paraphrasing; yet, a summary lets the reader know that you understand the topic. Too many quotes are tiring to read and leave the reader waiting in suspense for your interpretation, which never comes. The work ends up being an accumulation of items written by others; yet, the point of reading the literature is for you to explore the ideas of others in the context of your study and then, to explain to readers how those fit.

الاقتباس الزائد هو عندما تملأ ورقتك بعدد كبير جداً من الاقتباسات. بعض الباحثين يبالغون في الاقتباس لتجنب التلخيص وإعادة الصياغة ولكن الملخص المناسب يتيح للقارئ معرفة أنك تفهم الموضوع. الاقتباس عن الكثير من الأشياء مرهق للقراءة ويترك القارئ في انتظار تفسيرك الذي لا يأتي أبداً. ينتهي العمل بأن يكون ليس ورقتك ولكن تراكم الأوراق التي كتبها آخرون. الهدف الأساسي من قراءة مراجعات الأدبيات واستخراج المعلومات منها هو استكشاف هذه الموارد في سياق ورقتك البحثية. إذا كتبت بكلماتك الخاصة فسوف يتعرف القارئ على نوع الكاتب الذي أنت عليه وما يهملك. تصبح الورقة فريدة بالنسبة لك.

### Other Tips

*Descriptive statistics.* Authors misuse descriptive statistics to make conclusions, connections and inferences. Descriptive statistics are not designed to stand alone and almost always require additional forms of analysis to make sense of the relationships between variables. For example, one researcher states, “... those playing video games for more than 7 hours registered 70% higher chances of aggression compared to those who played for less than 1 hour, which registered at 13.3%”. This conclusion was based on a frequency table for the number of hours spent playing. The percentages found in the Cumulative Percent column do not provide a basis from which to make such an inference. Without a valid measure of aggression, this is not possible; instead, a correlation matrix would better show whether, and what kind of relationship exists between hours spent playing video games and aggression.



*The 5 year rule.* In this next example, publication dates matter. “In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the extent to which aspects of psychological wellbeing can be considered binary opposites (Chavez et al., 2005). Ryff et al. (2006) has called for “clarification of whether psychological well-being and ill-being comprise opposite ends of a bipolar continuum, or are best construed as separate, independent dimensions of mental health” (pg. 85). We take this same opinion to premise our arguments in this study.”

Had the authors stuck to the five year rule, they would have known that this issue in fact, has been resolved. Make your arguments on as recent studies as possible, otherwise your entire study’s premise is outdated. A failure to do so exposes the author’s lack of due diligence in the literature review. Science progresses month by month, what was true two years ago may no longer be so. Stick to the five years rule unless you are referring to a seminal (classic, original) article, or there are so few findings in that area that you must cite all of them as an example (this is unusual, but it does happen for more obscure topics).

*Why does the population or context matter?* Your research should not only tell a story, but highlight the context in which you did the research. For example, if you are looking at how findings may be influenced by, or look different in a specific culture or region, link this context to your results. Said another way: Why should the reader care that you are doing *this* particular study on *this* population, and how might the population influence *these* results (i.e. acts of kindness in collectivistic versus individualistic societies). Researchers should always give background and/or cultural context to help readers understand the significance of their findings.

*What gap does it fill?* Studies are conducted to answer a gap in the research literature; they have a purpose. The gap you are trying to fill must be clear by the end of your literature review, which serves to justify why you chose your research question. If the study served no identified purpose, it becomes almost impossible to publish. We can undertake something out of interest, but then it should be, well, interesting, and not merely one more replication of something that is already known. Such publications add no value to the literature as they do not advance our understanding of a problem. These are “junk publications” - publishing for publishing’s sake.

*Don’t run away.* Once you have reached the Discussion section and presented your findings in one or two sentences of the first paragraph, you are not finished. You must close the loop' by tying your findings back to the original gap you were trying to fill as well as to what others have found in that area. Here, you compare your findings to the specific studies you reviewed in the literature review so that you can evaluate what you found. Were your findings better, worse, different, or much the same? Specifically name them, i.e., “our findings were on par with those of Spear et al. (2017) and Nasser (2020); however, they contrasted with those of Al Naseem (2018).”

*APA formatting.* APA formatting is the norm for psychology manuscripts; however, each journal also has style requirements found in the “Instructions for Authors” section. It specifies manuscript and abstract word count, margin size, font size, number and placement of tables and figures, etc. In the unlikely event there is none, look at previous issues of that journal and follow the style. There is a human being receiving your manuscript and the closer it looks to the real thing, the easier their job becomes and the less likely they are to send it back for tedious, time



consuming changes on your part. Sometimes this means the difference between getting something published this year, or in another 12 months.

*Tables and more tables.* A table can easily summarize what is too wordy to include in the text, and words can explain what is too complex to decipher in a table. Yet, both options showing and/or explaining the same information are redundant. If the table can speak for itself, let it do so by merely noting in one sentence what can be found there. Alternatively, if you can fully explain in one to two sentences what is found in one table, then it is not needed. At best, most studies will have two to three tables and/or one figure. More is not better.

*Spelling mistakes.* This one indeed, goes without saying.

### Conclusion

While we have focused on the writing process for graduate students and researchers alike, good writing applies to psychology professionals too. Whether it is writing notes for client files, organizational accounts, court reports, psychological profiles and/or conceptualizations, or public communications including social media messaging of a psychological nature, writing must be succinct, accurate and efficient. If words fail to communicate anything meaningful, they become nothing more than noise rendering ideas useless and diluting the profession's credibility. Thus, we hope to have demystified the writing process for both early and mid-career researchers by sharing useful tips to quickly improve the quality of submitted documents and manuscripts.