CHAPTER 2

What the Research Community Labels a Good Research Paper – and the Way to Get Published

Levi Gårseth-Nesbakk
Nord University Business School

Abstract: This chapter reviews literature on academic writing and publishing. The following recommendations can be highlighted: prepare the study well; avoid the common mistake of submitting underdeveloped manuscripts; work on the structure, clarity and contribution of the study; and anticipate key questions frequently asked by reviewers. You also need to select an appropriate journal, as well as establish work routines and habits that facilitate your research. You must tackle and benefit from criticism. Paper production also requires good time management skills. Believing in your own work is necessary, but the use of cost-benefit considerations to balance perfectionism and meeting the minimum requirements in relation to different manuscripts, at various outlet levels, will improve research efficiency and effectiveness. This skill embodies the essence of any successful scholar, along with never resting until the work has been published.

Keywords: review, publication, academic writing

Citation: Gårseth-Nesbakk, L. (2018). What the Research Community Labels a Good Research Paper – and the Way to Get Published. In L. Gårseth-Nesbakk & F. Mellemvik (Eds.), *Dealing with Expectations and Traditions in Research* (pp. 13–35). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk. https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.42.ch2

1. Introduction

This article reviews publication advice provided by the research (publication) community, purporting to identify common mistakes and rewarding publication strategies. This is beneficial to all researchers since research journals and recommendations flourish, making it hard to keep an overview, also because of ever-intensifying publication pressure.

Publish or perish is a well-known phrase within research communities, but has become more and more important with the passage of time, as the drive to publish internationally is growing stronger and stronger (Jönsson, 2006; Tienari, 2012). "... As an academic researcher you simply must publish … It is our duty to make our results available to the international research community and to practice" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 481). Toft and Jaeger (1998, p. S42) also stress the need for publishing your findings, "Going through the motions of research but not publishing is not research", hinting at the publication process as a key research component. To publish in highly ranked journals has increasingly become the norm (Cederström and Hoedemaekers, 2012; Tienari, 2012; Wagner, 2012). Recent calls for more research impact increase publication pressure on researchers, especially young academics (Glick, Miller and Cardinal, 2007). By publishing they discharge their accountabilities to themselves, their universities, educational systems and society at large (see, Cederström and Hoedemaekers, 2012).

Overall, research publications in academic journals are important as they disseminate knowledge, promote research careers and strengthen institutions' competence, accreditation processes, reputation, ranking and funding. But how should researchers go about getting published? After all, "scientific style must be concise, absolutely accurate, and unambiguous" (Toft and Jaeger, 1998, p. S42).

This chapter reviews literature on academic publishing, targeting the following research question: What publication and manuscript preparation advice is offered by the research community? While so doing, the focus will not only be on outlining the variety of advice, but also to search for commonalities among the sets of advice in order to sketch out core features of how to get published. The chapter is based on a review of earlier publications on academic publishing as well as advice given by

publishing houses (e.g. Elsevier), as they are also an important part of the research publication community.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows: Section Two outlines publication advice provided by the research community; Section Three depicts key content and expectations regarding manuscript structure. The conclusions follow in Section Four.

2. Publication advice provided by the research community

The publication advice presented in this section starts in subsection 2.1 with the need to avoid common mistakes – explicating reasons as to why papers are rejected. Subsection 2.2 contains sound paper production principles. In subsection 2.3 the need to make a contribution to stand out in high-end journals is accentuated, followed, in subsection 2.4, by a discussion of the importance of journal selection and adhering to associated requirements. In subsection 2.5 a crucial final piece of advice is provided, namely: Do not give up – keep the faith.

2.1 Avoid common mistakes – suggestions as to why papers are rejected

"Inappropriate journal selection is one of the major causes for rejection" (Wagner, 2012, p. 22). Other reasons may include a lack of supporting empirical evidence, the submission of a theoretical article with no apparent application, or submission of a "pure" case study description (Wagner, 2012). Audisio et al. (2009, p. 351) argue that manuscript rejection is most likely caused by:

> Poor experimental design (lack of hypothesis/aims, poor recruitment or small sample size, short follow-up, a lack of or unjustified conclusions, or when the text is simply incomprehensible), … failure to conform to the target journal, insufficient problem statement, methods not described in detail, over-interpretation of results, inappropriate statistics, confusing presentation of tables and/or figures, conclusion not supported by data, and poor review of the literature.

Jönsson (2006) points out that 90 percent of the articles submitted to the Scandinavian Journal of Management were rejected because they were ill structured, failing to establish an appropriate beginning, main middle section and a clear end to the paper. Consequently, "when submitting, follow the instructions … do not make it more difficult for your manuscript to get through the review process by creating unnecessary extra work for the editors" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 486).

Conceptual unfamiliarity or inconsistencies may easily lead to confusion and make the publication process more troublesome or go nowhere (Ambert, Adler, Adler and Detzner, 1995; Belgrave, Zablotsky and Guadagno, 2002). Authors are therefore better off not introducing a variety of different definitions and concepts in their manuscripts.

Additional matters to be avoided: Do not publish meaningless or previously published data (Audisio et al., 2009). The paper must make intuitive sense (Ashkanasy, 2013). Too many articles are written due to the need to publish, rather than from the viewpoint that authors have new relevant data to communicate to the public (Audisio et al., 2009). Do not make it worse by referring conspicuously to your own work (Jönsson, 2006).

2.2 Sound paper production principles

Sound paper production principles are outlined below. These are: "Ensure that enough time is invested in paper production to achieve sufficient quality"; "Consider scholarly collaboration and networking as a way of improving your work"; "Embrace cost benefit considerations to improve research efficiency and effectiveness"; and "Make academic writing a habit".

Ensure that enough time is invested in paper production to achieve sufficient quality

"Scientists should aim to publish their results when the study is complete and to strive for excellence at all stages of the research and publication process, no matter how long that takes" (Toft and Jaeger, 1998, p. S42). Adhering to this advice of dedicating oneself to excellence explains for instance why the researcher often ends up with a surprisingly large set

of drafts before the manuscript is published (Audisio et al., 2009). This also suggests that the process is more time-consuming and demanding than what is foreseeable at the outset – causing scholars to underestimate the amount of time and effort required to get published. Moreover, when you believe you are approaching the submission stage: "Do not insult reviewers by sending them half ready manuscripts!" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 483) or virgin papers (Ashkanasy, 2013).

Consider scholarly collaboration and networking as a way of improving your work

Critical comments facilitate rigorous research. This will improve a scholar's citation rate, which even young scholars should care about. A high citation rate suggests your work represents an important contribution to the field (Ashkanasy, 2013). Critical comments can be obtained from the research community, perhaps from co-authors, at a conference or during workshop presentations or by asking specific colleagues for advice. This will namely inform the research community about your work. Such networking could result in their starting to send you information because they know you are interested in certain topics. It is nevertheless advisable to prepare a couple of drafts yourself, which should undergo a self-critical review process before being submitted to a conference. It is also advisable to send the manuscript to colleagues, to get their comments. Only then does it normally make sense to submit to a journal (Jönsson, 2006). Although they support the idea of preparing and presenting conference papers as a way of progressing your work toward the quality level of many journals, Guthrie, Parker and Gray (2008) warn against entering the conference bandwagon. The challenge is that conference papers would also clearly benefit from being well prepared and may have to be submitted several months before the conference. Consequently, if you (aspire to) regularly attend conferences, it means you do not have much time to submit the conference paper to a journal before having to work on a new project. Failing to do so may result in scholars travelling with the same paper over and over again.

Scholarly collaboration is a way to build competence, get inspiration and reduce the work load associated with collecting data, analyzing

findings and writing research. Thus, working with others, both PhD students and other scholars is frequently recommended (e.g. Ashkanasy, 2013). However, Endenich and Trapp (2016, p. 630) find that (international) scholarly cooperation "does not appear to be an obvious vehicle to increase research performance". They provide the following plausible explanations for their findings: Scholars may devote the time saved by cooperation to engage in other activities or they may cooperate for other reasons, including curiosity, intrinsic motivation or to enjoy social benefits. Alternatively, it may be that "cooperation reveals fewer synergies than expected because of, for example, a high coordination effort, divergences concerning modes of operating, or free riding issues" (Endenich and Trapp, 2016, p. 631).

The mixed recommendations or inferences concerning scholarly cooperation suggest that this activity is complex to manage, and that successful cooperation depends on a number of factors. Therefore, as a cautionary note, remember that every partner will expect you to do your share of the work. Thus, it is demanding to work on many different projects simultaneously, particularly if this also entails working with a variety of scholarly partners. Having too many coexisting projects that not only require your attention and devotion, but also a considerable work effort (collecting and analyzing data, and subsequently writing) is overwhelming. This will slow down most if not all projects, perhaps to the extent that they are all in jeopardy of being too late or never being completed at all. As a result, careful consideration is required regarding how many concurrent projects to embark on, and which partners to work with. A partnership may not be worthwhile if the completion of the project depends predominantly or solely on you.

Embrace cost benefit considerations to improve research efficiency and effectiveness

Authors need to believe in their ideas, projects and papers. Still, poorly written manuscripts are more likely to be rejected. Therefore, it is important to be hard working and to find some middle road between being blind to details and well-crafted work on the one hand and being a perfectionist on the other: "Given the randomness in the system, it does not pay to

spend hours and days polishing a paper, or moving it from 85 to 95 per cent perfect" (Glick et al., 2007, p. 828). Consequently, Glick et al. (2007, p. 827-828) offer the following advice to young academics, seeking to make a career by publishing articles:

> Shop early and often in the marketplace for ideas. … Generating a variety of project ideas is essential in a weak paradigm field, but aspiring scholars must focus their resources on projects that can be rapidly developed and submitted to a top journal. Along the way, individuals might ask themselves some basic questions in deciding whether to continue investing in a particular project. Does the project effectively leverage my prior investments in one of my platforms? Did my colleagues get excited by my two minute topic description in the hallway? Did I stimulate controversy with a quick sketch of the research model? … How much more work is required to complete this project? Killing a marginal project should be framed as creating opportunities for better projects rather than a loss of prior investments. … For each project … a final question to be answered is this: Am I putting too much effort into the project?

Make academic writing a habit

Jönsson (2006) advocates the need to "make academic writing a habit", supported by a time schedule and established rules in terms of how to spend your time. He also suggests it is worthwhile to attend conferences and workshops and to work on several manuscripts at a time, effectively making sure you do not squander time sitting around waiting for the editor's response. On the other hand, working with several manuscripts may make it more challenging to keep up the pace when receiving feedback and calls for revision, while trying not to forget about the other paper(s). Not spreading your work over too wide areas is Jönsson's (2006) advice to avoid this becoming a big issue (since for instance different fields require the reading of different literature stances, thus making the revision more time consuming). Two key research platforms should be the limit for thematic variation (Glick et al, 2007). Still, a requirement for professorship is typically research effort and publications within two to three different areas.

"Work – finish – publish" is the habit to embrace as an academician: "Your work is not done until you have reported it [i.e. your findings] in a

journal" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 489). In this process, beyond your own hard and systematic work, the reviewers play a key role. To enhance your publication chances, you should "love your reviewers", and pay close attention to every comment they provide (Jönsson, 2006).

2.3 Persuasively articulated contributions are needed in high-end journals

Ambert et al. (1995, p. 890) suggest that authors and reviewers need to pay close attention to the following questions: "Has something new been learned by this research and what is its significance? Does it contribute to knowledge...? Will it inspire further research?" A contribution may take the form of theoretical, practical and/or methodological contributions. "Most journal editors will expect both theoretical and practical contributions from the article" (Wagner, 2012, p. 22). In their aims and scope or other journal descriptions, it is common that esteemed journals clearly explain the necessity of making a contribution in order to be considered for publication in their journals. The way to unravel theoretical contributions is through active engagement with the literature. What has been said on the topic before (identified through your literature review), and how does the theoretical knowledge stance change with the findings from your study? For example, have you found an anomalous result in the literature that you might be able to explain? (Glick et al., 2007).

Whetten (1989) argues the theoretical elements ("what") and the ways in which they interrelate ("how") as well as "why" need to be dissected and discussed in order to illuminate the contribution of the paper. The "why" refers to the underlying assumptions or theoretical glue of the model, i.e. the dynamics that justify the theory, whether it is of a psychological, economic or social kind. The way to make a theoretical contribution is by demonstrating that your findings represent a shift in the list of elements (what), the way they interrelate (how) or why it is more reasonable to analyze the theoretical assumptions and model dynamics differently. Contributing through altering "hows" is more rewarding than "whats", but not as meritorious as demonstrating new "whys" (Whetten, 1989). "Who", "where" and "when" are temporal and contextual factors

that "place limitations on the propositions generated from a theoretical model". Such boundaries of generalizability constrain the range of the theory (Whetten, 1989, p. 492). However, "it is insufficient to point out limitations in current conceptions of a theory's range of application" (Whetten, 1989, p. 493). Furthermore, "critics should share responsibility for crafting improved conceptualizations. Otherwise, it is difficult to know whether the original is indeed inferior, or simply the best we can do in a very complex world" (Whetten, 1989, p. 494).

2.4 Selecting the right journal – address the aims and scope and format requirements

If targeting the best journals the work should be "absolutely original, innovative and methodologically outstanding" (Audisio et al. (2009, p. 355). A prerequisite is of course that the study and the manuscript fit the journal in question. The way to ensure that is to read prospective journals' aims and scope and subsequently to align the manuscript carefully to the format requirements of the selected journal.

However, in certain fields the journals are heavily influenced by particular countries or schools of thought, because of where they are published and who may hold the editorial board member positions. For instance, in accounting, there is a clear USA dominance and an almost Anglo Saxon monopoly situation when adding Canada, the UK and Australia to the list (Brinn and Jones, 2008). As such, it is pivotal to consider where the manuscript is more likely to fit the journal style, the ways of thinking of those dominating the editorial board positions, etc. This has been a subject for discussion (and concern) in accounting literature (e.g., Brinn and Jones, 2008; Merchant, 2010). A characteristic of these journals (including "Accounting Review", "Journal of Accounting and Economics", "Journal of Accounting Research" and "Review of Accounting Studies") is that they are largely quantitatively oriented. For instance they publish financial accounting articles in disproportionately high numbers (Bonner, Hesford, Van der Stede and Young, 2006), thus making it harder for qualitatively oriented scholars to publish in many of these "A" journals. Yet, this is unlikely to be the case only in the accounting

field. Tienari (2012, p. 205) argues the top tier journals "forces us to reproduce their favoured theoretical and methodological dogmas. … Critical, feminist, and post-colonialist scholars find it extremely difficult to get their work published in these journals." Ambert et al. (1995) and Belgrave et al. (2002) have written articles about how to understand and evaluate qualitative research. This was done partly due to frustration over the (seemingly) common errors made by quantitatively oriented researchers reading qualitative research studies.

A lot of time is wasted by scholars waiting for feedback from editors that reject their paper, primarily or partially because of a misfit with the aim and scope of the journal. Ironically, the waiting process when submitting to the wrong journal is often longer, when the editor does not "desk reject" the paper, because it takes more time to find appropriate or willing reviewers. If the editor succeeds in finding reviewers there is still a chance the reviewers might be critical towards the paper because it seems to be a bad fit with the journal. Moreover, the editor, having received a paper on the margin of the journal's scope and aim, is more likely not to rule in your favour when there is a dissensus between the reviewers or both are critical but nevertheless do not fully reject the paper. The author(s) might even risk waiting for months before finally being informed that the editor was unsuccessful in locating any suitable and willing reviewers! A large proportion of papers do need a goodwill spirit from the editor to make it through the review process. You are more likely to get that when submitting to an appropriate journal. The selection of journal should be made as early as possible, and the author should become familiar with the journal and try to relate their own work to earlier contributions in the journal. Nonetheless, journals vary considerably with respect to acceptable paper length, so the journal choice must also take that into consideration.

Paper length

Audisio et al. (2009, p. 352) advise researchers to be cognizant of the paper length by pointing out that shorter and more concise papers are more likely to be considered for publication. They add that most journals will not accept papers that are longer than 2500-4000 words (Audisio et al., 2009, p. 352). Yet it is clear that the acceptable norm for paper length

varies across research fields. In fields such as management, organization studies and accounting, particularly those that welcome qualitative studies, it is normal to operate with higher page limitation boundaries. Some journals do not have an explicit page limitation at all (for instance "Accounting, Organizations and Society" and "Accounting Forum"), whereas some operate with a high page limitation threshold, for instance "Critical Perspectives on Accounting", 20 000 words or "Accounting and Organizational Change" and "Organization Studies", 12 000 words. It is consequently important that authors read the instructions to authors carefully. Authors should nonetheless be wary of writing lengthy manuscripts as they not only take much more time to develop, but also to revise, quality assure, and align with format requirements. There will be a considerable difference in time spent on a short versus a long article, for formatting and technical reasons alone.

Language

Most articles are published in English, making it important to write good English (Jönsson, 2006; Tychinin and Kamnev, 2005). Actually, for non-native English speaking persons language assistance is almost a prerequisite for being accepted by a better journal. The language should be simple and plain (Audisio et al. (2009). Besides interacting with English speaking persons, Jönsson (2006) recommends writing regularly in English, getting feedback on your English and reading effective language (typically in international news magazines) as useful methods for improving your language.

Another practical option is to pay for language editing before submitting the manuscript to the journal. This is becoming a bigger and bigger industry and most of the larger publishing houses do offer such services today, as long as you pay for it. Although it may be desirable to do language editing when the paper has been accepted, to save money and your own time, it is unwise and arguably unethical to do so if your English is so bad that it causes non-trivial communication obstacles for the reviewers and the editor. Then you are wasting the reviewers' time and patience. You thereby risk that language alone becomes a reason to reject your paper, either for technical reasons, or because it indicates that the

paper generally speaking is underdeveloped. In terms of direct guidance, Elsevier (2013) offers the following advice. Use direct and short sentences. Include one idea or piece of info per sentence (avoid multiple statements in one sentence). Furthermore, use the active voice (it is shorter and better). Strive to minimize adverbs (such as however, in addition, moreover) and to eliminate redundant phrases. Finally, unfamiliar words should be double-checked. Two things are then important, spelling and the meaning of the words/phrases. Make sure the words are appropriate to the setting in which you use them.

Figures and tables

It is often useful to include figures and tables in the manuscript as they may facilitate summarizing and organizing the text. They thereby function as useful visual aids, but could also be useful in streamlining and shortening the manuscript (Fulmer, 2012). Preferably, the main concepts and ideas in the figure/table should be explained prior to the appearance of the figure/table in the text to avoid surprising and confusing the reader.

2.5 A final piece of advice: Do not give up – keep the faith

Glick et al. (2007) provide vital, albeit depressing statistics and viewpoints to scholars within organization science. Essentially, they point out that life within the field of organization science is difficult, due to a weak paradigm and thus a dissensus concerning what is to be regarded as good research. This materializes in a variety of ways, including high rejection rates (up to 92.5 % of original submissions for the best journals), low inter-rater reliability for reviewers (frequently lower than 0.3 and sometimes as low as 0.12 – even for the best journals) and modest article impact, measured on the basis of article citations. Glick et al. (2007, p. 820) therefore infer: "... the vast majority of authors in organization science are unable to predict editorial requirements as they labor on papers that are unlikely to be accepted by their target journals". With reference to rejection rates close to 90%, Moizer (2009, p. 285) declares: "Something cannot be right with a system which creates so much apparent waste". Most scholars

within the field of organization science are not located in an elite school or university. That is not necessary either, according to Glick et al. (2007), with respect to substantially improving one's publication chances in the better journals. They namely report a significant dispersion amongst top scholars' affiliations. Thus, that you – in order to achieve academic success – need a strong research community in your own institution (working with the same topics as yourself) is found to be a busted myth. Nonetheless, "... we remain concerned with the substantial role that chance plays in organization science careers. Significant numbers of deserving individuals continue to have papers rejected, promotions denied, and careers side-tracked while others benefit from good luck" (Glick et al, 2007, p. 832). Hence, it is pivotal to be persistent, thick-skinned and to hang in there (Ashkanasy, 2013). Do not become discouraged by rejections, especially not when submitting to the best-rated journals, frequently coined "A" journals. "It is true that "A" journals in many social sciences maintain a rejection rate disturbingly close to 100 per cent … Keep revising and submitting!" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 486).

3. Manuscript structure and "recipe" – key features and content

Although scholarly publications may come in different forms the norm adhered to in most journals is to expect manuscripts to include standard sections consisting of the introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusions (Audisio et al., 2009). Additionally, it is widely acknowledged today to also include a frame of reference section (although it might be coined differently, e.g. the theory section or the literature review section). Yet, as Fulmer (2012) points out, the title and the abstract are the only parts of your manuscript that most people will ever read. As a result it is very important to spend enough time polishing these items, not to mention ensuring they are consistent with the rest of the manuscript. They are, after all, appetizers (Fulmer, 2012). This section outlines recommendations regarding the content and features of these key sections (which also include a few recommendations when it comes to the use of references).

3.1 Title

The title "... should clearly and accurately address the content and be as eye-catching as possible" (Audisio et al., 2009, p. 355, see also Elsevier, 2013). Titles may still be very short and remain excellent (Fulmer, 2012), but they often follow a lengthier format. "An advantage of the longer style is that the author can use the 'precolonic' part of the title either to succinctly state the topic … or to artfully begin to tell the story using some sort of image or metaphor … while still being able to give additional clarifying information after the colon to help position the idea in the reader's mind" (Fulmer, 2012, p. 328). It is furthermore common that titles contain the main concepts or idea of the paper (Fulmer, 2012). Nevertheless, Elsevier (2013) argues against long titles and the use of rare abbreviations. Beyond being short, effective titles are characterized by identifying the main issue of the paper. Begin drafting the title by considering the subject of the paper, but also the need to be accurate, unambiguous and specific. Keep in mind that articles with short, catchy titles are often better cited (Elsevier, 2013). An example of a short and good title is found in Young's (2006) article, "Making Up Users". Only three words, but they still say a lot about the content and conclusions in the article. Essentially this means authors should spend a fair amount of time on creating an appropriate title.

3.2 Abstract

The purpose of the abstract is to introduce the reader to the essence of the work. "The abstract is what most readers will scroll through, and reviewers will base their decision primarily on this section. An interesting paper with a bad abstract may be rejected" (Audisio et al. (2009, p. 354–355). Elsevier (2013) offers the following guidance on what characterizes a good abstract: present it as a single paragraph, the advertisement of your article, interesting and easy to understand, accurate, specific and brief. Yet, there are different ways of writing the abstract. For instance, whereas some outline the paper, others start with their arguments or position (Fulmer, 2012). The best abstracts "clearly name and describe the core constructs and aims of the article … they also steer clear of

jargon" (Fulmer, 2012, p. 328). Generally speaking, though, the abstract should contain research hypotheses (or questions), the sample set, size and type of data, as well as the main findings. Brevity without exaggeration is key (White, 2005). In addition to the aforementioned list it is also common in the abstract to list the theories relied on in the study and preferably the implications.

3.3 Introduction

A key purpose of an introduction is to serve as a roadmap for the readers, explaining what the article is about and why it is important, while being precise, capturing the reader's interest, and still remaining short (Audisio et al., 2009; White, 2005). Essentially then, the introduction should set the scene, provide key information about the research area, state the purpose, rationale, research gap (i.e. address the "so what question"), research questions, the strength of the design (White, 2005), as well as the contributions. Jönsson (2006, p. 485) elaborates on the problematizing dimension of the introduction: "Stating the problem is probably the most important part of article writing. … Go back to the formulation of the problem many times during revisions and see if you cannot make it clearer and more aligned to your findings. The simpler the better!". Authors normally identify and define key concepts early on in the manuscript (Fulmer, 2012). The introduction is a suitable section for this. Moreover, "What we want from an article is a clear statement of what the contribution is" (Jönsson, 2006, p. 485). Many authors do this in the introduction. It normally ends by outlining the structure of the manuscript (Wagner, 2012).

3.4 Frame of reference/literature review

Some papers are founded on a particular theory, or sometimes theoretical pluralism (Jacobs, 2012), whereas others settle on outlining a literature review or potentially a combination of theory and literature review. Wagner (2012, p. 23) explains: "The purpose of the literature review is to set out relevant existing research in the topic area and … argue for a research gap that the current paper fills. The review should be precise, focused and

critically evaluate current publications. It is not expected to include everything written about a particular topic". Hence, boundaries, explanations and a defence of the choices made are needed (Wagner, 2012, p. 23).

To articulate a more precise direction in your research it may be advisable to outline theoretical perspectives or a conceptual model on the basis of the literature review, so as to further assist your reader toward the planned contribution of the work. The perspectives or theoretical foundation of the conceptual model should build on concepts and ideas discussed in the literature review, but might contain additional elements that could be logically associated with the research theme and complement conceptualizing the study.

3.5 Method

Think of the method section as a place in the manuscript to gain the readers' trust. Conversely, if they do not trust the robustness or the logic behind your method, it does not matter that you present a strong literature review or present apparently relevant contributions to the literature. Therefore, in the method section, descriptions and explanations are the most important elements, but you should not forget to incorporate a few relevant references that substantiate the logic behind your methodology.

The method section "should state all the details of the observed population and the methodology the authors have used, but nothing more" (Audisio et al. (2009, p. 353). It appears that greater uncertainty characterizes qualitative research than quantitative methods. The latter is often based on standard design considerations and software solutions. As such, "there is no sure 'recipe' for doing qualitative research" … Yet, "there is an overarching agreement on general standards and more particularly on the necessity for methodological and theoretical rigor and accountability of methods" (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 889). Despite varying standards and expectations, the dominant strategy when writing the method section in qualitative research is to be somewhat thorough in your description. It is better to be asked to curtail than to be rejected or accused of sloppy research or of displaying significant weaknesses in your writing.

Overall, outline the research methodology adhered to in the study and subsequently the research design. Explain its rationale and how you applied it in the research. What guided your choices? Reviewers will be looking for robust data and methodology and an explanation of why it is of general research interest and relevance to look at the empirical field in question. For instance, if you choose to include interviews, you should explain why interviews are suitable for the study as a part of the research design, but you must also be prepared to explain the four main interview dimensions.

The first dimension is an overview of the interviews conducted. This is often summarized effectively in a table, with one row per interviewee. The different columns could designate the interviewees' work position, the date of the interview(s), the duration and a unique interview code. Regarding the interview code, this represents a way of identifying and referencing the interviews. When you write up your results, use the interview codes to identify which interviewee it was that made the different statements. It could be that several interviewees made similar statements, making this a robust finding, which is easily spotted through the interview codes. The interview codes should represent natural abbreviations to make them easy to remember (e.g. manager = MAN1, MAN2 etc.; a board member = BM1, BM2, BM3 etc.).

The second (before), third (during) and fourth (after) dimensions deal, respectively, with: How did you prepare for the interview, what happened during the interview, and what actions and events took place after the interview? In relation to these dimensions, typical issues to address include the following questions. How did you go about selecting or identifying interviewees (and in that sense why was it relevant to speak with them)? Were the interviews unstructured, semi-structured or structured? Also, what themes and questions were prepared before the interview? Did you send an "interview guide" to the interviewees beforehand and did you adhere strictly to the guide during the interview? How did you record the data (via tape recorder, hand-written notes or by means of a computer)? How many researchers participated in the interview and where did the interviews take place? Importantly, how did you go about analyzing the interviews: by means of unstructured reading and rereading to identify a

pattern, by some sort of manual coding system, word count or other type of content analysis, through computer software analysis programs, etc.?

3.6 Results

Results are the driving force of the publication (Elsevier, 2013). The following recommendations are provided by Elsevier (2013). Only data that are essential to the discussion (i.e. primary data) should be included. Do not hide data in an attempt to save it for a later paper. This merely dilutes the work and ends with a loss of reinforcing data, making it more problematic to convince reviewers and readers of the robustness of the study. Tell a clear and easy-to-understand story; maintaining a common thread throughout the text is therefore important. The author should highlight data that differ from findings in previous publications and unexpected findings. For one thing, this makes it easier to substantiate the sturdiness of the paper's contribution(s). Elsevier (2013) furthermore counsels authors to avoid a duplication of results described in the text or other illustrations.

The results should be clearly presented. Tables or figures will often be a useful way of displaying the main results (Audisio et al., 2009; Elsevier, 2013). However, avoid the temptation to fill the table with too many words, and make sure to explain all indispensable concepts in the text relating to any tables or figures. Structure is essential when presenting the results, especially when reporting qualitative data where the descriptions may be quite lengthy. The use of subsections is one way to clarify the structure and logic of the paper (Elsevier, 2013).

3.7 Discussion

The discussion section is where you interpret what your results mean. It is the most important section in the paper. This is where you sell the data and articulate your contribution. It therefore follows that a paper really needs good data. A huge number of manuscripts are rejected because the discussion section is weak or merely contains a description of the results. The execution of the discussion (section) must thus be stupendous.

Necessary check points include making sure the discussion corresponds with, and complements the results, while doing more than merely repeating the results. Furthermore, relate your work to that of others, also contradictory findings. Convince the readers that your view/finding is better. Avoid statements that go beyond what the findings can support. The same is true of non-specific statements (i.e. be as accurate as possible). Furthermore, do not use or introduce new terms that have not already been introduced in your paper. This is important in order to avoid confusing the readers unnecessarily. Be careful with speculations. If included in the text, ensure that they are rooted in facts. They should preferably be presented at the end of the discussion section. Make sure your message is complete (meaning that you have what you need) before you start to write or submit the paper (Elsevier, 2013). Nonetheless, concerning length: "The discussion should be clear, sharp and direct. Length does not translate into quality" (Audisio et al. (2009, p. 354). Ensure that there is a close relationship between the (essence of the) literature review section or your theoretical lenses and your discussion section.

3.8 Conclusions

"The conclusion is the most challenging section to write and it should only be attempted once the rest of the manuscript is complete" (Audisio et al. (2009, p. 354). It is often useful to restate the purpose and/or the research questions at the beginning of the conclusion. Thereafter, outline the main findings so as to show clearly that you have answered what you set out to study. The emphasis should be on the "main" findings, referring to aggregated findings and overall inferences made from the data. Elsevier (2013) underscores this point. Do not just list the results here; trivial restatements are unacceptable. Implications should follow the main findings. Hitherto you have restated and answered the research question(s), but what does it mean? What are the implications? An important task here is thus to answer the imperative "so what" question. This relates closely to what Elsevier (2013) refers to as the need to explain how your work advances the field of study. Justifying and explaining this can be achieved by indicating uses, extensions or applications of the work.

3.9 Use of references

Use references wisely in your study to adequately, yet precisely indicate which literature you want to have a conversation with and contribute to (Jönsson, 2006). Make sure to relate to the format requirements. Some journals require specific styles, others allow more general styles for the initial submission. Nevertheless, be consistent and thorough, whether you decide to reference manually or via software like Endnote or Mendeley.

It is advisable to incorporate at least a few references in your manuscript from the journal you are targeting. This clarifies the thematic relevance of the submission to the journal and is a point of departure for relating to the literature and providing the foundation for a contribution.

References can roughly be divided into three categories: 1) core or essential references, 2) references relating to the research area but not very close to your approach, and 3) other references that essentially circumscribe other types of research. In your manuscript you are likely to end up with several category two references, which you naturally will reference only once or twice. You should have few or no category three references, while you are expected to carefully identify a few category one references. These are the references you will readdress several times in the text. They constitute the basic reference points for articulating the contribution of the study. Normally, the number of category one references is in the range of two to eight. Rather than adding many, you should engage properly with a small number of them.

3.10 Summarizing the characteristics of well written manuscripts

A common characteristic of the best articles "is the thoughtful and careful matching of manuscript form and structure to the theoretical purpose of the paper" (Fulmer, 2012, p. 330), making it easy to see through the "manuscript's window". Elsevier (2013) recommends that authors retain a key emphasis on clarity, objectivity, accuracy and brevity. Belgrave et al. (2002) largely agree, but meticulously point out the importance of providing enough details about your work. Balancing brevity and details is inherently difficult, yet important, and this challenge relates to what Whetten

(1989) called the trade off between parsimony and comprehensiveness. The former suggests that elements adding little or nothing to the text should be deleted. Comprehensiveness suggests that all necessary elements must be included. Thus, leaving out important factors without adequately and convincingly explaining why they are ignored is not a good idea.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on academic writing, seeking answers to the following research question: What publication and manuscript preparation advice is offered by the research community?

Key reasons why papers are rejected include: poor journal selection, insufficient problem statements, unbalanced (disproportionate) research design or manuscript structure, and confusing writing. Do not repeat these mistakes when drafting your manuscripts. Doing a research project and writing the subsequent manuscript is essentially about making a variety of choices. In the manuscript these choices must be described and explained well. The more surprised the reader becomes as he/she reads, the more likely it is because the manuscript is badly structured. Ambiguity and complexity are also dangers, including conceptual unfamiliarity or inconsistencies. It is therefore vital to establish a clear common thread throughout the entire manuscript.

Persuasively articulated contributions are needed in high-end journals. In this regard you must engage actively with the literature. To succeed you also need to build a strong set of arguments that will convince the readers (including the editor and the reviewers) of the merits of the manuscript. The contribution part, especially, must be dealt with meticulously. In light of high rejection rates, this will often mean the success or failure of the paper. The discussion section should therefore be used to sell the data and articulate your contribution. Effective, yet appropriate writing is important. Prominent scholars are expected to produce manuscripts with a key emphasis on clarity, objectivity, accuracy, and to master the parsimony and comprehensiveness trade off.

Paper production is not only about research details and manuscript technicalities. It also requires good time management skills. To stand a

better chance of getting your work published you should develop work routines and habits that ensure that you spend your time well and strengthen your opportunities and range by cooperating with carefully selected partners. Key issues therefore include the ability to focus and prioritize – not only between research activities and other activities, but also in terms of how your research time is best spent. Cost-benefit considerations are therefore essential to any successful scholar. Additionally, you must insist on not resting until your work is published. Above all, be persistent and believe in your work. Do not get discouraged, and do not give up!

One limitation of this study is the choice of targeting published journal articles. There are several books on the subject that might also be useful. Moreover, future studies can explore what it takes to succeed in other publication outlets/forms than academic journals, including anthologies. Additionally, further work in this area can explore factors that are important elements of what it takes to succeed as a publishing scholar, but hitherto neglected by the literature on academic writing (and thus not covered by this literature review).

References

Ambert, A.-M., Adler, P. A., Adler, P., & Detzner, D. F. (1995). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *57* (November), 879–893.

Ashkanasy, N. (2013). *Publishing for Impact*. Video clip of the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099–1379

Audisio, R. A., Stahel, R. A., Aapro, M. S., Costa, A., Pandey, M., & Pavlidis, N. (2009). Successful publishing: How to get your paper accepted. *Surgical Oncology*, *18*, 350–356.

Belgrave, L. L., Zablotsky, D., & Guadagno, M. A. (2002). How do we talk to each other? Writing qualitative research for quantitative readers. *Qualitative Health Research*, *12*(10), 1427–1439.

Bonner, S. E., Hesford, J. W., Van der Stede, W. A., & Young, S. M. (2006). The most influential journals in academic accounting. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *31*, 663–685.

Brinn, T., & Jones, M. J. (2008). The composition of editorial boards in accounting: A UK perspective. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *21*(1), 5–35.

Cederström, C., & Hoedemaekers, C. (2012). On dead dogs and unwritten jokes: Life in the university today. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *28*, 229–233.

Elsevier (2013). *Prepare your paper for submission*. Elsevier for Authors. Accessed 7. January 2013, Retrieved from http://www.elsevier.com/journal-authors/home#prepare-your-paper

Endenich, C., & Trapp, R. (2016). Cooperation for publication? An analysis of co-authorship patterns in leading accounting journals. *European Accounting Review*, *25*(3), 613–633.

Fulmer, I. S. (2012). Editor's comments: The craft of writing theory articles – variety and similarity in AMR. *Academy of Management Review*, *37*(3), 327–331.

Glick, W. H., Miller, C. C., & Cardinal, L. B. (2007). Making a life in the field of organization science. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *28*, 817–835.

Guthrie, J., Parker, L. D., & Gray, R. (2008). Requirements and understandings for publishing academic research: An insider view. In C. Humphrey & B. Lee (Eds.), *The real life guide to accounting research: A behind the scenes view of using qualitative research methods.* Oxford: CIMA Publishing.

Jacobs, K. (2012). Making sense of social practice: Theoretical pluralism in public sector accounting research. *Financial Accountability and Management*, *28*(1), 1–25.

Jönsson, S. (2006). On academic writing. *European Business Review*, *18*(6), 479–490.

Merchant, K. A. (2010). Paradigms in accounting research: A view from North America. *Management Accounting Research*, *21*, 116–120.

Moizer, p. (2009). Publishing in accounting journals: A fair game? *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *34*, 285–304.

Tienari, J. (2012). Editorial: Critical scholars in the machinery of publishing: Experiences, reflections, alternatives. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *28*, 205–208.

Toft, C. A., & Jaeger, R. G. (1998). Writing for scientific journals I: The manuscript. *Herpetologica*, *54* (Suppl.), S42–S54.

Tychinin, D. N., & Kamnev, A. A. (2005). Beyond style guides: Suggestions for better scientific English. *Acta Histochemica*, *107*, 157–160.

Wagner, B. A. (2012). Publishing in international journals: De-mystifying the process, reducing risk and improving success. *European Business Review*, *24*(1), 20–27.

Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, *14*(4), 490–495.

White, L. (2005). Writes of passage: Writing an empirical journal article. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *67* (November), 791–798.

Young J. J. (2006) Making up users. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 31*, 579–600.