WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs (2024) 23:131–136
https://doi.org/10.1007/s13437-024-00340-x

EDITORIAL

How to write a good research paper?

From 'publish or perish' to 'publish for purpose':
Elbanna and Child (2023)

Dong-Wook Song[1]

Published online: 17 June 2024

Prologue

Research is not fully completed until it is published. Publication at a peer-reviewed journal, like JOMA, is regarded as a disseminating activity to be routinely fulfilled by scholars and researchers. The activity is to be conducted in a way to contribute to the learned societies as well as the general public by sharing a knowledge generated by the research. Pressures to publish have, however, led us to face with an abundance of research on trivial matters, rather than on issues of significance as concerned by Elbanna and Child (2023; p. 614). This concern is even reflected by Deitz et al. (2023) who describe the academia as a marketplace of ideas wherein scholars and researchers compete to establish themselves as a thought leader in their chosen field. The thought leadership can be only achievable via publication of their works in a well-regarded or top-tiered journal of their discipline.

What elements are then essential for a good paper covering the significant issue? How to frame those components in the paper? Having the very intention of JOMA becoming a top-tiered outlet in the field of maritime studies, this editorial discusses these matters in a brief manner. Young scholars and researchers might consult for more details with those references enlisted in the end as a reading material for their own benefits.

✉ Dong-Wook Song
joma@wmu.se

[1] World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden

What is a good paper?

This question is of the characteristics or features that the good research paper contains. In other words, the same question is in line with what the research is about and for. The previous editorial (Song 2021) attempts to define it as "the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes" (p. 407). Thus, the good paper ought to conceptually and/or empirically produce new comprehension or at least better understanding of the world where we live in.

Practically speaking under this principle, we could make this question visualised by considering what an editor and a reviewer do when making an editorial decision for and reviewing a submitted manuscript. The items as listed below should be clearly articulated and well presented in the manuscript.

- Research focus and contribution.
- Literature review.
- Research design, method and methodology.
- Discussion and implication.
- Research limitation.

These elements are simply outlined as IMRAD standing for **I**ntroduction, **M**ethods, **R**esults and **D**iscussion. With these headings, Eriksson (2024) offers a detailed structural model for crafting a compelling academic publication. Von Larcher (2024) does succinctly add up a few lines to them in an easy-to-understand manner: that is, Introduction (***Why*** did you do the study?), Methods (***What*** did you do?), Results (***What*** did you find?), and Discussion (***How*** does the study advance the field?).

How to frame them?

How to operationally put those five components together in a logical and convincing way? This editorial makes an attempt to enlist a piece of advices for your own digestion, reflection and application with the hope that JOMA receives such a paper from now on.

Research focus and contribution

A good introduction is expected to succinctly present an intended contribution to the field in question; it might be practical, managerial, policy or, more importantly, scientific/theoretical. The contribution can be made by focusing on a particular topic and by identifying a gap. When doing so, you are warned to avoid the too-familiar 'seek to close the gap' type of research objective; you do not find a gap, you 'create' it; lack of conceptual or empirical precedent does not constitute the gap (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto 2021; p. A13). You must convince the editor-in-chief, section editor and reviewers that there is a noticeable contribution contained in your submitted manuscript by the end of your introduction section.

When writing the introduction, you might consider doing it in a prolepsis – start with the ending, then describe how you got there by helping readers to navigate your paper. The type of writing is likely to get necessary attention from the beginning since we are all aware that readers of academic articles are unlikely to read in a linear manner (Baruch et al. 2008; Lindgreen and Di Benedetto 2021).

Literature review

This is the first thing all researchers do. A well conducted literature review accomplishes a number of objectivise: that is, evincing your familiarity with the literature being questioned, supporting your proposed conceptual framework or model, and showing what is missing or under researched in the literature (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto 2021). Using the flow of Von Larcher (2024), the literature review is carried out in a way to find 'what is not known' by carefully examining 'what is known' about a topic being investigated. A frequently used bibliometric analysis could be a good starter to establish an overview of the field by visualising patterns and trends of previous researches in the chosen area; however, doing so just for a sake of itself – that is, a mechanical way – is not sufficient. The literature review section must be presented towards supporting your research objective(s) in a logical, rather than superficial, flow.

When your editor-in-chief was in his doctoral study, a well-respected senior maritime economist put him in a situation where he was to swim on the surface of literature oceans in a library and asked him not to come out until he could systematically figure out 'whats and whos' in the oceans – this stage could be reachable only after having yourself fully absorbed into the literature; in particular, this line of grounding research exercises is essential when you are jumping into an unknown territory. Of course, the said oceans imply a domain-specific or -related (sub)field of academic disciplines wherein you wish to put yourself as an established researcher or scholar. The said maritime economist was peacefully passed away a few years ago but his advice on how to conduct the literature review is embedded into the mind of your editor-in-chief in every respect.

Research design, method and methodology

You are to be aware that research design problems come up from all kinds of studies in nature (qualitative, quantitative and even mixed) and can potentially cause a bigger problem at the later stage of the paper. The following points made by Michael Mol in the editorial of Lindgreen and Di Benedetto (2021) are worth addressing as a food for thoughts:

> In decreasing order of importance, the top five research design problems are as follows: (i) *post-hoc theorising*, where hypotheses and the accompanying theory actually follow the results, but supposedly lead them, (ii) *endogeneity*, with many manuscripts suffering from omitted variable bias or the pos-

> sibility of reverse causality, (iii) *common method bias or variance*, when data collection from a single source artificially inflates correlations, (iv) *relevance*, when authors happen to have data that are employed to address an insignificant or even non-existent problem, and (v) *overly descriptive work*, which is most commonly found in qualitative manuscript (p. A14). [emphasised in italics by your editor-in-chief]

He goes one step further making a recommendation:

> Care in the selection of research design to suit the specific research question, anticipation of possible problems associated with the selected research design, undertaking robustness checks to *justify the choice of research design*, and to present research design *methodology* with full disclosure (p. A14). [emphasised in italics by your editor-in-chief]

Your editor-in-chief observes that there is a tendency to focus on methods over methodology in a quantitative paper, and on description over processes in a qualitative manuscript. One cannot be taken at the cost of the other. Again, in the Von Larcher (2024) frame, the section of Methods (*What* did you do?) is to be supplemented by Methodology (***How*** did you justify a chosen method?).

Discussion and implication

A good research paper is expected to make a strong conclusion that includes conceptual and/or theoretical contributions and managerial and/or policy implications – (hopefully) both but (at least) either. The paper with it is likely to win over reviewers and to convincingly persuade the editor-in-chief to make a revise-and-resubmit decision, or at least to avoid a desk-rejection.

The following advice, by Luigi De Luca in the editorial of Lindgreen and Di Benedetto (2021), seems particularly relevant:

> Managerial implications should not be an afterthought. They are a great opportunity to elevate your manuscript. A strategy I have used in recent manuscripts is to write managerial implications in 3–5 *action-oriented* paragraphs, each opened by a *direct and normative* statement for managers (p. A15) [emphasised in italics by your editor-in-chief].

This advice is still valid by putting ‘policy’ into the space of ‘managerial’.

Research limitation

Another part of the concluding section that a good research paper must contain is the discussion of limitations. We do all know that whatever level of research is designed, implemented and presented, it has a certain limitation. You are thus encouraged to proactively make a realistic statement of limitations. Doing so implies that you are fully aware of relevant literature, method and/or methodological defects (or imperfection) and, of course, usual data-related issues as is common in empirical studies.

Your editor-in-chief does occasionally see a manuscript that does not even acknowledge limitations of the study from which the manuscript is developed. Wise authors are likely to spare a space in the conclusion to address limitations as the future line of investigations. Peers in the same field are often beneficial when reading those limitations as theirs; thus, collectively advancing the literature by learning from others.

Epilogue

The academia is regarded as a marketplace of ideas (Deitz et al. 2023). Good ideas are more likely to produce a good research paper. Fisher (2022) puts forward the four ways of generating a good (research) idea – that is, research, conversation, observation, and attention. Your editor-in-chief is willing to make an effort by guiding and refining a manuscript if (and only if) he is intrigued by the central idea behind the manuscript.

A good idea is not born, it is developed. Your editor-in-chief has often found useful when transforming a night-awaken idea (like a eureka moment) into a visual form – 'writing' with a diagram. An idea is generated as a creative activity, while a critical mindset translates it through a convincing story-telling process. Nygaard (2015) terms these two interdependent and iterative exercises as 'Creative: What do I want to say?' and 'Critical: How should I say it?' Scholars or researchers communicate their idea (and output) primarily through writing. Thinking can be boosted by writing; writing can deepen thinking. Both creativity and criticality must go hand-in-hand.

By doing this repetitive but progressive process, you will become a better researcher over the years to come. By doing this much-needed intellectual exercise (especially, in an era of advanced technology like A.I.), all of us can enhance our knowledge in a way to make the world a better place by echoing the mindset of the *Publish for (or with) Purpose*.

Finally, in his latest reading (in fact, just yesterday), your editor-in-chief finds insightful the following sentence of a world-known social psychologist in his memoir.

> If you are going to be an academic, I think it helps foster originality to know things others do not, even at the cost of not knowing lots of things most others do (Nisbett 2021; p. 31).

Dong-Wook Song
Editor-in-Chief
joma@wmu.se

References

Baruch Y, Konrad A, Aguinis H, Starbuck W (eds) (2008) Opening the Black Box of Editorship. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Deitz G, Hansen J, Fox J, Morgan R (2023) Masterful Scholarly competences and the development of impactful B2B marketing theory: contributions of Dr. Shelby D. Hunt. Ind Mark Manage 115:368–377

Elbanna S, Child J (2023) From 'Publish or perish' to 'Publish for purpose'. Eur Manage Rev 20(4):614–618

Eriksson D (2024) The art and science of Scholarly writing: framing symmetry of specificity beyond IMRAD. Eur Bus Rev 36(2):141–153

Fisher G (2022) Good article ideas and where they come from. Bus Horiz 65:101–103

Lindgreen A, Di Benedetto A (2021) How authors really frame a top manuscript. Ind Mark Manage 94:A11–A17

Nisbett R (2021) Thinking: a memoir. Aqora Books, London

Nygaard L (2015) Writing for scholars: a practical guide to making sense and being heard. Sage, London

Song D-W (2021) What is Research? WMU J Maritime Affairs 20(4):407–411

Von Larcher T (2024) How to write a Scientific Paper. Author Workshop Webinar. Presented on 13th May