Writing to Get Published: The Necessary Elements of Scholarly Journal Articles

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Abstract:

This article provides an analysis of the problems scholars face in publishing in higher quality, peer-reviewed English language journals and proposes specific solutions. It is based on observations made in numerous workshops and close one-on-one work with postgraduate students and academics primarily in Asia but also elsewhere. The article makes a contribution by making explicit understandings, values and practices that underpin academic publishing and describing and analyzing the six elements required by peer reviewed journals. Using a ‘scholarship of application’ the article begins with an explanation of the literature review and then the element of novelty or necessity of a new idea. It then turns to the six elements of research and writing in terms of theory, themes and narrative as the first three and then the last three: the requirement for description, analysis and evaluation. Finally, it provides a series of specific tips to help manage each of these elements.

Keywords: academic writing; scholarship; literature review; scholarly publishing; English for Research Publication Purposes; writing tips

1. Introduction: Academic Publishing, Global Conversations and Literature Review

Public policy around the globe now pushes scholars to publish in English language journals with the distinctive norms of that style of publishing (Englander & Smith, 2013). Such publication requirements are considered normal and an expected part of academic role (De Rond & Miller, 2005). There are considerable hurdles to publishing in these journals. All academics face these challenges from understanding what topics and research methods are acceptable, to making the time to write and revise and to learning the mysteries of journal editors’ decision making.
There is an additional challenge for scholars whose first language is not English. This paper aims to help scholars from around the globe, whether coming from English speaking or non-English speaking backgrounds, to write and publish in international journals by providing insight into the six elements required for a scholarly journal article and a set of explicit tips for ensuring their articles are ready for submission to such a journal. The tips are set out at the end of each section.

The basic expectation for publications comes from the idea that the university is society’s leading knowledge institution—the top-level knowledge creator, evaluator, disseminator and repository. This view of the university as the knowledge hub is not widely understood because contemporary societies look elsewhere to establish the value of ideas. Contemporary society often determines the value of an idea by establishing its monetary value or by measuring public attention, often through social media or news. Yet the value of an idea is not best measured by financial interest nor by social media attention. The commercial value of an idea is a measure of potential profitability not truthfulness. In the same way, deciding the value of an idea by social media sharing measures only popularity and not the underlying value of the idea as a contribution to human knowledge and society.

The basic value of an idea is its correctness, its ability to provide additional insight into existing knowledge or to create new knowledge. Identifying and evaluating an idea, determining whether it provides a knowledge contribution, is a job for knowledge experts. For several centuries now, universities have had the mission of developing and evaluating new ideas. The contribution of university academics to this mission is demonstrated through the writing and publishing of scholarly journal articles.

To address the aim of this paper, helping non-English background scholars to publish—the first section of the paper explains the contribution and the literature review. The second section identifies the core reason for publishing—the discovery or the knowledge contribution. The third section distinguishes further between popular and scholarly writing. The fourth section describes the argumentation in terms of theory, themes and narrative. The fifth section describes the three scholarly tasks of every journal article, the descriptive, analytic and evaluative tasks and the sixth section provides a conclusion. Readers looking for the six elements immediately are directed to start at section 1.1 Global Conversation below.

A note on theory and method

This article is not a typical scholarly article aimed at advancing disciplinary knowledge per se. Rather, it is a type of scholarship described by Boyer as the “scholarship of application” (Boyer, 1990) p. 23—a type of knowledge developed by working in an applied context (Golding, 2017). As Golding explains in her work of similar scholarship: “I do not claim that every piece of advice is a ‘new discovery’ in the sense of ‘never thought of before’, because this would only be appropriate for the scholarship of discovery, not application.”(Golding, 2017) p. 47.

Lillis and Curry call for an unmasking of “understandings, values and practices” for people whose first language is not English and this paper aims to contribute to that research agenda (Lillis & Curry, 2010) p.6. There are a number of discrete reasons for this challenge. In the first place, much of the global conversation takes place in English (Lillis & Curry, 2010), and as such it creates special challenges for non-native speakers (Salager-Meyer, 2014). While efforts to create broader acceptance of non-standard Englishes, such as Costa’s proposal for Indian English (Costa, 2019), the academic journals consider excellent use of standard English one of the criterion for acceptance of a submission.
Secondly, scholars from different educational traditions (Lyytinen, Baskerville, Iivari, & Te’eni, 2007) have different understandings and take different approaches to writing. While this challenge is difficult for scholars of non-Anglo traditions generally, it is particularly challenging for academics whose educational background is in Asia (Arsyad, Arono, Ramadhan, & Maisarah, 2020). This double challenge of language and distinct educational traditions exists not only because Asian trained scholars publish in a foreign language that is far removed from their first language, but even more so, because Asian educational systems use profoundly different methods and approaches to knowledge development and transfer—traditions that are very different from the western traditions that underpin the leading journals. For example, while analysis and critique underpin western pedagogies, Asian pedagogies emphasize memorization and recitation.

Further issues result from the second language challenge. As Yeh notes in a study of English teaching in the Philippines, a country with very high rates of English understanding, there remains a strong preference for use of local languages and code-switching behaviour, reflecting a level of comfort in Tagalog not experienced in English (Yeh, 2019). It reflects thinking in the original language, even in highly academic settings, and a problem of finding pathways of expression of ideas in English. This problem is exacerbated in the context of writing academic English. Further, while a recent study of five academics from the Far East by Belcher and Yang did not find this educational difference for Asians to be particularly significant, it still noted that “limited research training, lack of international experience, or still developing research-writing proficiency”—the core contribution of the present article—was a challenge (D. Belcher & Yang, 2020).

These traditions make Western style thinking and writing socially awkward and create serious obstacles to journal writing. As Arsyad et al note in the context of Indonesia, for example, “authors tend to avoid criticising the work of others and thus have difficulty in revealing a knowledge gap or niche to justify their research and they tend to write descriptive discussion sections without comparing or contrasting their research results or findings with those of relevant studies in the literature” (Arsyad et al., 2020). This focus on description and avoidance on critique is common result of Asian education where a tradition of respect, an emphasis on memory work is preferred over analytic and creative work.

A third issue also identified by Arsyad et al. is a need for additional research on publication in international journals from a rhetorical perspective (Arsyad et al., 2020). They note that those articles that do address these rhetorical issues tend to focus on aspects of structure, namely, abstracts, introductions and discussion sections. The higher levels of rhetorical structure, such as theory, themes and narrative, are understudied (Arsyad et al., 2020). With these concerns and aims in mind, the article takes an applied approach for non-Anglo L2 academic writers.

The current article is based on experience is drawn from working closely with more than 50 researchers from non-English language backgrounds, advising them on their research, their draft articles, as well as reviewing for journals and supervising research students—a sample size similar to Lillis and Curry (Lillis & Curry, 2010). The article is not claiming novel discovery as its contribution. Rather, the claim is that the research contribution comes from offering illumination into the ‘black box’ or often implicit way in which western academics think while doing their research and writing. Thus it aims to make an applied contribution to addressing the challenges of English for Research Publication Purposes (Burgess & Cargill, 2017; Flowerdew, 2013). Its explicit aim is to help L2 scholars improve their work and so increase their chances of being published in their desired journals—an important and worthy
objective (Flowerdew, 2013), and a burgeoning area in need of support (Li & Flowerdew, 2020).

The method used is reflective and observational. The article does not attempt to address all issues in article writing, nor address particular challenges such as turning a dissertation into a journal article (Tribe & Tunariu, 2016) or the specific concerns of different disciplines (Van Way III, 2007). It does not aim to address other aspects of publishing such as helping junior scholars (Chan et al., 2016). Scholars looking for such help are advised to look to their specific disciplines for help, e.g. (Davidhizar, Bechtel, & Tiller, 1999; Shidham, Pitman, & DeMay, 2012; Soule, Whitely, & McIntosh, 2007; Sternberg & Sternberg, 2010). Rather, the ideas found in this article, while useful for most academic writing, are focused on articles for scholarly journals.

1.1 Global conversation

Academics at universities are engaged in a global conversation that aims to keep useful theories and findings alive, organized, and advancing free from error. The conversation takes place in published journals. Good ideas, insightful discoveries and significant contributions to this global conversation, however, do not belong to any single academic, university, or country. Rather, every country with its own academics and universities engages in the conversation to compare, contrast and test knowledge against the knowledge of others elsewhere.

Some of the knowledge is the identical, applicable and useful all around the world. For example, in the natural sciences we see the physics of gravity operating in the same way everywhere. If we drop a banana in the UK it will fall to the ground in exactly the same way as it drops to the ground in Bangladesh or Indonesia. Beyond the natural sciences, however, knowledge is not identical around the globe. These differences pose both problems and opportunities for scholars outside the natural sciences. The problems arise for those whose first language is not English or who are unaccustomed to the practices of academic writing as conducted in English speaking countries (Lillis & Curry, 2010). The opportunities, of course, come from their familiarity with knowledge outside the reach of traditional English language grounded scholars.

1.2 Literature Review

As taking part in a large, global discussion, there is a need to become familiar with what has already been written about this topic. Developing this familiarity, indeed, deep knowledge, is necessary to identify the areas still in need of research. This familiarity is necessary to justify the publication of a study and to understand methods used to approach problems. Therefore, every journal article starts with a literature review. A literature review is no more than a review of the global discussion about your specific topic discussion, or research question. After all, it is rude to step into a discussion without acknowledging the others (Thomson & Kamler, 2013). A literature review should identify the main journal articles on the topic and state their discoveries clearly (Webster & Watson, 2002). In doing so, it is necessary to reference each journal article carefully to avoid plagiarism.

Tip 1: Write a short review of the literature to ensure you are participating properly in the conversation. This short literature review can be used to develop a comprehensive, properly focused review. Be especially careful to reference your sources.
2. What Does a Journal Want to Publish? Discoveries!

With the internet readily available and local publications such as newspapers and magazines being willing to publish all types of writing, it seems unnecessary to publish in a journal. Why go through all the trouble when someone could publish in a local paper or magazine? After all, the audience many scholars wish to influence is local where one’s own language is common. This impulse, while beneficial locally, does not contribute to the global academic discussion. It fails the accepted tests for new knowledge—the test of peer review necessary to claim new, true discoveries.

Although there are many reasons to publish (Day, 1996), the basic idea of journals is the publication of new discoveries (Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006). Knowledge discoveries and original contributions do not necessarily mean scientific experiments in expensive laboratories. Rather, knowledge can be advanced in a number of ways. Observation, argumentation, reworking of ideas, constructive critiques and new synthesis of existing ideas can all lead to new knowledge and are equivalent to knowledge discoveries made in a scientific laboratory. A discovery in broad terms is the result of answering a new question, or providing a new answer to, or new way of thinking about an existing question, issue or problem. This question provides the main topic for an article, or main theme. It is referred to in many journals as the ‘Research Question.’ *Most journal articles will require a clearly stated research question.*

Developing a research question is a difficult undertaking for all but the most advanced researchers. In many disciplines, the method for identifying the research question comes from identifying a gap in knowledge, a missing bit that has not been investigated. The Literature Review can be very helpful in this regard. By reviewing the literature, one can find exactly what question has not yet been answered, or what methods for investigation may be novel.

While this approach of identifying a knowledge gap is certainly an acceptable approach, a more interesting approach is curiosity driven or problem-solving research—the “method of problem” (Eidlin, 2011). This approach requires a researcher to identify an interesting problem worth solving. So, for example, the literature review may reveal that “By most accounts, law has not played a major role in Asian economic growth.” (Ginsburg, 2000). Addressing the gap, one could create a research question such as “What has played a major role in Asian economic growth which substitutes for law?”

A “method of problem” approach could lead someone to investigate: “Why has law not performed the same role in economic growth in Asia that it has performed elsewhere?” To answer this question, one could, for example, investigate how corporate law has effected financial markets in different but comparable parts of Asia (Sheehy, Yu, & Lie, 2022). This problem method has much to recommend it with the caveat that the researcher must have conducted a thorough literature review to be certain that the question has indeed not been answered.

Returning to consider whether there is a new discovery, we are not directed to rely local on local politicians or the author’s friends. Rather, we are directed to the community of knowledge specialists who are in the best position to determine whether the discovery is truly a discovery, worthwhile and in fact true. *Every journal article must make a claim to have discovered something new, something not known before and something worthwhile discovering.* (Ramalho Correia & Carlos Teixeira, 2005)
The nature and value of a new discovery is evaluated by a “peer review” process. Thus, journals provide an independent review by knowledgeable peers to evaluate whether the article contains a new and worthwhile discovery. Being the person who discovered new knowledge, being the inventor of a new idea is a matter of great honour and prestige. The person who first publishes gains credit as the creator of the idea, the inventor.

As a result, the peer review by other scholars of our new knowledge claims are the most appropriate way to check and test that new knowledge. It is a critical and preliminary step in the evaluation and publication process. While it can be frustrating, it is also very important that claims to new knowledge are verified by experts who are able to determine that it is new, true and worthwhile knowledge.

**Tip 2:** Clearly identify what your new knowledge or discovery is.

### 3. What Is Scholarly Content?

A basic issue for many academic writers is trying to decide what to focus on or write about. Should they report on some new local event? Or, should they write on some popular event? Or perhaps they should write about a political problem. Such knowledge is readily at hand and so easier to write about. It is less costly in terms of time and money to obtain information or data, less difficult to understand and more likely to get attention as a popular topic for local conversation. The problem with this approach, however, is that it fails the journalism test: *reporting on events is journalism and not scholarly work.*

A second challenge for many academics is the temptation to make an argument about local political issues. Many academics see failures of local political systems, from corruption of government to inadequate delivery of public services as problems worth addressing. They are able to identify the wrongs carefully and in detail. They can reveal the names of corrupt officials and other wrong doers as well as identify honest officials and likely reformers. As a result, they may wish to write articles and books that advocate specific political reforms. This approach fails the political advocacy test: *writing aimed at changing politics is political advocacy not scholarly work.*

Finally, there is a common pseudo-academic literature publicizing some local miracle cure or financial wizardry which will solve all of one’s personal problems in love, health and wealth. Again, these writings fail the popular press test: *popular writing is not scholarly writing.* It is “click-bait.” So, what is scholarly work?

Scholarly writing is focused on the communication of new discoveries, new knowledge or argument—an idea discussed further below (Ramalho Correia & Carlos Teixeira, 2005). To understand what counts as a new discovery or knowledge, think about the discovery of the antibiotic drug penicillin. This new drug was effective in killing bacteria that killed hundreds of millions of people globally. The discovery of this drug was something to tell the world about! It was the result of many years of scientific research in laboratories, slow painful work. But the knowledge produced was of worldwide importance. It is the same with new knowledge and discoveries whether in technology, human rights or financial products.

**Tip 3:** Is your work more than journalism, political advocacy and popular writing?
4. Making the Argument, Telling The Story: Theory, Themes And Narrative

A scholarly journal article must make an argument and tell a story. Scholars are often confused when confronted with the term ‘argument’ in scholarly writing because, in common usage, ‘argument’ means to have a heated, verbal disagreement. Yet, in academic writing, the word ‘argument’ means something quite different. As summarized by Wingate, the term ‘argument’ means: “(1) the analysis and evaluation of content knowledge, (2) the writer’s development of a position, and (3) the presentation of that position in a coherent manner.” (Wingate, 2012) 146. In this part of the article, we focus on the development and presentation of a position.

4.1 Theory

Theories are designed and tested within disciplines (Rothman, 2004). They are statements about hypothesized states of affairs. A theory provides a guess, an idea or set of ideas, about how things are connected, how things are constructed, or how they work. The discussion of theory often causes concern among academics. Theory is thought to be difficult, abstract, confusing and useless. Yet, as Kurt Lewin observed “there’s nothing more useful than a good theory!” (Cited in (Rothman, 2004))

Theory needs to be thought of at two levels—the individual level and the disciplinary level. Both levels need to be thought through and articulated. At the individual level, one’s theory requires one to identify one’s ideas or opinion about a topic. It is often referred to as ‘taking a position’—the argument, an idea about what something is, how it works or what is happening (Wingate, 2012). In articles following a scientific format, the position is set out in the form of hypotheses. One way to think about one’s position, is to answer the question: What is the basis for the idea being conveyed to the reader?

The writer must be able to tell the reader what the writer believes to be the true or correct. That underlying belief is theory at the individual level—one’s position. If one believes supply chain labelling is inadequate, one must have an underlying idea of what labelling is for and how labelling should be done to achieve a desired outcome. At this point in the article (and research) it is a personal theory. It is no more than a mere opinion and it remains such until it has been connected it with larger disciplinary theories that provide insights into and modelling for labelling and supply chains.

At the second level, the disciplinary level, the scholar needs to consider theory. To construct a good article, the writer needs to have a clear discipline-based theory to refer to, to connect one’s ideas with the larger discussion and to provide a foundation for the analysis. The discipline has certain understandings of how things work. For example, economics is well-known to have a theory that people pursue only their own individual interests. Publications in economics derive further studies based on this theory of human behaviour. Analysis occurs against an appropriate theoretical background. It is insufficient to state “I don’t think the supply chain labelling is good.” Any person can make that statement. There must be a discipline-based theory of supply chain labelling, such as theories of information transparency, against which to make an evaluation and judgement.

Appropriate disciplinary theories may be theories about such things as efficiency, theories about information disclosure and theories about legitimacy. Which disciplinary theory is most appropriate for a particular article can only be determined by the author who has done the literature review and takes into consideration the hypotheses and methods of the discipline?
Theory is critical because theory and method go together. Theory instructs the writer what to look for. For example, if we are looking for legal compliance in supply chains, a legal theory of what precisely counts as “legal compliance” will be critical. In this case, the method will be drawn from the discipline of law, examining the legal texts, legislation, cases and contracts to determine what constitutes compliance and then examine practices in a supply chain. If, however, we are looking at efficiency of labelling practices in a supply chain, an economic theory tells us what to look for and provides a method for measuring it. In terms of quality management, regulation and consumption, theories of disclosure will be helpful in testing whether and how supply chains are operating.

In summary, theory is the critical first step. Although it may not be easy to identify one’s theory in the first step, or to read or understand theories, both level of theory must be done to provide a foundation for a scholarly article. Clear use of theory helps identify and emphasize the value of findings even if analysis contradicts the theory (Rothman, 2004). The theory is not supposed to be unchallengeable truth. It is a framework for organizing ideas. Regardless of whether findings support or undermine a theory, they still create a contribution to knowledge. A theory provides the foundation for a model. A model is built on a theory of what something is, how it works or what is happening.

**Tip 4:** Be sure you are able to complete the following statements: “My theory or argument of (article topic) is…” and “My disciplinary theory is…” Ensure you have explicitly connected your individual theory to more widely accepted theories in your discipline in your literature review.

### 4.2 Themes

Theory is critical for themes. Theory identifies the benchmark or framework for the research and is referred back to throughout the article. To write a good article, a consistent theme must be developed and reiterated throughout the work. A theme is a recurrent and consistent idea that grounds a piece, that provides an intellectual home base for a piece and keeps both writer and reader on track. It provides a focal point for the discussion, connecting the individual theory with the evidence. It provides idea coherence. For example, in an article on supply chain labelling, broader discussions of label size, location, color and content, all need to be brought back to the topic of labels in supply chains. In law, the discussion will include consideration of jurisdiction, corelative rights and duties and contracting, and how different parties in the supply chain may have different, but related rights and duties. Yet, all of these ideas need to be connected to the main theme: supply chain labelling.

Themes are identified in the article’s abstract as part of the problem, discussed in the introduction and literature review, form a touchstone in the analysis, argumentation and reconsidered in their application in evaluation. It is often helpful while writing and editing an article to have the themes written on a paper or white board in front of the writer. A constant reminder helps one avoid researching and writing that is off track or writing that otherwise unnecessarily strays from one’s main theme. To help stay on track the writer may ask after writing each paragraph: does this add directly to my topic? Or, do I need to connect it to my theme more directly?

Another useful method for staying on track and strengthening one’s argument is careful use of ‘meta-discourse markers’—words like ‘therefore’, ‘suggestion’, ‘should’, and ‘never’ (Ho & Li, 2018). Look at each paragraph written. Mentally, could one of these four words be added at the beginning of the paragraph? They should not be added to each paragraph; rather,
use these four words to test whether the paragraph is following the themes and developing the argument.

**Tip 5:** Write your 2-3 themes on a piece of paper or sticky note and paste it on your desk to help keep yourself focused.

### 4.3 Narrative

The term ‘narrative’ or ‘story’ is odd to many academic writers because it implies fiction, or story-telling. In the academic context, however, it means something slightly different. It means having an idea or theme that will be argued, explained and advanced throughout the article (Edit911, nd). Sometimes, the term narrative is referred to as argument in academic writing, as noted above; however, it goes beyond argument in thinking of the dynamic, the introduction, actors and plot of the article—the units of analysis, dynamic interactions and systemic nature of the context. The reason for the use of the term story is that the whole of the narrative has to persuade the reader of a position or idea.

Thinking in terms of story, the idea of narrative requires starting at the beginning with an introduction to the idea and related concepts and arguments. It requires explaining how that idea interacts with other ideas and arguments. It requires consideration of why the position and understanding of the ideas and concepts matters. Why is the idea important? It includes consideration of what can be done with the idea.

To write the narrative, one needs to identify what a reader needs to know, what are the elements that will used to argue the position and how the ideas will be connected to convince or persuade the reader of the correctness of the position. In our example of supply chain labelling, readers will need to know a number of different issues. For example, “characters” or units of analysis need to be identified and developed, in the case at hand the following questions must be answered: what is a supply chain? Can a supply chain exist within a single enterprise? Or must it include a number of different, unrelated businesses? Readers will also need to know what counts as a label. Must a label have writing? Or may colors and symbols be sufficient? Then a plot must be developed. What is the dynamic of the situation? Supply chains succeed when doing X labelling or fail when Y labelling occurs. Using the answers to these questions, a scholar will be able to write a narrative about how supply chains work and the nature and role of labelling within them. This is essentially what is meant by a narrative.

How this narrative or story is conveyed depends significantly on the discipline. Natural sciences, for example, begin with an introduction to the problem by way of a short literature review. They have a clearly focused set of hypotheses. These hypotheses will then be addressed by a widely accepted methodology, the method being used described next in detail. The results of the analysis are set out next. The results section is followed by a discussion providing interpretation of the results. The discussion section argues why the results are important and deserve consideration and further attention. It evaluates the significance of the results. Obviously, if reading a published article, the discussion has convinced the journal editor that the results are significant and important. A conclusion follows summarizing the work, identifying the implications for further thinking and research in the field as well as limitations of the study presented.

This same model is often used in the social sciences. Social scientists adopt this model to address a fundamental criticism of their work as being overly subjective. By adopting the widely accepted model of knowledge generation used in the natural sciences, social scientists hope to overcome the objections to their work. Unlike natural phenomenon which operates as it does as a result of laws that operate regardless of human action or inaction, social
phenomenon such as markets, schools, courts and relationships are all the creations of humans. As a result, the subject matter lacks the objectiveness that characterizes natural phenomenon. The natural science researcher is not involved with nor immersed in the phenomenon under observation unlike the social scientist who is a human watching and construing other humans, and unavoidably subjectively brought into the phenomenon.

In law, but as well in the other disciplines at a higher level, often a more abstract and less structured approach to problems and their investigation and resolution prevails. Such articles are often in the form of reviews, analyzing the ideas and questioning whether the fundamental ideas or direction of development is correct, appropriate or reasonable. Unlike the more common work done in positive analysis, this high order work is normative in nature, asking “is this the way the questions should be asked?” And “does the discipline or approach answer the right questions?” Journal articles of this type are structured differently. While they may survey some literature, their main thrust is critiquing the trajectory of scholarship and proposing new ways forward. They engage with the main ideas of the area, the big ideas or theories that are being tested and advanced.

Regardless of the discipline, drafting a table of contents, generating an overview of the narrative or structure, often helps. It establishes the characters and plot—subject to revision of course as one makes progress on the topic. Jot down the basic argument and then use the headings as one writes. An easy approach to developing and staying on track using a table of contents is to use a software function such as the ‘Navigation Pane’ function in Word, which helps to see that the narrative is logical, does not miss any important step and is balanced—there is not too much space dedicated to only one aspect of the paper. The table of contents provides a road map for the article ensuring that it is properly aimed at the end point—the justification of the individual theory or position.

**Tip 6:** Try writing a table of contents for your article as early as possible. Expect to update and revise your table of contents as you write your piece and develop your argument.

### 5. The Three Tasks of Scholarship: Descriptive, Analytic and Evaluative

As is clear by now, writing a journal article is about knowledge. It is about the creation, evaluation and advancement of knowledge. While this can occur in apparently different ways as the different disciplines illustrate, at a fundamental level all knowledge advancement requires the three elements of: description, analysis and evaluation. *Every journal article must have all three elements.* This part of the article describes these three tasks of scholarship in some detail.

#### 5.1 Descriptive

The first task of the scholar is to have a clear conception of the topic, thing or idea under consideration. The description requires identifying the parts and characteristics of those parts. For example, a journal article about twitter will describe it as “a social media platform limited to publishing 280 characters, marked by a light blue background with a light blue bird as its trademark.” Alternatively, if the article is in computer science, it may describe twitter as “a computer program allowing interconnectivity across a wide range of digital platforms, simultaneously, for one-to-many telecommunications.” In other areas, such as law, the
description may be of a piece of legislation. The description may be something that includes basic history and purpose as well as a few basic features. For example, the company law legislation in Australia could be described as follows: “The Corporations Act 2001 is a comprehensive statute introduced in Australia to consolidate state-based law. It is an extensive piece of legislation comprised of 1,541 sections.”

The descriptive task is often found in or revealed by the literature review. The description is critical because it sets out the limits of the topic and defines what the terms and ideas are. Further, it provides the basis for the argument and analysis which follows. In writing a descriptive section, consider what exactly the reader must know in order to identify the contribution to knowledge and understand the argument. Do not assume readers same understand the topic or see the literature the same way. Telling the reader what is being discussed is a matter of your interpretation. It is the descriptive task.

**Tip 7:** Identify the issues, ideas and concepts that need to be explored for readers to understand what you are talking about.

### 5.2 Analytic

The next task is to conduct analysis of the things or issues described. Whereas the descriptive task is about identifying the parts, describing in detail their features, the analysis looks at the connection between the parts and the dynamics, how the parts work together, what influences their movement or changes, and the task of identifying the consequences of their working together, changing or not working. The analytic task may also consider meaning. It may ask: what is the purpose or meaning of X as just described?

Analysis requires consideration of method. It asks: is the research method being used appropriate? The method chosen must be suitable to address the research question or topic. For example, to answer a question about supply chain operation, the analysis could be quantitative or qualitative, depending on what is being investigated. If it is a preliminary investigation about suppliers’ preferences with respect to labelling, a qualitative study may be most appropriate. If the study looks at comparative efficiencies, a quantitative study will be most appropriate. Alternatively, it may ask a question about method and meaning. Such a question may be: has the interpretation been done correctly to derive the right or reasonable meaning?

Looking at related supply chain issues in the discipline of law, rather than qualitative or quantitative analysis, the normative analysis will focus on the nature and distribution of rights and duties in labelling. Who is required to create which labels and what information is required on them? Alternatively, the legal analysis may focus on diverse regulations concerning labelling and avenues for law reform. The analysis could be focused on how rights and duties interact, how they are structured, whether rules are substantive or procedural and whether these are appropriate, following an appropriate logic in relation to the philosophy of law and legal objective. Was the interpretation of the correct, leading to the right meaning?

It is clear that these markedly different disciplines, while examining the same phenomenon, have very different questions and accordingly, employ radically different methods. Such differences create great challenges when interdisciplinary work is being contemplated or undertaken.

**Tip 8:** Ensure that you are engaging in appropriate analysis, focusing on the correct issues and using the correct approaches to answer the question you have asked. Do not submit a paper without analysis. Your readers expect you to have conducted a thorough analysis of whatever
you have chosen to study. Do not disappoint them with an insubstantial analysis of the problem or its solution.

5.3 Evaluative

The evaluative task is a critical one to be undertaken thoughtfully at the end of the work. The literature review sets up the question. It will include a description of the ideas and issues addressed in the paper. The analysis will follow, providing an in-depth look at the issue under consideration. It will offer more than trivial insights into the matters under investigation. The evaluation then draws together all the work done. It provides a considered view of a) what has gone before, b) what has been argued to this point, and c) whether the argument and findings align with previous work or challenges those findings. The evaluative asks and answers the fundamental question, is this idea, state of affairs or thing, good, useful and appropriate or is it in need of change?

The evaluation is the most important part of the paper. It provides the new knowledge drawn from the description and analysis. It usually provides the original contribution as it challenges, supports or expands on the previous work in the area. The evaluation requires the researcher to think carefully, deeply and creatively about the problem of the paper. The author must think, ask and answer the question: “What is the meaning of my research?” The question can be asked from the perspective of other scholars, or from policy makers, managers or clinicians. The question is about the expected use or impact of one’s findings. What can the reader do with the result of the research? In other words, how does the evaluation of the problem and proposed solution have an impact?

Tip 9: Have you provided an evaluation of the subject of your article? On what basis, or what background or measure have you evaluated it? Have you explained and argued why that is an appropriate basis for evaluation earlier in your piece?

6. Conclusion

Writing for journals is hard work for everyone, whether a native speaker or an L2 scholar. Having a clearly structured approach and understanding of what is required, however, is a good start.

This article has reviewed the basic ideas that create the foundation of an article. A journal article requires participation in a global conversation through a literature review. It also requires some type of fresh contribution or discovery. The article has distinguished between form and content and set out the necessity and nature of theory, themes and narrative. The article then brought the reader through the main thought elements of description, analysis and evaluation. While simply including these headings will provide very little to the article itself, without this work being done in a thoughtful, careful manner, there is no chance of an article finding success in a journal. While as noted, it is not easy, the careful, meticulous work required produces something of lasting value that merits publication in a journal.

(Writers looking for more specific writing advice are advised to dig deeper in other publications such as (W. L. Belcher, 2019; Goodson, 2016; Hanauer & Englander, 2013; Kallestinova, 2011; Labuschagne, 2004)).
References


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