

Tailoring research articles to journals

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Knowing the written and unwritten rules of the game in getting journal papers published is necessary to compete for research space in the international research discourse community. This workshop aims to provide guidelines on tailoring research articles to journals to increase chances of getting journal papers published. The theoretical knowledge for the workshop is drawn from research on conventions of research articles and studies on why papers are accepted or rejected. The workshop begins with a review of reasons for manuscript acceptance and rejection. This is followed by a presentation of how different parts of a research article are adjusted to fit targeted journals. Finally, several case studies are used to show how authors tailor their papers to targeted journals in terms of the relevance to the journal, novelty and soundness of research, methodological approach and, last but not least, the writing style and format requirements of journals. This workshop is designed to help participants develop a checking mechanism to ensure that their submissions are appropriate for the targeted journal and will get a fair chance of review. The workshop will benefit academics who are embarking on writing of research papers as well as academics accustomed to writing conference papers and who are venturing into journal paper writing.

Keywords: research article, getting published, manuscript rejection

Introduction

Conferences and journal papers are avenues for the dissemination of research findings which contribute to the extension of knowledge. Conferences offer a public forum for the quick dissemination of research findings but the work is not available to the wider research community. Journals, on the other hand, reach a potentially bigger audience but the publication of manuscripts usually takes at least a year, and can run into two or three years. The selectivity of journals also results in fewer research articles getting published. The workshop focuses on reasons for manuscript acceptance and rejection, and strategies for tailoring research articles to targeted journals to increase chances of a review.

Reasons for manuscript acceptance and rejection

Research on why some manuscripts get published and others are rejected are fairly consistent on qualities of papers which make it pass the desk of editors and out to reviewers (e.g. Daft, 1985; DeMaria, 2007; Holschuh, 1998).

According to Holschuh (1998), papers which are accepted for publication:

1. contribute to existing body of knowledge,
2. employ appropriate and sound methodology,
3. fit journal, and
4. are written clearly.

The novelty, accuracy (methodology) and relevance of the research article is also highlighted by DeMaria (2007). For example, in the case of quantitative research, statistical methods are expected to be reported accurately and adequately, and in the case of qualitative research, how the categories are formed and how the participants are selected need to be explained. In addition to these, other determinants of whether the papers get published are manuscript length, compliance to journal format requirements and ability to respond to concerns identified by reviewers (Donovan, 2007; Ernest, 1995; Stout, Rebele & Howard, 2006). Brice and Bligh (2005) also stressed the importance of using the covering letter to assert the contribution of the paper to the body of knowledge by explaining the rationale for submitting paper to journal, briefly describing what the paper is about, and explaining why the readers of the targeted journal are the right audience for the work.

The possibility of bias in manuscript rejection was also explored in various studies (e.g. Isaacs & Tang, 1996). Cabral, Njinya-Mujinya and Habomugisha (1998) reports the frustration of African intellectuals who receive no reasons for rejected manuscripts. However, Aina and Mabawonku (1998) found that the manuscripts submitted