

Chapter 3. Positioning your writing

By Joanna Kossykowska, Elun Hack and Lindsay Harrison

This chapter highlights the importance of theory and theoretical positioning to academic writing. It identifies the overarching issues and also provides example by way of comparison of pedagogical approaches.

3.1 Conveying a central message to an audience in a management studies journal (Joanna Koszykowska)

For academics, writing is an integral part of the 'journey of writing'. Identities and reputations of scholars are primarily established by the proof of the quality of their publications (Cloutier, 2016). Writing and publishing high-quality academic articles is a demanding task. Authors who wish to increase their chances of publication in business and allied social science journals must ensure that their manuscripts are well-designed and evaluated, as well as being properly formatted following the target journal's requirements (Ahlstrom, 2017). This article will discuss how to improve the author's success rate when submitting a manuscript to leading journals.

A prospective author should first read the journal's aims and scope, and several articles from the targeting journal to help the author better understand the types of articles publishing in that journal (Ahlstrom, 2015). The author should carefully select the keywords, as they are used in a database search, and their good choice increase the probability that other authors will read the paper (Bach, 2015). A vital element of a successful paper is a research question, which should be transparent and answerable, and will catch the reader's attention (Grant & Pollock, 2011). The first impression matter and the introduction in management and business manuscripts often determine whether the readers will continue to read (Ahlstrom, 2017). Following an introduction, the paper should contain a summary that situates the writing in past literature and shows the need for the current study.

Further, a well-written methodology section of a research manuscript demonstrates that the author followed acceptable scientific standards in conducting research and to enable another researcher to replicate the study for comparison of the results (LaPlaca et al., 2018). The findings section in the manuscript should be separate from the discussion section and should not have any interpretations or conclusions. The conclusions section is the last impression left with the reader, and the author should present global and specific findings concerning the objectives of their research. It is the final place where authors can demonstrate that the manuscript deserves to be accepted and published. Some authors, (Bartunek et al., 2006; Sansone & Thoman, 2005) believe that the article for the business journal should be interesting, as combined with asking important research questions and continuing to maintain methodological rigour, will increase the popularity and impact of management research, partly by enabling readers to become more interested in the content.

Another importance in writing for a business audience is to think deeper about the practical relevance of the article, to help decision maker implement a better decision. Many articles discuss what managers should do, but do not outline the mechanism that explains how to achieve or implement the findings. Therefore, to make the publication relevant for practice, the author should explain how to think about the problem differently, how to include other factors that have not been discussed before. Moreover, for example, given the cross-country nature of JIBS, the scholar needs to explain how to implement the recommendations in countries that have different regulatory and social and economic systems (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2013).

Patriotta (2017), an experienced reviewer of JMS, suggested that "academic writing is an act of communication involving a diversity of actors (authors, editors, reviewers and other scholars), and its aim at conveying a central message (contribution) to an audience of (management) scholars and practitioners". Persuasive writing requires an understanding of how the plurality actors make sense of what people write.

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3.2 The importance of theoretical positioning (Elun Hack)

Writing, and publishing in academic journals is by no means a simple feat and requires the author to overcome several key challenges. Due to the importance of the article being grounded theoretically, as well as the application of suitable methodological and design approaches, authors often neglect the organising and framing of their work (Ahlstrom, 2017). The importance of framing the work is further evidenced by the numbers of papers rejected as a result of fundamental shortfalls of the writing and organisation, making the paper difficult to read (Ahlstrom 2010; Konrad, 2008). Grant and Pollard (2011) similarly advocate for the importance of framing and organisation of papers by suggesting that inadequacies in these areas often lead to submissions being rejected. After a review of the relevant literature, some key themes emerge when attempting to overcome the challenges presented to authors, these are discussed under the following headings: Introduction Focus, Research Question, and Clarity of the research question.

Grant and Pollock (2011) contend the significance of the introduction by suggesting that it will in most cases determine if / if not the reader will continue to read the article further. Ahlstrom (2017) suggests two key considerations for an impactful and enticing introduction, *Positioning or Situating* and *Motivation*. Early on within the introduction it is important to position or situate the article and its contents within the past literature, providing the reader a focus point as to how your research relates too, or is connected too similar fields of research. Moreover, the introduction is required to offer fundamental motivation for the research, explaining to the reader why it is required, and what contributions it makes. These two focus points of the introduction are important for the organisation of the paper and are underpinned by the research question.

In order to avoid a lack of focus and to facilitate the positioning / situating of the article, and detailing the motivation for the research, the researcher should seek to clearly state an answerable research question early on (Belostecinic, 2017). A clear answerable research question leaves little uncertainty as to what the subject matter of the following text will cover. Furthermore, it should be interesting, and address an area of interest that was not fully answered by the previous research (Konrad, 2008).

Ahlstrom (2017) offers “overly broad” as one of the biggest challenges to deciding on and discussing an articles research question. Without specificity a research question and the subsequent research will end up being broadly “about” a topic, citing various other pieces of work, and therefore not failing to make a new and meaningful contribution to the area of research. A clear and instructive research question is essential for retaining the reader’s attention, due to the specific focus and contribution of

the article being clearly presented. A clear research question leaves little uncertainty as to what the paper will discuss and utilise (Ahlstrom, 2015).

The preceding headings serve to assist and guide authors as to some of the challenges they will encounter when writing their articles. Some guidelines are offered to help overcome these challenges and allow the articles to capture the reader's attention through clear, instructive research questions and well-structured introductions.

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3.3 Comparing pedagogical approaches – a three paper comparative review (Lindsay Harrison)

Researchers claim that to enter the international business domain as an academic scholar it is necessary to publish ([Guthrie & Parker, 2014](#)), and preferably in a high-ranking journal (Tusselman, Sinkovics & Pishchulov, 2016). Yet, students commonly experience anxiety at the prospect of writing in scholarly journals (Lassig, Dillon & Diezman 2013). Students' concerns are understandable given that the editors of business journals have raised issues about the writing, framing and organisation of papers that are submitted (Ragins, 2012; Ahlstrom, 2017). To address these issues, various pedagogical approaches are emerging to target student' academic writing development (Coterall, 2012). However, mixed results are frequently reported. For example, while the peer review process can lead students to progress their writing skills, it can also cause novice authors to relinquish their efforts (Gravett et al. 2010; Hyland 2012). Due to a scarcity of explanatory research to investigate inconsistent learning amongst students, it is unclear why particular pedagogies in academic writing are effective for some students and not others. This gap in knowledge may constrain educators from developing and delivering education in academic writing that is effective for all students.

This paper analyses the student perspective to explore this gap in knowledge. It asks, 'what educational and individual student factors influence students' academic writing development in the business domain?'

This paper utilised a comparative review methodology and selected three papers for qualitative synthesis. Qualitative papers reporting on students' evaluations of their education in academic writing were chosen due to their ability to answer the research question. Due to time constraints and the exploratory nature of the brief, additional paper selection criteria were not specified. The findings of papers were thematically synthesised at a semantic level under the lens of social cognitive theory (SCT) which asserts that human behaviours are influenced by an amalgamation of interacting personal and environmental factors (Torre & Durning, 2015). This enabled the identification of individual and educational factors which influenced students' writing progression in the business domain.

Three papers were identified for comparative review. These papers and their core elements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Studies included

	Educational Pedagogy evaluated	Methods	Participants	Results format
Gravett et al. (2020)	Peer-review feedback process	Concept map-mediated interviewing	Researchers, n = 6	Researcher reflections and concept maps
Woodhouse & Wood (2020)	Peer-review and assessment process	Semi-structured interviews	Doctoral students, n = 7	A summary matrix of key-themes
O'Mahony	Specialist academic writing support	Group interviews	Doctoral business students, n = 4	Summary of common themes

Thematic synthesis of the papers' findings under the lens of SCT revealed four core themes. These were constraining individual factors; enabling individual factors, constraining educational factors and enabling educational factors. These themes and their contents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Thematic synthesis

Constraining Individual factors	Enabling Individual factors	Constraining educational factors	Enabling educational factors
Individual traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of confidence</i> • <i>Emotionally driven</i> • <i>Emotionally guarded</i> • <i>Foreign language speaker</i> 	Individual traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Determined and hard-working</i> • <i>Confident</i> • <i>Pro-active</i> • <i>Resourceful and adaptable</i> • <i>Self-regulating</i> • <i>Emotionally open</i> • <i>Resilient</i> • <i>Self-aware</i> 	Unequal power relations	Supervisor/peer support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Co-authoring</i> • <i>Experience sharing</i>
Individual experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of experience</i> 	Individual experiences	Nature of feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unconstructive</i> 	Nature of feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Transparent</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Experience with academic process</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unclear</i> • <i>Slow</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kind</i> • <i>Genuine</i> • <i>Constructive</i>
			<p>Educator/reviewer traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Experience in business domain</i> • <i>Inexperience with domain</i> • <i>Approachable, friendly and caring</i> • <i>Available</i> • <i>Holds a PhD</i>

Despite an increasing range of academic writing interventions to prepare students to write in scholarly journals (Cotterall, 2020), research has struggled to account for the success or failure of individual pedagogies. By examining students’ perceptions of their education in academic writing, this paper identified that both individual and educational factors influence students’ perceived writing development. As a result, I contend that due to individual student differences, a singular pedagogy is unlikely to lead to academic writing success for all. Rather, educational initiatives in academic writing should respond to individual student needs and experiences. The findings of this paper have implications for educators and researchers alike, and further research is required to determine how they can tailor academic writing supports for individual students to enable their scholarly success.

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