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**FOUNDATIONS OF ACADEMIC WRITING: HOW TO PRODUCE  
PUBLISHABLE RESEARCH ARTICLES FROM THESES AND  
DISSERTATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Increasing globalisation and the demanding economic stage of the world today require straight-to-point and on-the-move documents for the world's busy people. Extensive reports are very burdensome for business people, professors, and other professionals who need quick and concise information. Conference proceedings, journal articles, memoirs and executive summaries are but some of the materials readily read by these people who sparingly refer to elaborate versions for confirmation and affirmation. This paper, therefore, presents a set of suggestions for reducing findings/results obtained in masters/doctoral theses and dissertations into research journal articles for publication. Although the ideas encompassed here are not prescriptions for the production of research articles, it represents a set of guidelines and proposals that one ought to take into consideration in preparing academic papers.

**Keywords:** Theses and Dissertations, academic writing, publishable articles, academic papers, journal-length articles.

**Introduction**

Academic research reports presented as findings at conferences, for publication in journals or those made into books provide a reflective exposition of a blend of the author's goals, the research sponsor or promoter's goals and the concerns of the research community. Also contained in these are the interests of a broader targeted readership community. Therefore, an author's understanding of the goal of the research as well as the stakeholders that would consume the study is crucial.

Social science and educational researchers would traditionally distance themselves from the significant stakeholders interested their publications, for example, policy makers, and managements of institutions of higher learning. They would usually choose traditional journals

and conferences to show their work output.

This paper does not only bring to bear what 21<sup>st</sup>-century professional communities of practice need but also argues that there are definite steps that an author need to master before achieving the milestone of reaching the heart of policymakers and communities of practitioners. Indeed, without gain saying, the goal of most educational research outputs is to help readers understand contexts by providing lens to deal with issues and opportunities to innovate based on prior research knowledge.

A number of steps are critical when selecting a topic to work on a typical academic research article as in the case of planning and executing an article development process with approved theses or dissertations. One, choosing the subject of the journal-length article from an existing topic of the dissertation from the masters or doctoral work could be a daunting task. The action involves crafting a new theme from an existing one. The situation is comparable to making a branch of a tree from an existing tree; it calls for specific skills. Therefore, it would be proper to identify the possible research audience of the intended journal-length article. Pepper (n.d.) intimates that there is the need to envisage while writing your dissertation or thesis the possibility of getting a research article(s) from the eventual product. Pepper further advises that that would require reading about what journals accept for inclusion and tidying their papers along such lines, doing so with an eye on quality rather the quantity of text, graphics and tables produced. Sadly, though the engagement is not one that is merely limited to a matter of reducing enough issues raised in the original dissertation length paper to meet the page limitation accorded by the chosen journal. The entire organisation and thrust of the manuscript must be reconceptualised to produce a practical and focused paper.

In today's age, authors abound in various fields that are either usually part of professional associations and networks; or sitting in the "academic backyards" of the discipline that they represent. One way to bring academics to the table is making the early career researchers more resourced to deal with issues of the practice including learning the art of making academic papers. This paper, therefore, sought to deal with the fears and headache associated with early career researchers sticking out their neck for academic writing using the illustrative case of developing scholarly works from their unpublished thesis. Acknowledging the ideas exposed through this paper would yield good dividends to early career fellows in academic activities.

Most masters and doctoral boards or committees are a team of experts in the field who offer guided suggestions at the thesis writing stage and in some cases approval stages. Therefore, the opportunity to produce a journal-length article at a stage where the author has to do more of the journey of authorship as a single expert comes with a new set of responsibilities. It is not every thesis or dissertation author that at the time of authoring the masters or doctoral work that is considered an early career fellow. Some scholars have worked enormously in their fields before embarking on a master or doctoral work. It additionally provides an opening to the author to showcase to the scientific community the findings and conclusions in their work.

More often than not, dissertation and theses remain at the repositories or libraries that are rarely visited by scholars. However, published research articles have broader and more pervasive effect. An authored paper in a recognised journal that uses indexing system makes the work more public to a more extensive readership body (Singh, 2015). Additionally, Pepper (n.d.) contends that using such publications, new researchers get the opportunity to meet one of the significant demands of Higher Education institutions regarding funding, and academic promotions of faculty members in their fields of study. It also relates to the ranking of universities; and provides for knowledge sharing.; Again, it gives an opportunity for authors to get the intellectual ownership for their academic breakthroughs and work outputs. For Singh (2015), publishing in journals offers emerging academics the platform to rise to the status of "peers". Indeed, the consideration of an author as peer gives the individual a scholastic platform to be recognized by colleagues in the area of the discipline.

A well-prepared article presents a signal to authorities in a particular field that someone of great expertise has emerged in the area. Usually, the painstaking and comprehensive attention given to scholarly works gets easily noticed by colleagues in the field, as astute readers and audience get the indication of the outstanding work. That notwithstanding, ground breaking works of scholars give experts in the field who are usually considered "peers" the chance to provide the much-needed comments that could be used to enhance the quality area of the discipline.

Publishable research articles offer readers with handy documents that are not too large but information- packed and are ready to be read on the go. These educational materials are usually peer-reviewed and so offer public safety standards and assurance of information of substance to readers and the general public. The report of an academic research scheduled for publication is intended for readers beyond the professors and masters/doctoral committee members; therefore, the language of communication should cater for readers on the fringes of the discipline. Consequently, this paper seeks to provide first time and contemporary authors an exposition to the realities and rubrics of academic paper production – the ones born from theses or dissertations. The paper additionally seeks to offer useful tips for burgeoning authors to produce papers that can both attract readership and become a source of reference for end users.

### **Methodology**

This approach is vital for expository studies and tends to offer insight on how to execute a design or an engagement including those relating to how to prepare papers by amateur academics.

The method employed for this paper sought to underline the necessary guideposts as well as rudiments that would be beneficial to potential authors of articles and also make it easy to get the articles approved for publication. For instance, specific areas worth considering by the various authors of journal-length essays from their theses or dissertations are pointed out. However, since demands by disciplines and journals vary, the areas identified here are only a reflection of the general and fundamental issues to look at by early career researchers considering taking up the step of publishing part of their research work, stemming from their theses or dissertation. The

paper highlights five topical areas that old and new authors could give thoughtful consideration to. For each of the five areas, a description of what is required as well as the steps to follow is provided.

### **Content Areas of an Article**

The five areas of research article that are projected for discussion are namely, abstract, background, methodology, findings and conclusions, each discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### **The Abstract Section**

The abstract provides a summary for the journal-length article. In the abstract, all the critical ingredients of the manuscript are presented. Usually, the body of the academic end of the article would typically begin with the abstract. The abstract expresses a condensed form of the entire paper and require the sharpest edge regarding its presentation since the majority of the readers decide whether or not to continue reading an article only after reading the abstract. Therefore, the first step for the author is to offer an indication of an interest arousing beginning and signal the significance of the study in the abstract. The abstract is often the last item that is written, but usually the first thing on the menu of the research paper to read. Hence ideas on how to write it well influence how the other parts of the article would connect with the whole. The abstract should show a clear roadmap right from the start to the end of the document, thereby offering a discernible thread of events in the article.

The technique suggested by the University of Adelaide (2014) requires that the author first read through the entire paper, marking significant sessions of the article and condensing the content as much as possible. Nonetheless, it should also take the crucial elements of writing the abstract either as a descriptive or informative piece to bear. The abstract uses a well-developed paragraph that is coherent and concise with the potential of exuding the stand-alone part of work. Academic papers have principal components, but for this paper, the discussion is centred on four distinct categories, namely the background, the methodology, findings and conclusions.

Foremost, the background to the study which hinges on introduction to the paper is characterised by history, interrogation of related literature, conceptual and methodological paradigms as well as the problem, purpose and research questions to answer or hypothesis to test. The second primary consideration is the methodology applied which relates to the design chosen for the study and with appropriate justification for the choice. Within the design chosen, methods and combination of methods to deploy are discussed as an entire procedure engaged. Also, the sample size and sampling consideration, data collections and data collection procedures adopted, and decisions regarding what to elaborate on in terms of the data gathered needs to clarified at this stage. In sum, the approach and techniques to employ should be correctly described more often than narrated.

Third, results or findings need to report in line with best practices in the field and in a

manner that can allow readers to understand the data. Fourth, the author needs to provide the implications and significance of the findings, recommendations and conclusions of the study at this stage. The abstract of the journal length document should be precisely that of the research paper and not that of the thesis since the thrust of the research article differ from that of the thesis.

### **The Background to the Study Section**

The background of the study usually elaborates on what the study is about, the conceptions and assumptions that underline it, literature that inform this current research, frameworks and raised issues that support why the study is worth conducting. There is the need therefore to put this part in a very logical and orderly manner. The usual requirement is that of using the background of study to produce a narrative of the setting of the study and making a case for its significance in the light of the literature employed. Also, coming up with the problem that underlies the study should be under this section. In addition, the author needs to provide the purpose and objectives. Equally, there is the need for the provision of research questions to answer or hypotheses to confirm or reject. Under this section too, the framework driving the study vis-à-vis the theoretical and conceptual positions of the author must be stated. Indeed, as an element of finality to this section, one must prepare a sentence explaining the specific question asked in the study that guided the course of the study.

The author needs to take into consideration the location of the thesis statement for the background of the study. Indeed, the choice of where theses statement should be ought to be deliberated. This adds up to the flair and luster the paper would finally have. Furthermore, make clear the central theme of what the study takes forward in the thesis statement. Therefore, when the thesis statement comes earlier in the narrative, it makes it possible for the readers to identify the issue of importance at the outset. However, some authors prefer to craft it as an element of finality for the background paragraphs. In a particular case of producing the research article from thesis/dissertation, the writer should be concerned about literature that encompasses the chosen hypothesis or research questions of the study. The author needs to do a review of relevant literature by sticking to the part(s) of the original literature that directly connects with the chosen sub-section of the thesis/dissertation that forms the basis for the article is imperative. Since there would be a shift in viewpoint of the language for the article, it appropriate to provide a new flow for the paper devoid of unnecessary gaps. For instance, the conceptual framework may be for the entire thesis, at this stage a new framework underpinned by the umbrella philosophy of the paper must make the headway.

### ***Methodology Section***

At the outset, distinction between methodology and methods section for a scientific research output is in place. Whereas methods are tools for data collection, for example, focus group discussions employed in collecting data from a small group of people with a homogenous background. Methodology, on the other hand, looks at the approaches and justification for their choice for carrying out the research work. For example, the rationale for the choice of a

conceptual framework, how to test the research hypotheses or how to address the research questions depends on the methodology applied. In other words, methodology combines methods with the viewpoint underlying the methods. A case in point is, why a particular type of method provides the most convincing route to addressing a research question comes under methodology. It has to do with the ideological foundations bases of the study, and this reflects the critical theoretical and methodological viewpoints. Methodology or procedures applied vary according to the discipline and topic at one level, and the type of journal, conference and audience that the research article targets.

The author needs to take into consideration the new focus of the article other than that of the dissertation. For example, it is useful to situate the study in a defined context, one bounded by a geographical location, other than what pertains to the entire thesis or dissertation. Given that, direction regarding the location of the study in addressing the research question might differ, probably as a microcosm of an entire location or the original one, it is essential to check and operationalise the study. The change of focus from dissertation to article additionally implies the population and sample size and sampling strategies, tools used for data collection, data collection -approaches employed, data handling and analysis decisions will see a modification. Hence, a restatement of these facts, in connection with how the research question(s) being addressed by the research paper came about would be useful.

The study design and reasons leading to the choice of that design also needs to be recounted. In addition, the author needs to provide justification for the essential choices as reported in the article needs to be highlighted and adequately justified. For quantitative studies, the methodology section should seek to define and operationalise dependent as well as independent variables and show how they come to bear on the research questions or null hypotheses. Technically, the findings of the study are a contribution to knowledge and procedures as applied to the analysis of a pilot section of the study or the main study as being reported in the article needs to show with a balance between languages and technics of writing.

### ***The Findings Section***

The entire effort spent preparing a good background and methodology would be a wasted effort if the research findings fail to communicate what they are set out to do. In the case of theses or dissertations, findings are based on addressing research questions or testing hypotheses to a broader research topic than it is with research articles. Similarly, findings with research articles come in the same fashion, but with a bit of difference. The difference stems from the fact that the findings of research articles are much succinct. Here again, an author ought to bring coherence and chronological order in the reportage of the findings of a study.

Therefore, the presentation of the findings either as narratives or tables, charts or graphs should be carefully decided at the methodology stage. Since paradigms differ, this paper is unable to make a recommendation of the preferred way of reporting. However, the path chosen by the author should be consistent with the objective of the paper and especially should be addressing the research question or testing the indicated hypotheses. Indeed, the choices made by

the author should show that academic papers are neither drawn or sketched. Thus, the narrative should at all times communicate the chart, tables and graphs and statistical inferences drawn from the data. In other words, the tables and graphics do a secondary role of supporting the arguments of the paper. This understanding would guide the course of brevity that the author may want to achieve while targeting the objective of the paper.

Again, as discussed at the theses or dissertations candidacy level, authors should avoid commenting on the tables and charts too elaborately. Similarly, it is not all findings that must be displayed in Tables, Charts or Graphs –straightforward data are better reported as narratives. According to Budinski (2005), visual aids more often make communication of convoluted findings more straightforward and easy to grasp than texts. In this regard, how the author introduces and discusses the presentation by visual aid's in the text is crucial. Again since the section of results or findings of the research article must be objective, authors' perspective and biases should not be introduced at this stage of the work (Rudner & Schafer, 1999). Therefore any assumptions taken during the reportage of the findings including violation of assumptions, miscoded dataset, missing data, and outliers should be tracked carefully on a different file so that when reviewers need further details, this could be easy to provide. The power of the research output is a function of the findings or results that emerge. It is therefore, useful for the author to allow the research to report without any potentially skewed data.

Akin to findings of research papers are the discussions that are done on them. Since a study is situated in a conceptual and methodological space, one must engage the findings with related literature in helping the audience understand the point or the argument of the current research paper. In the particular case of preparing a discussion of the findings from theses and dissertations, it is not appropriate to negotiate a move to discuss the reported findings as data shifts independently as new lens of the argument might have occurred. Also, it is appropriate to produce an interpretation that is consistent with the priorities offered to the paper regarding its problem, objectives(s), research question(s) or hypotheses in line with the methodology and analysis to draw academic inferences. Indeed, it is at this stage that the author shows the study's contribution to literature (Thompson, 1995).

### ***The Conclusion Section***

As an element of finality to the paper, the author needs to wrap up the paper by succinctly stating the most significant data insight the work has provided. The conclusion is not a summary of the findings but a provision of perspective that the study brings to bear. Primarily, a conclusion does three things; first, it indicates a note of finality to the paper. Second, it drives home the point by restating the objectives addressed by the study and third, it indicates the significance of the study and projects more clearly why its findings matter to the targetted audience. The rule of thumb is to use an explicit but compelling narrative that takes on both the author and the research outputs' voice in stating the closure of the work.

For the paper in question, it is at this point that the author indicates whether the research questions have been answered and the hypotheses confirmed or rejected. Also, the remarkably new insight the study brings to the fore needs to be unpacked at this stage of the writing process. Similarly, what crucially accelerated the need for the study should be restated, making a commanding note of finality, while at the same time displaying the worth of the study and why the targetted readership needs to give attention to.

### Conclusion

Burgeoning scholars around the world would agree with the authors that preparing a research paper from a thesis or dissertation is possible provided the indicators identified in this paper are carefully applied. This present paper highlights potential hotspots that amateurish authors can take note of and win their bid to publish in peer-reviewed journals. Finally, when it comes to developing content for academic papers, it suggested that this paper should guide the choices that writers would like to consider. Ultimately, one ought to master the ‘tricks’ and tips provided in this paper. Equally important is meeting the demands of the target journal.

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