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Writing Research Reports

Chapter Outline

The Research Report

Structure

Content

- Before writing

- The introduction

- The method section

- The results section

- The discussion section

- The title and abstract

Writing for Nonresearchers

- Establishing credibility

- Relevance

- Statistics

- Making recommendations

Journal Articles and Convention Presentations

The Journal Article

- Choosing a journal

- Preparing the manuscript

- Submitting the manuscript

- Peer review

- Editorial response

- Revising the manuscript

- After acceptance

- Dealing with rejection

Convention Presentations

- The submission abstract

- Oral presentation

- Poster session

Reviewing Manuscripts

- The reviewer's task

- Writing the review

Ethical Issues in Publication

- Authorship Credit

- Plagiarism

- Duplicate Publication

Chapter Summary

Suggestions for Further Reading

Key Terms

Questions for Review and Discussion

The knowledge generated by the research process has value only if it is communicated to people who can put it to use in the form of theory development and practical application. Consequently, scientists throughout history have endeavored to disseminate the results of their research to their colleagues. Today, there are four primary means of scientific communication: books, book chapters, journals, and presentations at professional meetings or conventions. In most of the behavioral sciences, the primary media for communicating the results of research studies are journal articles and convention presentations; except for long case studies, books and book chapters tend to be reserved for theoretical presentations, literature reviews, and handbooks for research and application. This chapter discusses the process of preparing research reports for journal publication and for presentation at professional meetings. We begin by discussing the structure and content of the research report, continue by describing the publication and presentation processes, and conclude by discussing ethical issues in publication.

The Research Report

Research reports exist to inform other people about what scientists have learned in the course of their research. The report begins by stating the research question and explaining the rationale the investigation: What makes the investigation important enough to justify the resources expended on it, to justify the cost of publication, and to justify others' spending their time reading it? The report continues with a description of how the question was investigated so that readers can evaluate the validity of the research and of the knowledge that it produced. Next, the results of the investigation are presented: the data that provide a basis for answering the question. The report concludes with a discussion of the meaning of the data; that is, the answers they provide to the research questions.

This section discusses five aspects of writing a research report: the structure of the report or outline it follows, the content of the report, evaluation criteria for research reports, and considerations in writing reports for nonresearchers. In this chapter, we cannot teach you how to write a research report; writing skill comes only through writing, being critiqued by more experienced writers, rewriting, and then continuing that process until you have a satisfactory manuscript. We can, however, provide some general guidelines to follow. The suggested readings at the end of the chapter give more detailed guidance, and we strongly recommend that you read them carefully.

A valuable resource is the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010b). The *Publication Manual* (popularly called the APA style manual) provides both detailed guidance on the format a research report should use and many examples of how to apply the format to writing a report. It also contains excellent advice on writing style, including examples of poor style and suggested improvements. All manuscripts submitted to journals published by the APA must follow the guidelines of the *Publication Manual*, and many other journals also require that manuscripts be submitted in APA format. Also, universities frequently require dissertations and theses in psychology and related fields to use APA format, and many professors require its use for papers submitted