



How to Write Good Technical Papers in International Journals

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1.0 Introduction

Writing a good quality paper for an international journal is something no one is born with. We all start by making mistakes and having our papers rejected, but with persistence we gradually grow as we learn from our mistakes as contained in the critical reviews of the reviewers of the journals we submit our articles to. However, it is wiser, faster and better to learn from the mistakes of others who have experienced these things earlier than to learn from ones' own mistakes. This is what I see as the intention in this presentation. I intend in this paper to present tips and techniques from my own experiences, including my mistakes and successes in international paper writing. That is why I commend the organizers of this presentation for the wisdom in choosing this topic. After all, for all of us in the academia, the maxim is publish or perish, and in publishing, there is the increasing requirement that the publishing should be in international journals. In my University, one needs forty percent of ones publications to be promoted to professorial rank.

Often we do not have much problems with paper acceptance in our professional journals like the Estate Surveyor and Valuer. We must recognize that there is a definite problem amongst the academia in most of our Nigerian Universities and polytechnics with international journal paper acceptance. I would estimate that seventy per cent of our papers are not being accepted in quality international journals. The acceptance level in my opinion is higher in international conferences (probably about fifty per cent acceptance level), due mainly to the lower standards put forward by organizers of conferences. Conference paper organizers want high

attendance. Why is there such a high rejection rate with regard to international journals? My experience as a writer and a mentor of those aspiring to write internationally suggests that the low level of acceptance in international journals is due to a variety of factors such as failure to define problem statements in an international area of interest, failure to set the discussion in the context of a broader field of enquiry, failure to address the gap that is being filled, use of inadequate or outdated literature, failure to use up-to-date statistical techniques, non-adherence to ethical issues (including plagiarism), failure to format papers according to journal/conference guidelines for authors, bad English, little or no contribution to knowledge, papers not being new and interesting, and such other issues. The aim of this paper is to provide some guidance on how to avoid such pitfalls so that we can become more prolific international writers of good quality papers that would be regularly accepted in quality international journals.

2.0 What is a Quality International Journal?

We must of course recognize that not all international journals are of high quality. There are some journals that are just after money. Many Indian and Pakistani journals and even some journals in Canada fall into this category. They do not peer review the papers sent to them and often just publish papers sent to them with all the mistakes inherent in them. I once saw a paper in a so called international journal where the author organized the papers in form of chapters, yet the publishers of the journal published it like that! On the other hand, there are many journals publishers that are reputable and of high quality including Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Springer, Wiley and so on. These use peer review and are indexed in SCOPUS, Thomson Reuters etc. They have a credible international editorial board, have impact factors that are from Thomson Reuters (impact factors refer to a rating based on how often papers in the journal are cited in the past two years) and do not charge submission charges.

Papers tend to be graded as accept, revise (major and minor revision) and reject. There is increasing pressure on reputable journals for aspiring paper writers and the standards and barriers are continually rising.

3.0 Some Preliminary Considerations for Paper Writers

- Perhaps the first question is: what do you want to write on? For those of us in the academia, I suggest it is preferable we write along the lines of our specialization.

Everyone should have specialty areas rather than being a jack of all trades, master of none. Usually many aspiring paper writers start writing from their B.Sc., MSc or PhD thesis. You do not need to put your entire thesis into one research paper. A good research paper addresses one objective or research question from such a thesis, though this is not a hard and fast rule. If a thesis allows you to address several research questions or objectives, you could write several papers!

- Another preliminary consideration is what type of paper to write. Generally there are six types of paper– review papers (do not cover original research but organize the results of several different papers into a coherent narrative) , theoretical analysis (a framework for discussing theories and models in a field of study), empirical papers (papers describing the results of an experiment or controlled study), methodology papers, case study papers (report specific instances of interesting phenomena and discusses its challenges and implications) and book reviews. This write-up focuses mostly on the empirical papers which appear to be the most common papers in journals and conferences. Many international journals in our field are not interested in theoretical papers. In empirical papers, the author should write the paper as a kind of Mini Thesis including review of literature, methodology, statistical analysis findings and discussion.
- Before writing any paper, make sure you do an extensive international review of papers in that field. This is important to give you a grasp of what has been done in the area, the direction of current research and the gaps which your paper can fill. Download at least twenty papers. Store them in a folder and categorize them according to research focus, note down the internet citation. Identify overall gap

4.0 Structure of an Empirical Paper

Title - This should consist of the fewest possible words that adequately describe the subject matter and contents of the paper and the location the contents are domiciled. Try to make the topic attractive to readers.

Authors – Indicate your surname and other names clearly with your affiliations.

Abstract - An abstract is simply a summary of the work that others can use as an overview. Even though the abstract comes before the introduction of the paper, it should be written only after the entire work is completed. Though the basic rules of writing abstracts are universal, it is important that a student understand the specific

rules for writing the abstract the journal or conference. Check the guidelines for authors (for example format and maximum number of words)!

The usual contents of an abstract are as follows:

Identify the problem at hand and the purpose (aim)/objectives of the study

Explain your methods

Describe your results

Give your conclusion

Keywords – This is used for indexing. Check the guidelines for authors for the maximum number of keywords, and other special requests.

Introduction –

- In a paper, the introduction covers what in a thesis would be the background to the problem, the problem, the aim/research question and the structure of the paper.
- In the background to the research problem, the author should be concerned with two things: explaining the subject matter and how interest in the subject matter has developed over the years in practice and in research. What are the motivations for going into the research?
- The problem is a gap in literature. It is very important to identify a global problem. Don't be too country specific! Offer the Nigerian case only as an example of how practice in one country responds to the issues under investigation!
- Situate the research problem in an international theory and build interest
- The statement of the problem may or may not commence as something wrong that the author or some other writer has observed in practice but what is important is that the author must additionally demonstrate that no one else has yet researched upon this area (that is, there is a gap in this area of literature). If he does not do so, his whole research may merely be repeating what some other author has already done which amounts to reinventing the wheel To identify this gap, the author must undertake a mini literature review. The literature review can be thematic: the author demonstrating that authors have researched on this and that theme in the past (mentioning examples of papers within each theme) with statements that the area which he (the author wishes to work on has not yet been addressed in the literature.

- Back up arguments with references.
- The paper introduction section should include an aim or research question. The aim is a statement of the overall objective that the researcher wishes to achieve in his/her study.
- In my papers, I would usually also state how my paper is structured into sections.

Literature review – Many writers write a literature review as if writing lecture notes – providing all kinds of information about the subject matter from textbooks, lecture notes, personal knowledge/experience and newspaper articles. This is a very wrong approach to writing a literature review. The author should review literature relevant to the subject matter, identifying gaps and recent methodological approaches that may be relevant to the study. Make sure the literature is mostly not more than ten years old. A literature review is supposed to focus primarily on journal/conference proceeding/book of readings papers, and only secondarily on views expressed in textbooks. You may or may not include a theoretical or conceptual framework if it is appropriate to the study and if you know how to use it.

Research Methods – Include a presentation on the study setting so that the international reader would have some mental picture of where the study is situated. Demonstrate why the setting is ideal for fulfilling the aim/research question of the paper. Provide some picture on Nigeria and the specific study area in Nigeria. Provide data on study population, sample frame, sample size, method of sampling data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques. The techniques must be up to date!

Results and Discussion – State your findings with respect to the aim or central research question.

State the differences or similarities between your results and previous publications.

Figures and tables are the most efficient way to present results. The captions or titles of the tables should be self-explanatory.

You don't need to duplicate with a graph what a table presents and vice versa. Discuss the tables. Are your results consistent with what other investigators have reported? Are their differences? Why?

Do not make statements beyond what the results can support.

Conclusions – As earlier stated, in some Universities, this comes before the recommendations. The conclusions are the main discoveries that appear naturally from the work. They are logical deductions based on the data in the findings section. In other words, conclusions are the summary of findings + logical conclusions. It should state how your work advances the field from the present state of knowledge. The researcher does not usually include percentage findings and other details in the conclusion. The conclusion may include the implications of the study for theory and practice.

Acknowledgements – Thank people who have helped you in the production of the paper and why they are acknowledged.

References – Conform to the guide for authors!

5.0 When you complete the first draft of your paper

- Ask a mentor to help review your paper before sending it
- Where necessary, seek assistance with writing English
- Which journal should you send the paper to? The point here is: which journal would have interest in your kind of subject? You would need to investigate the journals online to find out their aims and scope, sample types of articles, readership, and current hot topics (by going through recent abstracts). The articles in your reference list may suggest the right journal.
- In a choice between papers to send your journal to, decide if you want your paper to be published more quickly. A journal like the Journal of property research in the UK is very rigorous and would probably take much more time than a journal like the Journal of property investment and finance
- Are some journals racist?
- Study their guidelines for authors: this is to clarify the style of the Journal: including their referencing, format, type of topic. For example, don't exceed the number of words allowed for the paper (do a word count).
- Some journals have sample papers which do not need subscription. You stand a lot to gain from reading them.

- It is acceptable to challenge reviewers where there is good justification. Politely argue why the reviewer is wrong and show how you have accepted other aspects of the review

6.0 Ethical Considerations

Unethical behavior can earn rejection and even a ban from publishing in the journal. Unethical practices include:

- multiple submissions,
- plagiarism (appropriating another's ideas results or words without giving appropriate credit) ,
- submitting a previously published paper, same results but different titles

7.0 Concluding Remarks

It is not going to get easier to publish in the gh impact factor journals. But with good research and good writing ability, the chances of getting published are much higher.

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