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# GETTING A MANUSCRIPT TO PUBLICATION STANDARD

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After serving several terms as an Associate Editor for *Journal of Consumer Research* and on editorial boards for journals in marketing and sociology, I've learned a few things about getting manuscripts to publication. As a result, I've compiled some practical tools and exercises to help in this endeavor. No condensation is intended. Established scholars, doctoral students and grant writers may all find these exercises useful.

Try to write a two-three page synopsis of your paper that focuses on and highlights your theoretical and/or practical contribution to the field. In this synopsis, you should start with an opening sentence that introduces your domain, states your purpose, and draws explicit links to key research that has appeared previously (a tall order but doable). References and footnotes may be used here, of course. By key research, I mean a canonical study, a recent apposite, cutting edge contribution, or both. You should include a 3-4 sentence statement of what is known about this phenomenon or problem from prior research, and then what is unknown—the all-important knowledge gap. You want to write a very specific statement here. You then need to make a statement about why this gap in knowledge is an important problem, that is, how this gap prevents the next steps in the field from being taken. This helps frame the problem in your research.

All of these steps can be taken in 1-2 paragraphs. Then you want to state your objectives in a paragraph. Do this in three steps; your long term programmatic objective is stated first. This is a broad goal, a broad problem area. Then, state the immediate objective of the current research. Define this narrower objective as the means of filling the gap in previous knowledge you stated earlier. Be realistic, do not overstate or over anticipate your contribution. Phrase this objective in such a way that you can then write the third step. This should be either a central hypothesis about the phenomena of interest or a needs statement (what we need to know about the phenomena of interest to move the field forward).

Next write a rationale in one brief paragraph. State what your research will make possible or how it will enable the theoretical or practical steps that are not possible now. And state how the research you conducted makes feasible a solution to the problem you have delineated above.

Next write a paragraph-length statement of your specific conceptual (not descriptive) aims. That is, what you aim to accomplish, not how or why. There should be 2-5 of these at most oriented around the key constructs you wish to elaborate. These aims should be brief, write them as an eye-catching headline. They must flow logically from one to the other. And collectively they should test your hypothesis or fulfill the needs you have claimed are outstanding.

Make sure all three parts link together logically and are concordant with one another. Finally, they should be interdependent but not dependent on each other. This covers one-two pages.

Pages two-three are devoted to describing your empirical studies if applicable, summarizing your findings and making an impact statement. First, you need to describe or explain the empirical context for your research. Contexts are of fundamental importance in developing and testing theories. Simply put, a theory is a story about why acts, events, structures, or thoughts occur. The process of

Looking for ways to indicate approaches to writing articles for DRQ that will communicate to a readership across different design subfields, we found an article by Dr. Arnould in the *Association for Consumer Research ACRNews*, Fall, 2003. Dr. Arnould's views are particularly useful, especially as they address techniques for addressing the audience. We asked Dr. Arnould to provide his sort of practical advice as it would apply to design research and *DRQ in particular*.

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theorizing consists of activities such as abstracting, generalizing, relating, selecting, explaining, synthesizing and idealizing from contexts (Sutton and Staw 1995). Contexts give theoretical stories veracity and texture. Fundamentally, contexts should engage our and our readers' emotions and senses, stimulate discovery, invite description and excite comparison (Price, Arnould and Moisio forthcoming).

Describe your key results under 3-4 categories. Lead the reader through the synopsis of data. Avoid extraneous or irrelevant data. Everything you put here should make a point. A final sentence in each of the 3-4 paragraphs tells why it is relevant to your aims and/or central hypothesis or needs statement. Include one figure as an appendix, with a methodological note stating how it is derived from the data. Remember figures do not speak for themselves, and usually require an explanatory legend. This is especially true if the figure does not represent a causal model; these are usually represented by boxes and arrows and causality is imputed as flowing from left to right.

If your paper focuses on theory rather than empirical work, you will be presenting and analyzing theories and perspectives rather than empirical studies, but the procedure is much the same. You are researching the theories, their specific properties and characteristics, which function much like data in your analytical experiments. Your discussion summarizes your research findings.

Finally write a concluding/impact statement. Be blunt, say something like, 'This research is innovative because...'. Each aim (identified above) should have an outcome statement here. A statement as to why that outcome is theoretically or practically important should follow each outcome statement. You conclude with a statement of the collective impact of your work, how it advances theory or practice in your field as you claimed was needed in paragraph one.

Craft this two-three page statement until it is absolutely the cleanest, clearest strongest statement you can make. Then, once you've written this, pass it around to worthy colleagues and get their feedback on it. Re-write until tight and unblinkingly persuasive. Repeat the steps above as needed. Finally, re-write the whole manuscript as an expanded version of this synopsis.

This two-three page synopsis will provide the structure of your final manuscript. Longer manuscripts can include more details, background information, detailed descriptions of methodologies, etcetera. Thus, when you elaborate your argument, be sure that you keep to this structure. It provides the organization that will enable you to elaborate your argument without losing it.

As you craft a manuscript, try to ensure that the manuscript explicitly addresses the following statements. (Thanks to Professor Linda Price, Eller College of Management, University of Arizona, for this checklist!)

1. The purpose of this research is...
  - a. The theoretical significance of this research is... and/or
  - b. The practical importance of this research is...
2. The primary sources in the \_\_\_\_\_ literatures that address this topic are (Fill in the blank with the key literature streams that the work draws on. This might include design, art criticism, engineering, environmental ecology, sociology, various branches of psychology, etc. The key point is that a concise focused literature is identified, not great undigested swathes of previous thought.)
3. Previous research has suggested these basic ideas relevant to my research:
  - a. The most important constructs for my research are...
  - b. These constructs are related to each other in the following ways...
4. Other research has empirically substantiated...
5. What we don't know is...
  - a. My research is different from previous work because...
  - b. My research extends theory and previous research because...
6. My specific research questions are...(a short list is best; this set may also take the form of propositions or hypotheses as dictated by the author's methodological choices)
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
7. My methodology for answering these questions is...
  - a. The context is...because....
  - b. The sampling frame is...because...
  - c. The research boundaries are defined as...because...
  - d. The basic procedures for data collection that I will use include...(focus on providing transparency and highlighting novelty, no need to trace the origin of the techniques to their sources)
  - e. The basic procedures for data analysis that I will use include...(focus on providing transparency, establishing validity and reliability or credibility and trustworthiness [Wallendorf and Belk, 1989])

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8. This research approach is appropriate because...

a. My approach improves on previous work because...

b. My approach enables answers to my specific research objectives because...

9. Some surprising findings we may learn from my research are...

With manuscript or revision in hand, stand back and ask, 'What did I promise?' in terms of objectives and 'what precisely did I deliver by way of findings?' Ask whether your discussion and conclusion cash out the promises you made in the introduction and data analysis sections of the paper. Manuscripts need to be written front to back then back to front and from the inside out so that each section is consistent with all other sections. This advice is motivated by the common experience that we frequently figure out what we mean to say only in the writing process itself. Considering the nine statements above can help you achieve this.

When you think the paper is perfect, please give it to a researcher experienced in your methodological and substantive domains to read. If it were my work, I'd give it to someone outside of design, in anthropology or sociology say, and to someone in marketing as well, since these are the areas in which most of my work contributes. Give it preferably to someone who has published in DRSQ or related publications. Solicit their candid feedback on whether the manuscript makes its case or not.

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Dr. Eric Arnould is the PETSMART Distinguished Professor in the Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Arizona. Previously, he was E.J. Faulkner College Professor of Agribusiness and Marketing at the University of Nebraska and has also taught at Odense University, Denmark, EAP-ESCP, Paris; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; University of South Florida; California State University Long Beach; and, the University of Colorado at Denver. He holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology from the University of Arizona. From 1975-1990, he worked on problems of economic development in more than a dozen West African nations. Since 1990, he has been a full-time academic. His academic research investigates service relationships, channels structure and market organization, households, consumer culture theory, and issues associated with the conduct and representation of multi-method research. Dr. Arnould has written more than 40 articles and chapters that appear in the major US marketing journals, and other social science periodicals and books.

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