



Journal of Asia Business Studies

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Jerry Paul Sheppard , (2015), "Getting published: achieving acceptance from reviewers and editors", Journal of Asia Business Studies, Vol. 9 Iss 2 pp. 117 - 132

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JABS-02-2015-0024>

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Getting published: achieving acceptance from reviewers and editors

Jerry Paul Sheppard

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding how to successfully develop, write up and get research work accepted and published in an English language business research journal.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A review of good basics in writing, producing good scholarly academic writing, presentation of papers that are in a style that is proper for academic English language journals and how to avoid common writing problems and mistakes.*

Findings – *Getting research work published requires persistence, people and progress. One must have persistence in seriously approaching and improving one's research work. Researchers need to involve a network of people (conference attendees, people who understand the area, reviewers and editors) to develop good research. Research should lead to progress in our understanding of the way the world works.*

Practical implications – *This paper helps authors readily bring their research to publishable quality in English language research journals by reducing pitfalls to authors writing in English as a foreign language.*

Originality/value – *By providing not only sound practical advice, and how to avoid potential errors, the paper also provides graphic diagrams and a checklist for research writing that will aid authors writing in English as a foreign language in readily bringing their research to publishable quality in English language research journals.*

Keywords *Publishing, Writing, Article acceptance, Getting published, Research publication, Writing pitfalls*

Paper type *Conceptual paper*

Got things you want to do? Beliefs you're passionate about? Goals you've got to achieve? Business makes things happen and affects every part of our society. Whatever you want to do, understanding business will help you achieve it (Wharton, 2006).

If one accepts the above contention of the doyens at the Wharton School, nothing could be more important for achieving *anything* than a sound knowledge of business. Business brings us all better, more affordable products and services, and, hence, a better life for everyone. Nothing is more critical to a sound understanding of business than one's ability to access quality business research thinking. Essential to having others access *your* research thinking, is getting it published!

This piece is about getting academic research papers published. You may have already observed the first step. In the opening paragraph, the author did his or her best to convince you that research was critically important for the benefit of everyone in the world. The very first thing you must do is to convince the reader that what you have to say is important. Your readers do not know you, and there is no reason for them to believe that you are about to address any important issues unless you tell them how critically important a question you are about to ask, and how your research will provide a vitally important answer to that question! Do not give the reader the chance to say, "So what?" about your research, tell them right away why it is so important (no one is there at the moment they are reading to do that vitally important job).

Received 25 February 2015
Revised 25 February 2015
Accepted 28 February 2015

Special thanks to *Journal of Asia Business Studies* Editor-in-Chief Hemant Merchant for all his helpful suggestions, useful additional content and guidance in bringing out the potential of this paper.

The first item of business is to establish some good basics about research papers generally. Next, there are some critically important items to remember about good writing. Third, a brief review of some important relevant elements of good style, including meeting journal standards, is in order. As well some common problems and mistakes that can occur in endeavoring to publish your paper and having it well-cited will be discussed. The paper will conclude with a general summary.

Good basics

All inquiry begins with some basic questions. Typically these are who, what, why, when, where and how. There is one question that should also be added, "Are you sure?"

Who do you want to communicate with?

"Who" can refer to anyone involved in developing the research, reviewing it or the audience for which it is meant. One question is do you want to work with co-authors or not? Usually those who served on your dissertation committee will be your early collaborators. As they are already familiar with the work and have been successful authors, they can be of great assistance. Later on, adding other discretionary co-authors depends on how well you feel you can work with these others, whether they will fairly contribute to the work, and whether they will be available at the needed times.

There are also a range of others who will contribute to your work. People who work with your data and aid in your statistical analysis are important. Do not be shy about having others read the work, as they will be able to suggest improvements and aid in your paper's development. Developing a network of fellow researchers to discuss research informally and to read and/or review your work is extremely helpful. Just as importantly, review their work. Both activities are learning opportunities. In addition, these activities open up avenues for collaboration through the sharing of knowledge or data.

More importantly, who is your audience? Are they practitioners for which you want to discuss the potential applications of the research? Are you trying to develop new theory to present to other researchers? This will require stringent attention to logical connections between theories. You will also need to have a clear presentation of ideas. As well you will need to be explicit as to why your theory adds something new to thinking on your topic. Are you trying to present empirical proof of theory to other researchers? This may require careful development of representative variables and their operationalization. In any case, it is important to communicate the information in a way that a reasonable person in that group should understand the points you are trying to make. Your points should be made in an objective, fact-supported manner. Attracting an audience with a trending, timely topic promoted via well-chosen key words and a well-written paper will also be critical in having a well-cited paper.

Most importantly, you will have to satisfy the journal's editors and reviewers. Editors are senior academics who are interested in seeing you publish a quality paper. You can approach them for advice. The better written the paper is that you provided the editor initially, the more generous he or she is likely to be with their time and assistance. The same can be said for reviewers. Reviewers, though you cannot communicate with them directly, will also be more forthcoming with good advice if the paper they see initially is a well-written paper.

What are you talking about?

What is your topic? If you cannot succinctly state what your paper is about, how can you expect your audience to grasp the point of your article? Thus, you need to have a clearly stated research question. Your literature review should discuss the current thinking about the topic and give introduction and insight into the gap between what the current thinking is and where it ought to be or where it is lacking. Then, you must point out how your research will fill the gap. In other words, how does your research intend to make a

contribution to our knowledge base? Clearly identifying your intended contribution is critical because it supplies reviewers and editors with what your research adds to the current level of knowledge in the field.

What really is the purpose of your paper? One can use current or new methods to examine current or new theory (please see Figure 1). If you seek to replicate current theory with current methods, it is likely that you will be using new data under a new temporal, industry or national context to make your contribution. With such studies, it is important to clarify why a replication is needed. What is there about the current research that can be improved by your study? If you seek to replicate new theory with current methods, such as to frame issues around the topic in a new way, then a complete literature review and clear model development become critical. Testing current theory with new methods may present more robust tests and new ways to frame details about issues associated with the current theory. Testing new theory with new methods not only blazes a new innovative path to addressing a research question but also reframes that question so that the fundamental approach to the question is altered. All four approaches have value and different challenges. Knowing which approach you are taking makes the purpose of your paper clearer.

Where does this work fit?

Your literature review will tell the reader where your work fits with similar research. This allows both you and the reader to understand what knowledge your work is based upon and, this again must be stressed, how it extends our knowledge in what field.

A second and perhaps more important question to be addressed here is where your work should be published. In other words, which journal do you send it to? This is where having others read your work comes in handy. If you want a good feel for where the work should be sent, ask the people who have read it. They will be able to make suggestions. However, additional work will need to be performed to meet the journal's formatting standards (spacing, margin size, citation style and an array of unique requirements that help the journal review and potentially publish your work).

Why was this research undertaken?

Aside from wishing to get published, why was this research undertaken? What was the gap in our knowledge that makes this paper important? Why this research was done answers everyone's "so what" question. It allows you and the reader to figure out the contribution you make. If you do not have a good and clear answer as to why this research was undertaken then you diminish the value of your contribution to the knowledge base.

If you undertook your research because you have a data-driven research question then make certain that your theoretical foundations are not overshadowed by the methods used to test the question. If your research question drives the data acquisition, then make certain the variables used have good construct validity. In addition, insure that the needed possible control variables are included in your analysis.

Figure 1 Paper purpose

	Current Methods	New Methods
Current Theory	☺☺Replication ☺☺	☒ Frame breaking ☒
New Theory	☒ Frame making ☒	☛ Innovation / Frame cracking ☛

Source: Adapted from Merchant (2013)

When is your research applicable?

Here, one should be concerned with two issues. First, “when is your research applicable and when is it not?” Understanding and explaining this helps everyone comprehend under what circumstances the research might apply and where it would not. In addition, understanding when is your research applicable and when it is not aids you in clarifying the limitations of your research. More importantly, it helps direct you and the reader toward contingencies that could be important for future avenues of study. Such a jumping-off point may help direct your future research, or allow others to cite you as one of a number of researchers who are calling for further study in a subject area they are about to tackle.

A second issue is, why is your research important *now*? What is there about the current state of our knowledge that cries out for your contribution? This allows you to make sure your contribution is timely and of importance.

How do you get your research manuscript published?

Here, one should be principally concerned with how to get your research manuscript published. How you proceed from manuscript to published article involves three things. One is through presenting the journal with the best possible manuscript you can. The second is to be persistent, and, finally, addressing all the editors and reviewers' comments is critical.

There will be more on presenting the best possible manuscript in the sections below. However, one way to tell how good your work may be is to consider [Figure 2](#). Having both strong methods and theory is always your best bet. However, it is better to have strong theory in the absence of strong methods than it is to have strong methods in the absence of strong theory. Having a good grounding in the literature is the better move. Obviously, having weak theory and methods is never a good idea.

Regarding persistence, this is not a call to *harass* editors. Simply, you need to keep at the work in a dedicated way. Make sure you address the concerns of those who review the manuscript. If your paper is rejected, take some time off, then take a fresh look at what the reviewers had problems with and make corrections. Resubmit to a different journal.

If editors and reviewers, as gatekeepers, ask you to do something, you need to tell them specifically how you addressed their concerns. These communications are important. If you did not or could not address their concerns, explain in detail why the requested changes could not be made in the manner suggested. If you did something that obliquely addressed their concerns, explicitly tell them what you did and why this alternative was chosen instead.

Are you sure?

Before you submit your manuscript, make sure it is presented in the best possible way it can be. Common mistakes are discussed in a latter section, but suffice to say, there are some steps you should go through. First, make sure your work meets all the journal standards for subject, content, length, formatting, etc. Second, make sure others have read it for logic, readability, accuracy and structure. These readers should make sure you have shown a grasp of the current relevant literature. Third, make sure someone who has an

Figure 2 Paper position

	Strong Methods	Weak Methods
Strong Theory	High success likelihood	Medium-high success likelihood
Weak Theory	Medium-low success likelihood	Low success likelihood

Source: Adapted from Merchant (2013)

excellent understanding of the language in which the journal is published has proofread your work. Generally following the review in [Table I](#) should go a long way to helping you get published.

Good scholarly academic writing

Papers typically follow a standard layout. Thus, writing up research well via the standard layout is important. Writing up research in the standard way allows the reader to quickly find their way through the points you are trying to make (if you wish to be creative with the layout, you may either switch to writing fiction or not get your academic paper published). Generally, your paper should be arranged in the sections that follow.

The abstract

Your abstract must essentially summarize your entire work in a small space and in such a way that the interested scholar would have a sense of what it conveys. One thing the abstract must convey is seriousness. Spelling and other mistakes, for example, give the impression that you are not serious. That is, your abstract must carefully explain in a clear, interesting way the importance and relevance of your research to the intended audience. Your abstract should mention what contribution the work makes to theory and/or methodological rigor.

The introduction

Your introduction must meet the goal of grabbing the readers' attention. Start by making the paper interesting ([Davis, 1971](#) tells us that what is interesting are ideas that affect attention by denying an old truth, attacking the taken-for-granted world and by having practical repercussions). You can start with some important, known observations about the field,

Table I A primer on the basics

Who	Who are your co-authors? Do you feel you can work with others? Will others fairly contribute to the work and be available when needed? Who is in the network you develop? Those who can work with data and statistics; readers who can make suggestions Who is your audience? Are they practitioners or other researchers? Trending, timely topics, fitting key words and good writing make a cited paper
What	Who are the editors and reviewers? Provide a well written paper and seek advice What is your topic? Concisely state what the paper is about. Have a clearly stated research question Lit reviews should discuss current thinking and show where it is insufficient What is your contribution to our knowledge base? What, really, is the purpose of your paper? Current or new methods to examine current or new theory (please see Figure 1)
Where	Where does your research fit with others? A good lit review should address this Where should your work be published; in which journal? Readers help with this Make certain you meet the journal's formatting standards
Why	Why was this research undertaken? What knowledge gap makes the paper vital? Methods should not overshadow theory with data-driven research questions Good construct validity and control variables are a must for all research
When	Why now? Why does current state of knowledge cry out for your contribution? When is your research applicable and when is it not? This aids in understanding and being clear about the limitations of the research This helps direct to contingencies that may be vital for future avenues of study
How	Present the journal with the best possible manuscript you can Having both strong methods and theory is always best (please see Figure 2) Be persistent. Address all reviewers' and editor's comments Consider rejection as a learning opportunity to improve the paper
Are you sure	Check that your work meets all the journal standards for content, formatting, etc. Have others have read your work for logic, readability, accuracy and structure Make sure your work has been proofread by someone who has an excellent understanding of the language in which the journal is published

pointed out what a major component of those observations is and then point out how your research question is the critical part of that major component. Make sure you clearly state how the research makes a current, relevant contribution to the field of research. Even at this early stage you should discuss some of the essential relevant background literature related to the research question at hand. Obviously, you should also succinctly state your research question, which flows logically from your observations of the field thus far, and how empirical reality may be at odds with current theory.

The literature review

Your literature review positions your paper in the constellation of other relevant research. What you are trying to do here is place your ideas within the context of the concepts and previous research that can be associated with it. *This is not theory development*, but a review of the area. The [UC Santa Cruz University Library \(2014\)](#) notes that, foremost a literature review “surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources [. . .] relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic”.

According to the [UC Santa Cruz University Library \(2014\)](#), a literature review should comprise the following elements. First, you must provide an overview of the subject, issue or theory under consideration, along with the objectives of the literature review. Second, you should divide the works under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative theses entirely). Third, you should explain how each work is similar to and how it varies from the others. Fourth, you should express some logical conclusions as to which pieces are best considered in their argument, are most convincing of their opinions, and make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of their area of research. Finally, your literature review must do one or more of the following:

- Place each work in the context of its contribution to the understanding of the subject.
- Describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration.
- Identify new ways to interpret, and shed light on any gaps in, previous research.
- Resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies.
- Identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort.
- Point the way forward for further research.
- Place your original work in the context of existing literature.

Theoretical development and hypotheses

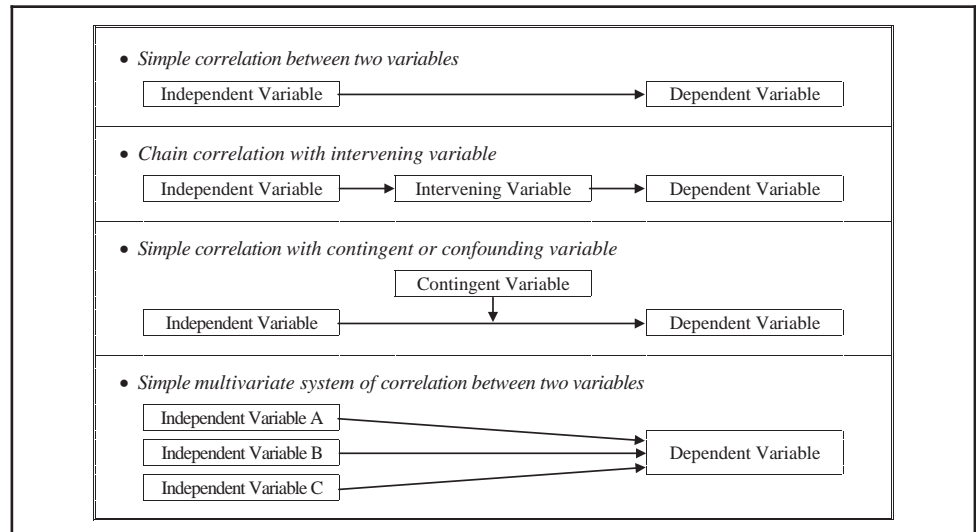
Your theoretical development and hypotheses should allow you to relate prior research to the model you have developed and show how its constituent parts will be tested. Thus, your hypotheses should allow you to stand on the shoulders of giants: i.e. they stem logically from the literature review. Hypotheses should be clearly stated as testable propositions.

It is critical that you can visualize the relationships between your variables. You should be able to diagram the relationship between your independent and dependent variables. [Sheppard et al. \(2000\)](#) suggest one of the following four simple models shown in [Figure 3](#) (though more types are possible). Such graphic representations allow you to explain how and why variables “fit” together. This is very helpful to reviewers and other readers as it provides a visual depiction of your specified relationships

The methods section

Your methods section addresses issues of measurement, data, testing, statistics and fit with theory. First, you should clearly describe the measurements needed to test each

Figure 3 Four simple correlation models



hypothesis. You should clearly operationalize the variables based upon previous work. To do this, you should have demonstrable command of concepts and definitions. This will allow you to insure that your core constructs and measurements are referenced back to others earlier research work that will establish their construct validity. Second, you should insure that the data and your sources for it are logical, generally acceptable and reflect what you are trying to measure. Third, you ought to outline the statistical tests to be used based on similar previous research. If these tests contribute to the rigor of testing the concept, do not be afraid to promote that fact. Finally, all of this should be integrated back into the theories you have already discussed.

The results section

Your results section should contain summary statistics (or references the appendix in which they are contained). You need to clearly describe or explain the results of the statistical tests used to (in text and tabular form without being unduly repetitive). All tables, figures, appendices, etc. must be mentioned in the text to direct the reader to the proper place. Finally, you will need to explain how the statistical results allow the reader to accept or reject the null hypotheses.

The discussion and conclusion sections

Your discussion and conclusion sections must do a number of things. First, your discussion section should tie the results of the study back to the research question and previous literature. In addition, the discussion section must clearly explain how the results of the study add to our knowledge of the field. At the beginning of the paper, you may have started with the idea that your question is a major component to some critical part of a larger issue. Here, you should come re-iterate that point. Explain how your findings help explain these larger issues that were of concern.

Other factors that might have influenced the research, unusual events, unique local contexts and boundary conditions and moderators could be mentioned here. These need explicit treatment. These may help to generate unique theoretical insights. New findings are not a contribution to the literature unless they give us some new theoretical insight. However, such insights are unclear unless they are explicitly placed within the context of the broader research literature stream in which they occur.

Your conclusion section should include a discussion of the limitations of your study and possible problems these limitations create in interpreting the results. In addition,

suggestions for how these problems could be averted in the future are helpful to future researchers. Finally, you should point toward the direction future research should take given the results of the study. Such calls for future study become the starting point for you and others to undertake new research.

Other material

Generally, every journal has a specific set of standards on how to handle tables, figures, notes, appendices, reviewer responses, etc. These requirements are fairly straightforward, are easy to do and are likely to trip you up. If you can do some complicated piece of research (cite theory, develop measurements, gather obscure data, run complicated multivariate statistics and explain the whole thing), you can surely follow simple instructions. That is, what the journal editor also believes. If you do not follow their simple instructions exactly, however, they begin to question if you could adequately execute the complicated piece of research. This is not a question you want to be raised in their minds, so it is best to double check that you have met the journal's standards. [Table II](#) summarizes the above sections.

Good style

Work is not a bad thing. Working harder than you must is a thing to be avoided. Working harder than you have to because others did not do their work is downright irritating, particularly to reviewers. Making your reader work harder than they have to because you have written a convoluted sentence or a poorly structured paragraph is very irritating to the people who know they stand between you and publication. The thing you do not want to do is irritate the reviewer such that they form a poor opinion of your paper. Do not force a reviewer to return something like [Figure 4](#) to you (the picture has been intentionally blurred to disguise the identity of the author). If the grammar is sloppy, the reviewer may begin to wonder what else in the paper was poorly executed. With regard to issues of style, your main goal is to allow the reader to read your work with ease and avoid poor grammar that

Table II Paper layout summary

Abstract	Your abstract must convey seriousness by explaining in a clear and interesting way the importance and relevance of your research
Introduction	Your introduction must meet the goal of grabbing the readers' attention
Literature Review	Clearly state how the research makes a current, relevant contribution The lit review positions the paper in a constellation of other relevant research Describe how the works cited relate to each other
Theory development and hypotheses	Identify new ways to interpret any gaps in previous research, if possible You must relate prior research to the model you develop here Show how test the constituent parts of the developed model Hypotheses should be clearly stated as testable propositions
Methods	Graphically show the relationships between your variables Clearly describe the measurements needed to test each hypothesis Clearly operationalize the variables based upon previous work Data, and sources for it, should be logical, accepted and have construct validity Outline the statistical tests to be employed based on similar previous research
Results	Insure that all of the above ties back to the theories already discussed Your results section should direct the reader to the summary statistics Explain the results of the statistical tests (in text and tabular form)
Discussion & conclusion	Explain how the statistical results allow you to accept or reject the null hypotheses Tie the results of the study back to the research question and previous literature Clearly explain how the results of the study add to our knowledge of the field Mention other factors that might have influenced the research
Other material	New findings are not contributions unless they give new theoretical insight Discuss the study's limitations and possible interpretation problems these create Point to the direction future research should take given the results of the study Make sure you correctly apply the journal's specific set of standards on how to handle tables, figures, notes, appendices, reviewer responses, etc.

detracts from what you are trying to say. Majid (2014) notes that “bad writing often goes hand-in-hand with murky thinking, so by writing clearly you are forced to clarify your understanding”.

Well-organized writing depends on well-organized thinking. There are innumerable Web sites to help you in this organizational effort. Most English-speaking universities have Web pages addressing organized writing. In this regard, Dartmouth (<http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/learning>) has an excellent review for organizing your thoughts:

- Let your research question guide you if you lose track of what you are trying to say.
- Sketch your arguments around the thesis, cluster the points you want to make; under each of these points, note the observations you intend to make.
- Outline the points you wish to make and the logical order you wish to present them in.
- Do not be afraid to add, re-arrange or eliminate parts as needed.

Majid (2014) also notes a number of critical writing considerations (also see Truss, 2003). These range from paragraph construction down to wording. Even assertions made in the paper need to be carefully attended to. These items, all paraphrased from Majid (and directly quoted), are addressed in Table III.

Good Grief: common problems and mistakes

This section is called “Good Grief” after cartoon character Charlie Brown’s expression of exasperation with difficulties. This can be boiled down into four sections. The first section deals with writing failures. The second section addresses issues with the journal (either failure to meet the journal’s standards or respond properly to the editor or reviewers). The third section addresses the unique place that replication studies have in international journals. Finally, there are some other issues for international authors that need to be discussed.

Table III Critical writing considerations	
Paragraphs	<p>A new paragraph signals a topic shift. Prior paragraphs are still active in a reader’s mind so any very big topic shift “should be excused by a suitable explanation like ‘Now we come to. . .’ signals could refer back to the introduction. . .”</p> <p>Topics should be grouped logically. You should avoid sandwiching topic ‘B’ between two paragraphs dealing with topic ‘A’</p> <p>All paragraphs have a topic sentence related to the thesis, can focus the paragraph, further arguments and make sense given preceding and following paragraphs</p>
Sentences	<p>Sentences should lead logically from one to the next. English prefers short sentences with structure connecting them. Ideas “If you want to change the topic. . . warn the reader by key phrases like ‘on the other hand’”</p> <p>As with paragraphs, logically group topics without sandwiching them</p> <p>“Some languages have long sentences with lots of commas, but English does not. . . sentences should be short and sharp. . . Look for sentences longer than one or two lines and see if words like ‘which’ or ‘where’ can be replaced by fresh sentences.”</p>
Wording and punctuation	<p>Pronouns like ‘this’ and ‘it’ should be unambiguous as to what they refer back to</p> <p>Consistently state actions in the past or presence tense (one or the other)</p> <p>Commas are best used as a way to make an aside with the help of a later comma (brackets are usually better, however). Often a new sentence would be better</p> <p>Avoid English language pitfalls by having a good third party proofread your paper</p>
Assertions	<p>Statements are self-evident from what was said previously</p> <p>Supported by a well-known fact that the reader should know anyway</p> <p>Backed by a fact proven elsewhere by others which you cited earlier (cite it again)</p> <p>Supported by a fact that you will justify later (give the forward reference)</p> <p>Unique terminology should be defined before it is extensively used</p>

Writing failures

There are failures that can occur at any point in a paper. It is considered improper current English usage to use gender-specific terms (“he” as opposed to “he or she”). English, unlike some other languages, can use non-gender-specific terms. This can be done by changing terms like “chairman” to “chair”, “businessman” to “businessperson”, or using the plural (e.g. “they” instead of “he”).

Exaggeration or rambling can be a problem. Exaggerating what the paper will do, or has done, the importance of the contribution, etc. and not delivering on the promises will not only earn you ire of editors, reviewers and readers but also compromise your intended research contribution by diminishing the perceived quality of your work. If you are insufficiently direct with the points you are trying to make and your writing is incoherent or rambling, you are wasting the reader’s time. If you have a great deal of information to convey use figures, tables and appendices to summarize material that may bog you down in the text.

Finally, being careless with your writing so that it is not clear what you are trying to say is also a waste of the reader’s time. Thus, if you have poor grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and so forth, you may end up with editors performing corrective actions that are ridiculously burdensome for both them and you (again refer to the sample in [Figure 4](#)). You do not want this kind of relationship with a journal editor.

There are writing failures that occur within specific sections of the paper. A careless introduction that does not provide a clear research question is a problem. An unclear, not seriously phrased introduction that overpromises what the study will do is also problematic. The introduction should be able to initiate the reader to the essential background literature and lead the way to having the reader understand what testable results may look like.

If the literature review shows a poor knowledge of past work, the reviewers, whom the editor has selected as knowledgeable people in the area, will spot it. Mistaking the literature review for demonstration of your theory is a problem. Your theory should extend the current knowledge base and connect current theory into a cohesive whole. Showing these relationships in a figure is essential and allows you to see, what one can call a “boxes without arrows”. These are circumstances where you have introduced concepts related to the subject at hand without integrating them into the theory. These concepts should either connect to the other theories or they may be something you can eliminate from the article since their contribution is questionable.

There are several not-infrequent mistakes that can be made in the methods section. One is that there are simply too many hypotheses. This is confusing to the reader and may lose you the opportunity to produce another paper with the same data. Another problem is if there is incongruence between the research question, your theory and the methods used, you are not really able to make a valid argument to support your theory. Finally, mistaking statements for arguments means that your contentions are unsupported by well-reasoned theory-backed points.

The results section has several traps for the writer. Executing a poor description of the sample and data is poor scientific method. A lack of reliability and validity tests means that the statistics used become questionable. Poor execution of statistics means that the conclusions drawn become questionable. Not explicitly returning to the hypotheses and addressing whether or not to accept or reject the null hypothesis for each one is a serious downfall.

The discussion and conclusion sections can create the opportunity for the writer to exaggerate what the study has done. In this section, the writer may take the research in a direction that is not truly indicated by the study that preceded it. Lastly, writers can fail to mention obvious limitations to the study that ought to be included. This brings us to issues that can be unique to a journal.

Issues with the journal

The most obvious mistake is to send the paper to a journal that is inappropriate for your work. This mistake can occur when you send an academic paper to a practitioner journal or vice versa, or the topic is something the journal does not address (you send a strategy paper to a finance journal). It could be that the degree of empirical rigor demanded by the journal differs from the paper you can produce.

A second issue is not meeting the journal formatting standards. This can include anything from not meeting the journal's standards for spacing, margin size, citation style, acceptable word processor, how to present tables, notes and figures, as well as an array of unique requirements that help the journal review and potentially publish your work.

Your goal is to align your paper to the journal's accepted standards as closely as possible. Essentially, you need to have the article in a standard acceptable form that allows the reader to quickly and easily figure out what you are trying to tell the reader. Do not waste the reader's time with poorly written or poorly presented material. Most importantly, the *Journal of Asia Business Studies (JABS)* has guidelines for manuscripts (www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs). If you cannot follow the guidelines, and this applies to any journal, the reviewer will wonder what else you have done incorrectly in the paper (if the editor does not beat them to the same question and then he or she does not even send your paper out for review). These guidelines are included on the checklist included in [Appendix 1](#).

A final mistake is to not respond to all of the editors and reviewers comments. If editors give you the chance to resubmit and the reviewers have taken the time to make helpful suggestions, you should try to address all their concerns. Again, even if you do not follow a reviewer's suggestions, you must provide convincing reasons what you did not act on those suggestions. No one wants to be ignored, and reviewers are no exception. Thus, a failure to respond in detail to the editors or reviewers can spell doom.

Replication alone is not research

Replication of a seminal work in the field does not add greatly to the stock of our knowledge. However, it becomes interesting if there exists a different context in which those results might change. Other factors that might have influenced the research, unusual events, unique local contexts and boundary conditions and moderators all contribute to why replicated research may make a contribution. These factors need to be explicitly stated and their inclusion may help to generate unique theoretical insights.

For example, if you are addressing a different national context you must tell the reader what the different context is and why it has the potential to impact the results of the replicated research. If your research is being undertaken because you are arguing that there is some difference between the country where it was first undertaken and the country you are studying, you must provide details as to what those differences are. However, knowledgeable your reviewers are regarding the theory and research generally, they may know very little about your national context. Help them out and provide one or two pages that explain the national context and why it is important to the research.

There are a number of ways that one can address differences in national context. One is the classic PEST or PESTEL analysis (Aguilar, 1967; Yüksel, 2012). PESTEL analysis can be used to review the differences between the home country of the original study and your study regarding political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental and legal differences between the two contexts. Other authors add various elements like global and demographic conditions (Hitt *et al.*, 2009). Porter's (1990) *Competitive Advantage of Nations* also provides a framework for analyzing country differences using country variations in factors of production, market demand conditions, related and supporting industries, and firm strategy structure and rivalry in the different markets.

Other issues

These points are particularly important for non-Western authors, or those who are not at mainstream academic institutions. These fall into four categories. The first is a limited access to literature. Many articles are available through Google Scholar. Harder-to-find articles can often be obtained simply by directly contacting one of the authors. We all appreciate that someone is really interested in something we have written and it opens the potential to improve your network of contacts. Second, you may have limited access to ideas and rebuttals. Developing that network will allow you contacts that may stimulate research ideas or at least give you some input on your research. Third, access to data can be a problem. Increasingly free data can be found online, particularly, historical data. Additionally, co-authors may be a source of data.

A final issue of concern is language. If you are trying to publish in English and English is not your first language then you are going to need a proofreader. Word processors will only correct so much. An alternative to getting a proofreader is to find a co-author who is a native English speaker with a good command of the language. If you ask for help, you should also offer it – do not hesitate to help on a paper where you can lend some expertise or review papers to gain perspective on what you want to see in a paper.

In summary, writing issues, journal issues and other language issues all pose threats. These can be overcome with good, careful writing and having others review your work before submitting it to a journal. Persistence and attention to detail will always serve you well.

Some parting thoughts

This article is intended to be an introduction to getting your research published in academic journals. It was a review of some good basics about research papers, important items to remember about good writing, important relevant elements of good style, including meeting journal standards, as well as common problems and potential mistakes. In the paper, and in each section of the paper, the author first often listed what was going to be discussed, then discussed it and then summarized what was discussed. These are all important elements in getting your points across to the reader. Below, there are some final additional places where you can get writing assistance and some closing points regarding the writing process generally.

Other assistance

A quick Web search for assistance for writers can give you a long list of resources. Friedman's (2009) *50 Free Resources That Will Improve Your Writing Skills* (www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/06/28/50-free-resources-that-will-improve-your-writing-skills/) comes to mind. In addition, *The 100 Best Business Writing Resources Online* (2014) (www.businessdegreeonline.net/business-writing-resources) is another comprehensive source. Also, Sheppard *et al.* (2000) provide a digestible concise guide for doing research within the context of a PhD program.

As mentioned, Dartmouth's guide is a good general source for writers (<http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/learning>). Additionally, the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University (2014) is a great searchable resource for writers (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). A fine guide to general elements of clear writing can be found at *The Economist* (2014) (www.economist.com/styleguide/introduction).

Finally, *JABS* has a detailed list of standards for authors available on the journal Web site (www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs). *JABS* publisher, Emerald Publishing, has a number of writing resources. The most critical ones at Emerald are:

- *A general checklist:* www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/authors/writing/checklist.htm
- *Guides for authors:* www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/authors/guides/index.htm

- *Editing services:* www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/authors/editing_service/index.htm
- *Authors' workshops:* www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/authors/workshops/index.htm

Last words

Any research requires persistence, people and progress. With regard to *persistence*, Ayivor (2013, p. 25) notes, "The chance that you will become a master in something after the first attempt is neither here nor there. You don't get a master's degree by attending school on the first day! Time will tell, so you got to persist!" Persistence is not just trying to get the same imperfect research work published, but persisting at making it better. All requests for revision and even rejections come with advice on how to make your paper better. Take the advice and persistently strive to improve your research.

Secondly, if you approach your research seriously, as was discussed above, *people* will help you. While it may take a village to raise a child (as the old African saying goes), it may take a network to develop good research. Presenting versions of your paper to conferences, having people who understand the area read and comment on early versions of the paper will help improve it. Academics appreciate it when you cite and build on their work. They want you to get it published. Reviewers and editors want to see good work published and to this end they will make positive suggestions regarding your work; it is thus usually good to take their advice.

Finally, your research should lead to *progress* in our understanding of the way the world works. While the research must fit within the context of the research that has preceded it, its true contribution is to extend that understanding in a novel and interesting way. Again, quoting Ayivor (2013, p. 33), "Learn new things. Do progressive research [. . .] Dare to be excellent".

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Further reading

Dartmouth College Institute for Writing and Rhetoric (2014), available at: <http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/learning> (accessed 14 February 2014).

Appendix 1. JABS journal guidelines

1. My article fits with the journal's aims and scope. For *JABS*, you should try to address theoretical and practical issues faced by firms competing in Asia or Asian firms competing Western markets (a more specific statement can be found at: www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs).
2. I have **formatted** the file using the accepted software (for *JABS*, as a Word document).
3. I have **met the title standards** for the journal:
 - The **article title** eight words or less (your title should make the work accessible to non-experts while being catchy enough to grab the reader's attention).
 - I have correctly completed the **article title page** using the template provided at www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs
4. I have followed *JABS* **vitaly important structured abstract** format in writing my 250 word abstract (see www.emeraldinsight.com/authors/guides/write/abstracts.htm?part=1#2). This is a great resource for developing an abstract that tells the reader what the article is all about, while forcing the author to be complete and concise. The importance of investing the time and effort to do this right (follow this format *and* make it interesting) cannot be over-emphasized. The abstract is where you will lose or hook the editor, reviewer and later reader on whether they want to take an interest and publish, or cite your article.
5. I have provided up to 10 keywords and categorized my paper (categories are Viewpoint, Research, Technical or Conceptual paper, Case study, or Literature or General review).
6. I have **met the general standards** for the journal:
 - My **article's length** is between 3,000 and 10,000 words (including all text, references and appendices. I have allowed 350 words for each figure or table).
 - I have correctly used **headings** (they are concise, with a clear indication of the distinction between the hierarchy of headings; first level headings presented in bold format and subsequent sub-headings presented in medium italics).
 - I have used **notes** only where absolutely necessary and identified them in the text by consecutive numbers, enclosed in square brackets and listed at the end of the article.
 - I have declared all sources of **external research funding** in the Acknowledgements section (authors should describe the role of the funder or financial sponsor in the entire research process, from study design to submission).
 - I have submitted all **Figures** (charts, diagrams, line drawings, web pages/screenshots, and photographic images) in electronic form. Additional details for figures are available at www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs
 - I have submitted all **Tables** typed in a separate file to the main body of the article. The position of each is clearly labeled in the body text of the article with related labels shown clearly in the separate file. Superscripts or asterisks are shown next to relevant items and have corresponding explanations displayed as table, figure or plate footnotes.
 - I have submitted **References in Harvard style** and carefully checked for accuracy, completeness, and consistency. Additional details for references are available at www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=jabs

About the author

Jerry Paul Sheppard is an Associate Professor of Strategic Management at the Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. His research focuses primarily on why things go wrong in organizations. Specifically, his research concerns organizational decline, turnaround, survival and failure. His PhD dissertation from the University of Washington in 1989 won the Strategic Management Society Best Dissertation Award. He has published journal articles in the *Journal of Management*, *Long Range Planning*, *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Social Science Research*. His most recent work is Sheppard and Chowdhury (2014), "The Story of a Tortoise: How Toyota Fell from the Top Spot," *Governance in action globally – Strategy, process and reality*, in J. Mueller and P. Wells, Editors, 267-283, Oxford, UK: RossiSmith Academic Publications Ltd. Jerry Paul Sheppard can be contacted at: sheppard@sfu.ca

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