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# Editorial

Peggy Johnson



As I prepared the first issue of the last volume of *Library Resources and Technical Services (LRTS)* I will edit, I decided to return once more to one of my recurring topics—writing for publication and, specifically, writing for publication in *LRTS*. People frequently ask me how they can write a paper that will be accepted for publication. The simple answer is “write a good paper that fits within the scope of *LRTS*,” but that response is insufficient for most would-be authors. In this editorial, I will offer targeted advice that will improve your chances of publication.

Read the professional literature, not just to learn the content but, equally important, to learn what makes a paper good. As you read, think about what you like about the paper, what makes it effective, and why you are reading it to the end.

Pick a topic in which you are interested and that will be of interest to our readers. Ideally, the topic should be something that has not been explored previously or that presents a new approach to solving a problem others have. The paper needs to answer the question, “so what?” Why should the reader care about your findings or your case study?

Any material submitted must be your own work. It should be original and not published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Avoid redundant publication (publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published, is under editorial consideration, has been published, or is in press). Do not submit to the same or different journals more than one paper describing essentially the same research or project.

Research the topic in the literature and summarize your findings in a section of the paper called the literature review. This will help you avoid revisiting topics that have been addressed in the same way and permit you to build on the work of others. An effective literature review sets the context for your paper and is necessary in both research papers and case studies.

Follow *LRTS* stylistic guidelines for citing your sources. These are clearly spelled out in the “Advice to Authors” section of the *LRTS* website ([www.ala.org/alcts/lrts](http://www.ala.org/alcts/lrts)). Look at recent issues of *LRTS* and make sure the format of your citations matches what you see there. Almost nothing annoys reviewers and editors more than inadequate, inaccurate, or poorly constructed references.

Always properly cite the work of others as well as your own related work. The latter can be redacted in the submission to keep your name confidential during the review process. Plagiarism (the use or presentation of the ideas or words of another person from existing sources without appropriate acknowledgment of that source) and self-plagiarism are unacceptable.

Note at the time of submission whether the work is based on thesis or dissertation research, any earlier presentations of the work at meetings, or previous distribution through electronic means. This does not usually disqualify a work for submission, but the editor should be aware of the state of ongoing dissemination of the work. The information can be conveyed to the editor at the point of submission and does not need to appear in the paper at this stage.

Pay attention to the mechanics of writing. Apply the guidelines you learned in school about writing effectively. Work from an outline. Remember that a paragraph has an initial topical sentence. Paragraphs should consist of more than one sentence. Do not change tense or voice within a paper. *LRTS* preference is for third person.

Write clearly. Above all, your paper should be readable. Never use the passive voice where you can use the active voice. Avoid jargon and ponderous prose. Overly academic writing is deadly. Cut the boring parts.

Do not make undocumented assertions or assumptions. Never, for example, write “it is widely known that . . .” The reader wants to know who knows it. Even what may seem obvious needs to be documented. For example, “E-books are increasingly popular” needs a reference to the source of this statement, which might be data on increased sales.

If your paper describes a research study that uses statistics, consult with a statistician to make sure that the statistics are handled correctly. Most librarians do not have sufficient experience with statistical analysis to do it effectively. Pay attention to reliability and validity. If the research study used a survey, provide the survey in an appendix.

Describe the research method used clearly. This should both address questions of reliability and validity and serve to permit others to replicate your research at a later date.

Describe the setting in which a case study or research project took place to provide context for the reader. Do not overwhelm the reader with detail. Provide sufficient information to understand the case study or research project.

Write in an orderly manner. Tell the reader what you intend to do in the introduction and then do it. If you start by saying you will cover five points, the paper should address each of these points in the order they appear in your introduction. Write with a logical flow from point to point with

signposts, such as subheadings and section introductions.

Do not omit standard elements found in peer-reviewed literature. A paper should have an introduction explaining what the paper will cover (clearly stating the purpose) and why this research or case study is important or useful; a description of the research question or questions to be answered, assumptions to be tested, or the problem to be solved; a literature review; a description of research methods or case study; findings; analysis or discussion; and a conclusion that summarizes what the paper has covered.

Use illustrations (tables and figures) effectively. They should enhance or illustrate concepts or points made in the paper. Remember that *LRTS* publishes in black and white. Limit the number of illustrations to no more than six or (rarely) eight. *LRTS* will not publish twenty illustrations. Reference each illustration in the text and explain what it highlights.

Always double-check tables and figures. Do columns total accurately? Are the numbers in the illustrations consistent with those in the text? Does each table and figure have a title? If the illustration is taken from another source, that source should be cited at the bottom of the illustration.

Always double-check citations for accuracy. While reviewers and the editor will spot check citations including URLs, their accuracy is your responsibility. Remember that the reference for a quotation must give the specific page on which the quotation appeared.

Have a colleague read your paper. My advice is to avoid friends and relatives, who are less likely to point out flaws in logic and structure, although they often can help spot grammatical errors. Pay attention to what your colleagues, the paper reviewers, and the editor tell you.

Finally—and this is my most important advice—revise, revise, revise. Every paper can be improved.

## Erratum

“Looking Back, Moving Forward in the Digital Age,” by Daryl R. Bullis and Lorre Smith (v. 55, no. 4, Oct. 2011) contains errors on page 214 and in endnote 179. The sentence on page 214 citing the source in endnote 179 should be “O’Neill, Connaway, and Dickey discussed the quantitative measure of the audience level field in an OCLC record to assess the appropriateness of books for given collections.” The correct citation (endnote 179) should be

179. Edward T. O’Neill, Lynn Sillipigni Connaway, and Timothy J. Dickey, “Estimating the Audience Level for Library Resources,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 59, no. 13 (Nov. 2008): 2042–50.