Tips for Preparing a Journal Manuscript

The tips below serve as guidelines for developing manuscripts for the *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*. We know that a great deal of work goes into preparing a manuscript for submission and that the editorial process can seem difficult to comprehend. In keeping with best practices in scholarly publishing, the notifications that are built into the JSSWR publishing platform and website are designed to keep authors informed of a manuscript's progress through the review process—from the moment of submission through the editorial decision, subsequent revisions (if required), and publication.

**Peer-Review Process**

Peer review is the central feature of this process. *JSSWR* uses a double-blind review process: Reviewers are masked to the identities of authors, and authors are masked to the identities of reviewers. To provide as informed a review as possible, reviewers are selected because they have expertise related to the substantive topics addressed in manuscripts and the methods used to collect and analyze data (whether numeric or text). When manuscripts fail, it is usually because of substantive or methodological problems. However, manuscripts can also fail because of inadequate or imprecise description. That is, the writing style lacks clarity and leaves readers with too many questions. Drawing on information from reviewers, our guidelines are organized in three categories: methodological, substantive, and stylistic guidelines.

**Methodological Guidelines**

**Tip 1.** Describe your methods clearly, thoroughly, and precisely. From JARS and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, a manuscript comprises the following sections: (a) Title page with an Author Note; (b) Abstract section with keywords; (c) Introduction section, including a review of the literature (note that APA omits any heading for the Introduction section); (d) Method section; (e) Results section; and (f) Conclusions.

The Method section describes the following aspects:

- participants, study sample;
- sampling procedures, including recruitment strategies, consent procedures, and safety monitoring;
- sample size, power, and precision;
- measures and covariates, including data collection methods, information on validity and reliability, and strategies to strengthen measurement;
- research design, including methods for assigning participants to conditions (if appropriate); and
• interventions, including program content for all conditions, the duration of exposure, and strategies to increase adherence and improve implementation.

The Results section reports the findings, and includes

• baseline data for all conditions, and
• data or text analyses.

The Discussion section provides interpretation of the findings; adverse events; implications of findings for theory, practice, or policy; and discussion of the study limitations and threats to validity. Authors are encouraged to weave the limitations into the overall discussion rather than present limitations in a separate paragraph(s).

The Conclusion section should summarize the key points of the argument and the evidence offered in support. This section should also offer cautious conclusions regarding the importance of the findings.

Tip 2. Anticipate the kind of questions the target audience or the reviewers are likely to have. As applicable, include information about the reliability and validity of all measures. Consider cultural validity. Justify sampling decisions and discuss the similarity of the sample to the population of interest.

Tip 3. Use the correct analytic procedures and cite references for those methods. Statistical methods should fit the data structure. For example, if the study includes children within families and families within neighborhoods (i.e., clustered or nested data), the selected methods should include a data analysis strategy that controls for clustering. Qualitative methods should be specified (e.g., constant comparison method of grounded theory).

Depending on the research design, you might also consider the following checklists:

For randomized controlled trials, see the Consolidated Standards for Reporting of Trials (CONSORT) Statement 2010 Checklist at: http://www.consort-statement.org/home/

For quasi-experimental design, see the Transparent Reporting of Evaluations with Nonrandomized Designs (TREND) checklist at: http://www.cdc.gov/trendstatement/Index.html

For cohort and cross-sectional designs, see the STrengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) at www.strobe-statement.org

For meta-analyses of the literature, see the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA, formerly QUOROM) statement at http://www.consort-statement.org/resources/related-guidelines-and-initiatives/
For qualitative studies, see the Qualitative Research Review Guidelines-RATS at http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/rats

Substantive Guidelines

Tip 1. Use substantive knowledge (i.e., prior research and theory) to inform the research question(s) and selection of measures. Show how population- or problem-related knowledge contributed to the thinking behind your study.

Tip 2. Review the literature from an interdisciplinary perspective. Consider both psychosocial and biosocial perspectives. For example, a study of child maltreatment or delinquency might not include genetic testing; however, you should mention that gene x environment interactions are an important consideration in the field. Acknowledge other perspectives, especially if they might support an alternative explanation of the findings.

Tip 3. Consider multiple levels of influence and the nesting of human behavior in families, peer groups, schools, communities, and workplaces. In addition, and as appropriate, authors should consider the effects of local, national, and global influences. For example, a discussion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic might assume a global perspective that extends beyond impacts in Western countries.

Tip 4. Consider the cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, religious, and other aspects of diverse human behavior.

For more information on substantive guidelines, see


Stylistic Guidelines


Tip 2. Before submitting, thoroughly and carefully proofread the manuscript. Reviewers are influenced by grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Make sure that words such as since versus although, and that versus which are used in accordance with the APA rules (see Chapter 3 of the Publication Manual).

Tip 3. Think of writing as a skill that you develop over time with practice, patience, and persistence.