



The Journal of Cadet Research

Academic Excellence at the US Coast Guard Academy

Formatting Tips

This area of the website contains some guidance for those writing for publication for the first time. The *top tips* are useful if you wish to submit your work to or if you wish to write up your research for another academic journal.

Some Basics

Don't submit an essay or report you have previously written. A written journal article needs much more than this – if you're unsure, check out other articles published in *JCR*, or in journals in your own subject area. Be aware that you will have a fair amount to do on your original work to turn it into a paper suitable for publication by *JCR*.

Read the style guide before you start

All articles submitted to a journal must conform to their style guide. Those that do not will almost certainly be returned to the author(s) without being read, so be aware of the requirements before you start. Please read and adhere to the Chicago [style guide](#) if you wish to send your work to *JCR*.

Make sure you use an academic style and references

Your written paper will need a full bibliography, referencing works you have cited as well as those you have used to inform your work. Make sure you use a formal style of writing.

Ensure you have identified a gap in the literature

Academic journals require submissions to address a gap in the existing research literature. Make sure you are clear in your paper why your article is of interest to readers and how it is different to academic work already published on the subject.

Back up your assertions

Be aware that you should be able to justify everything you say: there should be no generalizations such as 'everyone knows that ...' or 'it's true that most people tend to ...'. Also, do not extrapolate from your findings that something is generalized: even if your experiment has found something to be true, it does not mean that it holds true for the entire population. Ensure that your conclusions are in line with the scale of your research.

Check your permissions

If you have included images, tables, figures, etc. which are not your own, be aware that we, and other journals, can only publish them if you have obtained specific permission from the copyright holders (we can help you with this if required).

Abstracts and keywords

An abstract and keywords are necessary for most journal articles and you need to think about them carefully (see the [Abstract and Keywords](#) section for further tips) – these are the means by which readers will find your paper and decide whether they wish to read it.

Pay attention to ethics

Be aware that it is your responsibility to ensure that your research and its presentation are ethically sound. You must have permission from participants in your research to reproduce their words, image, responses, etc.

Check your work

Don't send your work off as soon as you have finished writing it. Leave it for a day or two and then proofread your paper carefully and don't rely on the spell checker. If necessary read your work from the back page forwards so that you can concentrate on the proofreading and not get caught up in the argument. Double check all of your equations, tables, figures, etc. for accuracy. Think about asking someone else to look at your work to check it - you will often see what you think a sentence should say and not what it actually does!

The Title of your Paper

- Ensure your title accurately reflects the core of your research
- Keep it concise
- Make it different from an essay title

Your title will be the first thing anyone sees of your article so it needs to draw readers in. Coming up with a good title is much more difficult than it looks. You need to convey your information in a concise manner, while avoiding the temptation to make it sound like an essay title. Particularly in an online journal, your title will make up key, searchable data, so don't waste the opportunity to get it right!

Abstract and Keywords

Most journal articles require an abstract. An abstract should be a concise summary of what the paper contains, including conclusions. Keywords need to be both specific and informative. Most journals will ask you to write an abstract of your paper, normally about 100-200 words long, and put it at the beginning of the paper so that people can read through it and see whether they want to read the whole paper. Writing a good abstract can be as difficult, if not more so, than writing the paper.

There are various techniques you can use to write an effective abstract. One of them is to go through your article and summarize each paragraph in one line. Then use all these lines to form the basis of your abstract (and if you find a paragraph that doesn't say anything that you want to include, perhaps you should think about removing it). Don't use the lines word for word and just run them together, but use them to shape your abstract. This technique means that there is a logical chronology to your abstract, which matches your main paper, and ensures that your abstract does not suddenly contain new information not included in your article. Alternatively, you could use the questions listed in our [Structuring your Article](#) section to form the basis of your abstract.

You are also required to provide keywords as you are writing an undergraduate academic article. These are words that people will be able to use on internet or database searches to find your article. When selecting keywords please be concise and informative. Keywords (and abstracts and titles) are becoming more and more important as

readers access papers more on-line than in hard copy. Keywords, titles and abstracts are the window to your research and must be accurate, interesting and relevant in order to ensure that (the right) people read your work. Make every word count and remember, this may be the only part of your research people read.

Structuring your Article

Your article should essentially answer four main questions: **Why?**, **What**, **So what?**, and **Now what?**. In an essay, you are normally given the title so you can just get started with addressing the question. This is not the case in an article, so you need to start by saying why your subject is important and why you want to study it. The **why?** is important: too many articles start with something like “the purpose of this article is to study X, so I collated some data and here is what I found”. You need to contextualize the topic and give some background, so you can set the stage: What are your research questions and why are they important?

Then, you need to move on to **what** you did: depending on your subject, the main body of your article may include literary analysis, case studies, data, and descriptions of experiments and so on. You are expected to decide to divide it into subsections. However, you can organize it, make it a logical progression in order to not to jump around and back. Always have your reader in mind when you're writing and ensure you are doing all you can to help readers understand your research.

This leads to: **so what?** – that is, what do your results mean and what has your analysis shown? Explicitly, what are the answers to your research questions? What are your conclusions? What effect has this had / could it have on your discipline? You don't want you leave your reader wondering why they read your article and what they have gained - asking **so what?**.

And finally, **Now what?** – have your discoveries opened up further questions for research, or have you produced something which is self-contained and doesn't need further study? Other people reading your work might have been inspired to carry out their own research so let them know what further questions you think your research has raised. The answer to the **now what** question might be any one of a number of things, but it still needs spelling out. Again, this is different from an essay.

Your paper should ideally demonstrate or describe a research problem, provide analysis of the issue and arrive at a conclusion. You are expected to illustrate awareness of contemporary research in the field, and acknowledge supporting and opposing views, demonstrate its own contribution to knowledge, and argue for the importance and validity of its subject and methodology (where appropriate).

Substantiating your Claims

- Provide references unless your point is seen as 'common knowledge'

Something which a lot of students get confused about is deciding when they do or don't need to reference something. Ask yourself – is this common knowledge or not?; and be aware that again this will vary from discipline to discipline. In every field there will be things which you can take for granted. There will also be some statements which aren't quite as black and white. If you are in doubt, it's always better to support your claims than not.

- Some areas of knowledge are contested

Some areas of research are contested and it is important to be aware of and acknowledge other schools of thought if they do not necessarily agree with your point of view. Not only should you come up with references, which support your own point of view, but you also have to show that you recognize that there was a different opinion: you need to provide references for people who disagreed, and show the evidence for why you disagree with them.

- Ensure you cite supporting literature

You can't ever do too much background reading, but you can do too little, so references to plenty of supporting literature won't go amiss. The way in which you reference will depend on your discipline and the style guide of the publication you are submitting to, but as a general rule of thumb, being over-precise is better than too vague. The reason you are referencing is so that people who read your article can see where you have taken that quote or idea from, so make it as easy as possible for them to find the original.

A good habit to get into is making a list of your references as you go along, so that you don't have to go back and look for things after you've finished, which is when you can make mistakes and end up plagiarizing something unintentionally. As a minimum, you should list any work to which you have made reference, but it's also good practice to list anything which you haven't specifically mentioned, but which shaped your thinking for the article. You don't have to include everything you've ever read – try to find a balance so that you include anything you think is relevant to your research.

- Plagiarism

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas, whether done intentionally or not. Clearly, you need to reference any direct quote. But you also need to clearly state if you base any part of your article on someone else's concepts or ideas. The sources from which you base your work should be properly cited and included as references.

Aspects of Style

Please remember to mind your style and grammar and not to be too informal or too formal. Any academic publication should be written in formal language. You are writing, not speaking, so avoid anything which looks too informal. However, be aware also that going too far in the other direction can be a problem too. Your task as an author is to convey complex ideas in a clear and concise manner – it's a question of balance. You are not trying to make yourself sound clever at the expense of your reader. Your job as an author is to communicate with your reader, to ensure that they fully understand your research by the time they have finished reading your paper. Finally, make sure you make sense. If you try to write something which you don't quite understand yourself, you will almost certainly end up with a sentence that doesn't make sense itself.

Permissions

There is a difference between permission and copyright. You need permission for any work in its entirety you are using in your paper. It is your responsibility to obtain this permission. We are not referring to the copyright of your own article after you've written it, this is about obtaining explicit permission for other people's work that you include in your own work. If you use any image, photo, drawing, map, chart or table that has been devised by someone else, you need to get permission for it, and you need to state in your article that you've done so. This normally takes the form of a caption under the image saying what it depicts, the source, and a statement that it was reproduced with the permission of X person.

Something less obvious might be quoting a short poem. This cannot just be referenced in the normal way, it too needs explicit permission to be granted before it is reproduced because it is seen as a work in its entirety. If you have any doubts you can always contact the publisher you will be submitting your work to and they should be able to help. If a photograph is your own, you can obviously publish it as you see fit, but you should include something which says *from the author's own collection or similar*: firstly, everyone will then know it's yours and not worry that it's an unreferenced picture of someone else's; and secondly, if anyone would like to reproduce parts of your article, they'll know to contact you as the copyright holder of that photo.

Writing a Book Review

You need to read the book thoroughly and reflect on it before you start. Once you begin writing, the key thing to remember is that this is a book review, not a book summary. Do not spend all of your review recapitulating the content; instead, reflect upon and react to the author and book, and write clearly, concisely and critically. You can explain briefly what the book is about in order to contextualize your review, but you should also make sure that you analyse its thesis and evidence, offer a critical assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and appraise its value to the scholarly and/or student community. Consider matters such as emphases and viewpoints, contributions to understanding, clarity and organization, credibility and evidence offered. Does the author present new findings or utilize new sources? How does the perspective and/or interpretation differ from the work of earlier scholars on this topic?

Mix up your commentary to avoid giving a chapter-by-chapter evaluation of the book. Even though it might seem systematic and organized to do so, this can make your review dull. Instead, touch on points that you find the most important and organize your review thematically. Simply telling your readers “I enjoyed the book” or “the book is good” is not terribly useful. Telling the readers about the contributions the author makes, with specific examples, is a useful feature of any review. You can refer to the book as “interesting”, “poorly organised”, or “helpful”, etc., but in all cases use specific examples (with page references where appropriate) to support your judgement.

Please remain civil at all times. Sometimes (particularly if you disagree with what has been written) it can be tempting to add a flourish of wit or sarcasm to a book review, but it's better to keep your tone professional and your criticism constructive.