Publishing and Authorship in Academia

In all fields of academic research, writing is very important. Writing quality articles, and getting them published serves the purpose of reporting new or existing knowledge to a community and helps peers stay abreast of research and outcomes within a field. This body of knowledge then promotes the creation of new research in a field (Purdue OWL, 2014).

Learning Outcomes

This module will help you to:

1. Identify the importance of writing in academia
2. Be familiarized with the publishing process and authorship

High-quality writing can be considered a form of “currency” in academia. Professors are constantly applying for grant funding in order to carry out research. An extremely competent researcher could have great research ideas or conduct quality research, but if he/she does not write it in an effective and convincing manner, a research idea may not be funded. Similarly, career promotion in academia is linked to the number of journal publications, conference papers, and grants that a researcher writes. If a manuscript is poorly written, there is a very high chance that it will not be accepted for publication.

As an undergraduate researcher, you might have to contribute to a research paper by writing a section of the paper (e.g., a literature review or reporting of findings). Even if you are not expected to write a paper in its entirety, learning the process of writing and the structure of a research paper will prove beneficial in your academic pursuit.

What is a research paper?: Now that you know why research papers are important, this section of the module will explore what a research paper is. A research paper is an essay with a combination of review of previous literature in a field and a presentation of a researcher’s thinking backed by results, information, and previous knowledge. The research paper supports any arguments or perspectives, ranging from experiments to a prior knowledge base in a field (SUNY, Empire State College, 2014a). According to the Empire State College, “A research paper is an expanded essay that presents your own interpretation or evaluation or argument, or analysis of a perspective” (SUNY, Empire State College, 2014a).

The Publication Process: This section will describe briefly the publication process. After completing the draft of your research paper, which is also called a manuscript, a researcher may submit the draft to a conference or to a journal, which is governed by an editor. Each journal has its own standards of rigor. Certain journals have different foci and/or are more highly acknowledged, or have a higher impact factor within the research community. For a peer-reviewed publication, if the editor deems the manuscript to be of good quality and to be relevant to the goals of the journal, he/she will select several experts in the area to peer-review the
manuscript. These peer-reviews could be double blind (i.e., both the reviewers and the authors do not know each other’s identity), or just blind (here the reviewers know who has written the draft paper). The reviewers will then read the manuscript and critique it, ultimately deciding if it should be accepted or not, along with suggestions for a revision. This can be a very time-intensive process, sometimes taking many months. If the manuscript is accepted after a peer review, the authors are given a chance to make the suggested edits. Once these edits have been made, the edited draft is then submitted back to the editor, which eventually gets published in the Journal.

If a paper is rejected, authors should review comments and then consider if they want to resubmit it to the same journal or to another journal. Another option is to add more data or revise other aspects of a paper for submission to another venue.

**Authorship:** A research paper can be written by a single person or by multiple people, also called as authors. In the case of multiple authors, the Principle Investigator (PI) usually determines the order of authorship and who should be added to the paper as an author. Often, the amount of contribution is designated by the order of authorship (e.g., the first author indicates the individual who has done most of the work, and thus receives most credit). This may vary by discipline. If you are collaborating with other people in writing a paper, it is advisable to have discussions early on regarding authorship so that conflicts may be avoided in the future.

As an undergraduate researcher, you need to be proactive about publishing and contribute in ways that are beneficial to your team.

References:

Purdue OWL (2014). Genre and the research paper. Retrieved from [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/02/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/02/)