

How to Become a Successful Author of a Paper to be Published in a World-Class Scholarly Journal?

An invited Guest Editorial

IUDr. Jozef Zat'ko, Publisher of *Europska Veda*, has asked me to prepare and convey a set of guidelines for authors who wish to be successful in preparing and submitting scholarly papers for consideration for publication in world-class, globally scoped academic journals, such as those indexed in Elsevier's **Scopus**[™] and ScienceDirect[™] and/or in Clarivate Analytics' **Web of Science**[™] databases. My guidelines provided below are intended for relatively junior authors, with limited prior experience in publishing, who are preparing their manuscripts in the realm of applied sciences. Some of the issues being raised herein are universal and as such they are equally applicable in other scholarly domains as well. I have based these guidelines on my 25+ years of experience as an editor-in-chief of a high-ranking international research journal in my own academic discipline. The journal has been included for a number of years both in Scopus[™] and in the Web of Science[™], earning their relatively high CiteScore[™] and Impact Factor[™] designations.

Academics work in an increasingly competitive environment. With many narrowly defined scientific disciplines, the race to the top has become relentless. There are currently over two thousand academic journal publishers worldwide, publishing over twenty thousand journals. The total number of refereed journal papers now exceeds 1.6 million annually and it is still growing rapidly. The largest numbers of such papers originate from the U.S.A., with China closely behind. A growing, and still largely unregulated, market for open-access publications further complicates the publishing environment. Over 90 percent of academic journal papers ever published will have been published in our professional lifetime. Ethical issues in academic publishing abound.

A successful article should contain the following major components, preferably but not necessarily presented in the stated order.

1. The title:

The title of an article should be as short as possible, but it should reflect the main issue addressed in the paper as well as the paper content. In most cases, the title of the article is decided after the entire content of the article has been completed. The wording of the title should avoid uncommon acronyms or descriptors confining the contents of the paper only to one country or one geographic region.

2. The abstract:

The abstract is an advertisement of your paper. It should be written in clear, short sentences which are easy to understand and should accurately reflect the contents of the paper and its main contribution to the global body of knowledge. One must avoid unnecessary sentences that belong to the introduction section of the paper. An good abstract should contain only 6 short sentences as follows: 1) The scientific domain and the problem within the domain which is the subject

matter of the paper, 2) The research question to be answered in the paper, 3) The means and methods (scientific tools) used to obtain the answer to the stated research question, 4) The answer to the research question, 5) The meaning and importance of the answer and the results obtained, 6) The future research directions based on the results of the completed research reported in this paper. The entire abstract should not exceed one-half of a printed page.

3. The keywords:

Keywords are the labels of your manuscript used in scientific databases containing many thousands of papers. A correct use of keywords will determine if your article is noticed by potential readers, or if it is only glanced over before the reader decides to move on the next article in the database without reading yours. Keywords that are generic in nature are always ineffective.

4. The introduction:

This section should set the stage for what is presented in the article. One must provide a clear description of the problem to be addressed along with detailed explanation of the importance of the problem. One should also define the group of stakeholders – the larger the better – for whom the stated problem is important. This is followed by the definition and detailed description of the specific research question to be addressed. A detailed justification of the importance of the question stated is also essential, along with a description of other related questions which are not being addressed in your paper. A clear definition of the future beneficiaries of the answer to be obtained must also be provided.

5. The literature review:

One must provide a critical, very brief and comprehensive summary of the most relevant prior research by the author(s) of this paper as well as by other writers worldwide attempting to address the same research question or other closely related questions. Such questions may have been addressed within the same subject domain, but also in different domains - sometimes in scholarly fields unrelated to one's own. All cited publications should be critically reviewed; do not cite publications that you have not fully absorbed and have not explained their relevance to the subject matter presented in your paper. Avoid an excessive number of self-citations or citations of publications from the same country or from the same geographic region.

6. The research methodology (your own selection of means and methods/tools employed to answer the stated research question):

- a. This section contains the detailed description of your approach to obtain the answer to your research question. Provide a clear justification of your selection of this approach and briefly discuss any alternate approaches which were also initially considered but ultimately discarded, along with justification of such a decision. Do not regurgitate a detailed description of established, well-known

analytical tools, procedures or testing methods – it should suffice to cite relevant sources. Your description should be complete, i.e. it should be possible for a reader to reproduce the results of your research with the use of the stated means and methods used to obtain your research answer. Describe in detail your data formatting and other requirements related to the performance of statistical tests and analyses. Avoid procedural shortcuts which may render your methodology description useless to interested readers.

7. The research results:

Provide a clear, detailed description of your results obtained by you with the use of the research methodology described in item 6 above. Concentrate on the main points and avoid digressing to only loosely related or unrelated topics. Your description should be aided by well-formatted and fully readable tables and figures emphasizing the main points being made. Avoid the inclusion of lettering and labels in a language other than English, as these will be useless for an audience unable to read in that language. Provide clear evidence and description of the validation of the obtained results by other researchers or in professional practice related to your academic field. Normally, validation attempts with the use of computer simulation only based on arbitrarily constructed models will be considered insufficient by reviewers assigned to evaluate your paper, as such reviewers often prefer the evidence of real-life implementation of your results.

8. The discussion of research results (discussion of the importance of the answer to the stated research question):

This may be the most important section from which the potential reviewers will begin their examination of your paper. Describe what your results mean and why they are important for the audience/readers/stakeholders targeted by this paper. Elaborate in detail on the contribution of your results to the body of new knowledge in your own scientific discipline and beyond.

9. Conclusions and directions for future research:

This section provides a brief summary of the most important findings produced by the presented research. Describe in detail why this finding may be important to a global audience, not merely to your national or regional stakeholders. One must also describe the limitations of the results obtained and suggestions on how these limitations may be overcome with follow-up research. Additionally, one should provide a detailed description of how the results presented will inspire future generations of researchers worldwide aspiring to make contributions in the same or related fields of academic and professional endeavor.

10. The references:

Make sure that all cited items contain complete bibliographic data. Avoid citing an excessive number of references which may be redundant and references in languages other than English. If one feels compelled to cite a non-English language reference, make sure to provide an English translation of the title (in

parentheses next to the title in the language of the publication). There is a growing trend to provide a digital object identifier (DOI) for each journal paper or conference proceedings article being cited that has such an identifier, an ISBN for each book reference, and a web address with the date of last access for all other resources. There is also a diminishing emphasis on a particular format of references (as long as the cited items are listed in a consistent manner), as the article typesetting processes at the publishers are currently automated and conversions from one referencing format to another are straightforward.

Most high-ranking journal publishers have been quietly removing strict limitations on the number of pages or words a paper is allowed to contain due to the fact that most paid subscriptions are currently electronic. This removes the burden of the authors to conform to the volume limitations of their articles, allowing for a complete presentation of relevant research results. Additionally, datasets used in the conduct of the research being presented may be stored in cloud-based repositories accessible by all concerned.

Owing to the limitations of space, this guest editorial does not touch upon numerous contemporary issues related to the publication of papers in scholarly journals. However, I often conduct hands-on, full-day workshops in academic settings worldwide for aspiring and active academics interested in sharpening their writing skills and in becoming successful in publishing their papers in top-ranking international scholarly journals. There are ample opportunities to address individual interests and answer specific questions during such workshops. I hope to see many of the readers of this editorial in a workshop to be conducted in the future in a location near you.

Miroslaw J. Skibniewski

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University of Maryland, College Park, USA

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