

Steps for “How to write a manuscript” - By Mona Loutfy – Updated June 2018

- First step – find journal you plan to submit article to.
 - How do you decide which journal – from your literature review, see which journals published articles of the same type and topic – can write in the cover letter that this current manuscript that you are submitting is to continue the theme of previous article published in the journal (and write reference in cover letter)
 - Copy or print out all the instruction and follow right from the start of drafting your article.
- Start with all the “fluff” ... that is what I start with because it is a great waste of time and feels like you are doing something
 - Start format of manuscript that will submit right from the beginning – i.e. title page (First page) – make up right from the beginning. Title page should include all info required as described in instructions (see IJCME recommendations).
 - Key words
 - Disclosure page, funding, etc
 - Acknowledgement page
 - All headings with blank in the text: Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, References, Tables, Figure Legend, Figures
- Second page – write Abstract as header; make note of what the word count + format of Abstract is
 - Some leave text blank and leave to do for end
 - Others like to do the abstract right at the beginning to set the tone + the message of the paper, especially if you already know some of the results
 - Note: the abstract is the most important part of the paper ... so don't do a rushed job
- 3rd page - write Introduction as header (some go to Methods & Results first as they are easier)
 - Trick to Introduction is not to write too much – max 2 pages; preferably 1 ½ to 1 ¾ ... I like to write the word count of each Section before I start – e.g. 800-900 words for Intro, 800-900 words for Methods, 600-750 words for Results, 1000-1200 words for Discussion ... typical quantitative study manuscript is 3000-3500 words ... no Editor likes a paper that is too long for no reason
 - I sometimes start with the topic of each paragraph of the Introduction – i.e. First paragraph - what is topic/why so important; 2nd paragraph – what have the key papers from previous literature found, 3rd paragraph - what is missing from literature, 4th paragraph – purpose or objective of this study). Then I expand on each paragraph
 - Another trick to the Intro ... is just to write it freestyle and then find the references
- Next – write Methods on the next pager as a Header (I like this to be the first section to write followed by results – can start by writing sub-headings and some points under each heading to direct you what to expand on: study population, study design, outcome description, correlates description, statistical analysis, ethical considerations ... I like sub-headings, makes papers easier to read + write this section
- Next - Results: same as methods – Again use subheadings - study population, primary analysis, secondary analysis – text tells the story; tables and figures are visual representation of results; don't put items in text that are in tables and figures
- Next page – write Discussion as header and will come back to
- Next – Acknowledgements – can write something here – standard of what is written
- Next – References and either put in if you have or leave blank; can you use Endnote or Reference manager

- Then your Tables & Figures – I do these before I write the Discussion - develop all the tables with titles and all features but leave boxes with numbers blank; Table 1 – demographics (always include), Table 2 – first analysis, so on; ensure all Tables have footnote describing abbreviations ... the Tables are probably the second most important part of the paper – they should stand alone and tell the story
- Figure legends go next – can also do this right away
- Figures are last - for statistician to put in
- As can see, you will have what I call a “skeleton” of the paper with a title page, methods and acknowledgement done; results, tables and figure legends started.
- If you are working with a statistician - at this point you will send the statistician this version to get started on the analysis – the statistician will edit the methods, potentially fill in the results, the tables and figures. There is likely to be some questions and back and forth at this stage.
- While the statistician is doing the analysis, you can work on the Introduction and discussion
- OK now the Discussion - you need your final results to write
 - First paragraph of Discussion is third most important of paper – it is a summary of your findings and your message (consider writing what the **messaging of your paper** right from the beginning – what is your story; what is this paper adding to the field.
 - Second paragraph is how your key finding relates to prior literature; can have a paragraph commenting on each finding; need 1-2 paragraphs on policy and programming implications; need a limitations paragraph; conclude with a conclusion paragraph that also contains next steps
- Again ... let’s talk about the Abstract
 - Most important part of manuscript (often it is the only thing the editor reads and will make a decision if will send out to review or not)
 - Short, concise summary of paper in easy to read format and language, never over-state and clarity are key
 - Must match results and content in paper in same way
 - Conclusion only based on results presented
- Congratulations – now you are done your first draft + can circulate to your co-authors
- Allow about 10 days for co-authors to review + provide feedback + comments ... sometimes you have to do some extra analyses but preferably not – always give a final date for co-authors to give feedback
- Add in edits from co-authors + finish references right at end when have final version -> VOILA – FINISHED!
- You do not need to send a second draft around to co-authors for re-review; you can submit + send them the final draft