Writing for Refereed Journals

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AAPOR

Part I.
Crafting an article

Step 1: What is the purpose of your article?

- Test a new theory
- Evaluate a new method
- Fill an existing gap in empirical tests of theory
- Fill an existing gap in what we understand about methods
- Replicate and expand on prior studies
- Comprehensively synthesize existing literature

Step 2: Outline, outline, outline

- Abstract (note: write this last!)
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Data and Methods (including analytic methods)
- Results
- Discussion

Step 3: Fill in the outline

- Many ways to get started
- Clearly identify your research questions
- Write (or at least understand) your literature review, data and methods, and results first
- Then motivate your manuscript with an introduction
- Finish with your discussion and conclusion
- Write an abstract that ties everything together

- Now for the hard parts…

What goes in an introduction?

- Get the reader excited about your work
- Identify the gap that this article is filling
- Give a preview of what is going to come
  - Research question, data/methods, why is this important
- Provides a road map for the article
  - May contain clearly demarcated research questions

Examples from introductions

Fowler, et al. (2016). *JSSAM*, p. 247.

Gibson and Nelson. (2016). *POQ*, p. 623.

This paper reports on our successful attempts to increase the response rate to a survey that began as an RDD telephone survey and the ways in which raising the response rates significantly changed many, although not all, of the key estimates from the survey.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to provide a new test of the hypothesis that institutional support for the Supreme Court is diminished by disappointment in its decisions. We introduce several important innovations to the study of this relationship. First, our research design acknowledges that *legitimacy is for losers*—that is, legitimacy is most relevant to those holding views contrary to the Court's ruling. Second, we employ a nationally representative, survey-based design that includes both a true experiment and a quasi-experiment. Finally, tipping our hat to verisimilitude, and addressing positivity theory, we incorporate the symbols of judicial authority into our analysis. Thus, our test of the dissatisfaction/legitimacy hypothesis is a demanding one, but nonetheless important and realistic.

| Clear statement of what the paper will do and what it finds | Clear statement of what is innovative in the paper, the theory, the design, and why it's important |

What goes in a literature review?

- Identify the problem that you are tackling in this article
  - State the problem clearly.
  - If unifying two disparate literatures, state that.
- Synthesize the existing literature about that problem
  - Not all possible literature on all possible related issues (this isn't a dissertation)
  - Organize by concepts, not by authors
    - Paragraphs should (generally) contain multiple citations
- Theory is critically important!
  - Why might the phenomenon occur?
  - Are there competing theoretical perspectives?
  - Under what conditions may the phenomenon change? (moderators)
  - What other concepts may explain the phenomenon or make it stronger? (mediators, suppressors)
  - Use theory to guide hypotheses

Examples from literature reviews

Sakshaug and Huber. (2016). JSSAM, p. 74.

Margolis. (2016). POQ, p. 718

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Panel Survey Response

All surveys aim to achieve high response rates and preserve the representative nature of the sample, but panel surveys face the daunting task of maintaining these features over multiple time points. The very nature of interviewing the same individuals repeatedly introduces a number of inherent challenges that make achieving high response rates rather difficult. One such challenge noted in Lepkowski and Couper's (2002) theoretical model of panel survey participation is locating panel participants after a change of address. The geographic mobility of panel members is a significant source of panel loss if efforts to trace their location are unsuccessful. Mobility is often linked to important life events and circumstantial changes, which are directly related to the precise characteristics that panel surveys seek to collect (e.g., employment status, continuing education, family formation). This source of differential nonresponse is likely to produce an unrepresentative sample over time where respondents who are less mobile are overrepresented in the survey. A second cause of panel loss described by Lepkowski and Couper (2002) is refusals. The problem of refusals is also shared with cross-sectional surveys, but even respondents who ostensibly agree to participate in the panel during the initial wave may lose interest over time. Situational factors, prior wave experience, and other factors (e.g., continuity of interviewer, time between waves, contact between waves) likely affect the propensity of continued cooperation in panel surveys.

Cognitive Dissonance and Compensatory Control

Cognitive dissonance theories contend that individuals want consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs and behaviors). Dissonance arises when elements of cognition do not fit together, motivating a person to reduce or eliminate the dissonance, "just as, for example, the presence of hunger leads to action to reduce the hunger" (Festinger 1957, 18). A common example of dissonance includes people who smoke despite knowing the associated health risks. Smokers can reduce the psychological discomfort stemming from the dissonance by downplaying the quality of research on smoking's effects, emphasizing the innumerable unavoidable health perils in the world, considering the potential drawbacks of quitting, and remembering that the enjoyment of smoking is worth the risk (Festinger 1957).

Cognitive dissonance often arises in response to events outside an individual's control that violate her worldview or expectations (for examples, see Harmon-Jones, Amodio, and Harmon-Jones 2009). Sometimes people can directly address the cognitive dissonance arising from these unwelcome events. For example, those who undergo a grueling initiation process to join a club group believe that the group is more interesting than those with a moderate initiation process (Aronson and Mills 1959). Despite being unable to resolve cognitive dissonance by changing the group, an individual can achieve consonance by updating her beliefs about the group. But not all scenarios lend themselves to resolving dissonance directly through attitude or behavior accommodation. An alternative, albeit less direct, strategy for reducing cognitive dissonance in these situations would be to reduce the negative feelings in "domains unrelated to the dissonance-inducing event" (Randles et al. 2015, 697).

| Theoretical framework outlined | Topic sentences tell the whole story |

What goes in Data and Methods?

- Data includes a full description of your data set
  - Including target population, sample size, AAPOR response rates, dates of data collection, definitions of subgroups for analysis, data collection firm and/or citation to the data set and/or inclusion/exclusion criteria for eligible studies to review, question wording
  - See POQ instructions to authors for full list of required data elements

- Methods includes a full description of what you did to design, collect and/or analyze your data
  - Experimental conditions (if applicable)
  - Operationalization of measures
  - Analytic approach – from simple t-tests to complex cross-classified random effects models to qualitative interpretation of themes
    - Did you account for any complex sample design features? What about missing data?
  - If you analytic approach is novel, unusual, or very advanced, you may need to also justify it in your literature review
  - May also include a descriptive statistics table for your data

Examples from Data and Methods

Dykema, et al. (2015). POQ, p. 912

Experimental factors clearly numbered and succinctly described

Wagner, et al. (2014). JSSAM, p. 414

Details on observational study well defined

What goes in Results?

- Your findings!
- Limited number of tables and/or graphs
  - Make use of supplemental material for more detailed analyses
- For a POQ audience, results should be written to communicate the substantive importance of findings, not simply a report of each piece of a table in "stats speak"
  - That is, interpret findings relative to your hypotheses
  - For JSSAM, this depends on the section of the journal, but it is generally a good idea to communicate broadly
- May be helpful to organize around research questions or hypotheses

Examples from Results

Turner, et al. (2015). JSSAM, p. 99

Messing, et al. (2016). POQ, pp. 57-58.

this section are estimated excluding outliers. Summary statistics from the models for the remaining eight items are then presented in table 2. Full results are available in an on-line appendix.

For eight out of the nine items in figure 3, providing a rounded response takes the same time or longer than providing a non-rounded response. A "Don't Know" answer has the longest response latency on seven items. The "station by bus" item is notable in that it shows the opposite pattern to the other items, with optimized responses taking the longest, at 14 s, the rounded response 13 s, and the "Don't Know" response 10 s. This, then, is the only item that conforms to what satisficing theory would predict, *if these indicators are valid measures of satisficing*. Of course, the patterns in figure 3 take no account of non-random allocation of respondents to interviewers and areas, which might account for some or all of these differences. Nor do they reveal if

RESULTS

Our results suggest that darker images of Obama can indeed activate negative stereotypes about Blacks, despite the fact that Obama is a counter-stereotypical exemplar. The mean number of fragments with stereotype-consistent completions was 0.33 in the "light" condition and 0.45 in the "dark" condition

$(T(623.66) = 2.64, P = 0.008, two-sided)$. In order to give the reader an intuition for the relative effect size, we provide an estimate of stereotype-consistent completions among conservatives: 0.55 compared to 0.36 for non-conservatives $(T(138.71) = 2.82, P = 0.005)$. Those in the treatment were 36 percent more likely to complete an additional ambiguous word in a stereotype-consistent way, compared to 53 percent among conservatives. Thus, we find clear evidence that darker images of candidates can increase stereotype activation.

Tables and figures referred to in the text, with summary over multiple outcomes

Details on statistical tests provided in text, including effect sizes.

What goes in a Discussion?

- Brief summary of the findings, linked to the initial research questions and/or hypotheses
  - What was expected versus unexpected in findings, given your theory and design?
- Limitations of your study
  - Why are the limitations not a deal breaker?
- Implications for theory
- Implications for survey practice

Examples from Discussions

Gravelle. (2016). POQ, p. 18

Mavletova and Couper. (2014). JSSAM, p. 509

Conclusion

This article began by asking whether contact or context mattered more in shaping Americans' attitudes toward illegal immigration. The results presented here point in favor of context over contact. Having contact with known or suspected undocumented immigrants did not have a significant effect on attitudes toward illegal immigration. One should not be too quick, though, to take this as a finding contrary to intergroup contact theory, as the measure of contact employed here may not adequately capture the kinds of close personal contact and friendship that the proponents of intergroup contact theory stipulate are required to reduce outgroup prejudice (Allport 1954; Amir 1969; Pettigrew 1998). Further research should endeavor to test the effects of more refined measures of intergroup contact on immigration policy attitudes while simultaneously testing the effects of racial/ethnic and spatial context.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There are two major findings in this paper. First, a scrolling design appears to make the process of completing the survey easier and more engaging for mobile web respondents. Specifically, it significantly decreases the completion time, produces fewer reported technical problems, and increases the reported level of satisfaction among respondents.

Second, taking into consideration both participation rates and the percentage of PC respondents, an SMS invitation is more efficient compared to e-mail in encouraging to survey completion via a mobile device. If researchers want to increase the use of mobile web, then SMS should be considered as an invitation mode.

The generalizability of our results is limited. First, the sample was restricted to members of a volunteer online access panel who participate in web surveys on a regular basis. Second, the experiment was conducted in Russia, which has relatively low mobile Internet penetration (30 percent, versus 50 percent in

Identifies the aims, the results, why important, and future research

Identifies the findings and limitations

Other issues to keep in mind

- Many journals have a word count in their instructions to authors
  - POQ and JSSAM are 6500 words, not including figures, tables, references, appendices, or abstract
- Some research ideas are better written as research notes (2750 words) or as brief Survey Practice articles (2500 words) than full-length manuscripts
- Use articles in the journal that you are thinking of submitting to as a model for your submission
  - No single "right" way of crafting each section

Questions?

Part II.
Finding the right journal

Peer Review Is Everywhere ☺

Faculty Lounge

Please note this area is restricted to staff and faculty only

Reviewer feedback:

Reviewer 1: The construct validity on this sign is unclear.
Reviewer 2: Please clarify what you mean by "Staff only". An operational definition is needed.
Reviewer 3: Please clarify your epistemological stance. I wonder if you would consider applying a critical social theoretical lens.

Please revise and resubmit at your earliest convenience.

Is it a match?
Finding the Right Journal for your Research

- Journal Type
- Journal Scope and Readership
- Journal Process and Requirements
- Acceptance Rates/Decisions
- Article Type and Structure
- Your Goals and Your Timeline
- Resources

Types of Journals

- Peer Reviewed?
  - Peer reviewed
    - Double blind, single blind or open?
  - Non-peer reviewed
    - E-journals (e.g. Survey Practice)
    - Proceedings (e.g. ASA)
    - Specialized Magazines/Reviews (e.g. Quirks)

- Indexed or Not?
  - Is the journal indexed by the International Scientific Indexing Service or Journal Citation Reports (e.g. can get a journal "impact factor") or "discoverable" on PubMed

- Open Access or Not?
  - Open Access – page costs/ Article Processing Charges
    - http://www.mdpi.com/about/apc
  - Not Open Access – subscription or paywall

- Only Online or Not?
  - Some journals offer both "print" and "online" distribution (POQ, JSSAM)
  - Other Journals are only Online (**BMC Medicine; Social Sciences**)

Journal Scope and Readership

- Within Social Sciences there are many Journals that may be interested in Survey Related Articles
- **Some of these have rather specific scopes**
  - Preventive Medicine Reports, JSSAM and Survey Research Methods, Survey Methodology; Journal of Official Statistics
- **Other Journals have much broader scopes**
  - Social Sciences, Cancer, Survey Methods: Insights from the Field, Field Methods
- **"International" journal or not?**
  - Most journals can be accessed by readers from around the world, but focus more specifically on applications within a specific country or region.
  - When publishing in a journal with an international scope, specifically, more details about the specific context of the country in which the research was conducted may be needed.

Journal of
**Survey Statistics
and Methodology**

social sciences

The journal will have three sections.
The **Survey Statistics** section will present papers on innovative sampling procedures, imputation, weighting, measures of uncertainty, small area inference, new methods of analysis, and other statistical issues related to surveys.
The **Survey Methodology** section will present papers that focus on methodological research, including methodological experiments, methods of data collection and use of paradata.
The **Applications** section will contain papers involving innovative applications of methods and providing practical contributions and guidance, and/or significant new findings.

Subject Areas

- Anthropology
- Economics
- Law
- Linguistics
- Education
- Geography
- History
- Political science
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Other related areas

Journal Process and Requirements

- **Submission process for journals can vary from "informal" to "formal"**
  - Submit directly to a main editor (e.g. Social Science Computer Review)
  - Submit to journal using electronic submission (e.g. POQ)
  - Some journals have a separate "scope review" prior to peer review (e.g. Expert Systems)

- **Requirements from authors, data and analyses**
  - Some journals require effort reports to be signed by all participants certifying their roles;
  - Some journals may require code examples, data files, etc. as part of "reproducibility"
  - Some journals may not accept certain types of evidence in your results sections (e.g. p-values – see *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*)

Journal Process

- **Peer Review Process**
  - Some journals require two reviewers and others three or even more. If your article is niche within the field it may take time to secure the adequate number of reviewers – potentially elongating review process.
  - Some journals use a "rapid review process" while others use a more traditional model of review (that can vary between 6 weeks to over 9 months).

- **Publication Frequency**
  - Can vary across journals with some having monthly issues, others quarterly, bi-annually or annually.
  - If the journals have an online outlet they may offer an "Advance Access" option where articles post earlier than their "in print" dates.

Acceptance Rates/Decisions

- Acceptance/rejection rates can vary widely across journals and in many cases are not publicly available.

  - American Psychological Association publishes annual acceptance rate statistics for a host of psychology oriented journals here: http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/statistics.aspx

  - Acceptance rates for many Political Science Journals have been collected here: http://www.reviewmyreview.eu/acceptance-rates-turnaround-time/

- The types of decisions that can result after your article is submitted can also vary across journals and the turn-around time for "revise and resubmits" can also vary.

Finding Information about Journals…

- Journalguide.com offers a database of journals that contains a variety of statistics about journals including acceptance rates, publication times as well as an overview of the scope of the journal and links to get you started.
  - Here is an example from searching for the "American Journal of Public Health"

Article Type and Structure

- Some journals accept a single type of paper (i.e. original research), but many journals have a few types of papers they will accept:
  - Main/original papers
  - Research notes
  - Syntheses
  - Reviews
- Each type of submission may have varying requirements as per word count, contents and structure.

Resources…

- Machine learning to the rescue! Finding candidate journals could be as easy as entering your title and abstract.
- See: http://journalfinder.elsevier.com/

Resources, Cont.

- **JournalGuide.com offers similar service from a broad array of journals from across many publishers and fields (about 46,000 currently)**

Final Thoughts: Your Goals and Your Timeline

- Now that you know more about journals and where to find them and how to evaluate them, the process of selection should incorporate a few key ideas:
- **What is your timeline?**
- What is your topic/scope?
- **To whom are you trying to get the "word" out**
- Do you have funds for page costs? Or do you expect your readers to have journal access through other means?
- **Are you resubmitting your paper to the same or different journal?**
- Is your design or approach rigorous enough or appropriate for the level of journal?
- **Have the methods used in your analysis appeared in other articles from the same journal?**
- Can you find a similar article (on topic, method, design or approach) that has appeared in the journal?
- **Do your graphics require color?**

Resources

- Directory of Open Access Journals
  - https://doaj.org/

- International Scientific Indexing
  - http://isindexing.com/isi/journals.php

- Journal Citation Report Listing of Journals by Impact Factor
  - http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/dis/infoserv/journal/list.html

- Upcoming conference short course on publishing in Survey Research
  - http://www.europeansurveyresearch.org/conference/publishing

- Broad listing of Journals with "Survey Research" in their scope:
  - http://psr.iq.harvard.edu/links/category/type-resource/journals

Questions?

Part III.
Navigating the
review process

The review process

- Internal screening
- Reviewer selection
- Portfolio assessment
- Editorial decision
- Follow-up (post-decision)
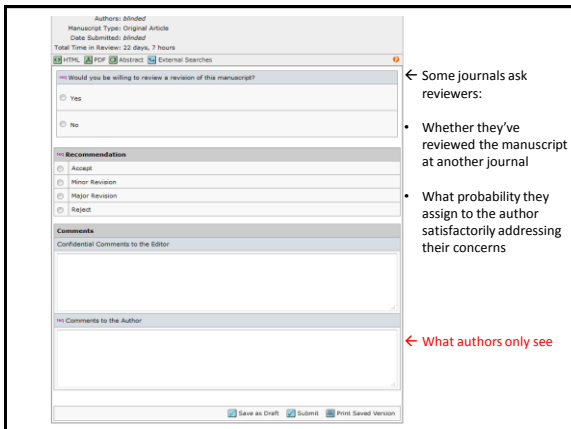
Step 1: Internal screening

COMMON OUTCOMES
- Desk rejection
  - Lack of fit with journal (e.g., epistemological approach, topic area)
  - Easily identifiable fatal flaws (e.g., lack of theory, inappropriate sample, analysis of items with little or no face validity, poor measures, incorrect analyses)
- Rejection with invitation to resubmit
  - Usually for manuscripts that are significantly over the word limit
  - Sometimes for manuscripts that require additional data
- Solicitation of external reviews

Step 2: Reviewer selection

- POQ database
  - Authors (potential and actual)
  - Reviewers
- Citations – authors whose works would be implicated in the submission
- Editorial board suggestions
- Editor's own networks
- Avoidance of coauthors
- Avoidance of colleagues from the same institution

Step 3: Portfolio assessment

- Is what you see what editors get?

Authors: *blinded*
Manuscript Type: Original Article
Date Submitted: *blinded*
Total Time in Review: 22 days, 7 hours

HTML PDF Abstract External Searches

Would you be willing to review a revision of this manuscript?

○ Yes

○ No

Recommendation
○ Accept
○ Minor Revision
○ Major Revision
○ Reject

Comments
Confidential Comments to the Editor

Comments to the Author

Save as Draft Submit Print Saved Version

← Some journals ask reviewers:

- Whether they've reviewed the manuscript at another journal

- What probability they assign to the author satisfactorily addressing their concerns

← What authors only see

Comments to authors:

This is an intriguing paper, and I enjoyed reading it. I am also having some difficulties with interpreting and applying the findings.

Comments to editors:

I would recommend the authors put this into a specialty journal. They are dealing with an important building block, but when I finish reading it, I don't see a new increment of knowledge that is important for survey methodologists to start using.

Comments to authors:

This manuscript is a well-written analysis of an important phenomenon and I enjoyed reading it. It uses a very solid collection of survey data to make an important statement. The paper is well organized and the analysis is well constructed. The analytic techniques, while not groundbreaking, are sound.

All positive!

Comments to editors:

The subject matter is not the best fit for POQ. Even though it does contain significant analysis of opinion data, its main theoretical focus makes it a stronger submission to a journal of [REDACTED].

Reviewing the full portfolio

- Reviewers' comments to authors
- Reviewers' comments to editor
- Editor's reading of manuscript
  - Needed to confirm negative reviews
  - Especially important if reviews are positive or mixed

Step 4: Editorial decision

- Why a rejection?
  - Fatal flaws cannot be fixed
  - Broad swath of problems across the manuscript → little confidence that revisions will satisfy reviewers' and editor's concerns
  - Competent study, but reviewers/editors perceive it as not warranting space in the journal
  - Reviewers offer relatively little support for the manuscript overall

Step 4: Editorial decision (cont'd)

- Why an invitation to revise and resubmit?
  - Concerns raised are addressable (but might involve much work – minor vs. major revisions)
  - Manuscript is viewed as publishable in some form (perhaps as a shorter research note)
  - Reviewers and editors express support for the manuscript
- Why an acceptance?
  - Concerns raised are negligible and very addressable (conditional acceptance)
  - Reviewers and editors are highly enthusiastic about the submission's contribution to the journal

Step 5: Follow-up
What to do if the decision involves…

- A rejection
  - Review feedback and identify reasons for rejection
  - Assess viability of resubmission to another journal
  - Address revisions and preempt concerns if resubmitting to another journal
  - Consider strong possibility of repeat reviewers
  - Process the feedback as constructive criticism and avoid taking it personally

Step 5: Follow-up (cont'd)
What to do if the decision involves…

- An invitation to revise and resubmit
  - Fully understand the concerns raised
  - Consider how to handle potentially contradictory revisions (contact editor as needed)
  - Address all concerns in a response memo
  - Address all concerns in the manuscript
  - Ensure the new manuscript stands on its own; new reviewers might not be one of the original reviewers
  - Remember that R&Rs aren't offered lightly (a partnership) and editor wants to see author succeed

cut this block entirely if unused

Step 5: Follow-up (cont'd)
What to do if the decision involves…

- An acceptance
  - Address remaining concerns raised by editor and/or reviewers
  - Post-acceptance
    - Work with editor to address final questions of clarity, language, and substance
    - Ensure adherence to journal style
    - Work with production team and carefully review your proofs

Questions?

Feel free to direct follow-up queries to:

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Thank you!