Effective Writing for Research
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Research and Professional Development Brown Bag Conversation
Institute of Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago
April 24, 2018
Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time. Remember this as a consolation in moments of despair. If you find that writing is hard, it’s because it is hard. It’s one of the hardest things that people do (On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Non-Fiction, William Zinsser, p. 13).
Overview

Why is effective writing important in research?
  • Communication and Influence
    • Effective writing important for conveying significance of research questions/aims, methods, results, and scientific and applied importance of findings
  • Archival Value
    • Research involves writing for posterity/long-term use not expediency/temporary use
  • Professional/Career Advancement
    • Well-written articles more likely to be accepted, cited, and evaluated favorably (e.g., search committees, grant application reviewers)
  • Intrinsic Pleasure!
    • The process of writing well can become its own reward, encouraging more of the same!
Resources

- **Guides for Research Writing**
  - Myriad overview articles and on-line resources on writing an effective journal article, grant application, etc. (see list appended to this presentation)

- **Style Manuals**
  - American Psychological Association and others
  - Guides to using manuals can often be found on-line

- **Computer Software**
  - Grammar and spelling check in Word, Power Thesaurus, etc.

- **Exemplars**
  - Look at examples of effective writing, especially in your area of research, identify strengths, and emulate!

- **“Second Readers”**
  - Be sure to have peers and mentors review your writing and provide feedback

- **Yourself**
  - Most important resource -- consistently work to develop your writing skills and take advantage of opportunities that will help you to do so
Four Keys to Effective Writing for Research

- Organization
- Conciseness
- Writing Fundamentals
- Accuracy

Strive to have your writing embody all of these ideals
- Use Friendly “Be”s (next slides)
Be Organized

- Goal = Logical, structured presentation that will be easily grasped by the reader --”Tell A Good Story”

- Tips
  - Use an outline
  - Include “advance primer” paragraphs
  - Use headings and subheadings
  - Use tabular and figures to advantage
  - Write well-crafted, internally-organized paragraphs
The Quadripartite Model Revisited:
Toward a Comprehensive Framework of Positive Mental Health in Children and Adolescents
(Guideline: 25-30 pages including references)

I. INTRODUCTION (brief--1.5 pages)
A. Growing Focus on Positive Mental Health (PMH) in Past Five Years
1. General Models of Positive Youth Development (Durlak, 2000)
2. Resiliency Literature–positive adaptive processes and outcomes for youth exposed to stressful life circumstances (Luthar et al., 2000)
3. Clinical and Preventive Interventions–emphasis on promotion of social competence in both treatment (Kendall) and in community-based preventive interventions (Durlak)
B. Need for Comprehensive Framework of PMH in Children and Adolescents
1. Taxonomies of PMH in infancy relative to those for disorder/maladaptation (Lazarus, 1975)
2. Quadripartite model promising starting point given prominent role of social competence (SC) in conceptualizations of PMH
3. Yet, as emphasized, in prior presentation of model, social competence is seen as “a necessary component of, but...not equivalent to positive mental health” (Felner et al., 1990, p. 260)
4. Psychological Competence or Well-Being (PCW)–several considerations
   a. Aspects of health/well-being–e.g., self-esteem, sense of mastery, optimism–consistently included in definitional criteria for PMH (e.g., Lazarus, 1975)
   b. Two fold emphasis on social and psychological dimensions of PMH analogous to well-established taxonomy of int./emot. and ext./beh.l child and adolescent mental health problems (Achenbach, 1991)
   c. Analogous internal structure and processes to social competence
      (1) same set of four constituent elements (i.e., quadripartite structure)
      (2) relevance of surrounding context (i.e., person-environment transactions)
5. Aims of Present Chapter
   a. Provide overview of expanded version of quadripartite model that incorporates consideration of PCW (see Figure 1)
   b. Illustrate utility of expanded framework with case example
   c. Discuss promising directions for future research and further elaboration of proposed framework

II. REVISED MODEL (10 pages)
A. Overview (1 page)
1. Components of PCW
   a. Same four constituent areas as assumed for SC in original model.
   b. Many of same specific skills and capacities within each of these areas that were described as bearing on SC also have direct relevance to PCW.
   c. Also, further skills/capacities that merit specific consideration with respect to PCW (indicated in italics in model)
2. Relationship Between SC and PCW
   a. Model assumes that they each constitute distinct components of PMH
Picture = 1,000 Words

Figure 1. Conceptual model of factors influencing perceived benefits and continuation of mentoring relationships for youth.
Be Concise

Goal = Avoid overly discursive or repetitive writing

Tips
• Don’t repeat same information in multiple sections (e.g., Introduction and Discussion)
• Include only essential information and details (e.g., describe methods/findings of prior research studies selectively)
• Don’t repeat information that is already presented in a table or figure
Avoid Redundancy

Charles Schultz’s Peanuts “Those Years in Paris” was removed before online publication to adhere to copyright law.

See the original cartoon at www.gocomics.com/peanuts/2002/03/07
Be Well–Written

- Goal = Write concise, clear, and grammatically sound sentences
- Tips
  - Eliminate (all) non-essential words
  - Use active voice whenever possible (e.g., avoid killer be’s)
  - Avoid Non-Sentences
    - Use only FANBOYS or ; for connecting independent clauses
  - Keep referents proximal to intended subjects (e.g., avoid “this” that refers to a subject two sentences back)
  - Take care with complex syntax (e.g., do all clauses in a list work with the stem?)
  - Break long sentences into two (or three!)
  - Strive for effective word choice
  - Use parenthetical text effectively
  - Use correct punctuation
    - Know rules for commas, apostrophes, etc. (e.g., don’t stick a comma in just because it seems like it is a good idea)
  - Avoid jargon and define all terms or concepts that may not be familiar to reader (e.g., subjective norms, secure attachment)
  - Iterative Drafting and Polishing: Read Paper ALOUD
Be Accurate

- Goal: Describe your research and prior research accurately
- Tips
  - Characterize prior research fairly (e.g., do not selectively omit studies or methodological details that run counter to your argument)
  - Provide a full and honest account of your own research (e.g., distinguish post hoc vs. planned analyses, report non-supportive results)
  - Clearly distinguish between objective empirical findings and theoretical suppositions, interpretative conclusions of findings, etc.
  - Describe findings using factual language
    - Make clear findings involve measures that are only indirect representations of constructs (e.g., “higher ratings of self-efficacy for exercise” rather than “self-efficacy for exercise”)
    - Avoid causal terminology (e.g., “X predicted Y” vs. “X influenced Y”, “standardized mean difference” vs. “effect size”, “indirect association” rather than “indirect effect”), even for RCTs (all studies have potential threats to internal validity)
Be Accurate!

The cartoon “As a summation of our work…” by Fran was removed to adhere to copyright law. See the original at:

www.cartoonstock.com/cartoonview.asp?catref=forn4935
Discrimination experiences

Telomere shortening

Impaired health

Everyday Discrimination Scale

qRT–PCR assay

Self-reported rating of health

Observable

Theoretical

Confounder (e.g., physical disability)

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Additional Resources

- Purdue Online Writing Lab
- “How to Write Your First Research Paper” (Kallestinova, 2011)
- “How to Write Articles that Get Published” (Jha, 2014)
- “Ten Simple Rules for Structuring Papers” (Mensh & Kording, 2017)