

Journal Article Menue

STRUCTURE GUIDE: EMPIRICAL JOURNAL ARTICLES

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This is a brief guide of how to structure empirical articles for a peer reviewed, standard international journal in political science, sociology and (perhaps) other disciplines. Most journals won't accept anything larger than 8,000 to 10,000 words (excluding appendix).

Usually, one submits a word document with double spaced line spacing, font size 12 pt, left-adjusted text in "Times New Roman" as font type. Have a look, however, at the specific journal's author guidelines. To find a fitting journal, visit the websites of the professional associations and their thematic subsections: American Political Science Association (www.apsa.org), American Sociological Association (www.asa.org), International Political Science Association (www.ipsr.org), International Sociological Association (www.isa.org), European Consortium of Political Research (www.ecpsr.org).

If your article analyses data from the World Values Survey, you can submit it for publication to the WVS online paper series (email to cwelzel@gmail.com). Publication in the paper series does *not* compromise later publication in a journal.

It is important that your article addresses upfront how your research deals with and partially resolves a recurrent puzzle, paradox, persisting problem, open question or that you clarify otherwise how your contribution offers fresh new and valuable insights into an existing topic. To highlight the novelty is the key issue here. Below follows an outline of how to structure an article.

FRONT PAGE: TITLE, ABSTRACT (150 words)

Choose a short and catchy title. The subtitle can be more precise in specifying the topic but it is the title that readers will remember, provided it resonates.

In the abstract you describe succinctly what you are analyzing on which evidence base. Announce out loud your key results and clarify how they build on prior knowledge and enrich the existing scholarship and literature. Most journals require abstracts of no more than 150 to 200 words.

INTRODUCTION (no number)

On 2 to 3 pages (without too many references) briefly describe what the topic is about and especially why the topic is relevant and interesting. Anticipate the main findings with a bit more detail than in the abstract. In the last paragraph of the introduction describe the structure of the article: theory section (literature review, hypotheses), data and methods section, findings section (no discussion and conclusion here), conclusion section.

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1. THEORY

1.1 Literature

Discuss how the topic has evolved and been addressed in the literature. Describe what we have learned from the literature and what we know for sure but also where we have conflicting expectations, areas of omission and inconclusive evidence. Don't be too dismissive of certain authors or approaches. It is more diplomatic to outline how your contribution builds on previous research, for instance by filling an area of omission. You need then to clarify why this is an important omission or gap of knowledge. Strictly avoid saying that you are doing what you do just because you thought it might be interesting.

In this section all hypotheses and all variables mentioned later must already be anticipated. Hypotheses should be anticipated in terms of theoretical propositions. Variables should be anticipated in terms of concepts.

1.2 Hypotheses

Here you need only a summary statement, like this: "Based on the above review, I formulate the following hypotheses ...". Then you list the hypotheses from 1 to X (avoid having more than five; otherwise one gets the impression that you don't have a focus).

The hypotheses must correspond to propositions made in the literature review. The difference to propositions is that hypotheses reformulate them in technically testable ways. This is done by restating the concepts addressed in the literature section in the form of variables. In contrast to concepts, variables are operationalizations of concepts that make an idea measurable. You might as well list corresponding propositions and hypotheses and corresponding concepts and variables in a table. This leaves a good impression of your conceptual organization.

Under all circumstances, avoid throwing in ad-hoc hypotheses at later stages in the text that haven't already been listed here.

2. DATA and METHODS

2.1 Data

Describe the sample and dataset: country coverage, time coverage, sampling methods etc. Then describe all the variables used and provide univariate descriptive statistics for each of them. Alternatively, descriptive statistics can be placed in the appendix. The same is true for exact coding and scaling procedures and questionnaire wordings. Avoid to be too technical here. Describe the data and variables more in substantive than technical terms.

Explain why the coverage of your data is suitable and sufficient to provide conclusive answers to your research question. It is very helpful if you can make a point that these are the best data available to tackle your research problem.

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2.2 Methods

Describe what types of analyses you intend to employ to test the hypotheses and why these are the appropriate analyses. Provide a road map of the various steps of the analyses and how they build on each other, moving from simpler to more complicated models.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Bivariate Results

Describe the simple bivariate relationship between your DV and each of its major IVs. In a multi-level setting, do that for both the individual level and the aggregate level. You might provide a scattergram by plotting the strength of the correlation between your DV and one or two major IVs.

3.2 Multivariate Results

Here you report the findings from your multivariate regression analyses. It is recommended to have a sequence from simple to more complicated models, with more IVs simultaneously included and interaction terms, if appropriate. Avoid, however, the “kitchen sink” approach that throws just everything into one regression (this is known in the meanwhile as “garbage can regression”).

3.3 Robustness Checks

In case you used OLS, address possible violations of OLS assumptions: multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity and influential cases. In case you used panel regressions, check for problems of serial correlation. In any case, address explicitly the issues of “omitted variable bias” and “endogeneity.” Think of additional plausibility checks concerning the main findings. Graphical illustrations always enhance credibility. You don’t have to show all the evidence in this section. Simply report the most important results and refer to the appendix. It is impressive, however, if you can tell that you did a lot to check the robustness of your main results.

CONCLUSION (no number)

Begin with restating the core research question and summarize the main findings. Talk more about key “insights” in substantive terms than about “results” in a technical sense. Then discuss the further implications of these findings beyond your own evidence base. You can be a bit speculative and creative here. Outline future routes of inquiry to test your speculations.

REFERENCES

Try to use APA citation style. Provide full references of all titles cited in the text but not more than that. Make sure your list is complete and your referencing style is consistent.

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Don't be blowsy here because you think no one really checks the references. I usually do when I review papers just to get an impression how careful an author works.

FIGURES AND TABLES

Limit the number of Figures and Tables to not more than five each. I strongly recommend to have graphical illustrations. Also think of a conceptual graphic illustrating your main line of reasoning.

APPENDIX

Here you can place documentary material concerning data sources, question wordings, coding and scaling procedures, technical variable transformations, index construction procedures. In addition, univariate statistics, alternative model specifications, and results of robustness checks belong into the appendix. Also think about replication data.

Note that appendices tend to become more important as journals downsize the word limits of articles. It is therefore important that you structure the appendix nicely, so it is easy to navigate through it. This is also important because references from the main text to the appendix should be easily found by the reader. Take care in preparing the appendix material in order to leave a good impression to reviewers who actually consult the appendix.

Stylistic Remarks

Don't be wordy. Avoid complicated, technical language and don't load two or more adjectives in front of a noun. And don't do that with more than one noun in the same sentence. Check the length of your sentences. Break up long sentences as well as terminological chain constructions consisting of a series of adjectives in front of a noun into a set of smaller sentences that build on each other.

Make the language fluent by taking care that sentences and paragraphs build on each other, showing a recognizable pathway of thought. Avoid passive language and try to verbalize nouns as much as possible. Delete redundant words.

In single authored pieces don't use "we" when speaking of yourself. Try to cite authors at the end rather than in the middle of sentences and don't place more than three pieces in one parenthesis at the end of a sentence. Whenever possible, try to refer to specific pages or chapters. It shows that you really know the literature.