The Journey of a Manuscript

Writing a manuscript can be a mystery if you have not published before. In this module you will learn:

1. How to find out if your research is publishable
2. How to develop a timeline and plan for writing a manuscript
3. How to save drafts of your manuscript
4. How to write a good title for your manuscript

1. Make Sure That Your Research is Publishable

1. Apply for the correct approval for your research before you begin. If you do not receive approvals to conduct your research and you publish it, there could be severe consequences for you and your advisor.
   a. The Institutional Review Board approves human subjects research
   b. The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee approves research involving vertebrate animals
   c. The International Traffic in Arms Regulations applies to international students.

2. Also, you need to verify with your funders, partner agencies or institutions, sponsors, and research collaborators that they approve a publication.
2. Choose the Right Journal

1. Once you’ve completed publishable research, select a journal(s) you could submit it to so that you can write your paper to fit their guidelines
2. See our Module titled Selecting a Scholarly Journal for guidance on choosing an appropriate journal for your paper
3. Discuss the potential for your research to be published with your principal investigator. He or she can help direct you towards potential journals.

3. Develop a Timeline

1. If a journal has submission deadlines, this will help you set a timeline. If not, set your own deadlines that are challenging but attainable. Work with a faculty mentor if you want assistance in creating a realistic timeline.
2. Editing is more time consuming than the initial writing phase. Develop an editing plan and find colleagues to provide friendly critiques of drafts along the way.
3. Give yourself enough time to research, read, and organize the literature.
4. Do you have co-authors?
   a. If you do, then parcel out the time amongst you, and decide now how the order of authorship will go.
5. Give yourself breaks.
   a. Taking a few days off every now and then can help you to think about your paper more clearly and develop new perspectives.
   b. See the Module “How to Keep Your Momentum.”

4. Brainstorm Before You Begin Writing

1. Certain techniques can help you to develop your thoughts before you begin to organize them in an outline.
2. Conduct a comprehensive literature review to see find your niche within the literature that makes your research unique. This will give you some context to help you begin writing your manuscript. See the module Reviewing the Literature for more on this.

3. Brainstorming can be used for conceptual and theoretical papers.

4. Try Concept Mapping
   a. Concept maps are diagrams that depicts relationships between concepts.
   b. Check out Carnegie Mellon’s website on how to create a concept map.

5. Try Free Writing
   a. Write whatever comes to mind about the topic for a set period of time.
   b. You can come back later to refine, so just let your thoughts flow onto the paper.

5. Write an Outline
   1. Download the journal’s template if they have one to guide your outline.
2. See the example from Georgetown University Law Center.
3. See the example from Penn State College of Earth and Mineral Sciences.

Table 1: Steps to create an outline

| Framing the Main Idea          | 1. Decide the purpose  
|                                | 2. Determine your audience  
|                                | 3. Develop your thesis  
| Organizing Your Paper          | 1. Group ideas together according to the question/problem they address.  
|                                | 2. Create sections according to the above groups.  
|                                | 3. Now create subsections arranged from most broad to most specific, or abstract to concrete.  
| Labeling Sections              | 1. Title the sections and subsections  
|                                | 2. Make sure the section and subsection order is coherent.  
| Adding Supporting Material     | 1. Add detail to subsections where necessary.  
|                                | 2. Locate sources pertaining to the details.  

6. Write the Content

1. Begin with a section that was agreed upon by your group.
2. Follow the layout described by the journal that you chose, or by the standard framework layouts listed in the module Manuscript Frameworks.

7. Write an Abstract

1. For a paper submission, you can write the abstract first or last.
2. If the journal allows or requests, send the abstract to the editor first to gauge its appropriateness.
3. For a presentation proposal, you will need to write the abstract first.
4. Get feedback on the abstract from a mentor.
5. See our module Writing a Strong Abstract.
8. Write the Title

1. Keep it descriptive (rather than explanatory) and simple.
2. Use keywords in your title so that when people search those popular terms your published article appears.
3. Titles can take the format of a question, noun phrase, or a statement (Cargill & O’Connor, 2009).

Example 2: Writing a good title

Too broad: Using Story For Change

Explanatory: Women Tell their Stories About Domestic Violence

Corrected: How Women's Stories of Domestic Violence Changed Their Self-Image

Noun phrase title: Engaged Scholarship Marketing in a Land Grant University

Question title: Does Engaged Scholarship Marketing Really Work?

Statement title: How to Make Engaged Scholarship Marketing a Success

9. Leave Time for Editing

1. Edit your manuscript multiple times for content and grammar.
2. Get friendly editors on board ahead of time so that you can be confident that you will receive feedback before you submit the article.
3. See our module about Editing Your Manuscript.
4. Choose and stick to a method of version control.
   a. Make sure that you choose and stick to one method for naming new versions of your manuscript.
b. Some common methods of version control are including the date you edited or the version number (and if working in a team, the editor’s initials).

Example 3: Manuscript file names

Title_10.10.15_DN Title_V3_DN

10. Final Checklist

1. Several people have edited your manuscript.
2. Your manuscript is understandable to the target audience.
3. You have selected keywords to include with your submission.
4. Your manuscript is formatted per the journal’s requirements.

Sources and Additional Resources:

1. Penn State Libraries: Create a Concept Map
2. Purdue OWL: Writing a Research Paper
3. Scientific Writing
4. Research Paper Writing Planner