



Who Do Business Scholars Write for in Journal Publications? Maximizing Researcher's Readership, Application, and Impact

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the established norms of academic scholarships and emphasizes the importance of writing academic journal articles in ways that maximize both scholarly impact and practical relevance, particularly for business researchers in leadership, human resources, and management. While traditional academic publishing often prioritizes theoretical contributions and complex statistical methodologies, such approaches can limit readership, accessibility and real-world application. To bridge the gap between academia and the workplace, researchers should adopt their writing with its intended audience while using jargon-free language, focusing on existing organizational challenges, and plainly articulating the practical implications of their findings. Strategies such as incorporating real-life examples, engaging visuals, and collaborative input from practitioners are also recommended to make its application easier for today's time-impovertished readers and managers. Furthermore, disseminating research through blogs, executive summaries, and practitioner-oriented outlets can extend the readership reach and influence of academic work. By aligning scholarly communication with the needs of practitioners and decision-makers, researchers can ensure their work contributes meaningfully to evidence-based management and leadership practices that offer direct, immediate, and measurable value.

Key words: Journal audience; readership, application; HR researchers; leadership; business scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on *who* business scholars write for in journal publications is essential for maximizing readership, practical application, and scholarly impact. Academic research often caters to a narrow audience of peers, limiting its reach and relevance beyond academia.

In this modern hype-technological era, data and scientific research are widespread. So, the challenge for knowledge seekers is not the availability of scientific research, but rather the unnecessary number of populist characters misinterpreting data with no training and full confidence. So, having access to information and complex data is no longer a hurdle, but understanding it continues to be a huge challenge. Authors should caution readers to reduce the possibility of misinterpreting the findings and misinformation being leaked out. By consciously identifying and addressing diverse stakeholders such as practitioners, policymakers, students, and interdisciplinary researchers, business scholars can produce work that is more accessible, actionable, and influential with the right target. This intentional approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, enhances knowledge translation, and ensures that valuable business and leadership insights contribute meaningfully to real-world decision-making and innovation in the business world. As shown in Figure 1, all business researchers and authors should keep the three pillars of writing academic articles in mind from the outset and throughout the process: readership, application, and impact (RAI).

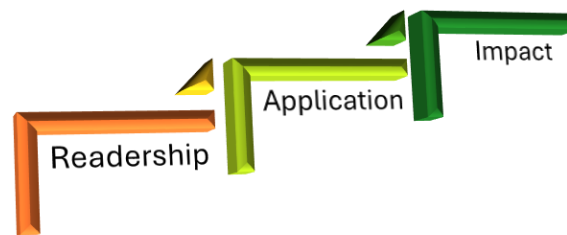


Figure 1 – Essential Pillars of Academic Writing, RAI

For many authors, the idea of reflecting on RAI is non-existent since they focus on replicating previous research or initiating a new stream of study to fill a gap in literature. This academic process can create a cycle of an elite class of researchers based on being first to publish and disseminate, which can stifle creativity, innovation, and thinking through new paradigms of future scholars.

In *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu offered a critique of the academic profession by revealing the underlying power structures and social dynamics that form intellectual life in higher education schools. Bourdieu was able to construct a map of the intellectual field in France for the analysis of various forms of capital, conflict, and power in academia, specifically in higher education. He painted a clear vision of intellectual life in France, while developing an approach to study culture and higher education (Bourdieu, 1988).

Bourdieu argued that academia is not a neutral space of free inquiry, since this culture is a segmented and stratified field governed by symbolic capital such as prestige, titles, and institutional affiliations. Ultimately, it is the symbolic capital which determines who is heard and valued in the industry. Perhaps it is largely true that academic legitimacy is often tied to social origin, personality, and networks, rather than to merit or intellectual rigor alone (Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006). This system can create vicious and continuous cycles of a self-replicating elite, where established academics tend to reproduce and reinforce their own power by selecting successors who mirror their values and dispositions.

Bourdieu critiqued the illusion of independence and impartiality in academic discourse. He pointed out that some scholars fail to recognize their own interests and biases, which are embedded in the very structures they claim to study. By turning the tools of sociology into the higher education institution itself, Bourdieu exposed how academic knowledge production is typically shaped by internal struggles for status, recognition, and control over definitions of legitimate knowledge. In doing so, he challenged academics to reflect critically on their own practices and positions, which usually urges a more impulsive, self-aware approach to scholarship that acknowledges the social conditions of its own production.

Bourdieu's assessment is a reality of modern times, because many researchers who do not follow the traditional norms might find the road to academic progress and disciplined-based recognition more challenging. The system of adhering to the established research and scholarship norms begins in college and continues being reinforced in most graduate programs. For example, to successfully earn a doctorate degree, most management and leadership scholars follow the established 5-chapter format of introduction, literature, methodology, findings, and summary in their dissertation research (Mujtaba. and Scharff, 2007). This format naturally does not always allow for deviance or creativity, and it does not emphasize the practical implications of the findings for the modern workforce. While chapter 4 (findings) might include some content on implications and recommendations for the workplace, its value becomes secondary or non-essential to the purpose of research. While the established norms help doctoral students to more effectively navigate the journey of obtaining a terminal degree, it simultaneously suppresses creativity and innovation.

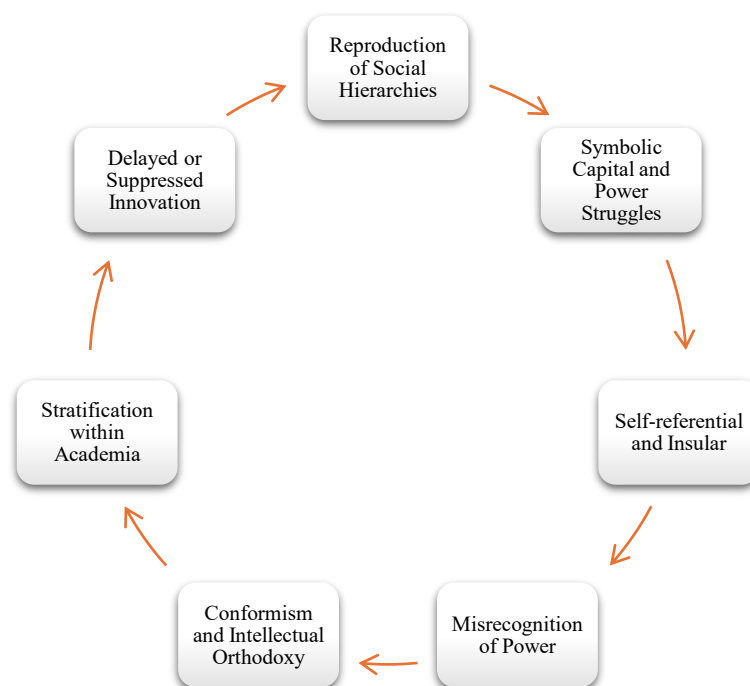


Figure 2 – Bourdieu's Critique of the Academic Profession

As shown in Figure 2, there are many key points from Bourdieu's critique of the academic profession (Bourdieu, 1988), that are very relevant for discussion and reflection today, including the following:

- *Reproduction of Social Hierarchies*: Bourdieu argues that academia tends to reproduce existing social and cultural hierarchies rather than challenge them, thereby reinforcing class distinctions through access to elite institutions and credentials. This can be seen from some researchers citing leading authors and journals for peer reviewers to positively perceive the new work based on first impressions, even when the content of previously published work may not necessarily warrant a citation.
- *Symbolic Capital and Power Struggles*: Academic fields are often traditional arenas of power where scholars compete for symbolic capital (prestige, recognition, titles) more than truth or innovation. Positions and recognition are often granted based on alignment with dominant academic tastes rather than merit. For example, the critique associated with the existing tenure system often leads to an exclusive elite in each discipline and institution, and thus their research is mimicked by the incoming faculty and researchers, especially when large grants are involved. The unintended consequence can be lack of creativity and innovation in new stream of research.
- *Self-referential and Insular*: The academic profession is often closed off from the real world, developing its own language, norms, and metrics that serve insiders but alienate outsiders and undermine broader social engagement. The example of this can be seen from the disconnect between academia and practitioners. A theory might be sound in writing but impractical to implement.
- *Misrecognition of Power*: Academics often misrecognize their own power and role in social reproduction, believing in the neutrality and objectivity of scholarship while participating in systems of exclusion and privilege. For example, publishing and coauthoring an article with a leading author in the discipline often allows a newcomer to be included in the elite exclusive and powerful group, but other well-deserving candidates are often not afforded such privileges.
- *Conformism and Intellectual Orthodoxy*: Academic careers reward conformity to established schools of thought and discourage risk-taking or interdisciplinary work, leading to intellectual stagnation and the marginalization of dissenting voices. Many argue that powerful accreditation bodies require schools to conform to established standards to become a part of the exclusive or elite clubs such as being accredited by AACSB, IACBE, ACBSP, etc. in each discipline.
- *Stratification within Academia*: There is a rigid hierarchy within academic institutions, from elite research universities to lower-status colleges, which mirrors broader societal inequalities and limits opportunities for those in less prestigious settings. This aim of "leveling the playing field" for the disadvantage groups was the basis for the "race-based" criteria argument being used as one element in college admission programs by Harvard and UNC, which the Supreme Court of the U.S. (SCOTUS) ended in 2023 (Mujtaba, 2024).
- *Delayed or Suppressed Innovation*: Because academic validation takes time and depends on peer approval, innovative or critical ideas are often delayed, diluted, or rejected, stifling the progress of thought. An example of this can be seen in the early response of Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts in science during the 1960s (Kuhn, 2012). Initially, some scholars resisted his challenge to the linear, cumulative view of scientific progress because it challenged dominant academic tales. So, it took years of debate and gradual

acceptance for his idea of paradigm shift to gain widespread legitimacy, so new questions could be asked, and existing norms could be questioned. This delay illustrates how academia's gatekeeping mechanisms can suppress pioneering thought until it fits accepted frameworks that are supported by the established elite.

LITERATURE

As leadership, management, and human resources management (HRM) faculty, business professors teach and naturally conduct research on relevant topics for the extension of theory or application in the modern workplace (Mujtaba & Lawrence, 2025). So, research scholars typically write for a variety of audiences, though the primary audience for journal publications is the discipline-based academic community such as other professors and students. Occasionally, there comes along authors like Kenneth Blanchard and Paul Hersey that present their "*Situational Leadership*" model through colorful visuals that made the content more understandable and attractive for practitioners (Hersey et al., 2012). The same can be said for how Stephen R. Covey nicely laid out his model of "*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*" which was facilitated to millions of working managers and leaders all around the globe (Covey, 2020).

The Blanchard-Hersey "Situational Leadership" model and Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" were visually effective for learning and understanding because they used clear, structured graphics to simplify complex concepts. The Situational Leadership model used a straightforward grid to depict leadership styles and follower readiness levels, thereby making it easy to match behavior with situational needs. Similarly, Covey's model used a hierarchical diagram (often in the form of a pyramid or maturity continuum) to illustrate the progressive development from dependence to interdependence, which visually reinforced the logical flow and interconnection of each habit. These visuals not only support memory retention but also enhance the learner's ability to apply the models in real-life scenarios.

Unlike the Blanchard-Hersey's situational leadership model and Covey's maturity continuum, a typical academic journal article is read by an astonishingly small number of people in any academic discipline or community. Some estimates suggest that the average scholarly article is read in full by only about 10 people, most of whom are fellow academics, peer reviewers, or students conducting literature reviews (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2001). Besides, a significant portion of published articles are never cited, which implies limited readership and impact on the academic community or application in the workplace. According to Priem et al. (2012), the traditional academic publishing model prioritizes publication volume and prestige over broad dissemination, which restricts accessibility and limits public engagement. Even in high-ranking journals, readership is generally confined to niche academic audiences with current access to libraries that offer articles free to their members; consequently, few articles ever reach practitioners or the public.

The primary readership of typical academic journal publications comprises scholars, researchers, and graduate students within specific disciplines. These readers rely on journals to stay informed about theoretical advancements, empirical findings, and methodological innovations. Academic journals serve as a platform for scholarly communication, often prioritizing theoretical rigor and methodological precision over practicality and accessibility. According to Becher and Trowler (2001), academic disciplines form distinct "epistemic communities" with shared norms and vocabulary, which can make journal articles difficult for outsiders to interpret. As a result, the dense language, specialized jargon, and assumption of prior knowledge make these

publications largely inaccessible to non-academic audiences such as practitioners, policymakers, or the public.

Some scholars, especially those who are senior faculty, aim to contribute to theoretical development. Others attempt to challenge or validate existing paradigms in their academic writings. Many authors write to discover and offer empirical evidence that advances disciplinary knowledge in their fields, such as management or leadership. Barley (2016) noted that “most management scholarship is written by scholars for scholars” (p. 169), emphasizing that research is often geared toward peers, reviewers, and editors who prioritize theoretical rigor and methodological soundness over practical utility. This dynamic reflects the institutional incentives in academia, such as tenure and promotion, which are often tied to publishing in top-tier outlets like the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Human Resource Management*, or others such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Despite their focus on academic readers, there is growing criticism of the limited practical impact of journal publications. Many scholars have noted a persistent gap between academic research and real-world application. For instance, Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft (2001) highlight the disconnect between what scholars publish and what practitioners need, emphasizing that academic articles often fail to influence management or policy decisions. Furthermore, Mingers and Willmott (2013) argue that the focus on publishing in high-impact journals for career advancement has reinforced an academic echo chamber, where the primary goal is scholarly recognition rather than societal impact. This tension has sparked calls for more accessible writing and engagement with broader audiences, but academic journal readership remains largely confined to fellow academics. According to George (2014), it is time to reconsider management research; chief among them is the discourse that the emphasis on technical rigor has shifted our focus away from the soul of relevance and the applied nature of our field” (p. 1).

The critique that leadership, management, and human resources research has become too insular, focusing on academic debates with limited relevance to practice, which is bothersome to those that have been managers, leaders, and practicing professionals in public or private organizations. Rynes et al. (2001) argue that while management scholars produce research of high technical quality, much of it fails to engage with real-world organizational challenges or practitioners’ concerns. This divide between theory and practice is further emphasized by the lack of accessible language and practical recommendations in many journal articles. Consequently, HR professionals, consultants, and policymakers, who could be the beneficiary of scholarly insights, often find published literature dense or irrelevant, which limits the impact of research on actual management practices with the modern workforce. Seelos et al. (2023) assert that, “We therefore add the principle of realism as a metatheory that aligns these principles with practice-oriented theorizing” (p. 263).

To address this gap, some researchers and even accrediting bodies (AACSB, IACBE, ACBSP, SACS, etc.) advocate for a more inclusive and impactful approach to writing and publishing. Bartunek and Rynes (2014) call for engaged scholarship that bridges academic rigor and practical relevance that encourage scholars to consider multiple participants such as practitioners, government policymakers, students, and educators. Similarly, Van de Ven (2007) promotes “engaged scholarship” as a participatory research model that involves collaboration between researchers and practitioners throughout the research process. Consequently, some journals such as *Harvard Business Review*, *Academy of Management Perspectives*, and *Human Resource Management Review* have become the “go-to” platforms for more accessible and practitioner-oriented scholarships.

Ultimately, while management and HR scholars primarily write for academic audiences, there is a growing recognition of the importance of expanding their readership. By writing with clarity, contextual relevance, and actionable insights, scholars can enhance the practical impact of their work without compromising scholarly standards. As journals and academic institutions increasingly value societal impact and relevance, future scholarships may evolve to serve a broader range of readers, including business leaders, HR practitioners, students, and policymakers.

DISCUSSION

It is important for faculty, researchers, and scholars to challenge the existing system of established research protocols because rigid adherence to traditional methodologies and publication norms can stifle creativity, limit intellectual diversity, and discourage innovative thinking. Standard protocols can prioritize conformity, replicability, and conventional metrics of success, such as publication in high-impact journals, over originality, risk-taking, and making the results available in a timely manner to an audience. As a result, scholars may feel pressured to produce safe, incremental work that aligns with existing paradigms rather than exploring bold or unconventional ideas. By questioning these norms, researchers can open space for interdisciplinary approaches, alternative epistemologies, and novel questions that may lead to breakthroughs in theory and practice.

Challenging established research systems can make academia more inclusive and socially responsive to the different needs and priorities of each community, city, industry, organization, and culture. Established protocols often privilege dominant perspectives and marginalize voices that do not conform to traditional academic expectations. Encouraging methodological and epistemological diversity invites contributions from underrepresented communities and ensures that research reflects a broader range of human experience. In doing so, scholars can make their work more relevant to real-world challenges to foster a more dynamic, innovative, and impactful research culture that transcends academic silos and contributes meaningfully to society. As one example, professors and academic institutions can allow more flexibility to graduate researchers in their thesis so they can have more than the traditional 5-chapter norm, as relevant for their research. So, to enhance the overall value of academic research, a leadership-related dissertation should include an additional chapter on practical implication of the findings by having the following format: introduction, literature, methodology, findings, practical implications, and summary.

To maximize readership and the workplace impact of research findings, all dissertations as well as academic journal articles related to leadership, HR, and management should be written with both clarity and relevance to a specific audience in mind. As their main obligation to bring about positive changes in modern organizations through effective leadership and coaching, scholars should aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice by using accessible language, avoiding excessive jargon, and clearly explaining the practical implications of their findings (Lawrence et al., 2023). Articles should begin with a compelling introduction that explains why the topic matters in real-world terms. A clear articulation of how the research addresses current workplace challenges such as employee engagement, diversity, digital transformation, artificial intelligence integration, or ethical leadership makes the content more relatable and actionable for organizational leaders, managers, and HR professionals outside academia.

Researchers can structure their articles to highlight actionable insights by including a dedicated “practical implication” or “managerial relevance” section for readers and practitioners alike. Using real-world examples, case studies, and concise summaries helps practitioners quickly

grasp how they can apply the findings. Writing in an engaging tone, supported by colorful visuals like charts, models and/or frameworks, can enhance readability and retention. Journals such as *Academy of Management Perspectives* and *Harvard Business Review* offer models for how to present rigorous insights in a more accessible and workplace-relevant format. Academic researchers should consider publishing executive summaries, blogs, or policy briefs alongside their rigorous articles to extend their reach beyond theoretical circles.

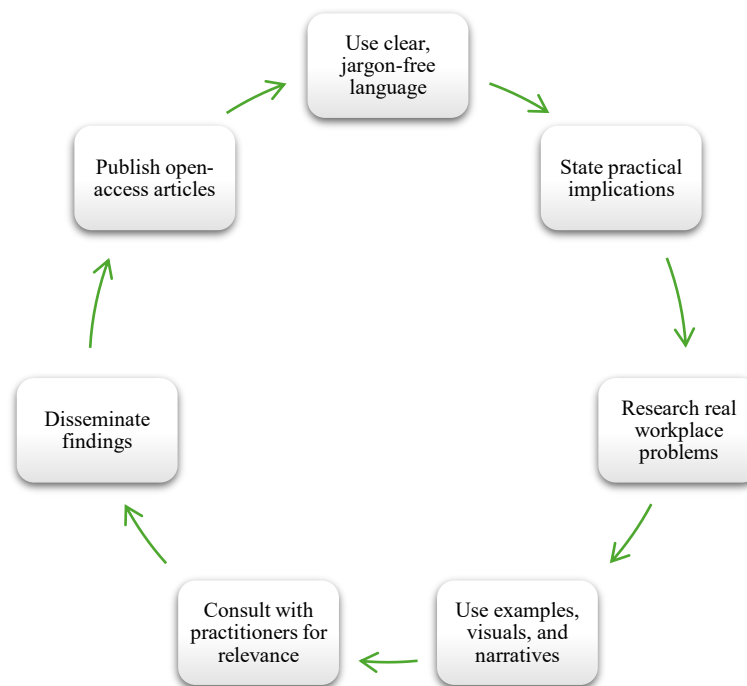


Figure 3 – Ways to Enhance Article Readership, Application, and Impact (RAI)

As shown in Figure 3, the following suggestions offer reflective propositions to professors, researchers and students for writing academic articles with workplace impact:

1. *Frame research around real workplace problems and current trends.* Framing research around real workplace problems and current trends ensures that management studies address issues that are timely, relevant, and meaningful to organizations in each locality. This focus increases the likelihood that research findings will inform policy, guide decision-making, and improve workplace practices. It also enhances the visibility and value of academic work among practitioners, thereby fostering stronger collaboration between scholars and the business world.
2. *Use clear, jargon-free language while maintaining academic rigor.* Using clear, jargon-free language allows leadership, HR, and management scholars to communicate complex ideas effectively to diverse audiences, including practitioners, policymakers, and interdisciplinary researchers. This clarity enhances the practical impact of their work while preserving academic rigor ensures credibility, trust, and intellectual depth (Kanaris & Mujtaba, 2024).

3. *State practical implications explicitly, ideally in a dedicated section.* Stating practical implications explicitly helps business scholars translate theoretical insights into actionable strategies that practitioners and decision-makers can readily apply. A dedicated section ensures these applications are clearly highlighted, which enhances the relevance and real-world impact of the research.
4. *Use examples, visuals, and narratives to communicate complex ideas clearly.* Using examples, visuals, and narratives help academic authors break down complex concepts into relatable and understandable elements, which can make their work more accessible and engaging. Additionally, such tools enhance comprehension and retention, especially for diverse audiences with varying levels of expertise and different learning styles.
5. *Co-author or consult with practitioners to ensure workplace relevance.* Co-authoring or consulting with practitioners in each discipline allows management, leadership, and HR researchers to ground their studies in real-world experiences, which ensures that the research addresses actual workplace challenges in each city and organization. This collaboration enriches the research with practical insights, thereby making the findings and recommendations more applicable and impactful for organizations. It also strengthens the connection between academia and industry, thereby fostering mutual learning and increasing the likelihood of research adoption in HR practices. Additionally, it can lead to consulting work for business researchers.
6. *Publish in journals with broader readership through open-access or accompany academic articles with summaries for non-academic platforms.* Publishing in open-access journals or providing summaries for non-academic platforms expands the reach of research beyond the academic community, which makes the findings more accessible to practitioners, policymakers, and the public, often at no cost to them. This broader dissemination increases the societal relevance and impact of the research, in hopes of fostering informed decision-making and real-world change. Additionally, it enhances the visibility and influence of the researcher's work, while contributing to greater academic and professional recognition.
7. *Disseminate findings through multiple formats, such as blog posts or webinars.* Disseminating research findings and publications through multiple formats like blog posts, social media outlets, and/or webinars allows researchers to engage with a wider and more diverse audience beyond traditional academic readers. These accessible formats enhance the visibility and impact of the research, which can lead to productive dialogues, collaborations, and knowledge exchange across sectors.

By writing with both scholarly peers and workplace professionals in mind, modern researchers and professors can significantly enhance the visibility, influence, and real-world utility of their publications.

SUMMARY

Academic researchers need not focus on popularity or marketing gimmicks but should stay focused on publishing rigorous articles with a strong focus on their practical application so each publication can be of direct, immediate, and measurable value to readers. When a published article has sufficient rigor, is readable by the average person within the discipline, and can be of immediate value to readers, it will attract a larger audience.

To enhance the readership and workplace impact of academic journal articles, researchers in leadership, human resources, and management should adopt a writing approach that balances academic rigor with practical relevance. This involves using clear, jargon-free language, structuring articles around real-world workplace challenges, and explicitly stating the practical implications of the findings. Including case examples, visual aids, and dedicated sections for managerial relevance can help practitioners better understand and apply research insights.

Additionally, researchers are encouraged to engage with practitioners during the research process, publish in accessible journals, and disseminate findings through multiple formats such as executive summaries, blogs, or industry talks. By making their work more accessible and actionable, scholars can significantly increase the real-world influence of their research while continuing to contribute to academic advancement. This dual focus strengthens the link between theory and practice, ultimately fostering more evidence-based leadership and management decision-making in organizations. As shown in Figure 4, “The central objective is to highlight why the study’s topic matters for both theory and practice, planting the study’s roots firmly in ‘Pasteur’s quadrant’ in order to contribute to both basic and applied knowledge” (Grant & Pollock, 2011, p. 873). According to Stokes (1997), Pasteur's quadrant is a classification of scientific research projects that seek fundamental understanding of scientific problems, while also having immediate use for society.

Research is inspired by:

Considerations of use?

No

Yes

*Quest for
fundamental
understanding?*

Yes

Pure basic
research
(Bohr)

Use-inspired
basic research
(Pasteur)

No

Pure applied
research
(Edison)

Figure 4 – Quadrant Model of Scientific Research

(Source: Stokes, 1997)

For new researchers, the following are some practical suggestions for writing quality papers while keeping readership, application, and impact in mind, that can be published in reputable academic journals:

1. *Create a descriptive title:* Create a focused title that reflects the readership, application, and impact (RAI) of the research. This step is even more important for coauthors that need to pursue the specific research question, while preventing “scope creep” from delaying the project.
2. *Conduct thorough literature review:* Understand the current state of research in your field, identify gaps, and build upon existing knowledge.

3. *Clearly define research questions or hypotheses:* Ensure your research objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).
4. *Develop a robust methodology:* Choose appropriate research designs, methods, and tools to collect and analyze data, ensuring validity and reliability. “Data must be shown, not merely described, so the reader can connect the raw data with the analyzed data, and the analyzed data with the emergent theorizing” (Bansal & Corley, 2012, p. 511).
5. *Organize and structure your paper effectively:* Follow the journal's guidelines and use a logical structure, including introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.
6. *Write clearly and concisely:* Use simple, precise language, avoiding jargon and technical terms unless necessary, and ensure your writing is free of grammatical errors. “They do not use jargon but attract, intrigue, and engage a broad readership and also write in a very accessible way; even someone with little expertise could understand” (Grant & Pollock, 2011, p. 876).
7. *Focus on the discussion section:* “A strong Discussion section should not only summarize the findings and ultimately delineate the theoretical and practical implications” (Bansal & Corley, 2012, p. 510).
8. *Use proper citation and referencing:* Accurately cite sources, follow the journal's citation style, and provide a comprehensive reference list.
9. *Ensure originality, application and impact:* Offer new insights, perspectives, or findings that contribute to the existing body of knowledge in your field.
10. *Use tables, figures, and appendices judiciously:* Use visual aids to present complex data, illustrate findings, and support your arguments, but avoid unnecessary or redundant information.
11. *Edit and proofread meticulously:* Review your paper multiple times, check for consistency, and have peers or mentors review your work before submission.
12. *Address reviewer comments and revise:* If your paper is rejected or requires revisions, carefully address reviewer comments, revise your paper, and resubmit them to the same or a different journal.

By following these practical suggestions, researchers can increase the chances of their paper being published, read, applied, and have an impact.

Acknowledgements

Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to improve the language content, after which the author checked the text and took full responsibility for its content.

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