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INTRODUCTION: USING THIS BOOK

Congratulations! You've completed your research, and now want to publish it in a peer-reviewed journal. You have two major hurdles to get published. First, you **have** to write the paper. Second, you have to get the paper through peer review. The latter is a harder task. You need to convince smart skeptical people that your work is interesting and make them forgive the shortcomings of your research.

This might seem a little intimidating, but I am here to help. I'd like to share what I've learned as a writer, reviewer, and editor in chief. I cannot do this alone, so I've enlisted the help of editors from several fields to share their own thoughts. This book will help you not only to write the paper but, more importantly, to be more likely to succeed in peer review.

The book has four major premises. The first is that writing involves a *relationship* between you (the writer) and your readers. Your research joins an ongoing conversation in a field, much like you might join a dinner party that has been happening for years. To be accepted into that conversation requires an appropriate entry, understanding of prior conversations, and savvy about underlying assumptions and tolerances. You will be more successful in peer review if you understand how to create a collaborative relationship with your readers.

The second premise is that *good writing is rewriting*. Many new writers suffer the myth that good writing flows easily from the pens of "naturally gifted" writers. Some people have such talents, but we don't like them much. I'm not so lucky, so I subscribe to the "word vomit and clean up" method: get your rough ideas on paper, then edit to make things clear, concise, complete, and perhaps beautiful. Revision is critical.

Research papers don't have to be dry. I bet that you know of a few academic articles that are fun and engaging to read. "Fun and engaging" are all matters of taste, of course. In my own work, about 80% of reviewers seem to enjoy (or at least tolerate) my writing style, while another 20% hate it. As a professional writer, you shrug your shoulders and keep going.

The third premise is that *writing in small bites is far better than binge writing*. Research shows that people who write daily are usually more productive than people who write in spurts or when they feel like it. Like most things, such as playing the piano or exercising, you get better through consistent practice.

The fourth premise is *persistent people win*. It's so easy to give up. You must finish the draft, which isn't easy given the seduction of procrastination. Just as important, you must keep trying even when the paper is rejected. We all have papers that are hard

to publish. I had one article that was rejected at eight different journals. It was tempting to give up after the third rejection, but the article was finally published after a lot of work (and many swear words).

This book assumes that you are ready to publish some of your research. It is *not* about how to initiate a research project. If you need help developing a project, I'd refer you to books by Kate Turabian.

I encourage you to read Chapters 2 to 4, then jump around the book as you please.

Chapter 2 talks about the culture of research journals. Each journal has its **own** quirks and customs. You need to keep these differences in mind as you write your article. If you don't, readers may misunderstand your ideas and not **find them** appealing. The chapter's exercises help you learn about these cultural differences.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of peer review, shaped largely by my experiences as the editor in chief of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (*JHSB*). Our review process was similar to that of many other journals, but **be aware that journals do differ**.

Chapter 4 goes into greater detail about how **peer reviewers think** and gives you practice in doing and receiving peer reviews. Experienced scholars write with peer review in mind. This includes adding text that anticipates reviewers' questions and critiques.

A popular way to organize scientific articles is through the IMRD structure, which refers to the sections **Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion**. Our book will cover each of these sections, and a bit more. However, my chapters will not discuss them in the order that you will typically read them (i.e., starting with the Introduction section and ending with the **Discussion**). You don't have to write in a linear order.

Rather than **start with the introduction**, we will begin with the Methods section in Chapter 5. Next, we'll cover tables in Chapter 6. Then we will focus on the Results section in **Chapter 7** and the Discussion section in Chapter 8. We won't cover the Introduction section of your research article until Chapter 9. This is because I think the introduction is most easily written *after* you have all of research in place. We'll **cover the Abstract, Title, and Keywords** in Chapter 10. The Abstract is the section that is most likely to be read, so it must be well written. Hence, the book is not organized in the linear IMRD fashion, but rather, in a way that might be easiest to write.

I caution that IMRD is most common in the quantitative sciences but may not necessarily apply to all articles, particularly those in qualitative and humanities traditions. Further, this book is shaped by my work in the social and medical sciences. I have tried to provide examples in many research traditions, but I do acknowledge the limitations of my own experiences. That said, I hope that the ideas and advice here help you do your work better, regardless of tradition.

Chapter 11 focuses on literature reviews, which often do not follow the IMRD structure.

Chapter 12 is about being more productive and overcoming writer's block. What is the secret to being productive? It's easier than you might think.

Chapter 13 is about authorship. This is a difficult topic, one that can make your career and possibly end friendships. I talk about some of the ways you can negotiate authorship with collaborators.

Chapter 14 is about citations. It almost seems trivial, but citation practices are very important. They can literally cost you money and reinforce stereotypes.

Finally, Chapter 15 contains short essays by several journal editors. You should read them all to appreciate the common themes and diversity of perspectives. This chapter is probably one of the most unique elements of this book, as you get to learn from past editors themselves about how to avoid common mistakes that novice writers make.

One of the hardest parts of any new project, whether it is a scholarly manuscript or a new exercise routine, is getting starting. Let's start, right now, with one simple task that will force you to think concretely about receiving feedback. Don't stress over this too much. You can change your mind about the topic and person later.

Complete this sentence:

*I am writing an article about _____
_____ and plan to ask my friend/colleague/mentor _____ for
feedback. I will get this article published.*

*I will also offer to help review an article by this same person with a spirit of mutual
respect and collaboration.*

Signed: _____ [your name] _____.

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