



INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP IN AUSTRALIA

The IELA Education Research Journal (erj) is a scholarly publication consisting of academic study, achievements, articles and information concerning education.

ERJ will be published each semester per year.

The Education Research Journal (erj) suggested guidelines

What's your question?

A good research paper addresses a specific research question. The research question—or study objective or main research hypothesis—is the central organising principle of the paper.

Whatever relates to the research question belongs in the paper; the rest doesn't.

Structure of your research article

Once your research question is clearly defined, writing the paper becomes considerably easier. The paper will ask the question, then answer it. The key to successful scientific writing is getting the structure of the paper right. The basic structure of a typical research paper is the sequence of Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion (sometimes abbreviated as IMRAD). Each section addresses a different objective. The author states: (i) the problem they intend to address - the research question—in the Introduction; (ii) what they did to answer the question in the Methods section; (iii) what they observed in the Results section; and (iv) what they think the results mean in the Discussion.

In turn, each basic section addresses several topics, and may be divided into subsections.

In the Introduction, the author should explain the rationale and background to the study. What is the research question, and why is it important to ask it? While it is neither necessary nor desirable to provide a full-blown review of the literature as a prelude to the study, it is helpful to situate the study within some larger field of enquiry. The research question should always be clearly defined.

Typical structure of a research paper

Introduction

State why the problem you address is important

State what is lacking in the current knowledge

State the objectives of your study or the research question

Methods

Describe the context and setting of the study

Specify the study design

Describe the 'population' (patients, doctors, hospitals, etc.)

Describe the sampling strategy

Describe the intervention (if applicable)

Identify the main study variables

Describe data collection instruments and procedures

Outline analysis methods

Results

Report on data collection and recruitment (response rates, etc.)

Describe participants (demographic, clinical condition, etc.)

Present key findings with respect to the central research question

Present secondary findings (secondary outcomes, subgroup analyses, etc.)

Discussion

State the main findings of the study

Discuss the main results with reference to previous research

Discuss policy and practice implications of the results

Analyse the strengths and limitations of the study

Offer perspectives for future work

Sections Outlined

The **Methods** section should provide the readers with sufficient detail about the study methods to be able to reproduce the study if so desired. This section should be specific, concrete, technical, and fairly detailed. The study setting, the sampling strategy used, instruments, data collection methods, and analysis strategies should be described. In the case of qualitative research studies, it is also useful to tell the reader which research tradition the study utilises and to link the choice of methodological strategies with the research goals.

The **Results** section is typically straightforward and factual. All results that relate to the research question should be given in detail, including simple counts and percentages. Resist the temptation to demonstrate analytic ability and the richness of the dataset by providing numerous tables of non-essential results.

The **Discussion** section allows the most freedom, but sometimes the most difficult to write, and is often the weakest part of a paper. Following a plan such as that proposed in the table above may help you stay on track.

References should be used wisely. Key assertions should be referenced, as well as the methods and instruments used. However, unless the paper is a comprehensive review of a topic, there is no need to be exhaustive. Also, references to unpublished work, to documents in the grey literature (technical reports), or to any source that the reader will have difficulty finding or understanding should be avoided.

Basic referencing guidelines

Here are some general guidelines for referencing your article, however if you have used a specific institution reference guideline or style guide that will not need to be changed.

The basics of a Reference List entry for a journal article:

- Author or authors. First initials follow the surname.
- Year of publication of the article.
- Article title (in single inverted commas).
- Journal title (in italics).
- Volume of journal.
- Issue number of journal.

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