

A Guide to Writing a Review Article for Novice Researchers

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ABSTRACT

Review articles constitute a significant staple of literature liked and sought after by readers and journals. They are vital in capturing key details of recent research endeavors and establishing connections with previous studies on a similar topic. In an era of an increasing number of scientific publications, producing review articles timely is of great importance. This writing delves into the subject matter of the process and elucidates both the methodology and the rationale behind drafting a review article. A brief overview of the review article is introduced. The fundamental rules for writing a review article and its structure are discussed. The importance of good writing is also highlighted. Additionally, the authors present insights into where to publish prepared review papers.

Keywords: Article publishing; Novice researcher; Review article; Scientific publication; Writing guidelines

INTRODUCTION

A review article is writing that abridges the cutting edge of understanding a topic in a particular scientific discipline. A well-written review paper should summarize the main research findings, describing current research areas of agreement, controversies and debates, and gaps in current knowledge. The review article is created for various purposes, including to provide theoretical background for upcoming research, to study the breadth of research on a topic of interest, to answer practical questions by understanding what existing studies should say about the issue, to keep up to date on the latest research, and to sidestep duplication of efforts

and waste resources on research topics whose answers are already clear (Balon, 2022). Generally, review articles are considered a secondary source since they discuss the information in previously published works. Nevertheless, review articles are one of the most important forms of scientific writing (Almila, 2022).

A huge amount of original research articles that offer novelty points, outcomes, methodological insight, and refined understanding are published daily all around the world. Identifying relevant and up-to-date evidence and its impact on them has become a challenge (Dutta, 2019, & Bahishti, 2021). Therefore, writing a good review article serves the scientific community and helps advance a research career. Well-written reviews are often highly cited, and in turn, can improve the authors' visibility and reputation. Besides, they define that the authors are good synthetic thinkers. In addition, for those who are in the situation of not working on original research works for any reason, producing a review paper allows them to continually add to their publication record (Suter, 2013). Anyhow, beginner researchers often face challenges in writing a review article, such as the difficulty of selecting relevant references, lack of access to information sources (web pages, online databases, books, articles, and others), weak ability to understand the contents of references, weak writing skills, and lack of supervision from advisors (Dina, 2023).

In this direction, we attempted to deliver a general background of writing a review article. This work introduces comprehensive compilations of aspects related to the fundamentals of preparing reviews, which makes it a standard reference for novice researchers or students. Further, this review paper discusses the importance of clear writing in presenting data in a scientific work, so that a widespread readership can easily understand it. The discussion regarding the general review structure is also incorporated into the text. Finally, it is crucial to know where the finished work will be published. The present study is essential for new researchers since providing clear and structured guidance on conducting and writing a review. Besides, it not only helps them understand the significant methodologies but also improves their research skills. Last but not least, this work fills the imperative gap by demystifying the writing process of a review and aiding novice researchers to make meaningful contributions to scholarly communication and knowledge synthesis.

BASIC RULES OF WRITING A REVIEW ARTICLE

If starting from scratch, reviewing the literature requires much hard work. That is why researchers who have taken the time to work on a particular research issue are in a good position to review the literature (Feld et al., 2024). Considering that most students begin their projects by producing an overview of what has been done about their research problem, schools need to provide courses in reviewing the literature. Indeed, this has been applied in world-class universities. For instance,

the University of Edinburgh specifically offers a subject primarily focusing on literature review (Writer Team, 2023). It aims to explore the criteria for a successful literature review, discuss the purpose of a literature review, and raise awareness of citation practices. Also, this course explores different potential patterns for organizing a literature review and examines introductions, transitions, and conclusions within the body of a literature review. In addition, it expresses your voice and writing critically, and synthesizes sources. Nevertheless, in implementation, many advisors might be negligent in their supervision, which obviously hinders the student's ability, especially from thinking circumstantially about how to approach and conduct effective literature reviews (Wong & Li, 2023).

Reviewing the literature is a multifaceted process that requires various skills. It begins with the ability to locate and assess relevant materials, which involves navigating academic databases and discerning the credibility of sources. Once the appropriate literature is gathered, synthesizing insights from these varied sources requires a keen analytical mindset, allowing researchers to draw meaningful connections and identify overarching themes. Critical analysis is vital to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing research, ensuring that the review is comprehensive and well-informed. Furthermore, proficient paraphrasing and referencing are crucial for accurately representing others' ideas while maintaining academic integrity. Despite the common nature of these skills, the specific insights and strategies necessary for crafting an effective review paper are not always readily available (Amobonye et al., 2024). In this section, the authors aim to share practical knowledge, as listed below, that can assist researchers especially newcomers in effectively drafting review papers, thereby improving the overall quality of their academic work.

Define the Goal, Topic, and Target Audience

Identifying the purpose of the review is the foundational step in creating any review article, as it sets the stage for the entire piece and guides the direction of the following research and discussion. Understanding the specific purpose helps to clarify what the authors intend to achieve with their review, whether it is to summarize existing knowledge on a particular topic, critically analyze and evaluate the methodologies and findings of previous studies, or identify gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. By setting a clear purpose, the authors can structure their review coherently and logically, making it easier for readers to follow the argument and understand the significance of the content presented. Furthermore, a well-defined purpose ensures that the review article is explicit to readers, allowing them to understand immediately what they can expect to learn or gain from engaging with the text (Palmatier et al., 2018).

When selecting a topic for a review article, the subject matter must be interesting to the authors and significant within the broader context of the field.

This means that the topic should address a well-defined issue that has relevance and importance, potentially contributing new insights to ongoing discussions within the discipline. Choosing a topic that resonates with the author's interests not only makes the writing process more engaging but enhances the likelihood of producing a passionate and insightful review as well. Moreover, understanding the significance of the chosen topic within the field ensures that the article will capture the attention of other researchers keen to explore that area further. Equally important is the task of identifying the intended audience for the article. Knowing who the readers will be helps tailor the content, language, and depth of analysis to meet their needs and expectations. While it is vital to define a target audience, authors should remain open to the broader implications of their topic, considering how it may resonate with various stakeholders across different fields. By doing so, authors not only expand the impact of their work as well as foster interdisciplinary dialogue that can enrich the understanding of the subject matter and encourage collaborative efforts in future research (Forero et al., 2019).

Gather the Literature and Take Notes While Reading

In searching the literature, different search engines and databases (PubMed, Database Systems and Logic Programming known as DBLP, Google Scholar, the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), Web of Science, Journal Storage (JSTOR) Search, Medline, Scopus, Connecting Repositories, Europe PubMed Central (Europe PMC), Science.gov, and bioRxiv/pronounced bio-archive) and keywords should be applied. It is also important to look at who cited past relevant sources. Besides, reference management systems like EndNote, Mendeley, Zotero, ReadCube, Sciwheel, RefWorks, and JabRef are also useful in this regard. Additionally, the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria to rule out irrelevant articles is very important since the retrieved references are often numbered in the hundreds or even thousands (Haery, 2017, & Bramer et al., 2017). For instance, the use of inclusion criteria defines the relevance, publication date, design of the study, language, quality of the articles, etc., whereas exclusion criteria specify factors like irrelevant research topics, outdated publication dates, and poor research quality.

Selecting articles to cite is a significant stage in preparing a review, and in so doing you should not take it lightly. A brief reading of the title and abstract of a huge number of references is an effective way to cite the article, whereas to improve the references retrieved to meet the predefined criteria a comprehensive reading is suggested. If you choose to peruse the papers before starting the review writing process, a strong memory is essential for memorizing the authors, individual impressions, and associations of each paper as you write your review afterward. One suggestion while reading the literature is to begin writing down interesting parts of information, insights in organizing the review, and thoughts on what to write. In this manner, upon completing the reading of your selected

literature, you will essentially have a preliminary version of the review in place. Indeed, this draft still needs revision (rewriting, restructuring, and rethinking) to obtain a coherent argument. To use quotation marks in directly citing a quote, it is very important to paraphrase such a quote with your own words in the final draft (Palmatier et al., 2018).

Decide the Type of Review

By having a rough idea of the amount of material available for review, it is the right time to decide what type of review you wish to write. Different types of reviews that can be considered in writing a review article, also constituting common types of reviews, include narrative reviews, descriptive/mapping reviews, scoping reviews, the form of aggregative reviews including systematic reviews and meta-analyses, realist reviews, and critical reviews (Amobonye et al., 2024). Similarly, Lane Medical Library of Stanford Medicine revealed six common types of reviews that consist of narrative review, scoping review, systematic review, rapid review, umbrella review, and clinical practice guidelines. Furthermore, Griffiths (2013) introduced a new review format, called a mini-review, to remind the readers of its limited scope. A mini-review article is not necessarily a small review, as an example as reported by Saputra et al. (2023). In other words, a mini-review is a type of review article that denotes a review with a more concise form than a standard review article. The basic structure of the mini-review looks like that of a complete systematic review. The mini-review will probably attract more attention from busy readers although simplifying some issues and leaving out several relevant materials owing to space limitations. On the other hand, a full review has the advantage of more freedom to present in detail the complexities of a certain scientific development. Ideally, the decision is not only based on the target readers and sources collected but on the time availability to write the article as well.

Keep the Review Focused, but Make It of Broad Interest

Keeping focus on your review is good advice. Incorporating content merely for the sake of inclusion can result in a review that attempts to multitask excessively. However, maintaining focus in a review can pose challenges, particularly in interdisciplinary contexts in which the objective is to connect disparate fields. While maintaining focus is crucial for an effective review, it must be balanced with the necessity of ensuring the review's relevance to a wide-ranging audience. This square could be encompassed by exploring the broader ramifications of the reviewed subject matter across various disciplines (Pautasso, 2013).

Be Critical

A high-quality review involves more than just summarizing existing data; it engages in a critical and thorough discussion of the information provided. This

includes analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various studies, taking into account differing methodologies, and pointing out areas where findings converge or diverge. Such a comprehensive investigation allows readers to grasp the nuances of the research landscape, facilitating a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. Moreover, by presenting a balanced critique, the review not only clarifies current knowledge but also identifies gaps and unresolved questions in the field. This insight is invaluable for researchers contemplating future studies, as it provides a solid foundation upon which they can build, potentially guiding them toward unexplored avenues of inquiry or prompting them to refine existing hypotheses. In the end, a well-crafted review serves as both a summary of recent discoveries and a springboard for future research, empowering readers to engage more thoughtfully with the subject matter (Pautasso, 2013).

Find a Logical Structure for Review

A review article must have a good structure (Karunarathna et al., 2024). For illustration, after the readers have read the particular review article, they should have a rough idea regarding the major achievements of the reviewed field, the main areas of debate, and the outstanding research inquiries. Certainly, to achieve this, the review articles should discuss in detail and systematically the significant methods and/or findings of a reported work so that the readers can reproduce them without having to refer to the corresponding original articles.

Collect the Feedback

To improve the quality of a review draft, incorporating feedback from reviewers is essential, as it plays a crucial role in creating a high-quality article. Seeking input from scholars with diverse viewpoints ensures a more comprehensive evaluation, allowing for fresh perspectives that the original authors may overlook. Different experts can highlight various aspects of the work, revealing inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and ambiguities that the writers may not have noticed. For example, one reviewer might identify unclear arguments or weak evidence, prompting the authors to clarify their points or strengthen their analysis, while another might suggest additional literature that could enrich the review. Engaging with feedback not only strengthens the content but also enhances the overall credibility of the article, as it demonstrates a commitment to scholarly rigor and integrity. Eventually, taking the time to thoughtfully consider and integrate constructive criticism leads to a more polished and effective review, better serving its intended audience and advancing knowledge within the field (Hati & Bhattacharyya, 2024).

Be Up to Date without Forgetting Older Studies

With the rapid pace of scientific paper publication, contemporary literature reviews must encompass not only the overarching trajectory and accomplishments within

a field but also remain updated with the latest studies. This is crucial to avoid becoming outdated before publication. Ideally, a literature review should refrain from identifying a significant research gap that has recently been addressed in a series of papers awaiting publication (Pautasso, 2013). Even if old, foundational research is important since it establishes key principles and theories that shape current understanding in a field. It provides historical context, helping researchers see how ideas have evolved. Older studies also serve as benchmarks, allowing new research to be measured against established knowledge. They can reveal understandings that remain relevant today and can inspire new approaches to long-standing problems. Overall, it reinforces the value of careful inquiry and helps guide future research.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING A CLEAR REVIEW ARTICLE

Writing poorly a review paper can reduce its value and even render it unimportant. The authors even admit to producing some bad writing of a review. What is actually bad writing in a review article? Bad writing constitutes typos or misspelled words, incorrect grammar, word processing diarrhea or too many words when a few would do, and disorganized presentation. Bad writing also includes diluting and confusing significant results by adding results that add little significance. Further, making biased or misleading acknowledgments and references to previous works by others is said to be bad writing, as it gets rid of such references. Simply put, bad writing does not clearly express why you did the work, what can or cannot be concluded from it, and why the conclusions are not significant (Mulvania, 2024, & Baer, 2008).

To improve the quality of writing a review article in practice, a crucial first step is to clearly understand your main message and objectives before writing down any sentences. This clarity will guide your thoughts and help ensure that your writing is focused and coherent. Additionally, developing the ability to recognize bad writing is essential, as it allows you to identify and eliminate unclear or ineffective passages as you create your work. For non-native English speakers, seeking out competent colleagues who can provide constructive criticism is vital, as their insights can help you refine your writing and enhance its clarity. Furthermore, a useful practice is to set your draft aside for a few days and then revisit it with fresh eyes. This break can often reveal dull prose and vague conclusions that might have gone unnoticed initially, allowing you to make necessary revisions that strengthen your arguments and improve overall readability. By combining these strategies—clarity of purpose, self-editing, peer feedback, and fresh perspectives—you can significantly elevate the quality of your review article (Kim et al., 2024, & MasterClass, 2022).

On the other side, good writing is clear thinking that contains specific information yet is relevant to the readers. In a review article, good writing

maintains plain language principles and is logically arranged which makes it easy to follow. Good writing is clear and concise, where it uses short sentences with simple words. For many people, good writing does not come naturally, which means it is a skill we necessity to learn. One of the ways to practice this skill is using plain language principles. Plain language is a clear language that is simple and direct but not simplistic or patronizing (Wright, 2023). Good writing is very important in drafting a review as it is easy to read and understand. However, to produce good writing for a review paper it is of great importance to understand the following principles.

Keep Sentences Short, Prefer the Simple to The Complex, and Prefer the Familiar Words

Despite being short, the length of sentences must vary so as not to bore the readers. It will be good if the average length of a sentence contains 15 to 20 words. The sentence length can be controlled by noticing the number of lines in each sentence. In short, always remember to vary the lengths of the sentences when drafting a manuscript but worry about those that run more than two lines (Laurinavichyute & Malsburg, 2024). Even if the use of simple words is preferred over complex ones, this does not mean the use of a complex form is prohibited. In scientific writing, both simple and complex forms are needed to compile a clear expression. At times, the complex forms may be best, so if the right words are the complex ones go ahead and use them. Nevertheless, if simple/shorter words do the job, then use them (Adizovna, 2023). The ten most common words (the, of, and, to, a, in, that, it, is, and I) are reported to make up 25% of all that is written and spoken in English. Meanwhile, 50, 1000, and 10000 words are often used to account for 50, 80, and 98%, respectively. Perhaps you can master a working vocabulary of 5000 words. However, to succeed in drafting high-quality scientific writing, you will be better able to get along with 30000 working vocabulary words. Indeed, this large vocabulary can be utilized to give clear and exact meaning to a sentence (Foran, 2002).

Avoid Unnecessary Words and Use Terms Your Reader Can Picture

Often, communication can be too wordy, repeating the same ideas without adding anything new. This happens without us even noticing, as unnecessary words can sneak into our writing. To make things clearer, it is important to organize the information and focus on the core points. This means removing extra words and details that do not help the message. By doing this, writers can express their ideas more clearly and keep the reader's attention. Overall, refining the content helps ensure that the message is direct and easy to understand (Laurinavichyute & Malsburg, 2024). To write clearly, it is best to avoid vague words like conditions, situations, facilities, inadequacies, etc. These words can confuse readers because they do not say exactly what you mean. Instead, use specific terms that clearly

describe your ideas. For example, instead of facilities, say labs or classrooms, and instead of conditions, use economic conditions or weather conditions. Being specific helps readers understand your message better and makes your writing stronger (Herbst et al., 2024).

Tie in With Your Reader's Experience

Many writings fail because writers overlook the reader's beliefs, such as ignoring how they came by them and how firmly they hold them. One thing to note is that words are not fixed, which means they vary in meaning from person to person depending on the person's experience and the pictures the words call to mind. In persuading the readers to accept your words, note that the meaning they give them will be determined entirely by their experience and purposes. It is useful for thinking when highly abstract terminologies are used in writing. Nonetheless, they are tricky in communication since open to such wide interpretation. For your words to be read, understood, and accepted, you must have a clear understanding of your goal and the reader's purpose. In writing, you should not get lost in the detail. It is not enough to write so you will be comprehended. Thus, you must write so you cannot be misconstrued (Foran, 2002).

Make Full Use of Variety

Your writing style will improve as you gain more experience. Good writers vary their sentence lengths, structures, and vocabulary to keep readers engaged and avoid sounding choppy or childish. Mixing short and long sentences helps maintain interest while using different sentence structures allows for clearer expression of ideas. A diverse vocabulary is important, too, as it helps convey thoughts more precisely. Instead of sticking to the same familiar words, trying out synonyms and more descriptive language can add depth to your writing. Achieving this kind of variety takes practice and a willingness to try new techniques. As you write more, you'll become more aware of how your choices affect the flow of your work. Reading widely can also inspire you by exposing you to different styles. The more you practice varying your writing, the more polished and sophisticated it will become (Varsha et al., 2024).

Write To Express, Not to Impress

Many inexperienced writers focus on trying to impress their readers instead of expressing their true thoughts and feelings. This desire to sound sophisticated can lead them to mimic others, which prevents them from finding their voice. Instead of sharing genuine ideas, they often use long, complicated words and meandering sentences, thinking that this makes their writing better. However, this approach can make writing more difficult and confusing for both the writer and the reader. While writing is always a challenge, it is more effective to object for clarity and authenticity. By keeping things simple and focusing on honest expression, writers

can connect more deeply with their audience and let their true ideas shine through. The goal should be to communicate clearly and effectively, rather than just to impress (Foran, 2002).

Fog Indexes

The Fog Index is a valuable tool for assessing the clarity of writing, as it quantifies the complexity of a text and offers insight into the reading or educational level needed to understand a particular passage. By analyzing factors such as average sentence length and the frequency of complex words, the Fog Index helps writers gauge how accessible their work is to different audiences. However, it is important to use this tool judiciously; relying too heavily on the Fog Index can lead to overly simplistic writing, resulting in short, choppy sentences that may lack depth and nuance. Instead of fixating on achieving a specific Fog Index score, writers should focus on honing their skills through learning and practice. By developing a strong grasp of language and style, they can produce clear, engaging, and sophisticated writing that effectively communicates their ideas without sacrificing quality for the sake of meeting readability metrics (Raja & Lodhi, 2024).

STRUCTURE OF REVIEW ARTICLE

Once the review's scientific content has been determined, it is time to define the structure of the article. In the process of writing, the created outline will likely be refined with additional subheadings as details are incorporated on the topic, but it is a good idea to have a broad framework to work with from the start (Dhillon, 2022). Typically, a well-designed review consists of an overall introduction to the topic, a key section discussing in-depth core topics, and a concluding part summarizing the take-home messages from the article and important perspectives for the future (Post et al., 2020). According to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), a review article should at least have the following (Gülpınar & Güçlü, 2013, Ondezy, 2024, & Dhillon, 2022).

Title

The title of the article plays a crucial role in effectively communicating the topic of the review, as it should summarize the essence of the article's content succinctly. Each word in the title is carefully chosen to convey maximum information and enhance the article's visibility in internet search engines, thus achieving optimal findability. In addition, while the title should aim to be as concise as possible, it must also inform readers of the major ideas discussed within the piece.

Abstract

Following the title, the abstract serves as a summary of both published and unpublished works, highlighting the major points made in the body of the scientific work. It typically provides a concise overview of the review's purpose, which may include the research question or rationale, the primary studies analyzed, and the resultant conclusions drawn from those analyses. The abstract is generally written last and is usually about a paragraph long, intentionally crafted without references to allow for a clear and focused summary.

Introduction

The introduction is designed to present the ideas that the authors will elaborate on in the paper's body. It should clearly outline the main objectives and significance of the article, setting the stage for what is to come. Generally, the introduction of a review article should include several key components: it must define the topic and provide an appropriate context for discussing the literature, establish the reasons or point of view that underpins the review, engage with the relevant literature, explain the organization of the paper, and state the scope of the review, clarifying what will and will not be included in the text.

Main content

This section is where the authors outline the background for their ideas and begin to synthesize the information gleaned from the articles they have read, to construct a coherent narrative. Specific headings can be utilized for each paragraph to facilitate a clear and easy-to-read format. Once the headings are established, topic sentences should be placed accordingly, ensuring that every paragraph contains clear, well-thought-out points that include only the necessary information to support that argument, followed by a conclusion that ties the ideas together. Also, it may be essential to incorporate a paragraph addressing the limitations of the studies reviewed, as well as another discussing the strengths and limitations of the review method employed.

Conclusion

The conclusion serves as the final piece of writing, summarizing the key supporting ideas discussed throughout the study and offering a final impression of the central idea. This section has to clearly state the major conclusions derived from the study and may also provide implications for future research, identifying gaps that need to be addressed.

Acknowledgment

The acknowledgment section helps to identify contributors who played a significant role in the work, including both authors and non-authors, such as supervisors and colleagues. It should also recognize any funding sources or

agencies, along with relevant grant numbers, if applicable. Lastly, the references must adhere to the standard format outlined by the journal to which the authors intend to submit their work, confirming proper attribution and allowing readers to locate the sources cited in the article.

WHERE TO PUBLISH?

Some journals may not accept literature reviews since they favor primary/empirical studies. However, on the other hand, many journals prefer to accept review articles taking into account that such articles attract much more citations than empirical studies, especially those which are on different levels. Usually, the more rigorous and structured a review article is, the more likely it is to be accepted. The best strategy to narrow down journals to publish review articles is to find your target journals and then search the scope of the journal which often identifies what type of submission they prefer. Also, it is important to look at recent copies to see whether they have published review articles. To obtain the potential journals that you can explore further, journal-suggesting tools like Edanz Journal Selector, Elsevier Journal Matcher, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Publication Recommender, Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE), Journal Rater from PhD Voice, Scholarly Publishing Information Hub (SPI-Hub) from Vanderbilt, Springer Nature Journal Suggester, Wiley Journal Finder, etc. can be used to receive the list.

CONCLUSION

In summary, reviews are objective efforts to study the state of the art on a certain topic and its impacts. A review article should explain why it is necessary to do so, introduce the references cited, and convey expert perspectives/opinions on the evidence accomplished in a structured format. The key stages during the writing of a review paper include viewing the subject from a large perspective, studying the research article literature methodologically and critically, and elaborating on the data in a fascinating manner.

While various types of article reviews exist, the present study offers a broad overview of writing an article review, specifically tailored to assist novice researchers. However, due to the limited scope of this guide, it is always necessary to look into other related works to gain a broader understanding.

Writing a review paper necessitates significant planning and research to draft, improve, and ultimately refine the final product/manuscript draft. Also, it demands a significant investment of time and endeavor, especially to produce a high-quality review. But such labor is well worth it since you will be satisfied knowing that your insights and/or perspective on a research topic have shaped and impacted thousands of readers globally.

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