

Kornieva, Z., Lukianenko V., Baklazhenko Y. (2024). Enhancing Manuscript Quality: Common Mistakes and Best Practices for Educational Research Papers. *Advanced Education*, 24, 4-11.
DOI: 10.20535/2410-8286.309550

ENHANCING MANUSCRIPT QUALITY: COMMON MISTAKES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PAPERS

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Abstract. *This editorial offers a comprehensive guide for researchers planning to publish in high-impact education journals. It identifies common pitfalls in manuscript submissions and provides practical recommendations to overcome them. The paper emphasizes the importance of aligning with a journal's aims and scope, adhering to submission guidelines, and effectively structuring the manuscript using the IMRAD model. It also addresses weaknesses in various manuscript sections and underlines the significance of citing up-to-date sources, detailed methodological descriptions, ethical considerations, and a logical flow between sections. It concludes that respectful communication in response letters to reviewers significantly impacts the publication decision. Additionally, it offers valuable strategies to improve publication success in high-impact education journals.*

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Keywords: *academic publishing, educational research journals, manuscript submission, peer review, research methodology, publication strategies.*

ПІДВИЩЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ РУКОПИСІВ: ТИПОВІ ПОМИЛКИ ТА КРАЩІ ПРАКТИКИ НАПИСАННЯ СТАТЕЙ З ПЕДАГОГІЧНИХ НАУК

Анотація. *Редакційна стаття пропонує практичні поради для дослідників, які планують публікуватися у високорейтингових педагогічних журналах. Визначено типові помилки при поданні рукописів та надано рекомендації щодо їх усунення. Підкреслюється важливість узгодження теми дослідження з цілями та проблематикою журналу, дотримання правил форматування та ефективного структурування рукопису згідно моделі IMRAD. Також розглядаються типові недоліки різних розділів рукопису та підкреслюється важливість цитування сучасних джерел, детального опису методології дослідження таким чином, щоб воно було відтворюваним, етики наукових досліджень та логічних переходів від одного розділу до іншого. Шанобливе спілкування з рецензентами та дотримання їх рекомендацій суттєво впливає на рішення щодо публікації. Дотримання запропонованих стратегій сприятиме підвищенню успішності публікацій у високорейтингових журналах з педагогічних наук.*

Ключові слова: *наукова публікація, журнали з педагогічних наук, подання рукопису, рецензування, методологія дослідження, публікаційні стратегії.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers, educators, and academic professionals aim to have their work published in high-impact education journals, which provide a platform for disseminating innovative research, influencing educational practices, and advancing academic careers. However, the process of getting published in reputable journals is challenging due to strict editorial standards, rigorous peer-review processes, and high competition among submissions. This editorial aims to highlight problematic issues and common mistakes observed in manuscripts submitted to the Advanced Education journal over the last two years and provide a comprehensive guide to addressing these barriers. We hope that this paper will assist researchers in overcoming the challenges of academic publishing and increasing their chances of acceptance in prestigious journals in the field of education.

To be published in reputable educational journals, researchers must demonstrate creativity, clear methodology, coherent writing, constructive engagement with peer review feedback, and rigorous adherence to journal criteria. As highlighted by Lodge et al. (2024), authors are expected to show how their study contributes to the advancement of current knowledge and fills important gaps in the existing literature. Insufficient detail in the methodology section often leads to difficulties in assessing the validity and reproducibility of the research.

Au (2017) offers guidelines to improve publication chances, including strong research justifications, concise and clear results, and meaningful conclusions. Additionally, the author

proposes five key criteria that must be addressed: originality of the hypothesis, innovative aims, up-to-date techniques, clear results, and significant conclusions. The title and abstract also play crucial roles in attracting initial interest and summarizing the paper effectively, thereby influencing reviewers' and readers' perceptions and decisions.

Busse and August (2020) provide researchers with a detailed guide to structuring and writing each section of a scientific paper. The article outlines the importance of selecting a target journal early, discusses the roles and responsibilities of authors, and offers detailed advice on writing the introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections. It also highlights common pitfalls and offers strategies for avoiding them, with the aim of improving the quality and clarity of research manuscripts for successful publication.

Hunt et al. (2019) argue that to enhance the chances of acceptance, it is crucial to present ideas clearly and effectively respond to reviewers' feedback. The response letter should be professional, organized, and objective, addressing each reviewer's comment with precise and evidence-backed replies. It's important to clearly explain the changes made to the manuscript in response to reviewers' critiques. The authors offer ten key points to help authors effectively respond to reviewers, emphasizing the importance of clear, concise, and persuasive communication. Providing appropriate counterarguments and knowing when to disagree with a reviewer are also discussed as essential components of the response process.

This editorial will address crucial topics, including aligning with the journal's aims and scope, adhering to submission guidelines, and effectively structuring the manuscript. Additionally, we will discuss responding to reviewers' comments. Given the acceptance rate of no more than 25% in the *Advanced Education* journal, our goal is to provide researchers with practical advice and strategies to improve their chances of publication in high-impact education journals.

2. ALIGNMENT WITH THE JOURNAL'S SCOPE AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

It might sound surprising, but approximately one-third of all submissions to *Advanced Education* are desk-rejected because they either fall outside the journal's focus and scope or fail to adhere to basic journal guidelines and standards. To increase the chances of publication in high-impact education journals, it is important for researchers to strictly follow the instructions for authors. We are interested in publishing research that offers innovative approaches and practical solutions to contemporary issues in higher education, particularly focusing on language teaching and educational technologies. Manuscripts should be relevant to these areas, demonstrating how their findings can address current educational challenges. Additionally, following the journal's formatting and citation guidelines (APA style) and submission steps are essential.

The *Advanced Education Journal* provides clear guidelines on manuscript structure (IMRAD) and the content required for each section (see <https://ae.fl.kpi.ua/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>). However, many submitted manuscripts do not meet these basic requirements. Table 1 summarizes weak points in authors' manuscripts and gives recommendations for authors to overcome them.

Table 1. Common weaknesses and suggestions for the improvement of research papers

Pitfall	Recommendation
Introduction	
Overly broad scope	Define a specific scope to ensure the introduction is focused and relevant
Poor organization and flow	Organize the introduction logically, progressing from general background to specific research questions
Overloading with professional jargon and abbreviations	Use clear and concise language to ensure readability
Inappropriate citations	Use appropriate and up-to-date citations to support claims
Lack of clear research questions or hypotheses	Clearly define research questions or hypotheses to guide the study
Aim is too vague	Clearly define the aim of the study
Ignoring the study's contributions	Highlight how the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and addresses gaps in the literature
Methods	
Ambiguous presentation	Follow a proposed structure for the methods section, provide detailed and precise descriptions of all procedures and techniques used
Research design not stated	Specify the type of research design you used (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, mixed), why it was chosen and how it aligns with research objectives
Procedure is unclear	Outline each step of the procedure in chronological order, Include details on how the study was conducted
Research not replicable	Provide enough information to allow for reproducibility and detailed descriptions of data collection tools
No justification for methods/sample	Clearly justify the methods and sample used in the study, which ensures the validity and relevance of your research
Sole reliance on self-reported satisfaction	Use additional measures to assess effectiveness, such as actual learning outcomes
No ethical issues	Ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical treatment of participants
Results	
Lack of coherency	Present results in a clear and coherent manner, ensure results address the research questions
Only percentages are presented, and no statistics	Use appropriate statistical analyses and report them
Text repeats data from tables	Avoid redundancy between text and tables; summarize tables in text
Overuse of tables and figures	Use tables and figures reasonably and ensure they add value to the research
References to literature in the results section	Generally, avoid referencing literature in the results section; focus solely on presenting the data and findings

Discussion	
Looks like a literature review	Focus on interpreting results and comparing them to existing research
Contains new information	The discussion should only explain the results; avoid adding new facts or data
Repeats detailed results	Summarize and interpret results, avoid repetition
No implications and recommendations	Discuss the broader impact of the findings on practice, policy, or future research and provide practical suggestions or guidelines based on the study's outcomes
No limitations	Acknowledge and discuss any limitations to the study to guide accurate interpretation of the results
Conclusions	
Do not reflect findings	Ensure that the study's results directly support the conclusions drawn
Repeat results	Highlight the importance and implications of the research rather than repeating the results
Overgeneralize results	Avoid making broad claims that extend beyond the data collected and analyzed
No suggestions for future research	Highlight specific areas where further research is needed based on the study's findings and limitations

The **introduction** sets the stage for your research. It should provide a clear background, establish the context, and identify the research gap your study addresses. The authors should explain clearly why their research is important and how it fits into the existing body of knowledge. The properly formulated research gap highlights the novelty and importance of your study. A research paper submitted to a reputable journal may be rejected because authors fail to show the 'niche' in reviewing previous relevant studies to justify their research. The most common strategy for identifying research gaps in applied linguistics journal articles, according to Arsyad and Zainil (2023), is to claim insufficient research on a specific aspect and highlight contradictory findings in previous studies.

The literature review should analyze the most recent sources in the field to ensure that the research is informed by the latest developments and trends. Contemporary sources reflect recent advancements, which is crucial for understanding the current state of knowledge and identifying emerging research gaps. According to author guidelines of our journal, it is recommended that the majority of cited sources come from reputable Scopus or Web of Science (WoS) indexed journals published within the last five years. This approach not only guarantees the relevance and quality of the sources but also ensures that the research is grounded in up-to-date information. Citing recent and reputable sources provides a more accurate and relevant analysis of the existing literature, thereby strengthening the overall validity and impact of the research.

The **methods** section should provide a detailed and replicable description of the research to provide context for readers to understand and interpret the results. A logical structure is essential, typically including study design, participants, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. Procedures need to be specific and detailed to ensure

replicability by other researchers. Clearly stating the tools and software used for data analysis enhances transparency and reproducibility.

Outdated methods and inappropriate use of scales also undermine the reliability of findings. Additionally, self-reported satisfaction with technologies should not be the sole measure of effectiveness, as it doesn't necessarily reflect learning outcomes. Both quantitative and qualitative methods need to align with current best practices, and results must be reported accurately to maintain credibility and trustworthiness in the research (Lodge et al., 2024).

The importance of ethical issues in educational research cannot be overstated since they are crucial for maintaining the study's integrity and credibility while also protecting the rights and well-being of the participants. Informed consent is a fundamental aspect, requiring researchers to provide clear, comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits (Abed, 2015). This allows participants to make voluntary and informed decisions about their involvement. Strict measures must be taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity to protect the identities and personal information of participants.

The **results** section highlights the associations found in the study rather than focusing solely on statistical tests (Busse & August, 2020). It directly addresses each aspect of the research question and clearly explains the analysis and variables for each result. This section presents the study findings without interpretation and is designed to be clear and concise. Visuals are crafted to be easy to understand and accurately reflect the findings. Every table and figure complements the text by conveying a clear message without restating it, providing all essential information so the reader can grasp the conclusions without referring back to the text. The title, legend, or footnote includes specific details on tests, comparisons, and information about the study's sample and timing. Since figures often have more visual appeal than tables, creating a figure when possible is recommended.

The **discussion** section interprets the results, compares them to previous research, and explains their implications. It should not repeat the literature review but interpret results in the context of existing research and highlight similarities and differences to contextualize your findings. Authors should provide a thorough analysis of what their results mean and discuss how they support or challenge existing theories and findings.

It is essential to include implications, recommendations, and limitations in the discussion section for several reasons. Implications offer a deeper understanding of the wider consequences of the research findings, demonstrating how the results can shape practical applications, policies, or future research. Recommendations provide practical suggestions or guidelines based on the study's results, contributing to their future implementation. Recognizing and discussing limitations helps readers appropriately evaluate the results and suggest areas that require additional investigation. In combination, these elements enrich the discussion, making it more comprehensive and informative and supporting a deeper understanding of the study's significance and applicability.

Linking the methods, results, and discussion sections to the research questions and organizing them appropriately is essential for maintaining the coherence and clarity of a research study. The methods section should detail the procedures and techniques used to address the research questions, ensuring that the approach is transparent and replicable.

The results section must present findings that directly answer these questions, providing concrete evidence and data. This logical flow ensures that the study remains focused, facilitates readers' understanding, and enhances the overall impact and validity of the research.

In drawing **conclusions**, it is important that they accurately reflect the study's findings and are directly supported by the results obtained. Conclusions should emphasize the significance and implications of the research rather than merely repeating the results. Overgeneralization of findings should be avoided to prevent making claims that extend beyond the data collected and analyzed. Additionally, suggesting areas for future research is crucial, as it identifies specific opportunities for further investigation based on the study's findings and limitations. This approach ensures that the conclusions are meaningful, focused, and valuable for advancing the field.

3. RESPONDING TO THE REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

The peer review process is a crucial part of the publication process in the *Advanced Education* journal. The journal employs a double-blind peer review process, meaning the identities of both reviewers and authors remain confidential. Authors should not expect a quick review process, as it requires time to find suitable reviewers, evaluate the manuscript, and prepare comprehensive feedback for the authors. Reviewers evaluate manuscripts on a voluntary basis. Upon receiving feedback, authors are expected to revise their manuscripts in accordance with the reviewers' recommendations, responding to all comments in a thorough and respectful manner.

When responding to reviewers, authors should clearly explain the changes made and provide polite, well-supported justifications for any suggestions they choose not to implement. Disagreements with reviewers should be approached respectfully, with relevant references provided to support the authors' position. If applicable, additional unpublished data can be included to strengthen the manuscript's findings (Hunt et al., 2019). It is essential to highlight all changes made, recognizing that reviewers have limited time and should not be required to reread the same text multiple times. Prompt submission of the revised manuscript is recommended, ideally within a few weeks. Delayed revisions can postpone the publication process, potentially leading to a loss of momentum and a negative perception of the author's commitment to addressing the feedback provided.

Responding to all comments is essential, and constructive feedback should be seen as a chance to improve work. The response letter often serves as the main document read after the initial review, so it must be thorough and well-written. Maintaining a balanced tone, including supporting information, and ensuring the text is written in proper English are vital steps (Hunt et al, 2019). The article may still be rejected if the reviewers' comments have not been adequately addressed or proper justification for not implementing certain suggestions has not been provided. The thoroughness and respectfulness of the response play a significant role in the final decision regarding the manuscript.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Successful publishing in high-impact education journals requires researchers to adopt a strategic approach centered on manuscript quality, adherence to submission guidelines, and constructive engagement with the peer review process. A significant number of submissions are desk-rejected because they either fall outside the journal's focus or fail to follow instructions for authors. This editorial outlines the prevalent challenges and common pitfalls that authors encounter, providing a roadmap for improving manuscript structure, aligning with journal standards, and addressing reviewers' feedback. Key recommendations include clarity and conciseness in material organization, up-to-date content, replicable methodologies, and thoroughly addressing all review comments in a respectful and justified manner. By adopting these practices, researchers can significantly enhance their chances of successful publication, contributing to advancements in the field of education.

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