

How Authors Really Frame a Top Manuscript

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ABSTRACT

Even when the research is completed successfully, the authors' job is not done. They must craft the best possible manuscript for submission to a targeted journal, which will put the research into the best possible light and enhance the likelihood of eventual acceptance. This is the process of framing the manuscript, and for this editorial we sought the thoughts and opinions of experienced academic colleagues on how authors should optimally frame manuscripts for journal submission. Each contributor was asked to provide three to five pieces of advice for young scholars on this topic. Our objective is to provide some non-obvious recommendations to young scholars that would substantially improve the manuscript from the reviewers' viewpoint. Our contributors present guidance on framing each section of the typical academic manuscript, from introduction to conclusion, as well as some suggestions for overall improvement. We conclude with summary remarks on the importance of putting in the time and effort to frame the manuscript effectively.

Keywords: Academic writing; review process; framing of manuscript; reviewers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an earlier editorial (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020c), we invited several colleagues to reflect on the reviewing process, and to discuss what they looked for when judging manuscripts under review. Our collaborators provided enlightening comments on the

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importance of writing style, presentation, avoiding mistakes, and responding to reviewer comments thoroughly. For this editorial, we invited a different team of experienced academic researchers to address a related, but different question: what specific advice would they give to authors in order to best frame their manuscript, that is, put the manuscript into the best possible light and increase its chance of acceptance?

To prepare this editorial we asked colleagues who are experienced authors to provide some thoughts and insights on how authors should frame manuscripts for top academic journals. We asked for three to five pieces of advice for young scholars on this topic. Our goal with this editorial is to provide some non-obvious recommendations to young scholars. Accordingly, we encouraged our contributors to think beyond the familiar, such as “write a really strong research question,” and to provide insights gained from experience that would substantially improve the manuscript from the reviewers’ viewpoint. For example, contributors could submit a few comments on what an author could do to nail the literature review, to write a convincing methodology section, to present coherent findings, to express a clear theoretical or conceptual contribution, or to write managerial implications or avenues for future research that do not sound like a superficial afterthought. Although a few lines for each piece of advice would be sufficient, we did ask that contributors could share a short story or two to illustrate their points.

The remaining parts of this editorial are organized as follows. We first present our contributors’ insights on the sections of a standard research manuscript, from introduction to conclusion and managerial implications. We then present some overall comments regarding manuscript length, use of visualizations, and management of the revision process. We conclude with a summary statement and overall thoughts on manuscript framing.

2. INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH FOCUS, AND CONTRIBUTION

2.1. Issues of Scope or Focus

John Nicholson reminds us of the importance of good fit with the target journal’s aims and scope. This is important when a manuscript has been rejected from Journal A and the author seeks to submit it to Journal B. We have discussed the risks of submitting a recently rejected manuscript without taking thoughtful reviewer comments into account (LaPlaca, Lindgreen, and Vanhamme, 2018; LaPlaca, Lindgreen, Vanhamme, and Di Benedetto, 2018). Nicholson notes another danger: the aims and scope of Journal B may not line up with those of Journal A, and the author fails to take advantage of an opportunity to show how the article is potentially a good contribution:

Too often, I see a manuscript that has clearly been round the houses of other journals and re-submitted to *Industrial Marketing Management* without modification. For instance, I have seen several manuscripts that clearly have been written for international business journals and then come [next] to *Industrial Marketing Management* for default. An author must build on a criticism and not just re-submit a manuscript. Many good, indeed classic manuscripts have been rejected multiple times before acceptance, but the key is to make the manuscript fit for the audience, that is, the readership of the journal. Accordingly, there must be reference to articles in the journal, or at least a strong case must be made why a previously unrecognized topic should be of interest to the readers of the journal. Using the same argument as used in previously rejected submissions is insufficient. (Nicholson)

Incidentally, an important takeaway from Nicholson is the reminder that many good articles may have been rejected more than once before eventual acceptance (and every top author has been rejected multiple times!). One must keep in mind that there is no shame in rejection, stay positive, and be sure to refocus the manuscript correctly to Journal B (its aims and scope are most certainly on the journal's webpage).

To properly frame the introduction section, a succinct statement of research objective is just as important as a clear focus. Too often, editors see manuscripts with an unfocused statement of research objective/question, or no research objective/question at all. Rob Morgan reminds us of the importance of a clear, short research objective statement. If one cannot summarize it briefly, it is possible that it is not sufficiently well thought out yet!

As Nietzsche famously claimed: "It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book." Equally, Felelon asserted that "the more you say, the less people remember. The fewer the words, the greater the profit." Rehearse your manuscript in elevator pitch. A measure for this is: can you summarize your manuscript in 35 words? If you cannot, you should! Practice this, reduce and identify the core of your work. You can then dress the manuscript. When you *find the focus*, the reader *gets in focus*. (Morgan)

Additionally, we have previously discussed the need to avoid the "so-what" reaction by reviewers (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020c). But how can the author frame the introduction to create the opposite reaction—to get the reviewer (and reader) not just to keep reading, but to find it impossible to put the manuscript down? Luigi De Luca details a successful illustrative example that accomplishes just this, and provides inspiration for how to write a riveting introduction:

Editors and reviewers constantly remind us about the importance of the introduction. Within this advice, I believe the very first page of your manuscript is particularly important. A stunning example of this is Harari's (2014) *Sapiens*' first page:

About 13.5 billion year ago, matter, energy, time and space came into being in what is known as the Big Bang. The story of these fundamental features of our universe is called physics.

About 300,000 years after their appearance, matter and energy started to coalesce into complex structures, called atoms, which then combined into molecules. The story of atoms, molecules and their interactions is called chemistry.

About 3.8 billion years ago, on a planet called Earth, certain molecules combined to form particularly large and intricate structures called organisms. The story of organisms is called biology.

About 70,000 years ago, organisms belonging to the species *Homo sapiens* started to form even more elaborate structures and cultures. The subsequent development of these human cultures is called history.

Three important revolutions shaped the course of history: the Cognitive Revolution kick-started history about 70,000 years ago. The Agricultural Revolution sped it up about 12,000 years ago. The Scientific Revolution, which got under way only 500 years ago, may well end history and start something completely different. This book tells the story of how these three revolutions have affected humans and their fellow organisms.

When I first read this page, I had a ‘wow moment’ only one minute into a book that at first looked a bit heavy and uninviting. I re-read this first page a few times. Out of curiosity, I typed it in Word, Times New Roman 12, doubled spaced, and it came out just over half a page. In under 200 words, this introduction brings the history of the universe into the text, and positions the text into the history of the universe. It summarizes and connects vast scientific domains (physics, chemistry, biology, history), using a simple language and consistent style. It goes straight to the point of what the book is about and is able to engage both the subject expert and the layperson. Finally, it is self-contained within the first page, which makes the overall effect even more powerful.

When crafting an introduction, I look out for examples like this. By the end of the first page, I try to achieve the following objectives: to introduce the research problem from a real-world perspective, using examples and quotes; to summarize what we know already from previous research; to state clearly what the manuscript is about, and why this is relevant. I try to keep the language simple and non-technical, using short sentences, and 3-4 well-balanced paragraphs. The aim is to make the reader/reviewer keen to turn the page and read on. I try to end the first page with a full-stop, making it self-contained. This is very important; a single line spilling over to the next page will dilute the effect. On page two, I introduce key concepts and describe the research design. Then, page three of the introduction is for describing the manuscript’s contributions and why they matter. When possible, I try to keep the introduction to three pages, following the structure described above. (De Luca)

2.2. Judicious Use of Prolepsis

The author has other considerations when writing the introduction. Rob Morgan suggests the use of a writing style that reminds us of news style or journalistic style: the lead paragraph has the most important news, and subsequent paragraphs present additional news in declining importance. Morgan stresses the need to use prolepsis (start with the ending, then describe how

you got there) to create interest early, for a very practical reason: readers of academic articles are not likely to read linearly:

A manuscript needs to create a drumbeat immediately. It should tee up an expectation early, and to build anticipation and eagerness for the reader to read on. Script writers often refer to this as *prolepsis*, which is a framed story where the narrative begins with a flash forward to the ending and then continues with a flashback. In this way, the manuscript gives away its conclusions, but the article is read so as to allow the reader to navigate the entire story. This creates a lock-in effect for the reader, which also allows a line of sight or critical path through the argumentation, method, and discussion such that the reader is able to understand the destination. Some commentators might consider this a spoiler that takes away the surprise for the reader, but this makes one erroneous assumption: that all readers make it to the end of the article. This is frequently not how an article is initially consumed by the reader. (Morgan)

Morgan also presents a useful checklist for authors to help their readers navigate their article. Some of these points pertain directly to good writing style in the introduction, while others will be fulfilled in later sections of the manuscript:

Does the manuscript satisfy the five Cs of ‘first-pass’ reading? For further consideration of how the readers consume an article, read the approach established by Keshav (2007) in an unpublished commentary on “How to Read a Paper.” In the first pass, the reader is seeking five issues that need to be addressed by you. Does the manuscript describe: (i) “category—what type of paper is this?; (ii) context—e.g., which other papers is it related to? which theoretical bases were used to analyze the problem?; (iii) correctness—e.g., do the assumptions appear to be valid?; (iv) contributions—what are the paper’s main contributions?; and, (v) clarity—is the paper well written?” (Morgan)

2.3. Scientific Contributions

A good introduction must present the intended theoretical contribution to the reader succinctly. As John Nicholson and Ad de Jong point out, the common author’s claim to fill some gap in the academic literature may not be nearly enough to confirm a substantial contribution to theory. Both contributors suggest that a strong contribution may be in the application to practice, which too often is relegated to a couple of sentences in the concluding section:

The author(s) must convince the editor and reviewers that there is a scientific contribution by the end of their introduction section. Without such a stated contribution, the chances—in my view—are prejudiced in terms of having a manuscript desk rejected or returned as a reject or a major correction. Many authors under claim their contribution(s), predicating their contribution(s) on a single gap, where often there is more in the manuscript. Also, by reducing the contribution(s) simply to gap-spotting (neglect or confusion), authors miss the

chance to claim that they are making much bigger challenges to underlying assumptions in a whole body of work. Equally, from a quantitative perspective, that the possibility of replications of existing studies is shied away from and instead of celebrating this it is played down in favor of a claim for a much smaller contribution based on an insignificant area of neglect or confusion. Equally, there seems to be great reticence to predicate a contribution on a practical problem area. Instead, the contribution is in most cases lead from a theoretical weakness. Therefore, how can authors claim impact in what we do without stronger reference to practice? Instead, these contributions tend to be afterthoughts tagged on the end of the manuscript. (Nicholson)

Developing a manuscript for a top journal takes time. To deliver a substantive contribution to the extant marketing literature, it is essential to describe carefully the *status quo* and the research gap. However, this is not enough for a publication in a top journal in marketing. Especially in the field of marketing, the simple fact that the topic is a new concept, or a new framework that fills a gap in the existing body of literature, is in itself not sufficient as a contribution. Rather, this new concept or new framework should also pinpoint an urgent problem that marketing practitioners struggle with, or help understanding a novel phenomenon that is trending in marketing practice. In addition, as an author you should be able to make a strong case and validate this problem or phenomenon by giving some clear and convincing examples from marketing practice (de Jong)

Rob Morgan suggests a strategy for avoiding the too-familiar “seek to close this gap” type research objective, which has to do with where the research gap comes from in the first place:

You do not find a gap, you ‘create’ it: Lack of conceptual or empirical precedent does not constitute a gap. Finding a research gap is elusive. Authors should construct arguments around the: (i) importance of the topic for research, policy, and practitioner audiences for example; (ii) the deficits in prevailing insights and explanations; (iii) contributions that will be derived; (iv) novelty of the approach of your work; and, (v) consequences of potential findings. (Morgan)

It is also a good idea to show how the contribution builds on the existing literature stream. Ad de Jong notes the importance of doing this constructively, and to avoid being overly critical of previous research. There are two good reasons for this: few authors are not standing on the shoulders of previous researchers, and their contribution to the existing stream should thus be clear; and those previous researchers may be the reviewers assigned to the manuscript and may be less open to new ideas that are harshly critical of the work most familiar to them!

Do not step on reviewers’ toes! One nice way to deliver a top contribution is to enthusiastically introduce a new concept or method to the marketing literature. The key challenge then is how to present this new concept or method such that you as an author do not break down existing concepts and methods in the field. This is critical because the reviewers of your manuscript and who are knowledgeable about the topic probably are adepts of these existing concepts and methods. That means that these reviewers often have

more difficulty in digesting your critical view on ‘their’ existing concepts and methods and will be less open to accepting new ones. It is therefore of importance to carefully introducing the new concept or method by using compelling arguments and presenting a constructive view on the current ones. (de Jong)

In sum, the introduction should clearly show the importance of the manuscript to the reader, which is sometimes challenging. The manuscript may be important to its author; the author cannot forget to communicate this enthusiasm to the reader. Tobias Schäfers makes several good suggestions to ensure this task is done right.

Authors should use the manuscript’s introduction to demonstrate clearly why what they are investigating is relevant to both academia and managerial practice. For the former, a good way is to refer to existing literature reviews or quote the Limitations and Further Research sections of published articles. For the latter, using industry figures, such as those published by government agencies or by market research companies, can be useful. That way, authors can prevent that after reading the Introduction, the readers ask themselves the question: “why exactly are the authors investigating this topic?” Essentially, a good manuscript convinces the reader right at the beginning that the topic is important. (Schäfers)

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As we have noted in an earlier editorial (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020c), a strong literature review accomplishes several objectives: shows the author’s familiarity with the literature, supports the author’s conceptual model, and shows what is missing or under researched in the literature. Once the conceptual model is set up and the hypotheses are defined, the author can choose the most appropriate research design.

3.1. Literature Review

Heiner Evanschitzky provides some valuable guidance on how to frame a solid literature review, which would accomplish all the objectives stated above:

My main concern with literature reviews is that most of the time the manuscripts selected to form part of such a review seems arbitrary. In my opinion, an ideal literature review on empirical manuscripts would be a simple effect-size meta-analysis for the main relationship(s) under study. Such an analysis would convincingly show the current empirical knowledge of a certain relationship and as such demonstrate where further research might be needed. For both empirical and non-empirical manuscripts, another good option to craft a perfect literature review would be to do a bibliometric analysis to visualize trends and patterns in the relevant literature. In particular, such an analysis will uncover critical points in the development of and seminal contributions to a particular field of research. (Evanschitzky)

3.2. Research Design

Michael Mol notes that research design problems emerge in all kinds of research studies, both qualitative and quantitative, and can cause bigger problems at later stages of the manuscript. He identifies five important research design problems that frequently crop up:

I have increasingly found that problematic aspects of my own empirical research manuscripts, as well as of the manuscripts I get to review for a range of journals, or be an action editor on, suffer from what I would call problems in research design. I broadly understand research design as any empirical setup that is proposed in response to a theoretically inspired question. Research design is not the choice of theory as such or the strength of the theoretical logic. Neither is research design concerned with the (technical) quality of the empirical analysis. Thus, not all problems in research manuscripts are to do with research design. Nonetheless, in my experience probably a large number of serious problems are research design problems. Research design problems pop up in quantitative and qualitative work, and whether authors collect their own data or rely on secondary sources.

In decreasing order of importance, the top five research design problems are as follows: 1) *post hoc* theorizing, where hypotheses and the accompanying theory actually follow the results, but supposedly lead them; 2) endogeneity, with many manuscripts suffering from omitted variable bias or the possibility of reverse causality; 3) common method bias or variance, when data collection from a single source artificially inflates correlations; 4) relevance, when authors happen to have data that is employed to address an insignificant or even non-existent problem; and 5) overly descriptive work, which is most commonly found in qualitative manuscripts. (Mol)

Mol comments on the origins of research design problems, and why they are prevalent:

These are not new problems, of course, and articles and even entire books have been written to address each of them. There are also some good research methods books that address sets of research design problems. However, research design problems tend to perpetuate. Without wanting to dwell on the reasons in any great detail, they relate to the behaviors of teams of researchers themselves, but equally to pressures exerted by employers, funding bodies, journal editors, and respondents. Perhaps more interestingly, what can (junior) scholars do to try and overcome problems in research design? (Mol)

Mol also makes several recommendations on how one can frame the research design section to improve presentation. He urges care in the selection of research design to suit the specified research question, anticipation of possible problems associated with the selected research design, undertaking robustness checks to justify the choice of research design, and to present research design methodology with full disclosure:

A first step, taken at the beginning of projects, is to try and to answer the question: ‘what would a good study design look like for this research question?’ While this may sound

obvious, in reality, many research projects do not have a clear beginning and are developed on the fly. Projects can, for instance, start when a junior scholar with previously collected data contacts a senior scholar, who might have some theoretical notion he wishes to put to the test. There is no telling whether the data and theory can be fitted. Another issue is that most (teams of) authors do not sufficiently discuss their initial research design with colleagues. And internal agreement over a research design often simply does not equate to external agreement.

I would urge (junior) scholars to develop a checklist of potential research-design problems. Then, before the study takes place and prior to submitting an empirical manuscript, they should run through this list to check whether these problems have been tackled sufficiently. The exact items are to an extent context dependent because business marketing differs from consumer marketing or strategic management, and certainly are method dependent. Common method variance problems, for instance, typically do not arise when secondary data are used.

I find that as an author it is of paramount importance to try to continuously justify the steps that were taken in the research. This includes an answer to the question why the research was conducted in a certain way. However, it also involves thinking through and then reporting the answer to the question: ‘are there any reasonable alternatives for the choices that have been made?’ Too often, I find that authors still present their research design and the empirical results it produces as ‘the only possible answer’. In reality, there are always alternatives, and robustness checks can for instance bring those out.

It is really important to write up the research design in such a way that the reader can work out what was done. Some research methods sections feel more like an attempt at promoting the work than a description of what was actually done. Authors should never try to obfuscate problems that are there; in fact, good scientific practice is to share with the reader what problems exist, and how these have been tackled.

... I would argue that some of the key qualities (junior) scholars can put into their work is to be conscious (about what they are doing), conscientious (in terms of how they go about doing their research), and transparent (by sharing with their audience the good and the bad of their work). (Mol)

4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The choice of methodology and methods can also help frame the manuscript, in that a correct choice will support not only the theoretical contribution, but will also increase managerial relevance of the results. John Nicholson suggests that much is to be gained by reviewing articles in the extant literature, which have appeared in the target journal, to get an idea of how the phenomenon previously has been studied in the journal and to make a stronger case for how the manuscript will contribute to the dialogue. It is fine to import a new methodology, but one must not sacrifice managerial relevance in doing so. He positions this argument in terms of a tradeoff between rigor and relevance:

Methodologically, I often see references to core ideas outside of the journal, which I believe is absolutely fine, but then many authors do not look inside the journal to see who else has applied this methodology within the subject area. Accordingly, for each seminal methodological principle, add a few references to who has used it in the target journal, and

how that has been adapted, changed, etc. With quantitative articles, there tends to be a focus on methods over methodology. Put another way, discussion starts with statistical rigor, and the relevance can be overlooked. This requires more methodological discussion and an argument why such rigor is relevant to practice. Authors must address the disjoint between practitioners who largely are skeptical about what we do. (Nicholson)

Tobias Schäfers expands on this idea. He reminds us that, regardless of the methodology that is chosen, there must still be meaningful managerial implications. He suggests careful selection of mediators and moderators, particularly stressing that moderators are most valuable in a model if they are managerially controllable and therefore actionable. Lacking this quality may raise “so-what” concerns:

In empirical studies, I very much appreciate when authors not only describe a phenomenon and the main effects causing it, but also dig deeper. This means looking at underlying processes that explain an effect (i.e., mediators), as well as boundary conditions that explain whether an effect occurs (i.e., moderators). With regards to moderators, I prefer authors investigating variables that are within managerial control, as this increases the likelihood of generating actionable insights. For example, while it may be interesting to show that certain personality characteristics of a purchasing manager influence an outcome variable, such as sales success, it would be difficult to use these insights in managerial decision-making (send every purchasing manager a personality questionnaire before negotiations? Probably not a good idea). In contrast, if a study showed that the success of two sales tactics differs depending on the situation in which they are employed, companies could use these findings to change their own way of doing business. (Schäfers)

5. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

We arrive at the concluding section, and even here the author has an opportunity to frame correctly and improve the overall impression made by the manuscript. Earlier sections stressed the importance of the managerial contribution. Heiner Evanschitzky suggests that a strong conclusion, including theoretical contributions and managerial implications, might win over a reviewer and encourage a revise-and-resubmit decision. To boost managerial relevance, he also recommends reporting a simulation based on the quantitative results, showing the practitioner reader what outcomes would be expected due to changes in the independent variables:

To be honest, manuscripts are hardly ever rejected for a weak managerial implication section. However, I think having written a very strong case for the practical importance of the research might be a way to get a manuscript past the first round of reviews. Despite some weaknesses in other sections, if I as a reviewer can see how relevant findings are for practice, I am inclined to not reject a manuscript because my strong belief is that our research must be relevant outside of academia. The reason for that is that manuscripts typically are rejected for lack of contribution, and if I can see at least a strong implication for management

practice, I am willing to work with the authors to re-focus and tease out the overall contribution.

If you write a quantitative, empirical manuscript, a nice way to demonstrate the managerial relevance of the findings would be to do a simulation. What would happen if your independent variable(s) change(s) by one unit? What would be the consequence(s) for down-stream outcome variables? How important or relevant would those changes be? (Evanschitzky)

Tobias Schäfers expands on this idea, noting that the author more generally can discuss how the methods presented in the study can improve accuracy of results or minimize unforeseen outcomes:

When reading a manuscript, whether it is empirical or conceptual, I always ask myself what the impact of the findings could be. Ideally, a study should result in suggestions for how companies or researchers should go about in addressing a current challenge. For instance, a study may provide evidence that using a different analytical method provides more accurate results than a common marketing practice leads to unintended negative consequences, or that addressing customers differently will change their behavior. (Schäfers)

The final word on this topic goes to Luigi De Luca, who offers actionable advice on how to frame the discussion of managerial implications:

Managerial implications should not be an afterthought. They are a great opportunity to elevate your manuscript. A strategy I have used in recent manuscripts is to write managerial implications in 3-5 action-oriented paragraphs, each opened by a direct and normative statement for managers such as “Create a data-driven culture” or “Sync your data strategy with your industry digitalization”. When possible, I try to engage managers, as I am writing the manuscript, to generate and/or validate these statements, for example by presenting my findings at a company workshop or executive education session. Also, I try to make the managerial implications section reference-free, and to keep them within a single self-contained page. (De Luca)

Another part of the conclusion section that sometimes receives insufficient attention is the discussion of limitations. Editors occasionally see manuscripts that do not even acknowledge limitations of the study. Certainly, even the best designed and implemented study has some limitations that can be addressed in future studies! Michael Mol notes that the author can improve the framing of the conclusions by proactively offering a realistic statement of limitations, rather than waiting for reviewers to suggest limitations. Of course, if the manuscript is invited for resubmission, the reviewers will no doubt have added their concerns, and some of these will be added to the statement of limitations for the revised version:

I would advise authors to always include the limitations of their study and use those limitations wisely. There are still a significant number of manuscripts submitted for review to journals that do not contain a limitations section. Perhaps the thinking behind this is that the reviewers are supposed to bring out the limitations, and only then will the authors include a limitations section. That is neither reasonable, because authors know their study far better than reviewers, nor realistic, because it creates a pretence that a study does not suffer from limitations. (Mol)

6. ADDITIONAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

In this section, we note several other topics mentioned by the contributors that did not fall neatly into one of the previous sections.

6.1. Manuscript Length

Manuscript length is always an issue. Some journals have maximum numbers of words or pages, and editors will insist on authors revising to meet length standards. Reviewers will most likely comment on the contribution-to-length ratio of an unusually long manuscript, especially if it is about a rather minor, incremental topic. Rob Morgan suggests that authors might question whether all those pages are really necessary, and reframe the presentation to be more compact and efficient. In fact, business academics can take a lesson from the leading natural science journals, which highly value concise and succinct writing style:

Less is more (as alpha faculties, let us learn from science and the beta and gamma faculties): One of the leading global scholarly publications is *Science* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Their research articles are typically half of that in most marketing and management journals at a maximum of 4,500 words including references and figures etc. The length-to-contribution to ratio is therefore exceptional in *Science*. Equally, *Nature* published by Springer Nature has a similar length-to-contribution ratio and, as is often argued, they extol the virtues of concise, accurate, and succinct text is the key means to communicate complex scientific information. (Morgan)

As anyone who has edited a manuscript for length will attest, trimming 2,000 or 3,000 words from a manuscript is easier said than done. It is painstaking work. Entire sections cannot simply be cut out; rather, each word and sentence may need to be rethought. Luigi De Luca presents a very thoughtful guide on editing for length, and the realistic problems encountered:

Whether the length of a manuscript is limited by word count, or by the number of pages, I try to make the best use of each line of text. Once I have a full draft, I carefully edit any line of text taken by only one or few words, at the end of a paragraph. Often, replacing a long word (e.g., therefore) with a shorter one with the same meaning (e.g., so) works well; often though, this process leads to identifying and cutting redundant words or entire chunks of

text. More generally, every word should deserve its space in the manuscript. (It is always easier to apply this logic to someone else's writing than to one's own, so be ready for occasional 'disagreement' with your co-authors on whether adding or removing a word will change the destiny of the world!) Some words or sentences may not seem wrong or harmful *per se*, yet they are redundant. They do not add anything to the text, yet they may annoy reviewers as every word is a little 'tax' on their time. The aim is to say what you need to say with the least number of words. This is a forensic exercise, but can also be enjoyable.

Related to the previous point, I try to keep the text (excluding references) between 30 and 36 pages, and to divide it into three symmetrical sections of 10-12 pages: introduction, conceptual framework, and hypotheses; methods and results; and discussion, implications, and future research. This establishes a rhythm in the manuscript and keeps it to an acceptable length. Also, it is ideal to place each of the main subheadings (particularly conceptual framework, methods, and discussion) at the beginning of the page. (De Luca)

6.2. Visualizations

An important part of any manuscript is correct choice and design of tables and figures. While a picture may say a thousand words, too many tables and figures can be overwhelming, and poorly-designed ones become a barrier to effective communication. Thus, another opportunity for the author to improve framing is to carefully design tables and figures, which effectively convey meaning to the reader. Both Tobias Schäfers and Luigi De Luca offered insights on this topic:

Obviously, any visual cues are processed much more quickly than text. Therefore, figures and tables contribute to the readers' first impression and also set their expectations. Authors should therefore include meaningful visualizations such as a research model or graphs of the results, and also make sure that tables are self-explanatory and well-arranged. (Schäfers)

Figures, diagrams, and tables are very helpful to succinctly visualize the positioning of the manuscript, and to summarize the contributions compared to existing research. For example, Venn diagrams are often used to identify the intersections among different streams of literature and to evidence research gaps. Tables help summarizing the key literature by identifying important 'dimensions' to dissect existing contributions (each dimension would be a column in a table). Examples of these dimensions are key theories, methods, findings, the presence of mediators and moderators, the geographical context, main limitations, and what your study adds in these respects. Very often, reviewers ask authors to develop such figures and tables in the review process, so I why not including them in the first submission? Even when figures and tables do not appear in the manuscript, they are very helpful to guide the writing of the introduction and discussion narratives. (De Luca)

6.3. Revising as a Project Management Skill

Finally, there is the revision process itself. Once the revise-and-resubmit decision has been made, the author needs to work hard to keep the editor, and the reviewers, positive towards the manuscript (this topic has been discussed in depth in the editorial by LaPlaca, Lindgreen, Di

Benedetto, and Vanhamme, 2018). Ad de Jong suggests applying project management skills to the review process. As with any other kind of project team, the challenge should be well understood by all participants, the team's capabilities to tackle the project should be assessed, and others with complementary capabilities may be invited to be *ad hoc* or full team members. In a revise-and-resubmit situation, that means seeking out a colleague who may have the needed expertise to address the reviewers' comments, and possibly inviting this colleague on as a co-author (assuming this is allowed by the journal):

When preparing a manuscript for a top-marketing journal, the first aim is to get a revision. However, once you are lucky to get such a revision, it is not yet a done deal. You should realize that doing a proper job on the revision concerns an essential follow-up task, which is at least as tough as the preparation of the manuscript itself for the first submission. It takes two to tango! Once having obtained a revision, please ensure that your review team is strong enough to properly handle the revision process. It often is a matter of good project management. In some situations, the members of the author team lack the right inspiration and motivation and are tied up with too many other things. Then, the revision is no one's priority and doomed to fail. Hence, being driven and prioritizing the revision is the most important success factor. In addition, good management of revision processes also means ensuring that the author team contains enough knowledge to do a decent job on the revision. For instance, if you as an author think that you, or your co-authors lack certain expertise to adequately tackle some tough reviewer comments, you should not hesitate to contact and ask another scholar who has expertise to help out. It sometimes may even make sense to add this person as an additional co-author (note: remember to check with the editor that is allowed), assuming that his/her contribution is indispensable for increasing the likelihood of successfully completing the revision (de Jong)

7. CONCLUSIONS

This editorial addresses the issue of framing the manuscript. Just as an artist will painstakingly choose a frame to best display a work of art, authors need to consider how to best display their research contribution. As we have seen, each section of the manuscript can be framed for maximum impact, and the authors can undertake minor or even major improvements to each section before submitting the manuscript for review. Also, just as the frame sets off the painting, making it more attractive for the art gallery patrons, proper framing of the manuscript will increase its appeal to reviewers and editors, maybe in a subtle way. A concise statement of research objective that pulls the reader in, or a statement of managerial implications that shows the practical applications of the findings, might just be enough to win over the reviewers and result in an opportunity to revise and resubmit.

In a previous editorial (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020c), a team of collaborators provided their insights on what they specifically look for when reviewing a manuscript. That

editorial showed that reviewers may approach a manuscript from different directions, and prioritize different parts of a manuscript, but there is certainly agreement on what constitutes a good contribution to the literature stream. This editorial turned again to a team of collaborators, who responded to a similar question, but from the author's point of view. That is, when preparing the manuscript for submission, what kind of frame should be put on it? Based on the perspectives of the collaborators presented here, it is clear that reviewers do very much care about the choice of frame, it can make at least a minor difference in the reviewers' overall impression, and authors should not overlook this important task. It is hoped that the contributors' comments encourage prospective authors to consider the importance of framing their research to maximum effect.

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