



How to write an academic paper

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Aims of the course

Developing strong and novel theoretical contributions is a critical requirement for publishing in top academic journals. This module examines the key processes involved in theorising and publishing research, guiding doctoral students from the initial conceptualisation of ideas through to the submission and review of manuscripts. Drawing on a combination of exercises, practical assignments, and carefully selected readings, students will learn how to build rigorous theory, craft compelling arguments, and write papers that meet the standards of leading academic publications.

Learning outcomes and competences

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of what constitutes theory in the social sciences, including its core components and underlying logic.
- Apply reflective and critical skills to the process of writing for academic publication, including structuring arguments and communicating contributions effectively.
- Gain first-hand experience of the editorial review process by critically evaluating manuscripts from the perspective of both reviewers and editors.
- Theorise and write up data collected for doctoral research in a manner suitable for submission to peer-reviewed journals.

Assessment methods

The assignment has two elements, which should be submitted as a single document:

1. Introductory section (800 words)

Write an 800-word introduction based on the topic of your dissertation. The introduction should address the following:

- Why is this an important topic to investigate?
- How is this project situated in the academic literature?
- Is the research question clearly stated?

- How does this project contribute to theory in the topic domain?

2. Literature review section (1,600 words)

Write a 1,600-word literature review based on the topic of your dissertation. The literature review should address the following:

- Identification of core conversations and debates
- Links to the research question and to the introductory section
- Clear synthesis and critical assessment of selected literature
- Problematisation of core assumptions
- Development of an original theoretical position

Word counts for both parts exclude references.

Course contents

The course comprises 12 contact hours, organised into three sessions of four hours each. Session 1 focuses on the foundations of the theorising process. Session 2 examines how the introductory and literature review sections of a paper contribute to the theorising process. Session 3 discusses how to develop theoretical contributions and addresses the dynamics of the peer-review process. Each session is supported by required and further readings, as detailed below.

SESSIONS OUTLINE

1. Theorising

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This session examines the importance of theory and the process of theory building in management and organisation studies. Students will explore what constitutes a theoretical contribution, how constructs and relationships are defined and refined, and how theory can be developed through different epistemological lenses. Students will engage with a range of perspectives on what makes management research interesting, compelling, and publishable.

Suggested readings

- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. 2007. Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4): 1265-1281.
- Astley, W. G. (1985). Administrative science as socially constructed truth. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30(4), 497–513.
- Bacharach, S. B. 1989. Organizational theories: Some criteria for evaluation. *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 496-515.
- Corley, K. J. and Gioia, D. A. (2011). Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 12-32.
- Shepherd, D. A., & Sutcliffe, K. M. 2011. Inductive top-down theorizing: A source of new theories of organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 361-380.

- Shepherd, D.A., and Suddaby, R. 2017. Theory Building: A Review and Integration. *Journal of Management*, 43: 59-86.
- Suddaby, R. 2010. Construct clarity in theories of management and organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (3) 346-358.
- Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 516-531.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). What theory is not, theorizing is, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40: 385-390.
- Whetten, A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 490-495.

2. Writing for publication

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2a. The craft of writing: how to frame your introductory section

Beyond the conventions that define what constitutes a strong and original theoretical contribution, publishing academic research is ultimately a craft—one that authors frequently, and often painfully, learn by doing. This session focuses on the practical side of scholarly writing: how to develop effective arguments, leverage academic conventions constructively, and communicate clear contributions to the intended audience, including editors, reviewers, and the broader academic readership.

Suggested Readings

- Bartunek, J., Rynes, S. and Ireland, R. D. (2006). What makes management research interesting, and why does it matter? *Academy of Management Journal*, 49, 9–15.
- Bechky, B. A., & Davis, G. F. (2025). Resisting the Algorithmic Management of Science: Craft and Community After Generative AI. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 70(1), 1-22.
- Davis, M. S. 1971. That's interesting: Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Philosophy of Social Science*, 1: 309-344.
- Huff, A. S. 1999. *Writing for scholarly publication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Johanson, L. A. (2007). Sitting in your reader's chair. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16, 290–4.^[1]_{SEP}
- Kilduff, M. (2006). Editor's comments: Publishing theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 31: 252–255. 2
- Patriotta, G. (2017). Crafting Papers for Publication: Novelty and Convention in Academic Writing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54, 747–759.
- Ragins, B.R. (2012). Editor's comments: reflections on the craft of clear writing. *Academy of Management Review*, 37, 4: 493 – 501
- Rindova, V. (2008). Publishing theory when you are new to the game. *Academy of Management Review*, 33: 300-303.
- Smithey Fulmer, I. (2012) Editor's comments: the craft of writing theory articles— variety and similarity in AMR. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 37, 3: 327– 331.

2b. Writing a literature review

A well-crafted literature review does more than summarise existing research—it identifies gaps, builds a compelling rationale for new inquiry, and positions a study within ongoing scholarly conversations. This session explores different approaches to writing literature reviews, including integrative, narrative, and systematic methods. Students will examine how leading scholars construct intertextual coherence, problematise existing knowledge, and use the literature review as a strategic tool for framing original contributions.

Suggested Readings

- Alvesson, M. and Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problemization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 247–71.
- Alvesson, M. and Sandberg, J. (2020). The problematizing review: A counterpoint to Elsbach and van Knippenberg's argument for integrative reviews. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57.
- Baumeister, R. F. and Leary, M. R. (1997). 'Writing narrative literature reviews'. *Review of General Psychology*, 1, 311–20.
- Bem, D. J. (1995). *Writing a review article for Psychological Bulletin*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 172–77.
- Callahan, J. L. (2010). Constructing a manuscript: Distinguishing integrative literature reviews and conceptual and theory articles. *Human Resource Development Review*, 9, 300–04.
- Callahan, J. L. (2014). Writing literature reviews: A reprise and update. *Human Resource Development Review*, 13, 271–75.
- Denyer, D., & Tranfield, D. (2009). Producing a systematic review. In D. Buchanan & A. Bryman (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods* (pp. 671-689). London, UK: Sage.
- Elsbach, K. and van Knippenberg, D. (2020). Creating high-impact literature reviews: An argument for integrative reviews. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57.
- Locke, K., and Golden-Biddle, K. (1997). Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and "problematizing" in organizational studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40, 1023-1062.
- Patriotta, G. (2020). Writing impactful review articles. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57.
- Post, C., Sarala, R., Gatrell, C. and Prescott, J. E. (2020). Advancing theory with review articles. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57, 351–76
- Short, J. (2009). The art of writing a review article. *Journal of Management*, 35(6), 1312-1317.
- Torraco, R. J. (2005). Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4, 356–67
- Torraco, R. J. (2016). 'Writing integrative literature reviews: Using the past to explore the future'. *Human Resource Development Review*, 15, 404–28.
- Webster, J., & Watson, R. T. (2002). Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: Writing a literature review. *MIS Quarterly*, 26(2), xiii-xxiii.

3. The review process: developing and communicating theoretical contributions

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Developing strong and novel theoretical contributions is a critical requirement for publishing in top academic journals. This session traces the full journey of a manuscript from initial submission through to final acceptance, examining the complex and often iterative interaction between authors, editors, and reviewers. Using an actual manuscript submitted to a leading journal and eventually published, students will gain an inside perspective on the challenges and opportunities that arise during the review process. By taking on the roles of both reviewers and editors, students will learn to assess scholarly work critically, provide constructive feedback, and reflect on the ongoing process of framing, revising, and refining a paper to meet the expectations of a target journal. The session also addresses the discussion section as a key site for articulating and developing theoretical contributions.

Suggested readings

AMJ seven-part series

- Colquitt, J. A. and George, G. (2011). From the editors: publishing in AMJ—part 1: Topic choice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54, 432 - 435.
- Bono, J. E. and McNamara, G. (2011). From the editors: publishing in AMJ—part 2: Research design. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54, 657 - 660.
- Grant, A. M. and Pollock, T. G. (2011). Publishing in AMJ – Part 3: Setting the hook. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54, 873–9.
- Sparrowe, R. T. and Mayer, K. J. (2011). Publishing in AMJ – Part 4: Grounding hypotheses. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54, 1098 – 1102.
- Zhang, Y., and Shaw, J. D. (2012). Publishing in AMJ – Part 5: Crafting the methods and results. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 8–12.
- Geletkanycz, M., and Tepper, B. J. (2012). Publishing in AMJ – Part 6: Discussing the implications. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 256–260.

Further readings

- Bedeian, A. G. 2004. Peer review and the social construction of knowledge in the management discipline. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 3: 198–216.
- Bergh, D. D. 2002. From the editors: Deriving greater benefit from the reviewing process. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45: 633–636.
- Clark, T., Floyd, S. W. and Wright, M. (2006). On the review process and journal development. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43, 655–64.
- Day, N. E. 2011. The silent majority: Manuscript rejection and its impact on scholars. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10: 704–718.
- Feldman, D. C. 2004. Being a developmental reviewer: Easier said than done. *Journal of Management*, 30: 161–164.

- Lepak, D. 2009. Editor's comments: What is good reviewing? *Academy of Management Review*, 34: 375–381.
- Harrison, D. 2002. From the editors: Obligations and obfuscations in the review process. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45: 1079–1084.
- Sanders, W. G. 2009. What it means to be a developmental action editor. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52: 640 – 642.
- Starbuck, W. H. 2003. Turning lemons into lemonade: Where is the value in peer reviews? *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12: 344–351.