

Pathways to International Publication in the Social Sciences

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A Guide for Early Career and Non-Native
English Researchers

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Preface

My Personal Journey

After earning my degree from Indiana University, Bloomington, I returned to South Korea to join Korea National Open University, a leading institution in distance education. I spent a decade there teaching distance learners, publishing books, and steadily building my reputation in the field. By my 30s, I had settled into the role of a highly-regarded national expert. However, this identity was about to shift dramatically.

In 2000, my 40s brought a whirlwind of change. I transitioned to Ewha Womans University, a more globally focused institution, while my children entered the next level of their schooling, the older in middle school and the younger in primary school. Naturally, my responsibilities increased as I balanced the roles of mother and full-time professor. At work, the demands were staggering—administrative duties, research, and a pressing need to publish in international journals. Time became my most precious commodity, and I found myself questioning how I could manage it all.

The academic environment in Korea had evolved rapidly. Universities began emphasizing international publications, with professors evaluated more rigorously. Securing tenure was no longer guaranteed without consistently producing high-quality research. As I navigated these pressures, I also recognized a deeper shift in my professional identity. I had long been the “leading expert in distance education in Korea,” but now I had to envision something greater: becoming an international researcher.

This shift did not come easily. Daily commutes, once exhausting, became my time to think and plan. I began to realize that the boundaries of distance education did not need to be confined to Korea, and neither did my identity. From that realization, I redefined both myself and my career path, with the goal of becoming a global scholar.

Time Management and the Daily Grind

As my career evolved, the biggest challenge I faced was time management. Between my work, family, and research, it felt like there were always more tasks than hours in the day. The demands of teaching, administrative duties, and publishing left little room for the deep, focused research needed for international contributions. I quickly realized that in order to achieve my goal, I had to get a handle on my time.

I sat down at my desk and mapped out my time. With a planner from the university, I organized my year into months, weeks, and days, creating a manageable time management system. I reserved weekends for rest and family, scheduling key meetings for Monday mornings and midweek check-ins on Thursdays. I taught classes on Monday and Thursday afternoons, kept Tuesdays for mandatory meetings, and set aside Wednesdays for research. Fridays were dedicated to preparing for classes and guiding students. In the evenings, after my family went to bed, I devoted two hours to reading and writing.

I learned to prioritize and protect my time, ensuring research hours were just as important as meetings. If someone requested a meeting during those hours, I suggested alternatives. This discipline allowed me to make steady progress on my papers and research, little by little. The structure I created became my guide, helping me balance work, family, and academic responsibilities while still carving out essential time for research. Each step brought me closer to my goal of becoming a global scholar, and I began to treasure these dedicated research hours.

Facing Doubts and Building Confidence

Despite my meticulous planning, one obstacle remained: confidence. Writing for international journals in English felt daunting. Even though I had studied and worked in the U.S., the idea of writing and submitting papers on my own seemed overwhelming. Doubts crept in. Could I really succeed in this new international arena?

Help came in the form of a mentor, an esteemed colleague in the field of distance education. His encouragement reminded me that I was not alone in this process, and with his support, I began to regain confidence. His simple words—"You can do it"—became a lifeline. Eventually, we started collaborating on projects, making the journey feel less solitary and far more achievable. Sadly, he passed away suddenly a few years ago. Though he is no longer with me, his encouraging words continue to guide me. They not only help me move forward in my own journey but also inspire me to support and uplift other researchers, just as he once did for me.

Collaboration as a Key to Success

As I grew more comfortable in my new academic identity, I realized that I did not have to tackle everything on my own. I sought out collaborators, colleagues who shared my passion for research. Together, we co-authored papers, each project a stepping stone toward more meaningful international contributions. Through collaboration, the quality of my research improved, and I gained the courage to reach out to the global academic community.

Slowly, the results followed. My first international publication was a modest four-page literature review, co-authored with a colleague. Over time, I published in several international journals, joined editorial boards, and even co-authored books with renowned global scholars.

From Local Researcher to Global Scholar

Looking back, it took a decade to evolve from a local researcher to an internationally recognized academic. This journey was not quick or easy, but each step added to the compound growth of both achievements and joy. What once felt overwhelming and nearly impossible slowly became a natural part of my routine.

As I moved forward, I realized that growth and collaboration are ongoing processes. Each new goal built on the previous ones, and the joy of working with others in the field became a source of inspiration. Today, I continue to explore new frontiers in research, confident that time and persistence, along with the support of others, will lead to even greater success.

Why I am Sharing My Journey

Although many scholars have achieved far more than I have, I decided to share my story because I believe my experiences can help guide social science researchers, particularly those early in their careers and for whom English is not a native language, through the challenges of academic publishing. What I once shared with my advisees and colleagues, and later on my personal blog in Korean, I now present this guide, written in English, for a broader audience. My hope is to spare you unnecessary stress and help you focus on what truly matters for success in international publishing.

Sharing the Joy of Establishing a Broader Identity

I want to share the joy and fulfillment that came not just from publishing in international journals but from embracing a new identity. As Carol S. Dweck explains in *Mindset*, “A simple belief about yourself guides a large part of your life.” This resonates deeply with my experience. Shifting from seeing myself as a local expert to envisioning myself as a global scholar transformed my career. That simple yet profound belief propelled me forward, and I hope you find the courage to embrace a broader identity in your own journey.

Presenting a Small, Manageable, and Rewarding Strategy

Another reason I am sharing my story is to offer a practical strategy that is small, manageable, and highly rewarding. In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear emphasizes the power of small, continuous improvements over time. My success was built on a system of steady progress—carving out time for research and writing, little by little. This approach was not about drastic changes or huge time investments. It was about consistency. I want you to see how powerful small, daily actions can be in building a foundation for long-term success. Clear’s book is a valuable resource for developing good habits that will support your growth.

Sharing the Fulfillment of Collaboration

I also want to highlight the fulfillment that comes from collaboration. At the start of my career, trying to publish internationally felt isolating and overwhelming. However, once I began collaborating with other researchers, the process became far more enjoyable and productive. Working with others allowed me to grow faster and produce better research. I want to encourage you to seek out collaborations—they can be the key to unlocking your potential and making the publishing process much smoother.

Overcoming Challenges in International Publishing as a Non-Native Researcher

I want to speak to those of you who, like me, are non-native English speakers and early career researchers who have not yet entered the world of international publications. Writing for international journals can be tough, especially with differing standards and language, and when it is your first time. But it is possible—I have done it.

Despite being raised and educated in Korea, I have published widely and gained global recognition. I share my story not to boast, but to offer strategies that helped me overcome those initial challenges. By sharing both my successes and mistakes, I hope to make your path easier and help you navigate international publishing with confidence, so you can focus on becoming the researcher you aspire to be.

How the Guide Is Structured

This guide accompanies early career and non-native English researchers in the social sciences on their journey to submit their first paper to an English-language international journal. Picture yourself as an explorer entering uncharted territory. You will navigate necessary knowledge, preparation techniques, essential mindsets, and potential collaborations. This guide provides crucial tips for a successful and enjoyable journey through academic publishing but does not cover research methodologies or the conduct of research itself. It assumes your research is either ongoing or completed and focuses on crafting your work into an English paper suitable for international submission. Real-life examples and checklists are provided throughout to facilitate your writing process.

The guide comprises 21 chapters (excluding the Preface), organized as follows:

Preface: Beginning with the author's personal story, this section provides an overview of the guide's structure, including brief introductions to each chapter. It also outlines the guide's primary aim: helping graduate, early career and non-native English researchers in the social sciences navigate the international publication process and succeed in their academic endeavors through practical guidance and real examples.

Part I: Foundation and Preparation (Six Introductory Chapters)

Chapter 1—Nervous About Your First Submission? Essential Preparation

Tips: Focuses on preparing researchers mentally and logistically for the publication journey. It covers essential topics such as setting a productive mindset, creating a supportive writing environment, and understanding international publishing ethics.

Chapter 2—The Stories of International Stars: Secrets to Their Success:

Shares success stories from seven renowned researchers with diverse backgrounds who have excelled in international publishing. It offers insights into their strategies, helping readers shape their own aspirations based on these examples.

Chapter 3—Will My Paper Be Well-Received Internationally? Discusses how to assess whether a paper is suitable for international journals. It explains the differences between domestic and international journals, helping researchers identify if their work aligns with global research standards.

Chapter 4—Identifying Reputable Journals and Avoiding Predatory Pitfalls: Offers guidelines on selecting high-quality journals, including understanding impact factors, ranking systems, and how to avoid predatory journals that exploit researchers.

Chapter 5—Smart Tools and Ethics: A New Era in Research Writing: Introduces digital tools to help researchers, particularly non-native speakers, enhance their academic writing in English. It covers tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT for editing and idea generation, as well as reference management software such as EndNote and RefWorks to streamline the writing process.

Chapter 6—Open Access to Scientific Information: Explores the significance of open access (OA) in academic research, helping early career researchers understand its advantages and challenges. It also provides an overview of different types of OA, the quality of OA journals, common concerns like article processing charges (APCs), and essential resources for identifying legitimate OA venues.

Part II: From Journal Selection to Writing and Submission (A 15-Week Guide)

Chapter 7—Week 1: Choosing Your Journal and Understanding Guidelines: Guides researchers in selecting the most suitable journal for their work, focusing on aligning the research topic with the journal's scope, audience, and submission guidelines. It provides practical steps for evaluating journal impact factors, readership demographics, and likelihood of acceptance. By the end of the chapter, researchers will have a clear understanding of which journals best match their research, improving their chances of publication.

Chapter 8—Week 2: Building a Solid Structure for Your Manuscript: Explains how to organize a manuscript's key components, such as introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. It provides strategies for building a strong foundation for both qualitative and quantitative research papers. Readers will learn how to structure their work in a logical, coherent manner that flows well, ensuring that their manuscript is easy to read and meets the expectations of international journals.

Chapter 9—Week 3: Utilizing ChatGPT and Prompts Strategically and Responsibly: Guides early career and non-native English researchers on effectively using ChatGPT for academic writing. It highlights the importance of specific prompts to avoid misinterpretation and unnecessary changes, supported by prompt

examples. Ethical use of ChatGPT is emphasized, along with recommendations for maintaining high-quality work.

Chapter 10—Week 4: Crafting a Compelling Title and Abstract: Offers techniques for writing attention-grabbing titles and abstracts that engage journal readers including editors and reviewers. It emphasizes clarity, precision, and succinctly conveying the research's essence. Through examples, readers will learn how to balance informativeness with brevity, ensuring that their title and abstract reflect the core theme and significance of their study.

Chapter 11—Week 5: Creating a Strong and Captivating Introduction: Teaches researchers how to craft introductions that engage readers while clearly presenting the research problem, theoretical framework, and research questions. It offers examples of effective introductions and provides step-by-step guidance to ensure readers grasp the need and significance of the research from the outset.

Chapter 12—Week 6: Writing the Quantitative Methods Section: Explains how to thoroughly describe research design, participants, data collection, and analysis for quantitative research. It helps researchers present their methods comprehensively and transparently, ensuring replicability. Through examples, it guides researchers in conveying complex methodological details clearly and concisely.

Chapter 13—Week 7: Writing the Qualitative Methods Section: Explains how to thoroughly describe research design, cases, data collection, and analysis for qualitative research, ensuring the process is clearly and coherently presented. Supported by examples, it helps researchers effectively articulate their qualitative approach, making it easy for both reviewers and readers to follow.

Chapter 14—Week 8: Writing the Document Analysis Methods Section: Provides detailed guidance on structuring the methods section for research based on document analysis. It explains how to describe the selection, examination, analysis, and interpretation of documents, with relevant examples that ensure clarity and rigor.

Chapter 15—Week 9: Presenting Research Results: Teaches researchers how to present their findings in a way that aligns with their research questions and international publishing standards. It focuses on the clear, logical presentation of data and results while highlighting the study's significance. Examples help illustrate how to structure and explain results effectively, maximizing their impact.

Chapter 16—Week 10: Crafting the Discussion Section: Explains how to discuss research results or findings in relation to existing literature, emphasizing the study's contribution to both knowledge and practical application. It includes examples of effective discussions and offers tips on connecting results or findings to broader academic debates, ensuring the research is positioned to make a meaningful impact.

Chapter 17—Week 11: Concluding Your Research: Provides guidance on writing strong conclusions that summarize the key contributions of the research

and discuss its broader implications, while also indicating the study's limitations and future research directions. Examples help researchers frame their conclusions to highlight the study's value, potential impact, and limitations, leaving a lasting impression on readers and reviewers.

Chapter 18—Week 12: Finalizing References and Ensuring Consistency:

Guides researchers through the critical final steps of preparing their manuscript by focusing on finalizing references and ensuring consistency throughout the paper. It emphasizes the importance of proper citation, helping researchers ensure that all sources are accurately referenced according to the required style guide. Additionally, it provides strategies for reviewing key sections—such as the abstract and conclusion—to verify that they consistently and accurately reflect the research findings.

Chapter 19—Week 13: Final Editing and Formatting Your Paper:

Focuses on the final stages of manuscript preparation, offering detailed advice on editing and formatting for submission. It guides researchers on how to polish their work to ensure a professional presentation, increasing the likelihood of acceptance. It emphasizes enhancing both the readability and professionalism of the manuscript.

Chapter 20—Week 14: Submission and Handling Review Results:

Provides step-by-step guidance on the submission process, from submitting the manuscript to handling reviewer feedback. It explains how to respond constructively to reviewer comments and make necessary revisions, while offering advice on approaching potential rejection with resilience and professionalism, supported by examples.

Chapter 21—Week 15: Post-Publication Strategies and Conclusion:

Explores what happens after publication and introduces strategies for increasing the visibility of your work. This includes tips on leveraging academic conferences, social media, and networking opportunities to build a professional presence and enhance the impact of your research post-publication. Additionally, it emphasizes three key factors—preparation, persistence, and confidence—as the most critical elements for successful international publishing, serving as the concluding focus of the guide.

Who Should Read This and How to Benefit

This guide is ideal for:

- Graduate students in the social sciences preparing for their first international publication.
- Early career researchers aiming to build a strong publication record.
- Non-native English researchers looking to navigate the complexities of international publishing.

- Experienced researchers who want to refine their publication strategies and improve their chances of acceptance in prestigious journals.

While addressing the specific needs of non-native English speakers, its practical insights are useful for native English speakers seeking a systematic approach to academic publishing.

I hope this guide provides practical advice to help social science researchers both overcome challenges and successfully publish their work in reputable international journals. To make the most of it, I recommend setting aside specific times each day or week for writing. Consistency is key to staying focused and achieving steady progress. While everyone’s schedules and situations will vary, the important thing is to work regularly and steadily, rather than trying to accomplish everything at once.

Author’s Notes

This guide was proofread, edited, and refined with the assistance of OpenAI’s ChatGPT-4o (Version as of October 2024), serving as a complement to the human editorial process. All original content was written by the author, who critically evaluated and validated the AI-assisted edits to ensure academic rigor and uphold ethical standards in the field. The author also reviewed potential biases in the AI-generated content before making final revisions. Responsibility for the final version of the paper rests solely with the author.

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Contents

Part I Foundation and Preparation (Six Introductory Chapters)

1	Nervous About Your First Submission? Essential Preparation	
	Tips	3
	Is Fluency in English Mandatory?	3
	Reading Before Writing: A Critical Foundation	3
	Building Productive Writing Habits Alongside Reading	4
	How Can I Find Time in a Busy Schedule?	5
	Integrating Writing into a Daily Routine	5
	Maximizing Productivity on a Dedicated Writing Day	6
	Breaking Down Tasks for Efficient Writing	6
	Incentivizing Writing with Rewards	7
	Where Should I Create a Productive Writing Environment?	7
	Starting the Day by Tidying up	7
	Designating a Space for Writing	8
	Preparing the Environment in Advance	8
	Maintaining and Improving the Workspace	8
	What Habits Should I Cultivate for Success?	8
	Starting a Day by Tidying Up	9
	Consistently Reading and Writing at a Set Time and Place	9
	Ending the Day Positively	9
	Letting Go of Unhelpful Habits	9
	What Ethical Guidelines Should I Follow When Submitting	
	a Paper?	10
	Avoiding Plagiarism at All Costs	10
	Following Ethical Guidelines for Authorship and Order	10
	Sharing Data for Verification	11
	Checklist: Essential Preparation Tips for Effective Writing	11
	References	11

2	The Stories of International Stars: Secrets to Their Success	13
	Dr. Dianne Conrad Story	13
	Prof. Aras Bozkurt Story	14
	Prof. Jihyun Lee Story	15
	Prof. Curtis Bonk Story	16
	Prof. Joo-Young Jung Story	17
	Prof. Olaf Zawacki-Richter Story	18
	Prof. Josep M Duart Story	19
	Checklist: Proven Success Strategies from International Publishing Experts	20
3	Will My Paper Be Well-Received Internationally?	21
	An Overview of Key Differences Between Domestic and International Journals	21
	Publication Region and Language	21
	Audience Scope	22
	Subject Areas	22
	Quality and Impact	22
	Submission and Publication Process	23
	Determining the Best Fit: Domestic Versus International Journal Publication	23
	Example 1	23
	Example 2	24
	Example 3	24
	More on Quality and Impact: Domestic Versus International Journals	24
	Domestic Journal Abstracting and Indexing Databases	24
	International Journal Abstracting and Indexing Services	25
	Abstracting and Indexing Databases for Open Access Journals	26
	Journals Not Indexed in Any Database	27
	Notes on Quality Assessment of Journals	27
	More on Publication Process and Fees: Domestic Versus International Journals	28
	From Submission to Decision	28
	Publication Fees	29
	Financial Models for Domestic Versus International Journals	30
	Checklist: Key Considerations for Selecting International Journals for Publication	31
	References	31
4	Identifying Reputable Journals and Avoiding Predatory Pitfalls	33
	How to Find Reputable International Journals in Your Field	33
	Finding Journals Indexed in SSCI	34
	Finding Journals Indexed in Scopus	34
	Finding Journals Indexed in PsycINFO	35

The Easiest Way to Find Detailed Information About an International Journal	35
Understanding Indicators of Influence for International Journals	35
Metrics for Journals Listed on WoS	36
Metrics for Journals Listed on Scopus	36
Other Important Metrics	36
If You Are Still Unfamiliar with These Metrics	37
Reputation of Online Open Access Journals	38
Domestic Journals Indexed in SSCI	39
How to Identify Predatory Journals	39
Key Characteristics of Predatory Journals	40
Consequences of Publishing in a Predatory Journal	40
Steps to Identifying Predatory Journals	41
Utilize Lists and Resources for Identifying Predatory Journals	41
Checklist: Key Steps to Identify Reputable Journals	42
References	42
5 Smart Tools and Ethics: A New Era in Research Writing	45
Changes in the Digital Research Support Environment	45
AI-Based Writing Support Tools	45
Cloud-Based Reference Management Tools	46
Plagiarism Detection and Originality-Checking Tools	46
Cloud-Based Collaboration and Storage Tools	46
Customized Content and Writing Guidelines Tools	46
ChatGPT—AI-Based Writing Support Tool	47
Get Started	47
Strategic Use of ChatGPT	48
AI Writing Tools Similar to ChatGPT	49
Strengths and Weaknesses of ChatGPT	49
Grammarly—Grammar and Spelling Checker	50
Strategic Use of Grammarly	50
EndNote—Reference Management Tool	50
Strategic Use of EndNote	51
Reference Tools Similar to EndNote	51
Turnitin—Plagiarism Checker	51
Strategic Use of Turnitin	52
Plagiarism Checkers Similar to Turnitin	52
Ethical Guidelines for the Use of AI Tools in International Journals ...	52
Transparency and Disclosure	52
Authorship and Contributions	53
Originality and Plagiarism	53
Quality and Validity	53
Bias and Fairness in AI Tools	53

Examples of Journal-Specific Guidelines	54
Checklist: Tips for Using Digital and AI Tools in Academic Writing ...	55
References	55
6 Open Access to Scientific Information	57
Introduction to Open Access (OA)	57
What is OA?	57
Why OA Matters for Your Research	58
Quality of OA Journals	59
Distinguishing Reputable OA Journals from Predatory Ones	59
How to Assess the Quality of OA Journals	59
Recognizing Impact Factors and Alternative Metrics	60
Financial and Ethical Aspects of OA Publishing	60
Understanding APCs and How to Budget for Them	60
Ethical Considerations Surrounding APCs and Academic Equity	61
Key OA Resources and Directories	61
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)	62
ISSN ROAD	62
Sherpa Romeo	62
Institutional Repositories	63
Balancing OA with Traditional Publishing Models	63
Pros and Cons	63
Long-Term Career Impacts of OA Publishing	63
Checklist: Considerations for Open Access Publishing	64
References	64
 Part II From Journal Selection to Writing and Submission (A 15-Week Guide)	
7 Week 1: Choosing Your Journal and Understanding Guidelines ...	67
Understanding Your Research	67
What Are the Focus and Scope of Your Research?	67
What Is the Novelty or Originality of Your Research?	68
Is Your Research Methodology Robust?	69
Who Is the Intended Audience for Your Research?	70
Evaluating the Reputation and Impact of Listed Journals	71
Checking Journal Impacts and Predatory Journals	71
Consulting Experienced Colleagues for Recommendations	71
Exploring Publisher Tools	72
Examining Publishing Guidelines and Requirements	72
Journal Goals	73
Word Count	73
Processing Speed	73
Acceptance Rate	73
Adhering to the Author Guidelines of International Journals	74

Registration	74
Obtaining an ORCID ID	74
Reviewing Author Guidelines	74
Ethical Responsibility	75
Checklist: Key Steps for Journal Selection	75
References	76
8 Week 2: Building a Solid Structure for Your Manuscript	77
Essential Tips for Organizing a Quantitative Manuscript	77
Start with a Standard Structure	77
Allocate Word Count Wisely	78
Basic Structure of a Quantitative Manuscript	79
Introduction	79
Methods	80
Results	81
Discussion	81
Conclusion	82
References	82
Structuring a Qualitative Manuscript	83
Understanding Qualitative Research	83
Tips for Structuring a Qualitative Paper	83
Checklist: Key Guidelines for Structuring Your Research Paper	85
References	85
9 Week 3: Utilizing ChatGPT and Prompts Strategically and Responsibly	87
Language and Grammar Checks	87
Examples of Effective Prompts	88
Translation into English	88
Examples of Effective Prompts	89
Generating and Revising Titles, Abstracts, and More	89
Examples of Effective Prompts	90
Generating Visual Ideas	90
Examples of Effective Prompts	90
Enhancing Quality, Clarity, and Consistency	92
Examples of Effective Prompts	92
Ethical Use of ChatGPT and Prompts	93
Understand ChatGPT's Limitations	93
Take Responsibility for Your Work	93
Ethical Transparency and Disclosure	94
Checklist: Guidelines for Integrating ChatGPT into Your Writing Process	94
References	95

10	Week 4: Crafting a Compelling Title and Abstract	97
	Three Major Roles of a Paper Title	97
	Communicating the Research Topic	97
	Conveying the Research’s Contribution	98
	Enhancing Discoverability	98
	Examples of Titles	98
	Example 1: Education Expansion in Vietnam	99
	Example 2: Social Media and Happiness	99
	Example 3: Blended Learning Effectiveness	100
	Strategies for Crafting a Clear and Compelling Paper Title	100
	Step 1: Brainstorm Potential Titles with Keywords	100
	Step 2: Refine Your Title for Clarity and Specificity	101
	Step 3: Add an Element of Intrigue to Attract Readers	101
	Step 4: Align the Title with the Target Journal	102
	Three Major Roles of an Abstract	102
	Acting as a Summary and Communication Tool	102
	Enhancing Discoverability and Impact	103
	Working as an Anchor for Writing and Structure	103
	Examples of Abstracts	103
	Example 1: Abstract of a Qualitative Research Paper	104
	Example 2: Abstract of a Quantitative Research Paper in Open Education	104
	Strategies for Writing an Effective Abstract	105
	Step 1: Review Abstracts from Published Papers	105
	Step 2: Familiarize Yourself with Journal Guidelines	105
	Step 3: Draft Your Abstract with a Clear Structure	106
	Step 4: Revisit the Abstract After Writing the Main Body	106
	Checklist: Tips to Crafting an Effective Title and Abstract	107
	References	107
11	Week 5: Creating a Strong and Captivating Introduction	109
	Background	109
	What to Include	110
	How to Write	110
	Example of the Background Section	111
	Research Gap (or Research Problem)	112
	What to Include	112
	How to Write	113
	Examples of the Research Gap Section	113
	Theoretical or Conceptual Framework	115
	What to Include	116
	How to Write	116
	Example of the Theoretical Framework Section:	117
	Research Questions	119
	What to Include	119

How to Write	119
Example of the Research Questions Section	120
Checklist: Essential Guidelines for Writing a Research	
Introduction	121
References	121
12 Week 6: Writing the Quantitative Methods Section	123
Research Design	123
What to Include	123
How to Write	124
Examples of the Research Design Section	124
Participants	125
What to Include	125
How to Write	126
Examples of the Participants Section	126
Instruments	128
What to Include	128
How to Write	128
Example of the Instruments Section	129
Data Collection and Analysis	130
What to Include	130
How to Write	130
Examples of the Data Collection and Analysis Section	131
Checklist: Key Strategies for Writing a Quantitative Methods	
Section	132
References	133
13 Week 7: Writing the Qualitative Methods Section	135
Research Design	135
Example of the Research Design Section	136
Context (or Setting)	136
What to Include	136
How to Write	137
Examples of the Context Section	137
Participants	138
What to Include	138
How to Write	139
Examples of the Participants Section	139
Data Collection and Analysis	140
What to Include	141
How to Write	141
Example of the Data Collection and Analysis Section	142
Notes on Researcher Positionality	143

Example of the Researcher Positionality Section	144
Checklist: Key Strategies for Writing a Qualitative Methods Section	144
References	145
14 Week 8: Writing the Document Analysis Methods Section	147
Overview	147
Selecting Journals and Papers	148
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	148
Search Strategy	148
Screening Process	149
Developing a Review Protocol (or an Analysis Framework)	149
Review Protocol	149
Analysis Framework	150
Pilot Testing	150
Data Coding and Analysis	151
Coding Process	151
Analysis Methods	152
Conclusion	152
Checklist: Key Strategies for Writing the Document Analysis Methods Section	153
References	153
15 Week 9: Presenting Research Results	155
The Importance of Research Results in a Scholarly Article	155
Structuring the Results Section	156
Considering Three Approaches	156
Revisiting the Research Questions	157
Structuring the Results Section	158
Writing the Results Section	158
Strategies to Write the Results for Quantitative Research	158
Strategies to Write the Findings for Qualitative Research	159
Concluding the Results/Findings Section	160
Checklist: Effective Tips for Writing the Results or Findings Section	160
References	161
16 Week 10: Crafting the Discussion Section	163
Determining the Optimal Length for the Discussion Section	163
How to Structure and Write the Discussion	164
Restatement of the Research Objectives	164
Discussion of Key Findings	164
Discussion of Results Consistent with Previous Research	166
Highlight of New and Interesting Findings	167

Discussion of Limitations and Directions for Future Research	168
Checklist: Key Strategies for Writing an Effective Discussion:	170
References	170
17 Week 11: Concluding Your Research	171
Summarizing Key Points	171
Strategies for Writing the Summary Part	171
Examples of the Summarizing Part	172
Highlighting Contribution to the Field	173
Strategies for Writing the Contributions	173
Examples of Highlighting Contribution Part	174
The Final Say—Ending with a Thought-Provoking Statement	175
Strategies for Concluding the Conclusion Section	176
Examples of the Final Say	176
Checklist: Key Strategies for Writing an Effective Conclusion	177
References	177
18 Week 12: Finalizing References and Ensuring Consistency	179
Reference Management	179
Guidelines for Selecting References	179
Guidelines for Citing and Organizing References	180
Recommended Length of References List	182
How to Avoid Plagiarism	182
Final Check of Abstract and Conclusion	183
Reviewing and Refining the Abstract	183
Reviewing and Refining the Conclusion	184
Examples of the Abstract and Conclusion Consistency	184
Checklist: Key Strategies for Finalizing References and Maintaining Consistency	187
References	187
19 Week 13: Final Editing and Formatting Your Paper	189
Understanding and Applying Journal Requirements	189
Scope and Aim	189
Author Guidelines	190
Editing English Expression	190
Why Editing is Important	190
Strategies for Editing English Expression	191
Reviewing the Structure of Your Paper	193
Paper Structure and Headings	193
Utilizing ChatGPT	193
Checking the Title Page and Main Text	194
Abstract	194
Keywords	194

Introduction, Methods, Results/Findings, Discussion, Conclusion	194
Reviewing Formatting According to Guidelines	195
Font and Spacing	195
Titles (Headings)	195
Page Numbers	195
Units and Abbreviations	195
Reviewing Citations and References	196
Citation Style	196
In-Text Citations	196
Reference List	196
Reviewing Ethical Considerations	196
Plagiarism	196
Permissions	197
Conflict of Interest	197
Checklist: Key Tips for Final Editing and Formatting	197
Reference	198
20 Week 14: Submission and Handling Review Results	199
Submitting Your Paper	199
General Considerations	199
The Submission Process	200
Review Outcomes and How to Respond	201
Rejection During Initial Screening or Desk Review	201
Acceptance Without Revisions (Accept as Is)	202
Acceptance with Minor Revisions	203
Revise and Resubmit	204
Completely Rejected	205
Checklist: Effective Strategies for Handling Review Results	206
References	207
21 Week 15: Post-publication Strategies and Conclusion	209
Emails You Will Receive After Your Paper is Published	209
Emails from Unknown Overseas Publishers or Journal Editors	209
Emails Offering Awards for Your Paper	210
Emails Requesting You to Review a Paper	210
Strategies for Promoting Your Paper	211
Social Media Platforms	211
Email Signature	211
Newsletters and Promotional Materials	212
Academic Networking Sites	212
Conferences and Seminars	212
Video Promotions and Multimedia Opportunities	213
Conclusion: Celebrating the Journey and Looking Ahead	213
Preparation and Strategy: The Foundation of Success	213
Persistence: The Path to Continuous Improvement	214

Confidence and Enjoyment: Nurturing the Joy of Writing	214
Final Words: Moving Forward with Confidence	214
Checklist: Key Strategies for Promoting Research and Sustaining Academic Success	215
References	215