

Writing academic articles of interest to practitioners

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Abstract

Professionals (including health and safety practitioners) may be expected to carry out small-scale, applied research that can be shared with others. Writing up and publishing the findings can be hard: Is there an appropriate journal? What do journals expect in manuscripts? Will they publish such research?

Drawing on academic and practitioner literature and journal requirements, this article shows how a manuscript meeting those requirements could be structured, written and submitted to a journal to increase the chances of selection for review, revision and publication. The requirements of the New Zealand Journal of Health and Safety Practice, a newly established, practice-oriented journal, are used here to give specific examples of journal expectations.

Key words

writing; publishing; communication; article;

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Professional requirements for health and safety practitioners

The International Network of Safety and Health Professional Organisations Framework (INSHPO, 2017, pp. 24, 33 and 34) requires health and safety practitioners to be able to carry out applied research on problems encountered in practice. This Framework has been adopted by many of the health and safety practitioner professional organisations that are members of INSHPO.

The online, open-access journal *New Zealand Journal of Health and Safety Practice* (NZJHSP, <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/nzjhsp/index>) was developed in 2024 to establish a journal willing to publish small-scale, practice-oriented research and to help overcome access to applied research for those who are interested. Postgraduate students also have the opportunity to write articles based on their research projects. Also, plans are in hand for the Journal to publish abstracts from major New Zealand conferences on workplace health and safety and for special editions to mark significant events or dates.

A call for articles for a special edition to be published in July 2024 led to requests from intending contributors for guidance on how to write such articles. A literature review identified some articles (eg, Martin, 2014; Shidham et al., 2012; Teodosiu, 2019) but these were behind paywalls and so unavailable to non-academic authors. Textbooks (eg, Belcher, 2019) giving guidance may be found in university libraries but may also be hard for non-academics to access.

1.2 Solution

This lack of open-access guidance for non-academic or novice health and safety authors led to writing this “article about writing articles of interest to practitioners” that might be submitted to NZJHSP or other journals. This article includes the requirements of NZJHSP; authors who intend submitting a manuscript elsewhere should check the requirements of other journals before starting to write a submission for them.

This article is written in the sequence that an author might follow when writing a manuscript for submission to NZJHSP or another journal. Intending authors should read this article through, choose which structure their manuscript will use, start a new word processor file, key in the headings for the chosen structure and start writing.

In this article two related words are used: manuscript and article. A manuscript is a typed text submitted for or awaiting printing and publication, while an article is a piece of writing included with others in a publication (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2022).

2.0 Structure, writing style, formatting, and referencing

2.1 Last things first

Do not give author names in the manuscript. They must be on the title page (see later), so they are only seen by the journal editor. This helps ensure that reviewers do not favour or penalise an author they know.

2.2 Follow the journal guidance and requirements

NZJHSP (and other journals) has a small budget for copy editing. Keeping to the journal requirements will help reduce requests to authors to revise their manuscripts and for subsequent copy editing by NZJHSP.

2.3 Writing style, formatting, and referencing

Use a title that is an eye-catching, brief description of the final manuscript, to attract potential readers (including the NZJHSP editor) to go further. If a reader finds the abstract interesting they may read more, even the whole, article. Do not use abbreviations in the title.

Regardless of the structure, NZJHSP requires manuscripts to consistently use British or American English in 11-point Arial font. Paragraphs should use 1.5 line spacing. Headings may be numbered to indicate the hierarchy used (eg, 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, etc). Measurements should be reported in metric units (metre, kilogram, or litre) or their decimal multiples and temperatures should be in degrees Celsius.

NZJHSP is read by a wide range of people with different backgrounds. Write concisely in plain English (Ragins, 2012) and avoid using long words in long sentences (Rogers & Lasky-Fink, 2023). Define technical terms and translate jargon into plain English. When an abbreviation is first used give the full text followed by the abbreviation in brackets; thereafter the abbreviation alone is used.

Any explanatory comments about legislation should be clear and brief unless the author has a legal background, or an important point of law is being discussed.

Papers about New Zealand must acknowledge Mātauranga Māori.

Language must show respect to all people; avoid implying that any person is superior to others on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, disability, or health condition. Use gender-neutral nouns and plurals; avoid “she/he”, “he” or “she”. “They” and “their” are acceptable gender-neutral pronouns.

2.4 Humanities, social sciences or quantitative structure?

This article broadly uses a “humanities” or social sciences structure (Belcher, 2019, pp. 268-269). If your manuscript is from the quantitative or experimental sciences use the **I**ntroduction, **M**ethods, **R**esults and **D**iscussion (extended IMRaD) format outlined below. In either case, each major section should end with a brief connection to the next section to give a flowing, seamless account of the work. Use of either the humanities or extended IMRaD structure will make a manuscript structure familiar to journal editors, possibly meaning the manuscript is more likely to be sent out for review.

2.5 Introduction

The introductory section is based on why, who, what, when, where, how (5W1H) describing how the problem became of interest to the author. It describes what is known about the problem and the author’s perceptions and arguments. (See the introduction on the first page of this article.) The reason this problem is important to academics or practitioners is then briefly summarised and the research question is described. This is briefly linked to the research section.

2.6 Research section

More detail of the problem may be given, leading to why the specific research methods were chosen. These should be clearly described. For example, the research may have used:

- a literature review
- thematic analysis of case studies
- thematic analysis of leading or recent court cases
- thematic analysis of responses to interviews
- an online survey and quantitative and thematic analysis of the results.

If the research used a literature review, give the search terms used and key databases searched. Where possible cite original research sources, preferably full articles or court decisions, not conference or other abstracts. Articles accepted for publication but not yet published should be dated as “in press” or “forthcoming.” A “personal communication” should give the name of the person who provided the information or comment and the date of the communication. Material generated by artificial intelligence is not acceptable as a source.

2.7 Ethics

Research that measured the exposure of people to a substance, agent, activity, etc that could affect them will almost certainly have required approval by the Human Ethics Committee of a university or similar organisation. A professional membership organisation (eg, INSHPO, 2017; IOSH, 2013; IPENZ, 2005; NZISM, 2020) may also require documented ethical research behaviour.

The relevant ethics approval should be named in the manuscript. Non-academic research within a business involving workers will require their written consent; how this was obtained must be described in the manuscript. If the research involved observation of, or measurements, involving people, give a description of the source population, recruitment of the participants, and the reason for your participant group. Describe how representative of the general population the participants were.

2.8 Results

Data collection and measurements

Describe how the data was gathered, including a brief description of any equipment used. Also, cite references for any established methods, specific methodology and statistical methods. If the methodology or equipment is new, not well-known, or modified, give reasons for their use.

Name all substances used or tested for and how they might affect people (see also ethics requirements).

Results should be presented in a logical sequence with tables and graphics embedded in the text. Each table or graphic should be referred to in the text, with the meaning or implications of each briefly discussed. Do not repeat the content of the tables or graphics in the text.

Graphics

Use the word processor function to add a caption (eg, Figure 1) immediately below the graphic and give a brief title that tells a reader what the graphic shows. Use this function to give subsequent graphics sequential numbers.

Graphics in manuscripts for submission to NZJHSP should be TIFF or JPG file format at 300 dpi minimum and may be in black and white or colour. Any text within a graphic should use the same font as the manuscript and should be legible on screen and when printed.

If a graphic is adapted from another document, cite the source immediately below the graphic and ask the copyright holder for permission to use their work.

Graphics may be positioned either in the body of the manuscript or at the end with a note in the text “Figure X near here” so the copy editor can position the graphic correctly.

Tables

Tables in manuscripts for submission to NZJHSP should be constructed to show patterns or exceptions to help readers easily “see” and understand the data (Ehrenberg, 1982, p. 223). NZJHSP prefers tables to be in black and white using Arial bold 10 point for column headings and Arial 10 point for the table content. Explain any variation in the cover letter to the editor (see later).

Use the word processor function to add a caption (eg, Table 1) immediately above the table and give a brief title that tells a reader the content. If the table, or the data it contains, are adapted from another document, cite the source immediately below the table and ask the copyright holder for permission to use their work.

Tables may be positioned either in the body of the manuscript or at the end with a note in the text “Table X near here” so the copy editor can position the table correctly.

2.9 Discussion

Summarise the key findings and give possible explanations for the results at the start of the discussion. This needs to be clearly linked to the research/literature previously presented.

Discuss the importance of the work to practice or scholarship. Include any gaps and the strengths or weaknesses in the research. If the research was in a “white space” (Cherry, 2010) (an area not previously investigated or encountered in New Zealand or elsewhere) this should be specified as a potentially significant finding. Point out any interesting or unusual findings and their implications. Sometimes research corroborates or refutes previous findings or shows new findings that are important for practice. For example:

- a review of District Court decisions shows an important pattern or theme due to poorly constructed definitions in legislation
- exposure of workers in an industry to a hazardous substance shows unexpected results
- a novel way of framing management of workplace health or safety suggests improvements in practice.

The strength of the evidence should be discussed (Stockwell et al., 2022), especially if the research changes the “weight of evidence” (Weed, 2005).

Graphics and tables in a manuscript should be used in the text to help illustrate a point. For example, how a process or activity progresses, times when some event or exposure occurs, places where specific events happen.

Discuss how the research findings might lead to further research. Link the findings with the goals of the study but only make strong claims if you have strong evidence. This is especially so if the results do not clearly show benefits. Avoid claiming the research or findings are groundbreaking or unique unless this has been confirmed by independent review.

2.10 Conclusions

Summarise how this work adds to or changes what was already known and why academics or practitioners may find the results important. Identify any areas requiring further research.

2.11 References

NZJHSP requires the use of APA 7th for non-legal referencing or footnoting for an article about the law. If available give the digital object identifier (DOI) for an article or eBook. Contact the NZJHSP editor if you need further guidance on referencing.

Where possible cite original work (ie, academic articles that have been anonymously reviewed).

If citing a legal decision give the case name, year decided in square brackets, docket number, and court where the case was decided. For example:

WorkSafe NZ v Whakaari Management Ltd [2023] NZDC 23224, Auckland District Court.

2.12 The end of the manuscript

Funding sources

Identify who provided financial support for the research that led to the manuscript. If you self-funded the work state at the end of the work “Self-funded by the author”.

Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest include any financial interest or personal relationships that may have biased your work. NZJHSP will reject submissions that appear to be marketing a business, service, or product.

If there are no conflicts, state “Declarations of interest: none” at the end of the work.

Author contributions

If the manuscript was written by two or more authors, state what each author contributed. For example, “AA carried out the field research, BB carried out the literature review and CC led writing of the article”.

Disclaimers

You may wish to state that the opinions or content are your own and do not represent your employer or funding agency.

2.13 Last things to write

Abstract

The abstract is usually the last part of a manuscript to write as it summarises the background, what led to the research and its purpose, gives an outline of how the research was carried out, and the main conclusions. Together with the title, the abstract is indexed in databases. It may be all that most people read, so it should be an interesting and accurate summary of the article content to help encourage a reader to download and read further.

References should not be cited in the abstract.

Keywords

Give up to six relevant key words that will help search engines locate the published article.

3.0 Alternative structure of a manuscript

Manuscripts submitted to NZJHSP from quantitative or experimental sciences (eg, an occupational hygiene or ergonomics study) may use the structure **Introduction, Materials and methods, Results and Discussion** sometimes referred to as the basic IMRaD model (Belcher, 2019, pp. 267-268). With additional content this becomes the extended IMRaD model (Teodosiu, 2019):

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction (also in basic IMRaD)
- Materials and methods (also in basic IMRaD)
- Results (also in basic IMRaD)
- Discussion (also in basic IMRaD)
- Conclusions
- Acknowledgements
- References
- Appendix or supporting information.

The materials and methods section should give a clear description of how and why the research was carried out so that another researcher could reproduce the results.

4.0 Cover letter to journal editor

If the research was unusual or if the manuscript has an unusual structure an author should give the editor a brief description and an explanation.

5.0 Title Page

The title page should be a separate, single page and give the manuscript title, author information, word count and the submission declaration.

5.1 Author information

If the manuscript is accepted, with or without revision, the following will be copied to the top of the first page of the article:

- the name of each author
- the organisation or institution where they work
- their email address
- their *Open Researcher and Contributor ID* (ORCID).

An ORCID identification is issued free of charge at <https://info.orcid.org/what-is-orcid/> and helps record the work of authors. If a manuscript was written by two or more authors, the submitting author must be named as the corresponding author.

5.2 Word count

NZJHSP and other journals may set a word limit for manuscripts. This helps the editor and reviewers decide if (i) the content is appropriate for its length and (ii) if the manuscript fits with the journal's goals. The word count does not include the references cited in the manuscript. The abstract may have a separate word count.

5.4 Submission declaration

Certify at the end of the title page that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere and will not be published elsewhere in the same or any other form in English or another language without the written consent of the NZJHSP. You may present the work as part of an abstract, lecture or thesis.

6.0 Before submitting the manuscript

Proofread the manuscript and then ask colleagues to proofread it for sense, grammar, flow, and conformance with NZJHSP policies.

Check the sources you have cited for accuracy and check all in-text citations match entries in the list of references and vice-versa.

7.0 Final words about this particular article

The author information is as shown on the first page.

This article was self-funded.

Declarations of interest: the author is Journal Editor of NZJHSP, but this article was anonymously reviewed.

The final, final words

Researching and writing this article took about a week. Perhaps a half of that time was spent revising the text.

Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time. Remember this in moments of despair. If you find that writing is hard, it's because it is hard.

(Zinsser, 2006)

I hope this article meets the needs of intending authors. Please persevere and share your research, findings and knowledge with others.

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