



checklist

When preparing to report research:

- Start organising writing early – at the start of the research if possible.
 - For team research, agree who will be shown as the authors and who will write what.
 - Decide on the intended publication outlet and discover their requirements for content, length and format.
 - Decide on the primary theme or message of the report.
 - Create an outline to show the structure of the report.
 - Start writing the easiest section first.
 - Use short sentences and avoid jargon as much as possible.
 - Put the first complete draft aside for a few days and then reread and edit it carefully.
 - Enlist the help of colleagues in commenting on drafts.
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project

Every academic paper is reviewed before publication by at least two referees, chosen from amongst the academic community by journal editors for their knowledge of the paper's topic. Referees (who are rarely paid for their labours) receive a copy of the paper and a letter (or sometimes a form) from the editor that requests them to comment on the paper's suitability for publication in terms of its clarity, originality and the adequacy of its argument. The referee has between two and six weeks to respond with a verdict (one of: accept, accept with minor revisions such as spelling or stylistic errors, accept but require major revisions, or reject) and a report. The report, which is always anonymous and will often be forwarded to the author, explains the referee's verdict, commenting on the overall strengths and weaknesses of the paper and making suggestions for improvements.

The first step in this project is to identify a research area in which you have an interest (the sociology of health, or deviance, for example). Look through the Library's Current Journals shelves and find a recent issue of a journal publishing in your area. Choose one paper from that journal. If possible, make a photocopy of it or download and print it from the internet.

You should imagine that you have received a copy of this paper from a journal editor to referee. Examine the paper closely. Is it clear? Is it well organised? Can one quickly identify the main conclusions? Are the justifications for those conclusions soundly based? Are the data appropriate to the topic of the paper? Are the methods of data collection and analysis described in sufficient detail that someone else could repeat the study? Are there plausible alternative interpretations of the data or of the results that the author has not noticed? Does the abstract adequately describe the contents of the paper? Are there passages that could be rewritten to make them clearer? Has the author referenced all the relevant literature?

It is surprising how often even published papers will wilt under careful scrutiny of this kind. In about 300 words, write a report about the article. Your criticisms should be phrased so that they are constructive, polite and encouraging – the aim of a referee's report is to encourage the author towards a better article, not to damage the author's ego.
