



What it takes to get published:

Positioning, Framing and Structuring Research

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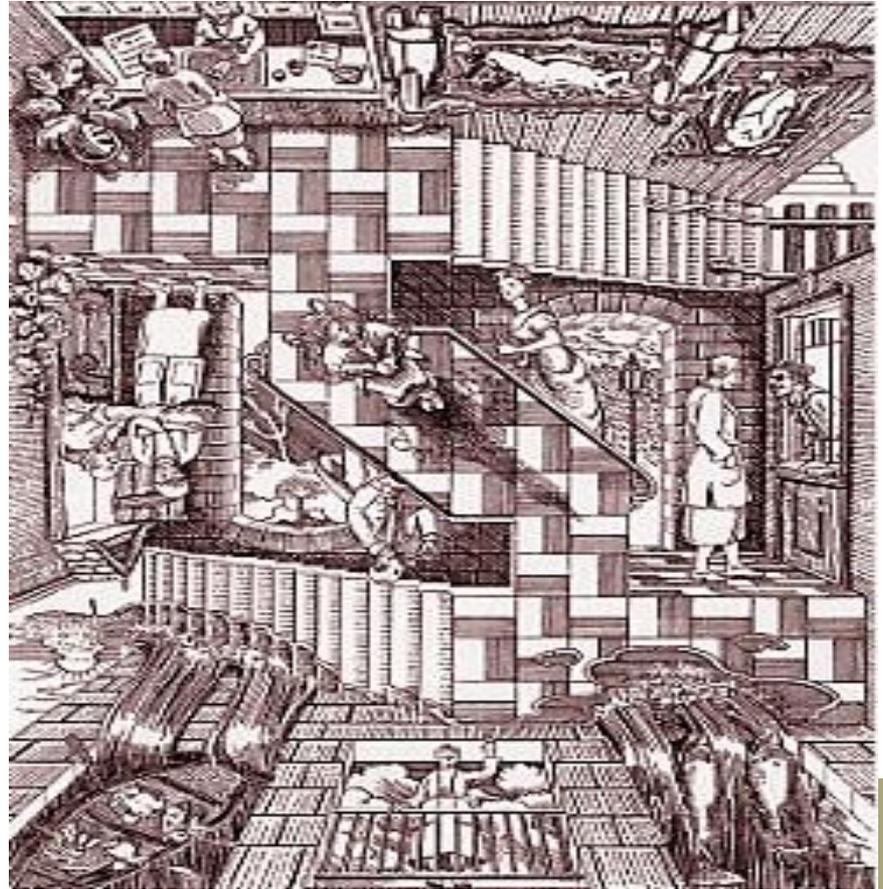
Agenda

- Positioning the research
 - Defining the audience
 - The open question or “gap”
- Framing the contribution
 - Constructing the literature
 - Incremental and radical alternatives
- Conventions of structure and style
 - Macro-structures
 - The introduction
 - The discussion
- Q & A



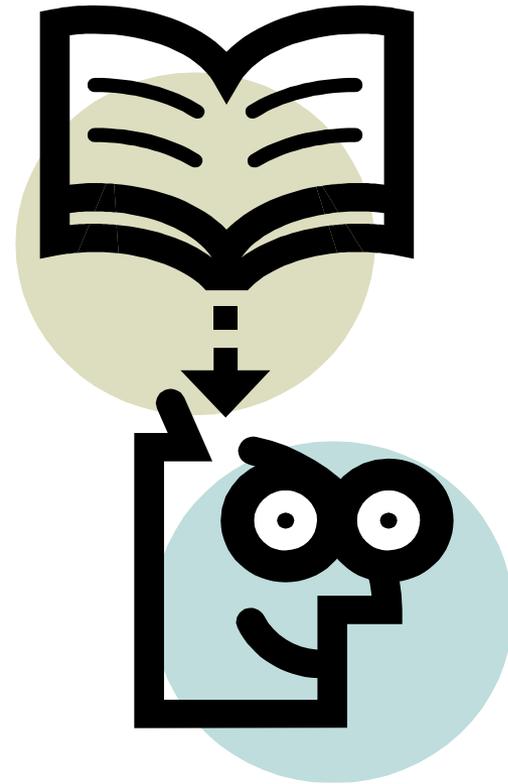
Confusing terms

- “Positioning” is where the article fits within an a stream of literature.
- “Positioning” is defined by the audience and the gap.



Who is the audience?

- The average first year citation count for top journals ranges from 2-10.
- The core audience is that small group of people who are writing on this subject in journals where you want to publish.
- The peripheral audience is the interested reader who may cite your work because it is related to what they do. The size of this audience depends on the outlet.
- Most of the time, it is possible to make a list of the people in your core audience.



Theoretical contribution is in the minds of the audience

What's the open question or gap?

- The gap is that specific piece of missing knowledge
 - It's not about the topic.
 - The question determines the contribution—so asking the right question is a critical first step.
 - Answering the question becomes the purpose of the study.
 - Gaps are what gain the audience's interest and attention.
 - On reading the question, you want the audience to pause and say “ah...that's interesting.”
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Audiences

- versus topics and problems

- Topics are broad areas of inquiry
 - Strategic decision making
- Problems are real-world issues
 - How to implement strategy
- Research audiences are specific people interested in a limited set of questions and theoretical approaches
 - Strategic consensus within the top management team



“*FRAME-ing*” the contribution

Picture frame (**invites** attention, **enhances** content)

Window frame (invites/enhances, **protects, distances**)

Frame of a building (skeleton: **enables** further work)

- CHOICE (act of agency) that **selects** and **highlights**
- DECISION that “cuts” out – i.e. scissors, incisors
- CONSTRUCTION (something “made”) that
 - **interacts with the audience**
 - **anticipates additions from the audience**

[Source: Anne S. Huff, AOM 2005]

Framing in the discussion

- Go back to the audience
 - Think: “collective picture-building”
 - Ask: How have others framed their contributions?
 - Ask: What specific things do I have to say to each of the core and (possibly) peripheral audience members? How does my paper “change the picture?”
- Contribution to theory is primary (empirical results and method are secondary)
- Introduce *each* contribution with a quick overview of recent research that outlines one part of the frame, e.g.
 - W et al started it, X et al has gone in this direction, Y has extended X, Z has contradicted X and Y and ‘I’ show how there really is no contradiction between X, Y and Z after all!

Framing the contribution

'Incremental' Alternatives

- What part(s) of the picture are missing?
 - E.g. Ignored fundamental concepts or variables
- What part(s) of the picture are incomplete?
 - E.g. Ignored Moderators, mediators or context
- What part(s) of the picture are wrong?
 - E.g. Correcting over-simplifications, constructively complicating



Framing the contribution

‘Radical’ alternatives

- How have conditions changed to make prior theory ‘obsolete’?
 - E.g. High-velocity environments and strategic decision making
- How does this new lens shed new light on a well-known phenomenon or theory
 - E.g. Cognitive framing and the strategy process
- How can we explain a new or under-researched phenomenon?
 - E.g. Development of sustainable strategies



The skeleton of an article – Key elements

[deductive theory-testing]

Introduction

- Positioning
- Gap
- Purpose
- Central argument
- Organizing
- Contribution
- So what?

Background

- Conceptual scope
- Definitions
- Existing explanations
- Critique
- Open questions = current focus

Theory

- Summary of argument
- Overview of model
- Detailed justification
- Hypotheses

Method

- Logic of research design
- Description of data – context, units of analysis, site, sample, appropriateness
- Description of measurement and/or observation procedures
- Validity and reliability tests
- Analytical procedures

Results

- Descriptive
- Statistical or qualitative patterns
- Inferences and implications

Discussion

- Summary and interpretation of results
- Main contributions to core audience – theoretical implications
- Contributions to peripheral audience
- Limitations – boundaries
- Future research
- Conclusions

The skeleton of an article – Key elements

[deductive theory-building]

Introduction

- Positioning
- Gap
- Purpose
- Central argument
- Organizing
- Contribution
- So what?

Background

- Conceptual scope
- Definitions
- Synthesis of existing theory(ies)
- Critique of existing theory(ies)
- Open questions = current focus

Theory

- Summary of argument
- Overview of model
- Detailed justifications
- Propositions

Discussion

- Summary
- Main contributions to core audience – theoretical implications
- Contributions to peripheral audience
- Limitations – boundaries
- Future research
- Conclusions

The skeleton of an article – Key elements

[inductive theory-building]

Introduction

- Positioning
- Gap
- Purpose
- Central argument
- Organizing
- Contribution
- So what?

Background

- Conceptual scope
- Definitions
- Existing explanations
- Critique
- Open questions = current focus

Method

- Logic of research design
- Description of data – context, units of analysis, site, sample, appropriateness
- Description of measurement and/or observation procedures
- Validity and reliability tests
- Analytical procedures

Results

- Descriptive
- 1st order analysis
- Qualitative patterns

Theory

- Overview of model
- 2nd order analysis
- Key Inferences

Discussion

- Summary of results and theory
- Main contributions to core audience – theoretical implications
- Contributions to peripheral audience
- Limitations – boundaries
- Future research
- Conclusions

Get your skeleton out of the closet

- Purpose: Make a messy process organized so that the reader can understand it
- Structure and form are the first hurdle
 - Reviewers rely on conforming to the norms of structure and form to comprehend your paper
- Force your paper into the structure
- Fill in missing pieces
- Remove parts that don't belong
 - Literature review for its own sake
 - Tangential or incidental results
 - Digressions, e.g. blind alleys

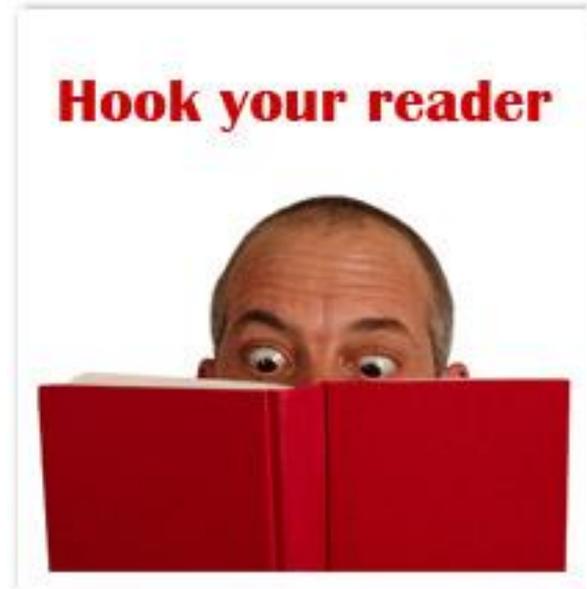


Bones to pick

- Most often missing
 - Clear positioning
 - Motivation and contribution
 - So what?
 - Logic of research design
 - Interesting or counter-intuitive insight
 - Validity and reliability
- Don't belong
 - Disparaging prior research
 - Unfocused literature review – “showing what I know”
 - Claims beyond the data (use of superlatives)
 - Universal versus bounded implications

The goals of an introduction

- Position the paper
 - The audience and the gap
- Hook the reader
 - Spark interest and stress importance
- Specify the purpose and contribution
 - Justify the reader going further



Form of the introduction [variations are infinite]

Paragraph 1

Introduce the topic
Define key construct
Say why the topic is important

Paragraph 2

Identify the gap
Sharpen the paper focus
Note research related to the gap

Paragraph 3

State the purpose of the study
How the research fulfills the purpose
What the central argument is

Paragraph 4

Summarize the contribution

Paragraph 5

Say why the contribution is important

Paragraph 6

Outline the organization of the paper



Guidelines for writing the introduction

- Rarely should the introduction exceed 500 words
 - Long-winded introductions bore the reader
- Craft the introduction early as a way to understand what you are doing
- Re-visit the introduction when the first draft is complete to make sure you lived up to it!



The Discussion

- This is the punch line
- Second most important section of the paper
 - Opportunity to elaborate the contribution
- Often read first or second by reviewers
 - Remember the busy reviewer
- Key indicator of paper seasoning
 - Makes a good or bad first impression
- Very important to the editor
 - Explains why this paper will be cited



Discussion

The skeleton

- Summary and interpretation of argument or results – 1 P
- Main contributions to or implications for core audience/theory/research stream – 3 P
 - Theory and method
- Contributions to or implications for peripheral audience/theory/research stream – 3 P
 - Especially important for general management journals
- Limitations and boundaries – 1 P
 - Limitations lead to future research
- Future research – 1 P
- Implications for Practice -- 1P
- Conclusions – 1 P



The Discussion

Common mistakes

- Completely neglected
- Confused with conclusion
- Ignores the audience
- Introduces ideas that are new to the paper
- Revisits the topic (more literature review or theory) rather than articulating the contribution
- Fails to summarize
- Fails to recognize limitations or boundaries



Summary

- There is no 'one best way' to write an academic article
- Knowing and utilizing scientific conventions may increase the odds of a favorable review
- The ability to articulate an interesting and important contribution to a specific audience is probably the single most important factor in whether a paper is accepted
- Research is a craft as much as it is a science; learning by doing (writing, submitting and reviewing) is the best teacher



APPENDIX

What constitutes a theoretical contribution?

- **Bounded explanation** addressing a **research question(s)** that is **interesting** to a **scholarly audience**
 - The question is framed by a body of literature(s)
 - The question articulates a missing piece of knowledge within the literature(s)
 - The explanation focuses on why or how a set of constructs relate to one another to account for a phenomena
 - The explanation is non-obvious and counter-intuitive to a specific set of scholars
 - The explanation is intuitively appealing to a specific set of scholars
 - The explanation is valid within an empirical and/or theoretical context
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APPENDIX

Workshop

Analyzing your paper's structure

- Pick the template that fits best
 - Highlight and label each part
 - Identify missing pieces
 - Identify new or different pieces
 - Analyze the macro-structure
 - Summarize your main observations
 - How closely does your paper conform to the structural expectations?
 - Where do you deviate? Why?
 - What changes does this analysis imply for your paper?
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