ACADEMIC WRITING WORKSHOP

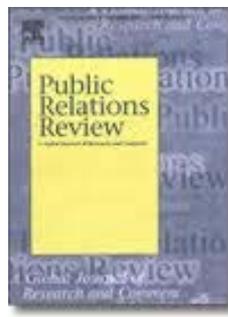Professor Tom Watson

Bournemouth University

My perspectives

- Editor and reviewer for *Journal of Communication Management*; Editor and reviewer for special editions of *Public Relations Review*, *PRism*

- Reviewer for *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *Journal of Further & Higher Education*; *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly; Media, War & Conflict;*

- Reviewer for *PR Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (US);Public Relations Institute of Australia Academic Forum; CICOM International Communications Conference, Pamplona, Spain; Conference on the Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing;*

- Examiner of eight PhD theses

Preparing a paper

- Read the journal

- Understand its format and style

- Check its submission guidance
  - JCOM: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jcomm (Emerald)
  - JPRR: http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hprr20/current (Taylor & Francis)
  - PRR: http://ees.elsevier.com/pubrel/default.asp (Elsevier)

Essential tests

- Does your research offer anything new? Novel, innovative, fresh insights, additions to theory, challenges
- Are you clear about the research's purpose?
- Are data recent? 2013 paper on PR in Vietnam based on 2010 sample and 2006 economic information – No!
- Is literature review up to date? Journals want the latest (it may be two years to publication)
- Don't recycle old material from PhD or Masters research without updating it
- Is your methodology sound (check other articles)? Has it been used before?

Structuring the paper

- Typical model of social science research paper
  1. Introduction
  2. Literature Review
  3. Research questions (RQ)
  4. Methodology
  5. Results/Findings
  6. Discussion
  7. Conclusion
  8. References/Bibliography

Literature Review

- The Literature Review must be extensive and undertaken critically
  - It forms the conceptual framework of the research
  - It sets the basis of the research questions (RQs) and hypotheses
  - It shows the author(s) are highly competent and knowledgeable

  - Don't be descriptive
  - Avoid unsupported assertions
  - When in doubt, reference everyone
  - Summarise, don't overuse direct quotations

Building ideas

- Avoid LEGO writing
- Introduce ideas and concepts
- Build a sequential discussion
- Avoid unrelated blocks of text, especially in Lit Review
- Summarising to bring discussion to a conclusion
- Tell the reader what they will be reading
- Be accurate in your use of words

Statements and Assertions

- "There has been great interest among scholars in understanding the antecedents to motivated behavior in organisations."

- How would you critique this?
- What's missing?

"That's our new mission statement."

Summarising

- "Others disagree with the two-way symmetrical model as a goal even in a normative way (Roper, 2005; Lyotard, 1992; Holtzhausen, 2000; Creedon, 1993; Pieczka, 1996)."

- How would you critique this? What does it tell the reader?
- What's the formatting error?

Presenting Results/Findings

- Outline research outcomes using RQs as sign posts
- Don't over-describe.
- Focus discussion on main findings
- Note any divergences
- Summarise results as a link to the Discussion and Conclusion that follows

Discussion and Conclusion

- Discuss the meaning derived from the research
- Depending on conceptual framework and RQs, relate what is new, different or confirmed
- Be confident in written style, but ensure that all statements are fully backed by the research
- If there are Limitations to the research, express them here
- The Conclusion is the other end of the paper to the Introduction and should reflect on the purpose of the research, its contribution to new knowledge and future directions

The Iterative Loop
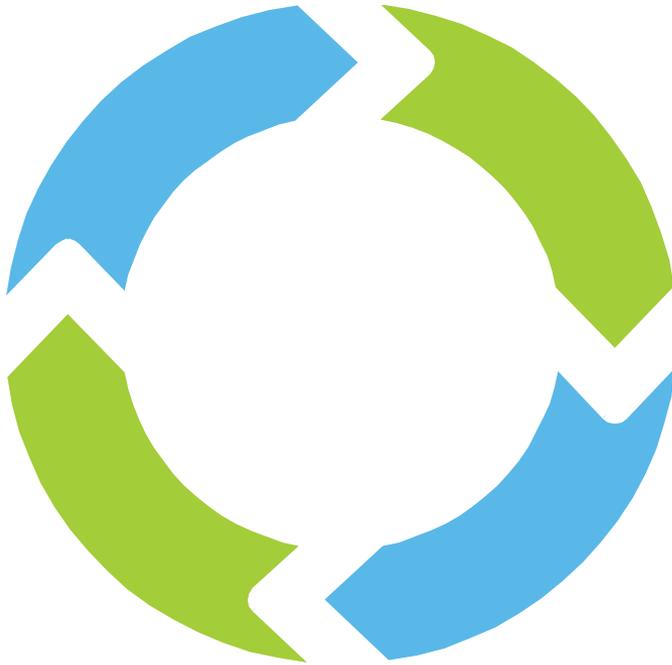
- The Findings and Discussion must relate to the Literature Review's conceptual framework
- Thus the research outcomes can show contribution to new knowledge

TIME FOR A BREAK

Next section – Guidelines from two major journals

Purpose of journal?

- Ensure you have read it (e.g. avoid sending articles on telecoms management to the *Journal of Communication Management*)

- JPRR: "primary mission is to publish original *research that texts, critiques, and/or extends <u>public relations theory</u>* …

- JCOM: "The journal is guided by the twin objectives of publishing submissions of *utmost relevance to day-to-day practice of communications specialists*, and promoting highest standards of intellectual rigour."

- Same field but different emphases

Reviewer guidelines (JPRR)

1. How well does the article conform to the purpose of the journal?
2. What contribution does it make to the body of literature?
3. In what ways does the article fail to contribute to the body of knowledge?
4. How well does the study conform to best ethical practices?
5. How well written and organised is the article?

Contribution

- Conceptual basis is clearly set out

- Methods to collect and analyze data are appropriate; clearly outlined; rigorously applied

- Research expands knowledge of a new domain; introduces new constructs or concepts

- Literature is synthesised to reveal gaps, consensus or disagreements; models tested and developed; new way to examine issues are provided

But not this

- Study flawed in conceptualisation
- Data collection and analysis methods not explained or flawed
- Author's contribution is little more describing findings from data
- Little contribution to public relations theory

Well written?

- Article is well-organised
- Ideas developed in a meaningful sequence
- Sections follow logically
- Introductory comments and summary conclusions used, where appropriate
- Writing conveys ideas and procedures
- Grammatically sound; accurate

Example of problem paper 1

- Topic: Measurement of PR creativity in east Asia country
- Problems
  - Paper in two sections: first was poorly organised lit review; second was report on survey about PR creativity. Not linked together
  - Many unsupported assertions
  - Lego writing: "collection of loose blocks of writing … not linked into a narrative"
  - Only one reference (practitioner book) on creativity in PR
  - Cultural skew: No discussion of cultural factors in the researched country

Example of problem paper 2

- Problems
  - Weak argumentation
    - Author proposed definition of PR creativity by substituting "PR" for "product" in an existing definition. No reason given for choosing this definition or why it was appropriate to adapt
  - Overstatement in conclusion
    - Claim that the new definition was built on seven findings from survey and "had contributed academically". But based on exploratory study in one country in a limited framework
- Outcome: Paper was given "Reject" rating

JCOM

- Manuscript type*
- Title (20 words)*
- Abstract (250 words)*
- Purpose*
- Design/Methodology/Approach*
- Findings*
- Practical implications
- Social implications
- Originality/value*
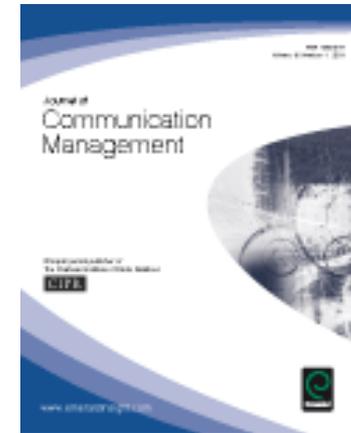
* = required

Manuscript type

- Original article: Not submitted elsewhere
- Book Review
- Editorial

Title

- Includes most important keywords
- Demonstrates significance of your research
- Clear in their meaning
  - An accurate descriptive title: e.g. *The value of Twitter as a crisis communication tactic* (Willmott & Watson, 2012)
  - Uses appropriate keywords
  - Make it searchable / SEO is important
- "Good titles make sense as sentences; they introduce content of the article and contain main words and phrases that readers will search on"

Keywords

- Help with searching for the article/topic
- Some should be in article's title
- Don't need to be single words: corporate social responsibility, CSR (include both)
- Use appropriate words, avoid jargon
- Look at keywords of similar articles and Google them

Purpose

- Establishes the essential reason for the paper – why has the research been undertaken?
  - "The purpose … is to examine the impact of leadership style and employee empowerment on employees' perceptions of organizational reputation"

  - "The purpose … is to investigate how senior communication executives measure the effectiveness of organizations' internal communication efforts and link the efforts with … business performance"

Design

- The methodology used, and why?
  - Establish the type of paper – quantitative, qualitative, hypothesised, discursive, etc
  - <u>Quantitative</u>: "The data presented stems from a quantitative online survey among communication professionals …"
  - <u>Mixed method</u>: "An international survey of 264 experienced business communicators was analyzed … In-depth interviews with 13 senior business communicators were used as a supplementary approach …"
  - <u>Qualitative</u>: "This is a conceptual paper based on a critical literature review aimed at understanding errors in the public relations models conceptualization …"

Findings

- OK, what were the research outcomes?
  - <u>Quantitative</u>: The results indicate that although many organizations claim to have strategies for social media communication, nine out of ten had no explicit regulatory frameworks …"
  - <u>Mixed method</u>: "Results suggested that most business communicators recognized the importance of measuring organizations' internal communications initiatives …"
  - <u>Qualitative</u>: "The study developed five scales of public relations as substitutions for models/dimensions. It proposed a measurement approach for the PR practice…"

Implications

- How should research be deployed - Practical and Social
  - <u>Quantitative</u>: "This research indicates that PR practices should focus on developing basic structures for social media communications and should not be limited to communications activities"
  - <u>Mixed method</u>: "Business communicators should demonstrate a stronger request for a consultative leadership direction in the organisation …
  - <u>Qualitative</u>: "This manuscript creates a measurement approach which PR practitioners can use to plan, monitor, and evaluate public relations campaigns and ongoing programs …"

ORIGINALITY / VALUE

- The reason(s) you should read this paper
  - <u>Quantitative</u>: While previous studies have focused on single aspects of social media governance, e.g. guidelines, very little research has been done on the overall concept …"
  - <u>Mixed method</u>: "It is important to recognize current trends and constraints in measurement to be able to leverage the value of communication practices in the organization."
  - <u>Quantitative</u>: "This reconceptualization can finally address the criticism of earlier models and dimensions of public relations, establish a measurement approach for the practice of public relations, as well as provide a tool …"

Referencing

- Most common method is APA, followed by Harvard (several versions). These are Author/Date style
- Also used are Chicago, MLA and many, many more.
- Ensure that your referencing is in the required style!
- Poor in-text referencing reduces reviewer's confidence in author(s) standards
- Excellent online guides at Purdue University, e.g. http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

Final thoughts

- If you want to get published – research and write it up
- *Authors who get published are those who submit papers*
- First, take small steps to polish your academic style
- Learn from reviewer feedback
- Look for opportunities
- Then go for a major journal