RASE

Special Series Article

Writing Research Reports for Publication: Recommendations for New Authors

Lynn S. Fuchs and Douglas Fuchs

The purposes of this article are to highlight the salient, and sometimes invisible, features of the standard format for reporting research and to provide guidelines to help novice writers avoid some of the more frequent problems they encounter. First, we describe some general considerations about planning and writing for publication. Then, after discussing each of the five components of the research report (abstract, introduction, method, results, and discussion), we address questions about the writing and publishing process frequently posed by our students as they begin to conduct and disseminate research independently.

A STANDARD FORMAT exists for describing and publishing a research report. This format, which comprises five sections—abstract, introduction, method, results, and discussion—is rooted in the scientific method, and it encompasses a formal network of rules for organization and communication. Although this format, with its traditions and regulations, at first may seem rigid, arbitrary, and unfamiliar, its standardization actually facilitates the communication of information: Readers familiar with the format benefit from an advance organizer through which they can anticipate the structure of a research report and by which they can easily access the information they seek. Moreover, once experienced and familiar with this standard format, writers can rely on this structural advance organizer to make the writing task easier and to increase the chances of communicating effectively and efficiently.

The purpose of this paper is not to review each and every rule constituting this system (for a complete set of rules, see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* [APA], 1983). Rather, we highlight the salient, and sometimes invisible, features of the standard format for reporting research and emphasize ways to avoid some of the more frequent problems encountered by novice writers. We begin by discussing some general considerations about planning and writing for publication. Then, after treating each of the five components of the research report separately, we address questions about the writing and publishing process frequently posed by our students as they begin to conduct and disseminate research independently.

General Considerations About Planning and Writing for Publication

Planning

Formulate the Major Issues for Discussion. Planning is critical—before designing a study and, after its completion, prior to writing the report. To write a paper for publication, it is not enough merely to have a study to describe. A publishable paper must discuss an issue of importance to the field and of interest to the journal readership. Consequently, before writing, develop the key concepts to be explored in the manuscript. Developing these concepts prior to writing should help produce an interesting, publishable, and internally consistent document, with an introduction and discussion that (a) fit together to explore the key concepts effectively and (b) relate well to the method and results sections.

Identify Two or More Potential Outlets for the Study. Before writing, tentatively identify the journals to which the paper may be submitted. We recommend identifying more than one journal, because experience with the peer-review process indicates that you

should never assume that a paper will be accepted for publication by any particular journal. You should always know where a manuscript will be sent in case it is rejected by a first-choice journal. (Of course, after you read the initial set of reviews, the second-choice journal needs to be reconsidered in light of the reviewer criticisms.) Additionally, when you write a paper with specific publication outlets in mind, you can tailor the paper to fit length and style requirements and to address the concerns and interests of the journals' readerships.

Technical Writing

Length. It is not possible to recommend a generic length for a research report. In technical writing, however, it is useful to remember that journal space is precious, and that a shorter paper generally has a better chance for publication than a longer one. Of course, some topics and studies warrant relatively long papers. As you consider your topic and the probable length of the manuscript, review the length requirements of different journals: These requirements may dictate your choices.

As a general rule, use subheadings to avoid losing your readers for an introduction that exceeds three pages, for any method section, for a results section longer than three pages, and for a discussion that exceeds four pages. Headings make the organization of a paper visible and assist readers in understanding the logic of a manuscript. Remember, your responsibility as an author is to make your paper as accessible and easy to read as possible, while still communicating information in a comprehensive way. A paper that succeeds in communicating effectively and efficiently (and is free from typographical and other easily avoidable errors) will bias many reviewers in favor of acceptance. A report that describes a study of comparably strong design and potential interest, but is written in a laborious, complicated way (and that contains avoidable errors), may suffer from reviewer bias against publication.

Style. Additional recommendations about technical writing, in general, follow:

1. Outline the development of your argument before you begin writing, and check fidelity to this outline by listing the topic sentence of each paragraph and matching this list against your outline.
2. Reread your writing to eliminate all unnecessary words. Technical writing should be terse, clear, and simple.
3. Avoid fancy vocabulary when simple words communicate clearly (e.g., "we *used* a 2 × 2 factorial design" rather than "we *utilized* . . .").
4. Select nouns and verbs that convey meaning directly and clearly, and avoid unnecessary adjectives and adverbs (especially words like *very* or *really*).
5. Vary the structure of your sentences.
6. Avoid the passive voice.
7. Make sure your sentences are not too long. As a rule, check any sentence that runs more than four lines to determine whether it can be broken into two sentences.
8. Do not be afraid to write in the first person. (APA guidelines encourage use of the first person [except to editorialize], and the first person is an effective strategy for avoiding the passive voice.)
9. Avoid long quotations (most readers will skip over them), and it is usually more effective to summarize the idea (while, of course, acknowledging the original author through citation).
10. Provide citations for statements that represent more than common sense.
11. Learn and use APA style (beware that some editors and reviewers react impatiently to authors' lack of compliance with APA style).
12. Before sending a paper for review, have a trusted colleague read and critique it or put the paper away for at least 1 week and then reread and edit the manuscript yourself. Remember, good writing is hard work. Reconcile yourself to this at the onset. Only the rare individual writes without much need for rewriting.

The Five Components of the Research Report

Abstract

The abstract of a research report provides readers with a summary of the research to follow. This summary allows readers to determine whether the paper (a) focuses on a topic relevant to their interests, (b) uses a convincing methodology, and (c) contains findings of interest to them.

The abstract typically contains 100 to 150 words, constituting four to six sentences, usually organized as follows: The first sentence states the purpose of the research; the second describes the participants; the third explains what the participants did during the study; the fourth identifies the key measures employed; the fifth summarizes important (not necessarily *all*) analyses and findings; and the sixth briefly explains implications of the findings. Although abstracts vary in their construction, one "generic" form follows:

> The purpose of this study was. . . . The participants were . . . , who were assigned randomly to the following treatments, . . . , which lasted for X weeks.

During the study, participants . . . (description of what they did). Before and after implementation of the treatment, we measured participants with. . . . Analyses of variance (or whatever analysis was used) indicated. . . . Results are discussed in terms of. . . .

A common grammatical problem with abstracts is tense: Abstracts should be presented in the past tense (as should all descriptions of the purposes, method, and results of the study; in the discussion, past tense is also appropriate except that present tense may be appropriate for results with continuing applicability). The most frequent structural problem with abstracts is length. The error that typically produces inappropriately long abstracts is unnecessary inclusion of rationale and context. The abstract should not provide a rationale for the study; it does not explain the context for the study; it does not try to "sell" the research. Rather, it provides a terse, straightforward summary of what was done and found in the study; this summary allows readers to assess their interest in reading the full report.

Introduction

The introduction to a research report contains four important parts: (a) the context for the research, (b) a statement of the purpose and the specific research questions addressed, (c) a description of how the current study adds to the already existing research literature, and (d) a rationale for why the questions under study are important to answer.

At the opening of a paper, it is helpful to assume that readers are not necessarily familiar with the research topic. The first paragraph or two of the introduction, therefore, provide context that allows readers to relate the current topic to their own background information. To address the broadest special education readership, the context should include information about practical applications or day-to-day experiences, as well as description of previously conducted research to establish the research context. It is important to note that, in writing for publication, the introduction should not necessarily describe the previous research literature comprehensively; rather, it should highlight the most salient, representative previous studies.

After establishing the practical and research context, provide a clear statement of the purpose of the current study, along with a concise set of questions addressed by the research. There are no rules about where this statement occurs. Our experience in reading research reports, however, leads us to recommend that authors organize the introduction so that the purpose is stated relatively early. With this established, readers can more easily orient the information in the introduction to the purpose of the current investigation.

The next responsibility is to state how the study contributes to the existing literature. Occasionally, this contribution represents a radical substantive or methodological departure from previous research. More typically, however, it represents a relatively subtle, but clear and important, expansion of a theoretical component, a practical application, or a methodological dimension. In any case, it is important to state this expansion and contribution explicitly; it is not the readers' responsibility to infer the nature of this contribution.

Finally, you must state why these research questions are important to study. A study is not necessarily important because it addresses a substantive or methodological issue never studied before. (Maybe no one has ever addressed these questions because they are not interesting.) You need to try to convince readers that, in addition to expanding the research base, this study provides information important to the field. In our reading of research reports, this statement of importance is the most frequently omitted component of introductions. Even if the importance seems obvious, it is the authors' responsibility to communicate the importance explicitly. If the authors cannot put the importance into words, they should not assume that readers will figure it out.

Consequently, although an infinite number of effective strategies exist for crafting an introduction, there is no formula for writing a successful introduction. Below, however, we outline one possible structure for an introduction, containing the following components:

1. Explanation of the topic, with a focus on helping the reader relate this topic to the reader's own practical background information.
2. Overview of salient previous research on this topic.
3. Identification of an unresolved, unaddressed aspect of the previous research.
4. Statement of the purpose of the study and the research questions addressed.
5. Explanation of how the current study contributes to the existing literature.
6. Statement of why these research questions are important to the field and how they will contribute to our understanding of a phenomenon or the solution to a practical problem.

Method

The method section of a journal article should explain in detail how the study was conducted. This explanation should provide enough information to allow another researcher to make a reasonable attempt at repeating the major components of the study (i.e., replication and to allow for clear interpretation of results). Most method sections include the following

components: participants or subjects, measures, procedure, and design/data analysis. In accordance with APA style, these sections are denoted by subheadings. Of course, the nature of a specific study determines which components of a method section actually are required.

Subjects. In any study that involves participants, a complete description of subjects is necessary. A thorough description is required because findings may vary for different subject groups and, therefore, results can be generalized only to individuals similar to those participating in the study. Description of teacher participants in special education research frequently includes age, years of general and special education teaching experience, race, sex, highest educational degree, and certifications. Student demographic variables typically include a thorough description of disability and students' classifications, along with means and standard deviations for student age, grade, sex, race, socioeconomic level, years of special education service, intelligence, achievement, and type of special education service received.

In addition to providing a thorough description of participants, it is necessary to state (a) which inclusion criteria were used; (b) how subjects were recruited; (c) whether any participants dropped out of the study and, if so, why, from which groups, and whether the remaining sample was comparable to the original sample; and (d) when the study involves more than one treatment, how participants were assigned to differing conditions.

Importantly, when a study involves multiple treatment groups, it is insufficient to provide overall demographic information across all participants. Rather, authors must report demographic information separately for each group and must provide inferential statistics to explore the extent to which these groups can be considered comparable. This lack of separate description and formal comparison of the demographics among treatment groups is a common error in research reports. It can represent a critical flaw that precludes publication.

Measures. A complete description is required of each measure employed in a study. Without such information and without information about how accurate and meaningful the data produced by these measurements might be, readers cannot conclude anything important from the study's findings. For well-known measures, this description should include information about what the measure requires the test taker and observer–examiner to do, and what the technical features (i.e., reliability and validity) of the instrument are. It is important to emphasize, given the typical errors we see among inexperienced writers, that information about reliability and validity is necessary even for commercially available and well-accepted instruments. A thorough analysis of test manuals, even for commonly used measures, will reveal varying levels of reliability and validity, some of which are not acceptable (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Benowitz, & Barringer, 1987; Tindal et al., 1985). Consequently, we cannot assume technical adequacy simply because a test is used frequently, and it is not the reader's responsibility to find the test manual to verify acceptable reliability and validity.

For measures that are less well known, newly developed, or constructed specifically for a study, additional information is required. Description of the procedures for development are necessary, along with information about measurement methods. All available reliability and validity data should be reported, including the samples upon which those data were based. With this said, it is important to reiterate that this information should be presented concisely.

Procedure. In the procedure section, explain what the participants did and how the measures were employed. Questions answered in the procedure section include the following: What treatment(s) was (were) employed and exactly what did participants do in each treatment? Where was the study conducted? Who implemented the study? How were participants trained or prepared to participate? How were data collected—by whom and when? When the procedure section has been completed, determine whether enough information has been provided to permit another researcher to make a respectable attempt at setting up and conducting a similar study.

Design and Data Analysis. In many research reports, authors provide a separate section to describe the research design. This description lays out the contrasting treatments and labels the experimental design. It also provides a thorough description of the statistical analysis applied to each measure (or set of measures) employed in the study. Additionally, a rationale for the design and statistical methods frequently is incorporated. Including a section that details the design and statistical methods often helps clarify the structure of a study and assists the readers in anticipating the description of results to follow.

Results

The results section may be considered the "guts" of a research report. Here, the authors detail their findings. It is their responsibility to provide a clear, thorough description of results; it is the readers' responsibility to review the findings carefully to determine the extent to which they agree with the authors' characterization of results, which will follow in the discussion. (It is critical for the reader to approach the results section with an independent attitude; it is not uncommon for careful readers to disagree with how findings are portrayed in a discussion section.)

One effective way to report findings is to divide the results section by measures used, to organize these into conceptually related sets, and to offer subheadings for each. Examples of "sets" include fidelity data (i.e., results of measures taken to examine the extent to which treatments were implemented as intended), achievement data, self-concept data, teacher planning data, and social validity data. Providing such subheadings can assist readers in processing results sections that include a lot of detailed information.

For each type of measure, authors need to report descriptive information (i.e., means and standard deviations for interval data and frequencies and percentages for nominal or ordinal data). Additionally, when treatment groups are involved, authors should report descriptive information for each treatment group, as well as inferential statistics (i.e., analyses of variance or other types of parametric statistics for interval data; chi-squares or other types of nonparametric statistics for nominal or ordinal data) to determine whether the performance of groups can be reliably distinguished.

In reporting results, authors can present numbers within text, in tables, or in figures. Two important rules of thumb to remember, however, are (a) do not repeat numbers in text and tables or in tables and figures, which wastes journal space, and (b) do not include more tables or figures than are necessary. (Tables and figures are more expensive to produce than text. Also, in reviewing papers, it is not uncommon to see tables with only two or three rows of information—such a table is better combined with another table or eliminated by incorporating the numbers in the text.)

Two additional points are important regarding results sections: First, report all statistical values, even those that are not significant. Second, consider reporting the magnitude of findings. Reporting effect sizes can help readers understand the importance of findings and help meta-analysts derive accurate information for aggregating findings across studies.

Discussion

Content. The discussion section should review study findings in a nontechnical manner (i.e., summarize results without referring to numbers). Additionally, a thorough discussion should explain (a) how these findings relate to the central purpose of the study and to results reported in previous related studies, (b) exactly how the findings add to the field's theoretical or practical understanding of some important phenomenon, (c) why the results may have turned out as they did, (d) the investigation's limitations, and (e) the study's implications for practice and future research.

Internal Consistency Errors. Some frequent errors we have observed in research reports include the following: First, some authors introduce findings from their present study in the discussion for which they have included no description of method or results. This is not permitted, except when cited as a separate document through which readers can obtain a complete description of methods and results to support the findings newly introduced in the discussion. Second, some authors use the discussion to speculate on a topic only marginally related to the current study. Although such speculation may be interesting as a position paper, it should be avoided in a research report: Information included in a discussion should be closely related to the context developed in the introduction and to the method and results of the study just presented.

Both of these errors address the concern for the internal consistency of a research report. As each section of the report is crafted and completed, check the document for internal consistency. For example, after the method is completed, carefully review the introduction and method to determine that the statement of purpose and the research questions conform to the methodology of the study. After the results section has been written, ensure that every type of data introduced in the method has corresponding data reported in the results. Similarly, every datum presented in the results should have supporting documentation in the method describing what the measure is and how the data were collected. After the discussion is organized and prepared, check the introduction against the discussion to make sure that the central themes, purposes, and previous research review provided in the introduction have been reviewed and resolved in the discussion. Also check the results against the discussion to determine whether each finding presented in the results has been addressed in the discussion and that no new findings have been introduced in the discussion.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Publication Process

The Editorial Process

What Are the Mechanics of the Editorial Process? The editorial process typically comprises the following stages: manuscript submission, initial editorial screening and independent field reviews, decision by the editor, revision and additional review, and postacceptance activities.

Manuscript submission. First, identify one journal to which you will submit your manuscript (see discussion below about strategies for identifying an appropriate journal). Consult a recent issue of that journal to learn to whom and where to send how many copies of the paper and whether any specific statements are required in your cover letter.

According to APA style, the cover letter should provide the editor with general information about the manuscript, including (a) whether it has been presented at a scientific meeting; (b) whether closely related manuscripts exist and, if so, where they have been published or to which journals they have been submitted; (c) the title, length, and number of tables and figures included in the manuscript; (d) verification that the treatment of participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of APA; (e) if copyrighted material is being reproduced, a copy of the permission letter; and (f) a telephone number and address for future correspondence. Some editors specifically require authors to include in a cover letter background information about the authors or a statement that the paper is not under simultaneous review with any other journal (check the journal's statement of editorial policy to determine whether additional information is requested in the cover letter). If the journal conforms to APA style, however, simultaneous submission to more than one journal is not permitted (and may be considered unethical).

Initial screening and independent reviewing. When the editor receives the manuscript, he or she usually completes a cursory review of the paper to ensure the general appropriateness of focus and methodology of the manuscript. If the paper is considered inappropriate, the editor will reject it immediately and write a letter to the authors explaining why the manuscript is inappropriate. Frequently, the editor will provide some suggestions for more appropriate outlets.

If the paper is viewed as having an appropriate focus for the journal, the editor will send the first author a postcard or letter acknowledging receipt of the manuscript. The editor identifies two to four individuals who have substantive or methodological expertise relevant to the content of the paper and sends the paper to these individuals for review. The editor typically requests that the review be returned within 1 month. Readers sometimes do not meet the requested deadlines, however, resulting in reviews that take longer to complete than authors and editors would like.

Some journals provide reviewers with the cover page of the manuscript, identifying the authors. Others rely on "blind" review, whereby the cover page and all information identifying the authors have been removed prior to review, so that the readers will not be able to identify the authors automatically. (When submitting to journals that employ blind review, authors must remove all identifying information from the body of a manuscript prior to submission. Some reviewers react negatively to authors directly, or even indirectly, identifying themselves.)

Decision by the editor. When all of the reviews have been returned, the editor reads the manuscript, along with the independent reviews, and decides whether the paper may be publishable. Among special education peer-review journals, acceptance rates range between 20% and 40%, including papers that have been revised and resubmitted. This means, of course, that 60% to 80% of papers will be rejected after the initial review.

It is important to remember, however, that with a rejection, the authors have gained several evaluations of the manuscript. The serious author will develop a "thick skin," which will permit him or her to use those evaluations to the greatest advantage: to revise the manuscript for review by another journal, to identify a more appropriate outlet, and to consider those evaluations in planning future research and writing subsequent papers. Using reviewer feedback to make the paper stronger for review by another journal is an important behavior associated with successful publication. Perseverance and a willingness to learn account for a lot in getting papers published!

Revision and additional review. Even when the editor deems a manuscript as potentially publishable in the target journal, it is rare for a paper to be accepted for publication in its initial form. In nearly all cases, the editor requests a revision, to address the concerns noted by the reviewers and to correct any additional problems identified by the editor. Frequently, these required revisions are extensive. Moreover, these revisions sometimes are requested with no promise of eventual publication; that is, the paper is rejected, a revision is suggested (but sometimes explicitly not encouraged), and a second review is promised if the authors submit a revision (frequently this second review is completed by an entirely new set of reviewers; sometimes, by a subset of the original reviewers with one or more new reviewers added; and sometimes, by only the original reviewers).

Consequently, the authors must be prepared to exert considerable energy in revising a paper in accordance with specific concerns, when there is no assurance that this activity will result in a publication. More times than not, however, when authors undertake serious and meticulous revisions, their manuscripts are eventually accepted. Again, perseverance is important.

Postacceptance activities. After a final revision has been accepted for publication, the authors still have several responsibilities to fulfill. First, they sign copyright assignment forms and frequently must supply information about themselves to include with the manuscript for publication. Second, they must secure permission to reprint any materials derived from previously published work (ideally this permission should be acquired prior to submission and sent to the editor at the time of submission). Third, the authors must supply high-quality (or camera-ready) versions of figures, if these are included in the manuscript. Fourth, after

the journal's copyeditor has worked on the manuscript, the author must review the copyeditor's work and approve those changes. (Because copyeditors often lack substantive expertise in the area of study, they can make changes that alter the authors' meaning, so a careful review is necessary.) Finally, the author must read the typeset version of the paper to identify any errors, if the journal sends it for his or her approval. These last two requirements are tedious and typically are requested by publishers without warning and with only 2- to 5-day deadlines. Nevertheless, they are critical to ensure accurate, scholarly copy.

How Does Signing Over the Copyright to a Journal Affect Your Obligations If You Want to Write a Similar Article for Another Outlet? Copyrights pertain to the wordings employed, not to the ideas expressed in a manuscript. Consequently, in a legal sense, an author could publish the results of one study or publish similar arguments more than once, as long as different wordings were used to express the ideas. According to APA, however, it is considered unethical to publish results of the same study more than once.

How Does One Determine How Much Involvement Warrants Coauthorship as Opposed to Acknowledgment? According to APA, authorship denotes primary credit and responsibility for a work. First authorship indicates principal credit and responsibility, and subsequent names indicate decreasing contribution. "Substantial contributions may include formulating the problem . . . , structuring the . . . design, organizing and conducting the statistical analysis, interpreting the results, or writing a major portion of the paper" (APA, 1983, p. 20). Lesser contributions, which may be credited in an acknowledgment rather than with authorship, include the following: designing or preparing materials, suggesting or advising about statistical analyses, collecting data, modifying or structuring a computer program, or arranging for research participants. As stated in the APA manual, the writer always should obtain consent before including a person's name as an author or in a note.

In addition to these guidelines, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (1991) recently published a set of ethical standards, which include guidelines for authorship. According to AERA, authorship is reserved for those "who have made substantive creative contribution to the generation of an intellectual product" (p. 33). First authorship and order of subsequent authors should indicate relative creative leadership and contribution.

> Examples of creative contributions are writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or substantive editing; and contributing generative ideas or basic conceptual schemes or analytic categories, collecting data which requires significant interpretation or judgment, and interpreting data. (p. 33)

Journal Selection

How Does a Writer Determine Which Journal Is Appropriate for a Particular Topic, and How Does an Author Find Out Information About Different Outlets. Familiarity with journals is the best way to determine how appropriate a particular research report is for a specific journal. New authors probably should complete an index card for each potentially appropriate journal in their field. Useful information to record on this index card may include the title of the journal, the editor, the editor's address and telephone number, the number of years that the journal has been published, the number of individual subscriptions, the number of library subscriptions, the statement of purpose and editorial policies as provided by the journal editor, dimensions of manuscripts that increase appropriateness as provided by an editor's statement, a listing of the types and lengths of articles found in recent issues of the journal, the salient features of types of articles found in recent issues, a quick assessment of the overall quality of the articles in recent issues, the journal's acceptance rate and publication lag, and the journal's fee to publish (if any).

When identifying an appropriate journal for a specific manuscript, attempt to find one that (a) publishes research related to the substantive focus of the manuscript, (b) publishes studies with methodologies similar to the one employed in the investigation described in the paper, and (c) publishes research of a similar quality. Given a set of journals that match the substance, methodology, and overall quality of the manuscript, try to submit the work to a journal (a) with a large readership (especially with a large library subscription base, which makes an article most accessible), (b) with an interested readership that may either use the information in their practice or consider and cite the study in their own academic work, (c) with a long history of publication (to increase the likelihood that the journal will not cease to publish and thereby become relatively unavailable), and (d) with a strong reputation for quality.

Some publications provide summaries of important dimensions of journals to assist writers in identifying appropriate outlets. For example, in the area of reading research, the International Reading Association publishes an annual *Contributor's Guide to Periodicals in Reading* (e.g., 1990). This publication lists information about almost 200 periodicals that carry articles about reading (the information was provided by the editors of those periodicals in response to a questionnaire). The listed information includes the edi-

tor, the editor's address, and the editorial process (i.e., number of issues per year, approximate length of manuscripts, circulation, number of manuscripts per issue, typical length of time between submission and editorial decision, typical length of time between acceptance and publication, language in which the journal is published, and required style).

Is It More Effective to Submit a Manuscript Unsolicited or in Response to a Call for Papers? Frequently, when a call for papers is issued by a journal, the editor or guest editor also has solicited papers on this topic. Consequently, it is hard to predict how "open" such a call for papers may be. Sometimes, these calls are issued as a courtesy to journal readers; other times, they represent sincere invitations for papers. We would suggest calling the editor to obtain additional information about the call (a) to determine whether (and if so, how many) other papers have been solicited, how many papers in all will be published in the special issue, and whether a guest editor may have additional information, as well as (b) to discuss the appropriateness of the specific paper you may submit.

Guidelines for Journal Writing

What Are the Critical Dimensions That Usually Determine Whether a Manuscript Will Be Published in a Major Special Education Journal? In our experience, papers will be published when the editors and reviewers can answer "yes" to the following questions: (a) Does the manuscript address an interesting, important issue? (b) Is this issue relevant to the readership of the journal to which the paper has been submitted? (c) Is the paper easy to read and understand? and (d) Was the study competently designed and executed, so that the findings are convincing?

What Can Authors Do to Increase Their Chances of Getting an Article Accepted for Publication? To increase the chances of getting a manuscript accepted for publication, we recommend the following: (a) Keep the paper as short as possible, while communicating the method and results with sufficient detail so that reviewers can judge the integrity of the study; (b) make the key points clear (and avoid unnecessary minor points if they distract from the important issues); (c) conform to all aspects of APA style; and (d) avoid careless errors. (Remember, the reviewers are donating their time to the editorial process; they will not be pleased to see careless errors that may reflect a lack of time on the authors' part.)

Lynn S. Fuchs *is an associate professor in the Department of Special Education at George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. She received her PhD from the University of Minnesota in educational psychology in 1981. Her research focuses on curriculum-based measurement and general educators' instructional adaptation for students with disabilities.* **Douglas Fuchs** *is a professor in the Department of Special Education at George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. He received his PhD from the University of Minnesota in educational psychology in 1978. His research interests focus on how to make general education settings more accommodating for difficult-to-teach students. Address: Lynn S. Fuchs, Box 328 Peabody, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203.*

References

American Educational Research Association. (1991). Proposed ethical standards for AERA. *Educational Researcher, 20*(9), 31–35.

American Psychological Association. (1983). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., Benowitz, S.A., & Barringer, K. (1987). Norm-referenced tests: Are they valid for use with handicapped children? *Exceptional Children, 54,* 263–271.

International Reading Association. (1990). *Contributor's guide to periodicals in reading.* Newark, DE: Author.

Tindal, G., Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Shinn, M.R., Deno, S.L., & Germann, G. (1985). Empirical validation of criterion-referenced tests. *Journal of Educational Research, 78,* 203–209.