

“Well Begun is Half Done” (Aristotle): A Year-in-Review of Editorial Observations to Guide Aspiring Authors

Editorial

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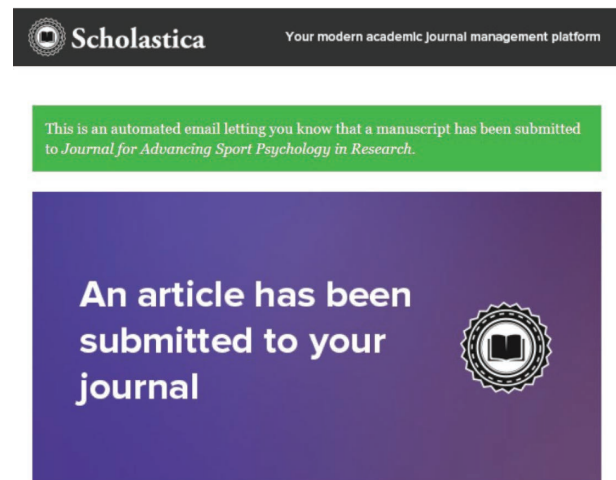
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December 1st, 2020 an e-mail message arrives in our respective inboxes with the following message: “This is an automated e-mail letting you know that a manuscript has been submitted to *Journal for Advancing Sport Psychology in Research*.” We, along with the rest of JASPR’s inaugural Editorial Board, had been waiting for this moment. It was not a mock manuscript; like the ones we had created to practice the hand-off exchanges a manuscript makes as it works its way through the journal’s various publishing processes. Instead, it was the first student-led, student-submitted manuscript to JASPR. Ten months later, after rounds of rigorous, double-blind peer reviews conducted by three Reviewers, with each round carefully vetted by the Junior Associate Editor, the Associate Editor, the Junior Editor-in-Chief, and the Editor-in-Chief, JASPR sends its first ‘Accept’ decision of a manuscript: “We are delighted to inform you and your co-authors that your manuscript has now been formally accepted in its current form for publication in *Journal for Advancing Sport Psychology in Research*.” Just over a year from being formally established, at the publishing of this paper, JASPR has received 39 manuscript submissions. Of them, 51% have received a ‘Reject’ decision. The remaining manuscripts are in various stages of the peer review process, many of them in round three or four of peer review.

Given the rate at which student-author submissions are unsuccessful in reaching a standard acceptable for publication, our objective is to provide aspiring student-authors and faculty mentors with submission guidance to maximize publication success. Based on our editorial observations of the past year, we have identified common issues within manuscripts that have consistently led to ‘Reject’ decision or in numerous rounds of revision and resubmission. To ensure more

Figure 1. The Long-Awaited First Submission
E-mail for JASPR



successful publication process, student-authors and faculty mentors are advised to heed the guidance shared herein, which is also relevant when considering a manuscript submission to any academic journal.

Editorial Observations

Evaluate Submission Readiness

Depending on the university guidelines, a finished thesis or dissertation is not always immediately ready to be submitted as a manuscript. Typically, a thesis or dissertation has a lengthy introduction section and an in-depth review of the literature, whereas the introduction of a manuscript is meant to parsimoniously present only the most relevant background literature to provide a strong rationale within 4-5 paragraphs.

Equally, differences between a thesis/dissertation and a manuscript can be found in the method section, in that a thesis or dissertation often includes detailed justification of the methodological decisions made, and a manuscript simply states what methods were used with selected citations in support of the methodology. At *JASPR*, many student manuscripts are not adequately in the form required of a peer reviewed academic manuscript, and therefore are not yet ready to undergo the peer review process. When a manuscript is not written in proper form, it can lead to an automatic desk reject, or at the very least, delay the publication process considerably as much work must be completed before it can undergo the peer review process.

Adhere to All Submission Guidelines

JASPR, like all other peer reviewed academic journals, has specific guidelines that must be adhered to in the preparation of a manuscript for submission to the journal. To give a manuscript the best possible chance for success, making sure the manuscript meets the basic requirements for submission is paramount. Manuscripts that do not adhere to the submission guidelines is unfortunately far too common. Approximately 40% of all manuscript submissions to *JASPR* either: (a) are not aligned topically with the journal's scope, (b) do not adhere to the journal's formatting and style requirements, or (c) do not include all the mandatory submission documents that must also accompany the manuscript ([see *JASPR's* vision, mission, and scope along with its Author guidelines](#)). Adhering to submission guidelines is not optional, and too often results in a desk reject.

Adhere to the American Psychological Association (APA) Style Journal Article Reporting Standards

Part of the submission requirements at *JASPR* is adherence to the [APA Style Journal Article Reporting Standards](#) (APA Style JARS) which is a:

set of guidelines designed for journal authors, reviewers, and editors to enhance scientific rigor in peer-reviewed journal articles. Educators and students can use APA Style JARS as teaching and learning tools for conducting high quality research and determining what information to report in scholarly papers (APA, 2021).

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of becoming familiar with APA Style JARS and ensuring these standards are followed throughout the manuscript. Lack of adherence to APA Style JARS

typically means the manuscript lacks scientific rigor in one or more areas – and as such, has become one of the key reasons why a manuscript goes through numerous rounds of revisions at *JASPR* or has been rejected.

Pay Attention to Details – They Matter

At *JASPR*, many of the rejected manuscript submissions share one broad commonality – the manuscript lacks important, and necessary, attention to detail. This lack of attention to detail is not typically isolated to one section of the manuscript, rather it is seen throughout the work in the title, abstract, introduction, method, analysis, results, discussion, and reference sections. This incongruence is always a red flag – as it begs the question: how valid are the results if the methods of data collection and analysis do not match with the aim of the research? At *JASPR*, lack of cohesive alignment across the different research elements needed for a study is a concern frequently highlighted by *JASPR's* peer reviewers (for more details on cohesive alignment, see [Arvinen-Barrow & Vissek, 2021](#)).

In addition, it is also not uncommon for a manuscript to lack strong theoretical and empirical rationale for the research conducted. This lack of detail provided in one section, namely the introduction when providing justification for the research, in effect leads to an absence of cohesive alignment across the other sections of the manuscript. Typically, this also results in weak understanding of the connections among the variables under investigation. How are the variables proposed to be connected (*theory*) and why? What is established in the literature about these connections already (*empirical evidence*)?

At *JASPR*, we also see inconsistencies in the terminology used to describe varied constructs. For example, our field is often referred to as “sport psychology” and in fewer instances “sports psychology”. While there is debate which is correct, it is important to make sure the manuscript uses one terminology consistently rather than interchanging among them within a manuscript. Similarly, when referring to a person working in our field (e.g., sport psychology *consultant*, sport psychology *practitioner*, sport psychology *professional*) should be consistently applied through the manuscript. Consistency in a manuscript across the terminology adopted will aid in clarity, whereas inconsistency contributes to confusion.

Be Realistic About Research Limitations

Given the apparent limitations of student research (e.g., time, funding, research infrastructure), some

manuscripts submitted to *JASPR* are what is considered small-scale research. Manuscripts of this kind can be expected of a student-centered journal like *JASPR*. Pilot studies, when well justified, are acceptable. For example, much of the student work submitted to *JASPR* is preliminary in nature, and indeed, an important early step in a novel area of research. If the research conducted fits this category, it must be framed as such. In the case of preliminary (and indeed all) research, authors are encouraged to boldly discuss limitations of their (preliminary) research. Identifying limitations does not make research less than; rather, it is important to transparently identify both the strengths and limitations of every research study conducted, rather than emboldening the results, findings, and implications and attempting to hide or bury a study's inherent limitations.

It is also important to note that not all small research is *preliminary* if the study design and research findings are already well established in the literature. This is a distinction that often gets muddled up in manuscripts submitted to *JASPR*, which results in multiple rounds of peer reviews in order for the Editors and Reviewers to confidently decipher if the research is indeed preliminary and novel and thus congruent with *JASPR*'s vision and mission (to expand the field of psychology in the domains of sport, exercise, and performance), or if the research presents small-scale findings of knowledge already established in the field. A manuscript will more efficiently make its way through the publishing processes if the presentation of the research conducted is accurately described, discussed, and its limitations acknowledged in the original submission.

Understand the Reviewer Guidelines


In sport, no performer enters a competition without understanding the rules of the competition and being prepared for what the performance will be judged on and penalized for. The same applies to manuscripts, and certainly any coursework assignments. Much like preparing for a sport performance and a coursework assignment, the preparation of a research manuscript should include having a thorough understanding of the criteria the work is being evaluated against. At *JASPR*, the [Reviewer Guidelines](#) are available not only for Reviewers, but also for both student-authors and faculty mentors to become familiar with prior to submitting their work to *JASPR*. It is important to know the criteria the work will be evaluated against, as this will provide student-authors an opportunity to view their own work from multiple vantage points – that of the author, reviewer, and ultimately, the reader of the work.

“Well Begun is Half Done” (Aristotle)


As the Establishing Editors of a student-centered journal, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of evaluating the manuscript for its readiness for submission, ensuring it adheres to all submission guidelines and APA JARS standards, and paying attention to details. Correspondingly, being realistic about the limitations and merits of the research is a fundamental characteristic of quality science. Further, understanding the Reviewer Guidelines can help the student-author(s) and faculty mentors to guide the student in presenting their work in such a way that ticks the required boxes of manuscript submissions. While it might be tempting to submit a thesis or dissertation work to *JASPR* “as is”, to maximize the chance of ultimately receiving a desired publication decision of ‘Accept’, student-authors, with appropriate faculty mentorship and oversight, must adequately conduct the work needed to properly prepare a manuscript for submission that meets the fundamental requirements of an academic publication

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