

**Publishing our research:
Selecting a topic and writing abstract and
introduction**

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Selecting a topic

Where do topics come from?

- Our own experience
- The courses that we teach/have taken
- Suggestions for further research in published articles
- Discussion with colleagues
- Conferences and seminars

We need to ask the following questions while selecting a topic which is likely to have some *impact*:

- Why are we interested in the topic?
- Who will provide the required information for our research?
- What are the major questions that we want to answer?
- In which context is the topic relevant (local, national, global)?

- After identifying a broader area, we need to read in the area of our interest
- Start can start with a recently published paper and follow their references
- Reading in the area of our interest will help us to identify:
 - key figures in the area
 - seminal work in the area
 - commonly asked research questions
 - generally used theoretical frameworks
 - research methods employed
 - ways of analyzing data and discussing results
- It is good to take some papers as exemplars; dialogue with existing literature is the great way of learning (Scaffolding)

Which area are you interested in?

Abstract

- A research article (RA) abstract is an exact and concise description or factual summary of an RA.
- It serves to persuade **readers** that the RA is worth reading. We need to think about the following questions:
 - a. Who are the readers of our RAs?
 - b. Why is it important to make them read our RAs?
- Abstract is the readers' first encounter with the RA – first impressions count.

What to achieve through the abstract?

- Gain readers' attention
- Persuade them to read on

How?

By demonstrating that we have ...

- a. something new and worthwhile to say
- b. professional credibility to address their topic as an 'insider'

Again, how?

What to include in an RA abstract?

Highly selective information:

- Background information
- Purpose of study
- Methodology
- Main findings
- Main discussion points
- Limitations & recommendations

Example

Students' perceptions of supervisory feedback can have a profound impact on their engagement with and agency in learning. Understanding students' perceptions is vital to tailoring feedback to their needs. However, little is known about student perceptions of supervisory feedback on master's theses. To address this lacuna, the present study collected feedback perceptions with a written questionnaire from 434 students in four disciplines (English Education, English Studies, Physics, and Engineering) at a Nepalese university. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that the students as a group did not receive sufficient supervisory support and found their supervisors' feedback practices unsatisfactory. Despite the inadequate support, they reported emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement with the supervisory feedback that they received, and their perceptions of supervisory feedback significantly predicted their self-reported engagement. Furthermore, perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement varied significantly across the disciplines.

Implications are derived from these findings for improving supervisory feedback practices. (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2021a)

Task 1: Identify and indicate various aspects in the following abstract

Research on supervisory feedback on master's theses, especially attitudinal stances conveyed in such feedback, is thin on the ground. Students' construal of their supervisors' attitudes, however, can have a profound impact on their engagement with supervisory feedback. Drawing on the appraisal framework, which characterizes attitudinal meanings in terms of affect (i.e., emotional responses), judgement (i.e., normative evaluation of human behaviors) and appreciation (i.e., aesthetically-/socially-based evaluation of objects and products), this study examined Nepalese supervisors' attitudinal stances communicated in written comments on master's thesis drafts (n = 76) submitted by English-as-a-foreign-language students and oral feedback on proposal and thesis defences (n = 89). Quantitative analyses revealed that while instances of appreciation dominated in the supervisors' use of evaluative language, judgements were also frequent, with affective responses trailing far behind. In both the oral feedback and written comments, significant disciplinary variations were observed for certain types of judgment and appreciation. These findings are discussed in terms of disciplinary culture and the potential impact of the attitudinal stances on students' learning. Implications are derived for the productive framing of supervisory feedback to facilitate students' feedback uptake. (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2021b)

What to avoid in an RA abstract?

- Make sure that the abstract does not have
 - new information not in the paper
 - undefined abbreviations or technical vocabulary
 - literature review
 - unnecessary or excessive methodological details
- Ensure the information is coherent in its sequencing, i.e., purpose, basic study design, methodology, main findings and discussion, conclusions, and implications.
- Check to see if the final abstract meets the guidelines of the target journal such as word limit.

Introductions

Often the most important section of a research article to:

- Set out our topic
- Introduce our idea/s
- State the purpose of the article
- *Persuade* someone that they should read the article
- Demonstrate that we can take our ideas and organize them in a concise, relevant way
- The structure of the introduction *orientates, engages and persuades the reader to continue.*

- It usually flows from *general* to *specific* information
- “Beginning **broadly** and ending **narrowly**, the introduction opens by **globally** describing the study’s focus and rationale, moves to a **presentation of the related empirical literature**, and then closes in a precise manner with the proposal of a **specific** research question(s)”
(Fried, Foltz, Lender, & Vaccaro, 2018, p. 111)

The three-move structure creating a research space(CARS) model

- **Move:** A segment of a text with specific communicative function
- **Move 1:** Establishing a research territory:
 - Claiming centrality of the topic
 - Making generalization
 - Reviewing previous research
- **Move 2:** Establishing a niche/gap (counterclaiming, indicating the gap, question raising, or continuing the tradition)
- **Move 3:** Occupying the niche (outlining the purpose, announcing the research, announcing principal findings, indicating RA structure) (*Swales 1990*)
- The 3-move framework moves from the **general** to the **specific**.

Example

Students' perceptions of supervisory feedback can significantly influence their engagement with such feedback, sense of responsibility, and agency in learning (Davis & Dargusch, 2015) by mediating their learning process (Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). While positive perceptions can enhance academic satisfaction and learning (e.g., de Kleijn, Meijer, Pilot, & Brekelmans, 2014; Harks, Rakoczy, Hattie, Besser, & Klieme, 2014), negative perceptions may result in frustration, alienation, plummeting self-esteem, and suboptimal engagement with feedback (Carless, 2006; de Kleijn et al., 2014). Since feedback is a dialogic process, it remains incomplete without meaningful engagement on the student's part (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Although staff tend to believe that students do not engage with the feedback that they provide (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017), "relatively little is known about how students perceive feedback and even less about the immediate influence of this perception on further learning processes" (Harks et al., 2014, p. 272). Against this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate how master's students perceive various aspects of supervisory feedback on their theses, to what extent they engage with such feedback, and how disciplinary background may influence student perceptions and engagement. (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2021a)

Task 2: Identify and indicate various moves in the following introduction

Guided research is the climax of a master's degree (Paran, Hyland, & Bentall, 2017). Extant research has indicated that writing a master's thesis is often a demanding task for students (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010; Vehviläinen, 2009) due to a number of factors, for example, the daunting size of such a thesis (Dong, 1998), students' lack of previous research experience (Paran et al., 2017), and their limited understanding of the thesis genre and disciplinary requirements (Bitchener et al., 2010). Therefore, students tend to “feel that the amount of energy they spend on writing this work equals or outweighs the energy they spend during their whole studies” (Sadeghi & Shirzad Khajepasha, 2015, p.357)...Despite its critical role in scaffolding students' research and thesis writing, supervisory feedback on master's theses has been underresearched, compared with research on doctoral supervision. Insufficient research attention has been paid to the actual feedback provided on master's thesis drafts to gain insights into the nature and adequacy of supervisors' comments and to shed light on feedback practices in different educational contexts. To bridge this lacuna, this study set out to examine aspects of English-medium master's theses that supervisors focused on in their feedback at a major public university in Nepal, an educational context that is little represented in the extant literature. The study aimed to ascertain to what extent supervisory feedback would meet students' learning needs and expectations with a view to providing useful input for the formulation of supervision policies and the development of effective supervisory practices. (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2021c)

Experience as a learner

Experience from reviewing articles that do meet standard for publication:

- Reading and writing go side by side.
- When we are in the beginning, it is wise to follow a well-established model.
- There is no short-cut to writing: We learn to write only by writing.
- There is no option but to start from where we are.
- The desire to do better and further our skills is more important than the actual capabilities we have at a present moment.

References

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