WHY REFEREES REJECT MANUSCRIPTS

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This article presents the results of content analysis of 373 referees' reports of manuscripts submitted to 35 hospitality and tourism journals where rejection or major revision was recommended. Failed manuscripts had multiple shortcomings, with referees identifying an average of 6.2 deficiencies per article. The most common areas where referees found fault with manuscripts were methodology (74% of papers), failure to elucidate significance effectively (60%), poor writing style (58%) and a weak literature review (50%). The study concluded that communications' problems were more common than technical flaws.

KEYWORDS: *referee; rejection*

Peer review lies at the heart of scientific and academic publishing (Yuksel, 2003). It is an indispensable part of the manuscript screening and selection process (Kassirer & Campion, 1994) for referees determine which papers are accepted or rejected (Coelho, 2000; Horrobin, 2001). It is not surprising then to note that it can be controversial for the refereeing process involves a great deal of subjectivity (Kassirer & Campion, as cited in Coelho, 2000), as Seaton (1996) noted in his scathing commentary on tourism referees. Moreover, reviewing is an essentially negative process, with up to 9 of every 10 manuscripts being rejected by leading journals.

Despite their critical role, referees get no formal training in the assessment process. The academic literature on this subject is also scant leading Kassirer and Campion (1994) to comment "we know surprisingly little about the cognitive aspects of what a reviewer does when he or she assesses a study submitted for publication" (p. 96). This observation made more than 10 years ago still holds true today. Some commentaries have been written about their roles (Kassirer & Campion; McKercher, 2002; Robergs, 2003), and some journal editors have expressed their personal opinions about why papers are accepted or rejected (Eden & Rynes, 2003; Holschuh, 1998). However, research focusing on how papers are assessed is limited and tends to examine reviewers' perceptions

(Jefferson, Wager, & Davidoff, 2002; Yuksel, 2003) rather than actual referees' reports. The current study addresses that gap in the literature by presenting a quantitative analysis of 373 referee reports written by five academics since 2000 where rejection or major revisions were recommended.

BACKGROUND

Rejection of manuscripts is the norm rather than the exception in academia. The top information sciences journals, for example, accept only 10% to 15% of manuscripts (Straub, Ang, & Evaristo, 1994), whereas leading marketing journals reportedly accept around 10%, with 80% rejected at the first review round (Summers, 2001). Ransdell, Sedlacek, Kennedy, Gallegos, and Devoe's (1998) analysis of 75 health-related journals revealed acceptance rates varying from 10% to 90%, with a mean of 42%. A study of 95 editors who publish accounting-related journals showed that almost one half reported acceptance rates of less than 10%, with about one fourth indicating that they accepted 30% or more of the papers submitted (Borkowski & Welsh, 1998). Informal discussions with editors in the hospitality and tourism fields suggest that similar rates are common. The top journals now accept around 10% of manuscripts whereas lower tier journals have higher rates.

Virtually everyone who has written academic papers has had their work rejected at some stage. A study of "the top few percent of ecologists in terms of publications' success in the 1990s" (Cassey & Blackburn, 2003, p. 375) shows that even among this cohort 22% of the manuscripts submitted were rejected at least once, and 72% of the sample submitted at least one paper that was not published anywhere. Some papers are bad fits for the journal and would be received more favorably had they been submitted elsewhere. At other times, competition is so fierce that editors must decline publishing worthwhile papers. Summers (2001) observed, for example, that there is not a dramatic drop in quality between the top 10% of papers submitted to leading marketing journals and the next 10%.

Yet these circumstances explain only a small portion of rejections. The vast majority of failed manuscripts are likely to be rejected as a direct result of some flaw or combination of flaws that render them unpublishable. Indeed, manuscript quality has been a long-standing, endemic problem in academia. Bonjean and Hullum (1978) studied this issue nearly 30 years ago, whereas Hargens (1988) concluded 10 years later that longitudinal data on journal rejection rates have been stable over time and are largely unaffected by changes in submissions and space shortages in journals.

Surveys of referees, authors, and journal editors (Czyzewski & Dickinson, 1990; Glogoff, 1988; Gorman, 2000; Kassirer & Campion, 1994: McConnell, 2000; Pierson, 2004: Straub et al., 1994), as well as editors' own reflections (Holschuh, 1998) from other fields of study offer some insights into quality issues affecting manuscripts. Contribution to knowledge, writing style, and the development of the theory or framework were cited most often by these authors. McConnell (2000) concluded that poorly written or poorly developed manuscripts are the two main reasons manuscripts are rejected by English language nursing

journals originating outside the United States. Contribution to knowledge, logical rigor, and theory were identified consistently as high-order factors in information sciences manuscripts, regardless of the method adopted in the research (Straub et al., 1994). Holschuh (1998) identified six main reasons why manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Literacy Research* are rejected, including research that does not contribute anything new to the field of study, problems in the design and implementation of the research, and problems related to the quality of the writing itself. She observed that many authors have difficulty stating clearly the importance of the study and its significance.

Yuksel (2003) surveyed 43 reviewers from seven international tourism, travel, and hospitality journals. Using a short, open-ended research instrument, he asked respondents to identify and elucidate the three most important criteria that lead to the acceptance of a paper and the three most important flaws that cause rejection. Reviewers identified eight key areas they look for when examining empirical papers. They include contribution to knowledge, innovation and originality, meeting journal objectives, clarity of writing, the use of literature, the quality of the argument made, research methodology and data analysis, and research implications.

Few studies were found that attempted to analyze referees' and/or editors' reports, even though these comments form the basis of editors' acceptance/ rejection decisions. Bonjean and Hullum (1978) conducted a systematic analysis of 600 rejection letters written to sociologists, political scientists, and economists who submitted papers to a leading social sciences journal. Using a set of 17 reasons grouped into five categories developed intuitively during the analysis process, the authors were able to categorize about 97% of all reasons for rejection. Unimportant or insignificant contributions were identified most often, reflecting about 30% of the reasons given. Specifically, papers were rejected because they were seen to add nothing new to the knowledge and understanding of the subject, or made little or no attempt to relate the empirical research to some theoretical construct. Methodological problems ranked second and represented about one fourth of all reasons for rejection. The use of an unsound theoretical framework ranked third, followed by the failure of the manuscript to meet the journal's criteria and poor presentation.

Bordage (2001) conducted a content analysis of reviewers' comments on 123 manuscripts receiving negative comments that were submitted to a medical education conference during a 2-year period. An average of 8.1 reasons per manuscript were given. He was able to group most of the comments into 20 categories. Problems with the results section were identified most frequently, due in large part to the inappropriate use of statistics and the mis-, over-, or underinterpretation of the results. A failure to identify the problem statement clearly and frame it in the literature emerged as the second most commonly cited reason. Weaknesses in the instrumentation, data collection, and sampling ranked next.

METHOD

The current study adopted a method similar to that used by Bordage (2001). Content analysis was undertaken of 373 referee reports written between early

2000 and late 2005 where outright rejection or major revisions to the manuscript were proposed. The manuscripts were submitted to 35 different hospitality and tourism journals. Collectively, we searched our personal records and found 507 full reports and/or recommendation letters to editors. About one fourth (23.5%) recommended publication as is or with minor modifications, whereas the remaining three fourths (76.5%) recommended rejection or major revisions. A recommendation of major revisions can also be interpreted as a polite way of rejecting a manuscript.

Content analysis is a technique used for gathering and analyzing the content of text (Neumann, 2003). Material can be presented in either a quantitative or qualitative format depending on the purpose of the research study. This article adopts a quantitative approach using frequency counts. A preliminary 93-item list was developed based on the literature and the personal observations of the study team. It was refined further as the study progressed. In the end, 104 criteria were identified that could be grouped into 17 broad categories. Nine of these categories relate to specific sections of the paper, such as the abstract, introduction, literature review, method, sampling, data analysis, discussions, conclusions, and references. The other eight categories addressed more fundamental issues relating to the paper's significance, its writing style, the appropriateness for the journal, overall organization, rigor, whether the paper was plagiarized in whole or in part, whether it followed the journal guidelines, and finally, whether any sections were missing. A researcher was hired to conduct the preliminary content analysis of the reports. She worked through each of the contributing author's reports progressively, completing one set before moving on to the next set. She then met with that author to verify the accuracy of interpretation.

Confidentiality is an important issue in the refereeing process. All the manuscripts reviewed were subjected to double-blind refereeing. The study team did not know who wrote the manuscripts, and the manuscript authors were unaware of the referees' names. Aggregate results are presented to protect confidentiality. No reference is made to any specific manuscript or journal. Where appropriate excerpts from the referees' comments are included to better explain a point.

Analyzing reports written by only five individuals represents a potential limitation of the study. Although it is accepted that our views may not reflect the views of the global community of referees, they are thought to be broadly representative, given each of our diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise, and range of journals reviewed. Our interests include casinos and gaming, consumer behavior, conventions and exhibition management, customer service, economics, e-commerce, forecasting, the geography of tourism, hospitality management, information technology, knowledge management, marketing and market research, regional development, transport, and an array of special interest topic areas. Each author reviews between 25 and 30 manuscripts annually. Two are editors-in-chief of their own journals, and all have been appointed to more than 30 editorial boards. All are active researchers who have collectively published more than 250 refereed journal articles during our careers. Two of the five authors are women, and only one is a native English speaker. We have worked

Table 1
Rank Order of Deficiencies Cited in Manuscripts (% of manuscripts reviewed)

Category	% of Manuscripts
Methodology	74.3
Significance / "so what"	60.3
Writing style	58.4
Literature review section of paper	50.9
Data analysis section of paper	42.1
Organization	34.6
Quality and rigor	30.0
Sampling	29.2
Conclusions section of paper	27.6
Discussions section of paper	25.2
Reference section of paper	23.6
Appropriateness of the paper for the journal	16.1
Failure to follow journal guidelines	14.2
Introduction section of paper	14.2
Manuscript is incomplete (sections missing)	7.0
Abstract section of the paper	3.2
Paper plagiarized or published elsewhere	.8

in universities in Asia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

FINDINGS

The 17 categories are ranked according to the frequency of responses (Table 1). Rejected papers had a mean of 6.2 deficiencies per paper, with the number of flaws identified per reviewer ranging from 3.8 to 8.5. Structural problems relating to method, significance, and writing style arose most often, with three fourths of failed manuscripts having identifiable methodological weaknesses. The ability to clearly elucidate the significance of the paper is also a common problem that may also be reflected in deficiencies noted in writing style (3rd), organization of the paper (6th), and the overall quality and rigor (7th). Literature reviews were the weakest section of the paper, identified in one half of the manuscripts.

Structural Deficiencies

Structural deficiencies reflect fundamental flaws in the research design or the ability of the author to communicate the research design effectively. These types of deficiencies are particularly problematic for three reasons. First, they may represent fatal flaws in the research design that will likely result in an unacceptable manuscript regardless of the paper's other qualities. These flaws can often be traced to the initial conceptualization of the work, setting the study on an inevitable path to failure. Second, fundamental flaws cannot be hidden during the writing-up stage. Third, and most frustrating, most structural flaws are

clearly evident to the referees and could be rectified easily at an earlier stage of the research project, leading some of us to wonder how well trained many academics are.

Method and sampling. Methodological problems, including a specific subset of sampling problems were, by far, the most common deficiencies observed. It is impossible to produce publishable research based on a flawed method. Simply stated, a sound methodology forms the foundation of good research whereas the use of an unsound methodology usually produces poor or unreliable research results.

Table 2 summarizes the methodological problems in rank order. Two broad categories can be observed: a failure to explain the method adequately and technical concerns about the validity of the method chosen or its application. Indeed, the failure to explain the method adequately appears to be a more pressing issue than technical weaknesses as the failure to describe the method, the inability to define terms clearly, and the failure to describe the research instrument all appeared near the top of the list. We suspect, though, that poor communication may also mask deeper technical deficiencies.

Technical faults, though less common, appear with surprising frequency. Up to one in five manuscripts adopted a method that was unsuitable for the type of research undertaken. One in 10 manuscripts simply used the wrong method. One observation made is that many authors appear to be genuine enthusiasts of the topic being examined or the method used. Their enthusiasm seems, at times, to curb their ability to analyze critically the validity of the method or the reliability of the results it produces. This rather acerbic comment was made about a manuscript that "proved" the potential market for a special interest product was 200 times larger than the existing, mature market:

> Simply stated the results are incredible in the sense of being unbelievable . . . a much more interesting paper would be to write a cautionary tale about the risks of conducting such research using a naive instrument and flawed methodology that concludes enormous market potential when, in reality, none exists.

Likewise, a proponent of a particular forecasting technique believed it could predict the impact of periodic shocks on tourism systems, even though the data showed unequivocally this was not the case. The following comment was offered:

> rejection of the paper is recommended, as the author demonstrates conclusively that the [xyz] model is not a valid predictor for [abc] catastrophic event . . . the author could re-write the paper showing how poorly forecasting models work in forecasting catastrophic effects.

Problems with sampling were also identified in about 30% of cases. Table 3 reveals that about one in six manuscripts failed to state clearly the sample size or explain the population adequately, whereas about 1 in 12 papers relied on too small a sample to produce reliable results.

Table 2
Methodological Issues

Issue	% of Manuscripts
Method not explained, explained poorly or in a confusing manner	32.2
Terms not defined well	19.8
Method chosen is weak, unreliable, or problematic for the problem being studied	18.5
Research instrument or questionnaire not explained or explained poorly	15.0
Wrong method	9.4
Poor operationalization of variables and/or selection of variables not justified	8.0
Poor questionnaire design	7.2
Method not justified if justification is needed	5.9
Sample size calculated incorrectly	5.1
Lack of available data, including small dataset, or unreliable data	5.1
Limitations in method not stated	5.1
Old dataset used	3.8
Poor hypothesis formulation	2.9
Failed to explain data source	2.7
Irrelevant information included in method section (i.e., results)	1.9
Research instrument wrong and/or cannot answer question	1.3
Unethical method used	.9
Does not understand method	.3

Table 3
Sampling Issues

Issue	% of Manuscripts
Sample size and/or population poorly explained	16.4
Sample too small	8.0
Wrong population or sample selected and/or failed to represent the results/response rate too low	6.2
Sample size not stated	1.3
Misuse of terms (i.e., random when convenience was used)	1.1
Attempt to obscure flaws in sampling	.3

Significance and/or "so what" issue. Manuscripts that contribute little or nothing to the advancement of the collective body of knowledge in a subject area will have difficulty getting published. The "so what" question, as it is commonly referred to, is stated explicitly in the guidelines to authors in many journals. The home page for this journal, for example states that *JHTR* (2006) publishes

> research that has a solid theoretical foundation and theoretically based articles that contribute to the conceptual development of the hospitality management field. The word contribution is key. Articles should exhibit excellence in scholarship and make a significant and relevant contribution to the field.

Table 4
Significance / So What

Issue	% of Manuscripts
Study fails to make a significant contribution to literature and/or lacks "so what" implications	45.6
Nothing new and/or replication of other work	13.4
No purpose or need for this study	.3

Editors also reinforce this message when a manuscript is sent to a referee. One journal editor includes an advisory message to referees that "a paper must make a substantive contribution, either theoretically or methodologically, to the tourism research literature . . . " or it should be rejected.

Yet the majority of rejected manuscripts fail to elucidate the "so what" question effectively. These papers are seen either to make no significant contribution or simply replicate others' work (Table 4). The causes are manifest. Some papers are simply superficial, leading one reviewer to write "this manuscript reads like a student's term paper. Nothing new is offered. The information in the paper is pretty much common sense and has been published in textbooks and earlier journal articles."

Increasingly, it would appear that papers are being submitted on subject areas that have been covered effectively before or are replicating methods that have been superseded by more sophisticated approaches to a topic. Often, the author will argue that the "significance" lies in replicating a study in a new locale; however, that alone is not a convincing argument. For example, more than 100 studies have been published on the social and community impacts of tourism (Easterling, 2004). Likewise, the literature on adoption rates of e-tourism is extensive as are purely descriptive studies on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), 9/11 and other catastrophes.

In a similar manner, the proliferation of hospitality and tourism journals has resulted in a geometric expansion of publication opportunities. The impact has been that the state-of-the-art of knowledge now advances faster than ever before and, apparently, faster than many academics realize. We are seeing an increasing number of studies using methods that were common 3 to 5 years ago but have now been superseded by more sophisticated techniques. The original, pioneering methods are now outdated, and given the maturity of research, studies using these methods are unpublishable. This observation applies especially to market studies of emerging areas, including most special interest topic areas.

It is surprising to note that it would appear that some authors are more intent on demonstrating their proficiency with different statistical techniques than with exploring new ideas or developing innovative methods. The following comments are common: "this manuscript looks as if it came out of a research method class project. The focus was on using LISREL, regardless of the adequacy of the technique and the meaning of using the method" and "the authors wander far from the stated title and objectives of the paper. Indeed, they seem more intent on trying a variety of qualitative and quantitative statistical methods rather than answering the research question."

Quality of writing, organization, and rigor. Almost 6 of 10 manuscripts were so poorly written that referees felt obligated to comment. Related areas of poor organization and lack of rigor affect about one third and 30% of cases, respectively. Table 5 summarizes the types of deficiencies noted within these three areas. Manuscripts replete with spelling and grammatical errors and those that are not carefully proofread are likely to receive a negative reaction from the referee. As one of the authors said, "if the authors don't care enough about their work, then why should I care?" The following comments are typical of poorly written papers:

> There are numerous grammatical and logical faults throughout the entire manuscript. . . . I have basically stopped copy-editing the manuscript after the first sentence. The author should have found a professional editor to proofread the manuscript before sending it to a refereed research journal.

> Careless editing—how can an article be submitted with question marks on references—should reviewers make a guess?

Many papers are also poorly structured. Poor structure restricts the author's ability to elucidate the core thesis clearly. Such problems usually manifest themselves in a paper that lacks focus, rambles, or contains much irrelevant information. One report noted that "the paper never really gets started. By page 8, the authors are still telling us what they intend to do in the paper. By page 18 the reader is still waiting to see what the paper is all about." Another was far more caustic, remarking that "meandering on 40+ pages and without a clear focus is worse than useless."

Content Issues

Literature review. About one half of the rejected manuscripts had weak literature reviews. Two key roles of the literature review, contextualization and conceptualization, were often poorly addressed. In addition, many authors relied on dated sources (Table 6). The failure to write a strong review of the literature leads referees to suspect that the author may be unfamiliar with the subject area and, is therefore, unlikely to produce work that adds knowledge. One manuscript was rejected because "this paper is concerned with [a certain type of] tourism but it does not mention a single published study in the area," whereas another one was not supported because "the author ignored completely the latest development in tourism [topic]."

Analysis, discussions, and conclusions. Poor data analysis affected about 40% of rejected manuscripts, whereas deficiencies in the discussion and conclusions sections affected about one fourth each. Most of the weaknesses identified in the analysis section are technical in nature (Table 7) whereas most of the problems found in the discussion and conclusions sections relate to poor communication. The inability to interpret the results accurately, the failure to

Table 5
Writing, Organization, and Rigor

Quality of Writing	%	Organization of Paper	%	Rigor	%
Poor, sloppy grammar, punctuation, spelling, proofreading	37.3	Tables, figures, and diagrams presented poorly	18.0	Contains factual errors, unsubstantiated arguments, or misleading information	16.4
Inappropriate wordings and/or terms used	11.0	Too much superfluous information and/or repetitive	7.5	Overall lack of rigor throughout	9.9
Inappropriate title used	9.1	Misdirected, confusing presentation and/or lacking in flow	4.8	No empirical testing of ideas and/or hypotheses	3.2
Quality of English writing (not readable)	6.2	Too many tables, figures, and diagrams	4.3	Ignored existing literature sources	2.7
Paper is overwritten or underwritten	5.4	Sections not integrated	3.8	Fundamentally flawed in conceptualization	2.4
Did not focus on argument made and/or stated title	4.3	Trying to do too much and/or focus in one issue, or divide into multiple papers	2.7	Project sliced too thin	.8
Lack of comprehensibility and/or could not determine the argument being made	3.2	Poor arrangement of subdivisions	2.4		
Shallow and/or insufficient scope of argument	.3	Problematic numbers	2.4		
		Irrelevant tables included	1.1		
		Failure to provide sufficient details	.5		

Table 6
Literature Review

Issue	% of manuscripts
Failure to place the study in a broader context	25.7
Failure to establish theoretical framework, if needed	12.6
Old and/or outdated sources	8.3
No critical evaluation of the literature	5.9
Literature review not relevant to study	4.3
Poor referencing	3.8
Did not cite key sources	3.2
Too short or too long	1.9
Repetitive	.8
Reference stacking (too many references for too few points being made)	.3
Plagiarism	.3
Contradictory—the literature review argues against itself	.3

explain the mode of analysis, and the use of the wrong technique or the right technique inappropriately are common analytical issues that arise. Likewise, the discussion and/or conclusions sections often include material that is not relevant to the study or cannot be warranted by the data. At times, authors try to modify the result to suit their needs, with little success.

Other issues. Other issues appeared less frequently but contributed to the rejection of the paper nonetheless. About one fourth of all manuscripts had poor or incomplete references. Typically, references were included in the body of the text and excluded from the reference list, or included in the reference list but omitted from the text. Both reflect poor proofreading. About one in six rejected manuscripts was deemed to be inappropriate for the journal. Of these, two thirds were recommended for revision as research notes whereas about one third were more aptly suited to other journals.

One in seven manuscripts also failed to follow the journal's guidelines. Most criticism of this nature relates to the structure of the paper noting that it was written in too much of a consulting, public relations, or journalistic style. One referee cited this reason for rejecting a manuscript: "at present it reads more like a sales promotion for the product of a particular company rather than a case study from which definite conclusions can be drawn by readers."

Plagiarism does not seem to be a major issue but did appear from time to time. Referees are deeply offended when presented with a clear case of plagiarism, especially when it is their own work that is plagiarized. Authors must appreciate that manuscripts are sent to experts in the field. If the field is emerging, the pool of experts is small, heightening the chances that a referee will see his or her own work cited inappropriately.

Table 7
Analysis, Discussions, and Conclusions

Analysis	%	Discussion	%	Conclusions	%
Results interpreted incorrectly	18.5	Unsubstantiated claims or editorial comments made	9.4	No implications stated and/or weak conclusion	11.5
Mode of analysis poorly explained	9.9	Discussion is contradictory and argues against itself	4.8	Conclusions not warranted from data	8.0
Does not answer question	9.4	Findings are not related to the study	4.6	No recommendations or recommendations too simplistic, shallow, or wrong	6.4
Wrong technique used	7.5	Lacks depth and/or too simple	3.8	Conclusions not relevant to paper	2.7
Technique used is too simple for the journal	2.7	Findings do not flow logically from the data	2.1	Not integrated in paper	.3
Technique used inappropriately	2.4	Irrelevant information included (i.e., results)	1.9		
Misuse of terms (i.e., significant)	1.9	Validity tests not conducted and/or poorly conducted	1.3		
Failure to analysis sample size and/or population	1.3	Repetitive	1.3		
Technique not justified, if required	.8	Too much information. The story gets lost in the minutiae of the data	.8		
Fail to provide statistical results	.8	Findings not related to the literature	.8		
Confusing presentation of the data	.5	Does not answer question	.5		

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to conduct an empirical analysis of why manuscripts are rejected. The study involved content analysis of 373 referees' reports written us. The study indicated that multiple faults were common in poor manuscripts (mean of 6.2 per paper). Structural faults relating to method, significance, writing style, and organization predominated, whereas many manuscripts had deficiencies in the construction of the literature review and analysis sections. The study also suggested that within each of these categories, faults could be grouped into one of two subcategories: content problems relating to fundamental deficiencies with the research process and communication problems relating to how the content was presented. The former is harder to resolve, whereas the latter is much easier to address.

Content problems could be found at all levels of rejected papers. Manuscripts that have such problems tended to be descriptive, added little or nothing to the literature, were methodologically weak, had sampling problems, contained factual errors, lacked rigor in their research process, and relied on a superficial and incomplete literature review. Most significantly, the core conceptualization of the study was weak, limiting its scope.

These types of core deficiencies cannot be hidden during the writing-up stage. Instead they need to be resolved at the much earlier planning and operationalization stages of the project. There is no simple solution for papers that begin with a fundamental flaw. At best, the authors can acknowledge this flaw with the likelihood that the paper will be publishable only as a much shorter research note. The lesson to be learned is that greater care needs to be taken at the early stages of the research process to identify and resolve potential problems while they can still be addressed. It is impossible, for example, to fix a deficient questionnaire, or to address sampling problems after the data have been collected.

Communication problems, on the other hand, are easier to resolve, but are far more common. They are also extremely annoying for referees and invoke far less sympathy from them. Sloppy writing, poor proofreading, the failure to provide sufficient information, the inclusion of irrelevant materials, laziness in preparing the literature review, and the inability to tell an integrated story with a logical plot line will almost certainly guarantee rejection.

Academic writing is no different from any other form of nonfiction writing. The work must have a central thesis and follow a clear and logical plot line from introduction to conclusion. There can be no gaps in content or flaws in the logic. Each of the component sections must form a part of the whole, and each must also function as discrete complete sections in their own right. Journal articles follow a prescribed formula of introduction, literature review, method, results, and discussions and/or conclusions for a reason. Each of the sections sets the stage for the following section, and collectively as a whole, they contribute to form a cohesive piece of research. The writing of manuscripts must, therefore, be carefully planned to ensure that the desired story is told in a consistent manner. The best papers are a joy to read. The worst are little more than a rambling stream of conscious thoughts with no point.

What frustrates referees is that the above comments are, or should be, so self-evident that they need not be mentioned. They represent basic writing principles. Yet the literature indicates that these types of issues have been a problem for at least 30 years in academia. Poor communication carries with it the real risk that the referees will reject a good piece simply because the author does not know how to construct an argument. It is not a matter of English language proficiency. Remember that four of five of us are non-native English speakers. It is a matter of being able to tell a story.

The issue of significance, or the "so what" question also warrants further discussion. Authors need to consider that the underlying purpose of academic publishing is to explore ideas. It is not simply to present data, as is the case in many technical and consultancy reports. Thus, the ability to seek insights from data becomes the critical factor that separates academic writing from research reports. It may sound ironic, but good journal articles are rarely about the data; instead, they are about the insights the data shed on a topic. Far too many papers are focused on the numbers and not their deeper meaning.

This observation leads to a final point about the overall planning of a piece of research. Experienced authors usually have a target journal in mind when they begin to plan a research project, rather than choosing a journal after they write the paper. Each hospitality and tourism journal has a different focus, prefers different types of papers, and has different requirements relating to the amount of detail required in the literature review, method, analysis, and conclusions sections. What is acceptable for one journal may not be acceptable for another.

Academic writing is as much an art as it is a science. As the current study suggests, publishable manuscripts must be technically proficient and free from fatal conceptual, methodological, and analytical flaws. However, they must also be presented in a compelling manner that tells an integrated story beginning with a key thesis and relevant literature review and concluding with the ability to present the results in a manner that answers the research question and seeks real insights. Academics can enhance their publication success rate significantly by becoming aware of and avoiding the common pitfalls identified in the current study.

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