

Manuscript preparation

What follows is brief guidance for authors on how to prepare the submission of a manuscript to ST-OPEN.

We remind the authors to pay special attention to the title and abstract, as they are the parts of the article that will be searchable in bibliographical databases and in online search engines such as Google.

Abstract

The functions of the abstract are the following:

- Abstract is a brief summary of the article so that a reader can decide whether to read the whole article.
- Abstract focuses the reader on the core of the research.
- Abstract makes understanding the information easier because it separates information into several simpler units.

ST-OPEN requires a structured abstract no longer than 350 words.

A structured abstract has at least four subtitles:

Aim: State the main objective of the study.

Methods: State type of the study design, place of research, sample (participants), variables measured and statistical analysis. For experimental studies, describe the intervention and main outcome measure(s). This part can be further structured into Design, Setting, Participants, Interventions, and Primary outcome measures if appropriate (e.g., for interventional medical studies).

Results: Summarize the main results of the study, with the relevant statistics if necessary.

Conclusions: State the conclusions (not repeating the results!) from the main study findings.

Registration: Information about the registration of the study protocol - registry and registration number (e.g., ClinicalTrials.gov and NCT number, link to OSF registration)

Structure of the manuscript

ST-OPEN accepts two types of organization of the manuscripts, depending on whether the article is a report on a hypothesis testing or not.

a) Reports that do not contain hypothesis testing

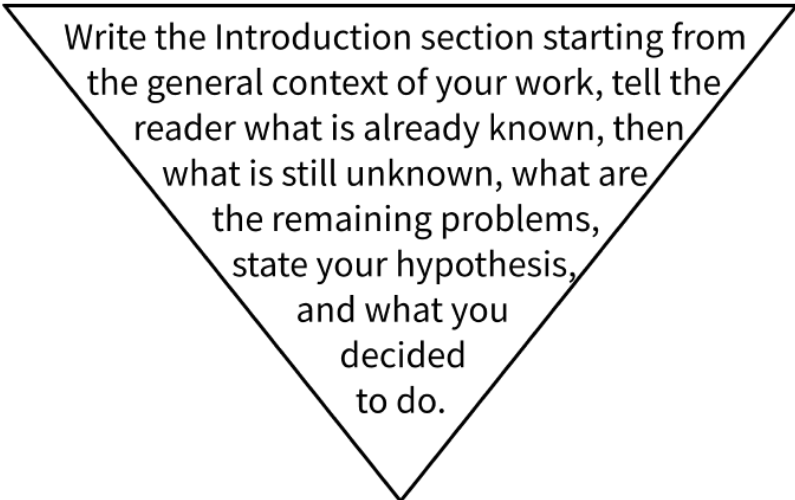
Some scientific articles, especially in social sciences and humanities, do not rely on concrete testing of a hypothesis, so their authors are advised to use the structure of the manuscript common in their research field. However, for the sake of clarity and brevity, ST-OPEN still advises these authors to read the instructions below that are mandatory for articles reporting hypothesis-testing research.

b) Reports on hypothesis testing

These articles should use IMRaD organization of the manuscript: Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion.

Introduction

For each article it should be clear why the research was performed. It presents the question, i.e. the subject of the study and its relation to the general knowledge of the research field. Introduction is not a place for presenting textbook knowledge but justifies the research described in the article by citing relevant literature and explaining the problem to the relevant audience. The audience probably knows about the research field almost as much as the author, so authors do not need to start with the textbook knowledge or show off their knowledge. The Introduction should be focused on the problem. As the Introduction section is the introduction to the hypothesis of presented research, the hypothesis, either explicitly stated or presented as a research problem, comes at the end of the section. This is the stylistic format of the Introduction section – going from the general to the specific:



Write the Introduction section starting from the general context of your work, tell the reader what is already known, then what is still unknown, what are the remaining problems, state your hypothesis, and what you decided to do.

Methods

Methods section should describe in detail the study, including the study groups, so that other researchers can assess the methodological quality of the study and repeat methodological procedures. The reader wants to read how the study was planned and performed, so that it could be assessed whether the results support the conclusions. Methods section is the part of the article which experts (including peer reviewers) use to judge the quality of the report. Therefore, the authors of ST-OPEN, regardless of their field of work and habits of reporting, should make special effort to describe in detail the materials or research participants with which they worked and the methods they applied for data acquisition, analysis and presentation.

In principle, it is advisable to use subheadings, including Statistical analysis. For health research, Outcome measures should be described.

This section should also include the description of ethics consideration related to the study, including the information about ethics approval (see the section on Author declarations).

Outcome measures

Outcome measures are parameters measured in the study. In health research one of the measures is the primary measure of the study outcome, which is used to plan the study, including sample size calculation. All standard laboratory procedures need not to be described in detail but have a citation to the relevant publication. Only specific variations and changes should be described. New measuring procedures should be described in detail, including the evidence on how they were validated.

Statistical analysis

Well-known statistical tests need to be just stated, with adequate reference to the statistical software used. New statistical methods should be described in detail, including the assessment of their validity. The information on the statistical software used for the analysis should include the name of the manufacturer, city, and state).

Results

The results section is a condensed and logical story about the research performed. Details on the actual data should be presented in tables and figures. The text of the Results is not just a simple listing of numbers from tables and figures, but a summative and critical presentation of the most important results. Data should be presented in a single way – in the text, table, or figure, without repetition (for example, citing all numbers from a table in the text). Each table and figure must be self-descriptive, so that it can be understood without reference to the text.

The most important advice for writing the Results section is that the text must be developed around the evidence, and not the other way round: to write up the text and then add evidence. This is the reason why it is important to have the data summarized and systematized into tables and figures before writing up the first draft. They may change along the

way to the final version of the manuscript, but they provide the framework for building up the “story” of the article. It is not advisable to present statistically insignificant results using the phrases “showed a tendency for increase” or “showed a promising trend.” Each statement on statistical significance must be supported by statistical data (P-value and the type of statistical analysis, or confidence intervals).

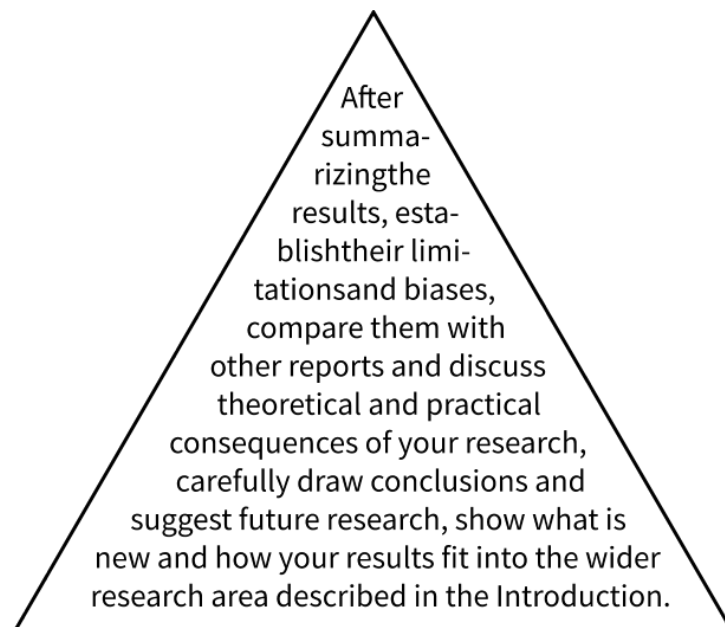
Discussion

The purpose of the Discussion section is to provide a critical assessment of the data described in the Results section. It usually starts with a section which clearly formulates the answer to the question put forward in the beginning of the article, and which is supported by the data presented in the Results.

The Discussion section should also address the limitations of the study. This usually comes after the presentation of the main finding of the study in the first paragraph of the Discussion section. Strengths of the study can be emphasized here, too. If appropriate, a subheading “Strengths and limitations of the study” may be used.

Own arguments may be supported by other data, either own previous results of other authors. They should be cited fairly – it is not fair to ignore the publications of other authors so that own research would look more impressive.

The Discussion section is the place to present the counterarguments – they should be assessed in view of own findings and the differences should be explained. If your study resulted in conclusions different from other studies your Discussion should consider this evidence even if perhaps it is not possible to explain the differences.



Conclusion should be a part of the Discussion section. It should clearly summarize the answer obtained by the study and is usually the last paragraph in the Discussion section.

Technical requirements

- All manuscripts can only be submitted electronically via OJS.
- Write in word processing programme, such as Word. Pages should be numbered.
- Use consistently either British English or American English.
- Clearly indicate corresponding author. Contact details must include the e-mail address and the complete postal address.
- Title and headings should be written in lowercase. Use a maximum of three level headings.
- Authors are invited to submit keywords associated with their paper (max. 6).
- Paragraphing should be indicated with indentions, not with extra space between paragraphs.
- Italics should be indicated with an italic typeface, not underlining. We discourage the use of italics for emphasis.
- Dates should be formatted as day month year (e.g., 1 January 2019). Dates in archival citations may follow the format used by the archive.
- Quotation marks should always be double, not single; single quotation marks should be used only to set off quotations within quotations.
- Punctuation with quotation marks: periods and commas at the ends of quotations should go inside the closing quotation mark. Other punctuation (colons, semicolons, question marks, exclamation points) should go outside unless part of the quotation.
- Block quotations in a separate paragraph should generally be restricted to quoted material of more than 100 words. Shorter quotations should usually be run into the text.

Length of the article

ST-OPEN does not impose any restrictions in the length of the article, but encourages the authors to present their research in a clear and concise way. Supplemental files are allowed and will be published online together with the paper, subject to peer review. (See Data management document.)

Units of measurement

Units of measurement should be expressed in SI and metric units.

Standard abbreviations and symbols

Standard abbreviations and symbols should be used, and then defined in full in the first instance when they are mentioned unless they are standard units of measurement (such as length, mass, and temperature units). This applies independently to the abstract, text and each table or figure. Avoid the use of abbreviations in the title and abstract.

Tables and figures

Tables and figures must be self-explanatory – a reader should understand them without referring to the text of the article.

Each table or figure presents one argument for a research finding, i.e. “a single deductive consequence of the hypothesis.”

Tables and figures show details of the data described in the text of the Results section of the article. The authors should avoid repeating data from a table/figure in the text; only key findings (with mean values and P-values) should be given in the text.

Tables are suitable to present a large number of numerical data.

Figures are suitable for comparisons of data and especially for showing temporal changes (changes in time), or to present primary research findings (like microphotographs).

Tables

- Tables should have a purpose; they should add information to the text of the manuscript, which tells the story of the research study, and be integrated with it. The purpose (“message”) of the table determines its form.
- Tables should be visually arranged to assist readers in finding, seeing, understanding, and remembering relevant information.
- Values to be compared should be placed side by side.
- Data presented in tables should not be duplicated elsewhere in the text.

Components of the tables:

1. Table number and title (above the table, with no period at the end).
2. Column headings.
3. Row headings.
4. Data.
5. Horizontal and vertical lines (simple only). (Do not use bold and shading.)
6. Expanded forms of abbreviations used in the table shown in the footnotes.
7. Footnotes referenced in the table, below the expanded abbreviations, with symbols usually used in the following order: *, †, ‡, §, ¶, ||, **, ††, and so on.

Figures

- Figures should have a purpose; they should contribute to and be integrated with the rest of the text.
- Figures should be designed to assist readers in finding, seeing, understanding, and remembering information.
- Figures should be clear and uncluttered.

- Figures should contain only those elements that are necessary to fulfill their purpose.
- The data should be emphasized over other elements in the figure.
- Data presented in figures should not be duplicated in the text.

Components of the figures:

1. Figure number.
2. Figure caption (legend). Figure legend has three parts: title, explanation of the symbols, key statistics. The legend is written continuously (no paragraphs), with a period at the end.
3. Data field.
4. Vertical scale.
5. Horizontal scale.
6. Labels for each scale.
7. Data.
8. Reference lines (e.g. zero line).
9. Keys and legends.

Do not make 3D figures unless you want to show three variables.

Author declarations

At the end of the body text, before the References, the authors must provide the following declarations.

Acknowledgments

All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an Acknowledgements section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help, or a department chair that provided only general support.

Ethics considerations

We require the authors to provide statements addressing ethics issues related to the research presented in the article, including but not limited to the participation of human individuals in research, use of animals in research, protection of the privacy of data, and health, safety and environment issues. We are aware of different ethics standards in different disciplines (e.g. social sciences and humanities vs. medical sciences), and expect the authors to follow best practices in their fields.

The manuscript must include a statement that the study obtained ethics approval, including the name of the ethics committee(s) and the official number of the document, as well as a statement that participants gave informed consent before taking part. When ethics approval was not required, this must be stated. This statements should be a part of the Methods section.

Funding

State the details of all sources of funding for the study. The statement must include a description of the role of the study funders, if any, in the study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the article for publication.

Authorship contributions

ST-OPEN subscribes to the authorship criteria developed by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) : “The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria: 1) Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; and 2) Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) Final approval of the version to be published; and 4) Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.” However, in view of the limitations of the ICMJE definition and its practical applications, we ask the authors to write in their own words why they think they deserve authorship of the submitted manuscript. Authors’ declared contributions to the research are published at the end of the article.

Data sharing statement

Authors must provide a statement about the availability of the research data associated with a paper is available, as well as the conditions under which the data can be accessed. Where applicable, links to the data set must be provided.

Competing interests

ST-OPEN subscribes to the ICMJE uniform disclosure form for reporting all financial and personal relationships that might bias the authors’ work. We ask authors to fill out the form available at the ICMJE site and state in the manuscript any possible conflict of interest. The ICMJE forms should be available from the corresponding author. ST-OPEN also asks its reviewers to declare possible conflicts of interest related to the manuscripts under review.

Writing assistance

Individuals who provided writing assistance, e.g. from a specialist communications company, do not qualify as authors and so should be included in the Acknowledgements section. Authors must disclose any writing assistance – including the individual’s name, company and level of input – and identify the entity paid for this assistance. The use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technologies should be disclosed in the manuscript. This should be in a form of a declaration statement at the end of the manuscript: Declaration of AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work the author(s) used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON]. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for

the content of the publication.” This declaration does not apply to the use of basic editing tools, such as those for checking grammar, spelling and references.

Supplemental material

ST OPEN provides hosting additional materials online (e.g. datasets, podcasts, videos, images etc.) alongside the full-text of the article. For more information please refer to Data Management guidance.

Language

Articles may be submitted in Croatian and English for editorial evaluation. ST OPEN will commission English translation for the works which pass the intramural review, before they are sent out for external peer-review.

Maximize your chances of being published

Observational studies

Is there important confounding and bias (owing to absent or incomplete measurement of/adjustment for important factors)?

Survey research

Was the response rate robust (>65%)? If not, should a high response rate have been achievable?

Is any important non-response bias accounted for and analysed?

Qualitative studies

Is the study placed within a theoretical framework?

Is the sampling strategy clearly described?

Is the sampling driven by convenience or theory?

Are the methods of data analysis clearly described and theoretically justified?

Does the data analysis relate to the original research question?

Does the title contain the study design and a clear statement of the research focus? This helps authors searching indexes and databases to know that your article is reporting research and is not opinion or commentary.

Does the abstract clearly state the research question or study design? This greatly aids readers as well as reviewers.

Are the conclusions directly justified by the results?

Does the article follow ST-OPEN'S detailed instructions for authors regarding its submission?