



#3: The 5 Stage Writing Process

What are the 5 Stages of the Writing Process?

Now that you know why you are writing and for whom, you are ready to embark on the 5 stages of the writing process:

1) Pre-writing or Planning; 2) Drafting; 3) Revising; 4) Editing; and 5) Publishing.

Stage 1: Pre-writing

First, think about your key messages — don't start to write until these are very clear. Then, develop an outline that organizes your work into the main parts required by most publications as follows:¹

- **Abstract:** 100-150 word summary of paper; usually written last
- **Rationale/ objective:** Why you did what you did & why you are writing about it
- **Background:** What available research and/or expert opinion says
- **Context & setting:** What was happening in your setting
- **Design & methods:** What you did
- **Findings:** What results occurred
- **Analysis (discussion):** What you learned from the results & what you did about it, if anything
- **Conclusion:** Summary of work, including limitations, lessons, or benefits for others

Test the flow of ideas and key messages to see where you might have to develop them further or add transitions. Decide where you can use tables or figures to amplify your key messages. Graphics should stand alone and the text describing them should summarize their main parts. Based on the journal's Instructions for Authors, determine the length in words or pages, required parts of the paper, and possible tables, figures and illustrations. To compute words per page using 12 point Times New Roman font, expect that an 8.5" by 11" page with 1" margins gets just short of 300 words (285+).

Stage 2: Drafting

Now you are ready to use your outline to develop a first draft of your paper. You already have thought about what you will say, so just get started. You may be surprised how fast the words come. Writing is like any other skill – it will improve with practice. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar at this stage. The idea is to get it down, then get it right. Date each draft to show how they improve – and to assure that no ideas are lost that you may need later. Draft the body and graphics of the paper first, then add the introduction, conclusion, abstract, acknowledgements, title and author information.

Stage 3: Revising

Reread and take a second look at the previous draft(s). Ask yourself if this is your best work. Is it clear? Does it make sense? Rearrange sentences, paragraphs and transitions to create a logical flow of ideas. Find clumsy or overused words and phrases and replace them with simpler ones. Shorten sentences of 20 words or more and paragraphs of 8 sentences or more (Dixon, 2001). Use solid sentence structure and substitute strong nouns and verbs for the passive voice.

Stage 4: Editing

Get out your red pen (or computer highlighter tool). Correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. Run the spell and grammar check from your computer software. Put the paper away for a few days and edit again – and again. Enlist an accomplished writer with no vested interest in your project to proofread the paper for clarity and errors. Friends and family can also provide feedback on clarity and flow of ideas.

Stage 5: Publishing

Make sure that your final draft is as perfect as possible. Now, you are ready to submit your paper!

1. Dixon, N. (2001). Writing for publication- A guide for new authors. *Inter'l J Quality in Health Care*, 15(5): 417-21.

What Does a Sample Abstract Look Like?

Hanni, KD, Garcia, E., Elleberg, C., & Winkleby, H. (2009). Targeting the Taqueria: Implementing Healthy Food Options at Mexican American Restaurants. *Health Promotion Practice*, 10 (2): 91-9 S.

As part of a 5-year community-based intervention in Salinas, California, the Steps to a Healthier Salinas team developed a taqueria intervention addressing obesity and diabetes among Mexican Americans. The authors present: (a) a comparison of service/entrée options for Salinas taquerias (n = 35) and fast-food restaurants (n = 38) at baseline, (b) a case study of one taqueria, (c) a description of a healthy nutrition toolkit tailored to taquerias, and (d) an evaluation of the intervention at Year 3. It was found that traditional Mexican American-style menu offerings at taquerias tended to be healthier than American-style fast-food restaurant offerings. In addition, the initial response to the intervention has shown positive changes, which include the taqueria owners promoting available healthy menu items and modifying other menu offerings to reduce fats and increase fruit and vegetable availability. This, in turn, has led to a transition of the owners' perceptions of themselves as gatekeepers for a healthy community.



This resource, others, and more information are available at: www.sophe.org