

# Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks

A Guide to Academic Publishing Success

SECOND EDITION

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*For my parents, with respect and gratitude*

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Let's assume that you're an extraordinary reader, someone who manages to read five books and fifteen articles a week, week in and week out. You'll still read "only" 260 books and 780 articles a year, or about 10,000 books and 30,000 articles over a career. That seems like a lot until you realize that even the smallest humanities discipline publishes over 3,000 books a year in the United States (AAAS and Bosch 2015, indicator IV-12b), and the smallest social science discipline publishes hundreds of thousands of articles each year, so that even extraordinary readers can't keep up with their field. That remains true even though scholars are reading double the amount they read forty years ago, and reading more in less time. One survey shows US faculty reading on average 21 articles per month, or 252 articles per year (about 10,000 articles over a career) (Tenopir, King, et al. 2015, 102). The same faculty also reported spending an average of 32 minutes reading each article and a total of about 11 hours a month, or 132 hours annually, reading articles (102).

What's the upshot? You must abandon the hope of being comprehensive in your reading. No one is reading everything in his or her discipline or field. But fortunately, the bad news is also the good news. If you could keep up with your field, you might feel obligated to do so. But since you can't, you don't have to and instead can make a realistic plan for reading. How do you identify and read enough of the right sources? That's what this chapter is about.

## TYPES OF SCHOLARLY TEXTS

All published journal articles cite other texts. And the number of these texts cited in any article is not small. A survey found that US faculty in medicine reported reading 34 texts for their last substantive work, those in the sciences 104, those in the humanities 130, and those in the social sciences 211 (Tenopir, King, et al. 2015, 97). That's a lot of reading!

An important part of strategizing how to get such reading done is to identify your texts by type. Knowing the distinct categories they fall into can help you plan your reading and use the right body of texts for the right purpose. The categories are *primary, original, or exhibit sources* (texts that are your subject of study), *scholarly or secondary literature* (texts that help you think about your subject of study), and *derivative or tertiary documents* (unoriginal texts that should not be cited, like Wikipedia). Another way of typifying texts is according to their authorship. Good scholars ensure that bias has not led to their ignoring strong scholarship by a diversity of authors—I'll have more to say about this later in the chapter.

### Primary, Original, or Exhibit Sources

The texts you are analyzing or interpreting in your article are known as the primary, original, or exhibit sources. Joseph Bizup, a prominent scholar of writing, likens such texts to "exhibits in a museum or a trial," which can and are read in a multiplicity of ways in articles (2008, 75). Of course, we subject all texts to analysis, but we analyze only certain sources openly, repeatedly, and carefully in our articles. Primary sources can be written texts, but they can also be images, sounds, or objects. In the experimental sciences, primary sources are any document that describes the experiment. Some examples of what might be your primary or exhibit sources are as follows:

- **archival sources**, such as diaries, letters, email, ships' logs, pamphlets, newsletters, planning documents, court cases, legislation, dictionaries, and corporate reports
- **media sources**, such as magazines, newspapers, news blogs, and television programs
- **ethnographic sources**, such as interview tapes and video, eyewitness accounts, field notes and observations, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and student journals
- **statistical sources**, such as online polls, government censuses, phone surveys, and data sets
- **experiment sources**, such as genome sequences, laboratory notebooks, technical reports, video observations of laboratory experiments with human beings, and student examinations
- **literary sources**, such as novels, short stories, memoirs, and poetry as well as scripts for films, plays, and musicals
- **visual sources**, such as photographs, paintings, sculptures, advertisements, films, videos, television programs, streaming media, and exhibits, but also furniture, buildings, and roads
- **aural sources**, such as pop songs, operas, musicals, scores, concerts, and elevator music, but also alarms and conversation
- **online sources**, such as original material on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Reddit; Amazon and Goodreads comments; online comment sections; individual blogs; and disease discussion sites

How scholars use a text ultimately determines its category. Some texts not ordinarily treated as exhibit or primary sources become so in certain articles because of how the author applies them. A US history textbook may be an unusable tertiary document to a scholar of the women's suffrage movement, but an essential primary source to a scholar of sexism in educational textbooks.

A common mistake made by novice authors is not citing primary or exhibit sources. If your article proceeds without any, start working to include them in your article. You can't just state your own opinions; you must carefully analyze the exhibit or primary sources as evidence. Even theoretical articles in the humanities cite these sources (e.g., in one of Heather Love's [2010, 385] most cited theoretical articles, she uses a paragraph from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* to explicate her theory). When analyzing exhibit or primary sources, there are no shortcuts. You must not skim them; you must read them deeply.

Do I cite primary sources in this article? If not, what's at least one primary source I could include?

## Scholarly or Secondary Literature

Most of the texts that scholars cite in their journal article fall into the category of secondary sources, commonly known as "the literature." Such texts are all the books, articles, and chapters written by other scholars and excluding primary sources and tertiary documents.

However, there are several types of secondary literature: *contextual literature* (works that help you describe your subject’s context), *methodological literature* (works that aid in your process of studying your subject), *theoretical literature* (works that help you think about your subject), and *related literature* (works that are about your subject exactly). Let’s go through each of them.

### Contextual Secondary Literature

Scholarly texts containing information about the broader context of your topic are contextual literature; you usually cite them in the introduction of your article or in a dedicated section right after it. Bizup calls these “background” texts, because they are the “materials a writer relies on for general information or for factual evidence” (2008, 72).

Many of us can spend massive amounts of time on this category of literature, tracking down information about the historical, epochal, geographic, economic, demographic, aesthetic, or political context of our subjects. After all, we do need to contextualize. But stay conscious of what contextual literature you’re reading, along with how much of it and why. If you’re writing an article about Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, you may not need to read an entire book about eighteenth-century London. If you’re writing an article about risky traditional practices associated with HIV transmission, you may not need to read a book about the biology of disease transmission. Only you can decide what contextual sources are relevant to your work; but if you still have contextual literature to read for this article, try limiting yourself to three texts and then continuing with other article-related tasks. You can always come back to this reading activity. And if you weren’t planning to read any contextual literature at all, that’s fine by me.

Do I need to cite more contextual literature in this article? If so, how can I limit that reading?

### Methodological Secondary Literature

Scholarly texts supplying you with the *processes* for producing and analyzing your evidence are methodological literature. Bizup describes these texts as “materials from which a writer . . . derives a manner of working” (2008, 72). Most journal articles do not cite methodological literature. If your methodology is common and accepted, you don’t need to either. As one senior scholar in the social sciences said to me, “We don’t want to see a manual for doing statistics in the Methods section. Would you trust a mechanic who worked on your car with the car’s manual in hand?” In the humanities, citing methodological literature is extremely rare. If you’re using a methodology that has its challengers, however, you may need to head off the peer reviewers by demonstrating both your awareness of the concerns and your sound reasons for using the method anyway.

Do I need to cite more methodological literature in this article? If so, how can I limit that reading?

### Theoretical Secondary Literature

Scholarly texts supplying you with conceptual approaches to or explanatory frameworks for your evidence are theoretical literature. You most often cite theoretical literature in the introduction of your article or in a theory section immediately following. Bizup describes these texts as the “materials from which a writer takes a governing concept” (2008, 72). The difference between theoretical and methodological literature is slim and depends quite a bit on the discipline: in the humanities, the term *theoretical literature* is more common; in the social, health, behavioral, and natural sciences, the term *methodological literature* is more common. (Indeed, Bizup doesn’t differentiate between the two, calling both “method” sources, although he gives a two-part definition of *secondary literature* that maps onto my two terms.) I continue to differentiate them: methods are about how you *do* something; theories are about how you *think* about something. For example, snowball sampling and close reading are methods for collecting data; social cohesion theory and feminist theory are ways of thinking about that data.

Note that, like methodological literature, some theories have become so accepted that they’re not always cited these days. Many a Marxist analysis is published without citing Marx’s works; many a work of deconstruction is published without citing Jacques Derrida’s or Ferdinand de Saussure’s works. So you may not need to read or cite any additional theoretical literature. However, if you’re working with a new theory, one that might be unfamiliar to many in your field, you’ll need to cite some of the literature laying that theory out.

Do I need to cite more theoretical literature in this article? If so, how can I limit that reading?

### Related Secondary Literature

Scholarly texts that analyze and make arguments about the same topic, sources, and/or argument as your article are what I call *related secondary literature* or just *related literature*—scholarship that relates to your article. The previously mentioned types of secondary literature—contextual, methodological, and theoretical—rarely mention your exact topic, sources, and/or argument. Related literature does, and you discuss it in your article’s literature review section. Bizup usefully calls these “argument” sources, because they are the “materials whose claims a writer affirms, disputes, refines, or extends in some way” (2008, 75). A literature review is, for him, an exploration of “specific constellations of argument sources” (81).

In the social, health, behavioral, and natural sciences, most scholars are trained to read and cite the related literature as undergraduates. They know that if they are writing about the causes of a social problem, they must discuss the previous research of those who have claimed to identify its causes. If they are challenging the premises of a policy, they know they must analyze the previous research on that policy. But for many novice authors in the humanities, this point—that you must cite the related literature, the constellation of argument sources—is one of the toughest to grasp. Perhaps this is because humanities students can write classroom essays without a professor’s ever asking them to cite what has already been argued on the topic. In the classroom, professors rarely assign scholarly articles about a particular novel, poem, or artwork. So humanities students know that they

are supposed to reference various theories and theoreticians (like Theodor W. Adorno, Gloria Anzaldúa, or Judith Butler), but they don't know that their interpretation of a work must be related to other interpretations of the work. For instance, if you're writing a class analysis of Stendahl's *Le Rouge et le noir*, you must note who else has written a class analysis of this novel, and articulate how your article relates to the arguments of previous scholarly research on the novel. The task of addressing related literature makes up the bulk of this chapter.

Do I cite the related literature in this article? If not, what are some keywords of that related literature that I could use to search for it?

Let me summarize the four types of secondary literature by using an example. Say you're writing an article about women's Bible study groups in two Chicago neighborhoods, one predominantly black, one predominantly white. The *contextual* literature might be anything previously published about the history or population of the neighborhoods, Chicago's racial segregation, and/or evangelicalism, among other things. The *methodological* literature might be about the best ways to conduct studies across race or about religious groups, for instance. The *theoretical* literature might be on topics that include feminist theory, intersectionality, and mitigating factors for implicit bias and/or racism. The *related* literature, meanwhile, would be anything published about women's Bible study groups. If nothing has been published on your exact topic, sources, and/or argument, then your related literature would be whatever discusses the next closest thing: for instance, men's Bible study groups, women's Qur'anic study groups, church youth groups, women's bridge clubs, and so on.

## Derivative or Tertiary Documents

Popular or reference texts consisting of nonscholarly *summaries* of others' research are known as derivative or tertiary documents ("tertiary" because the research is at third hand, and to align it with the "primary" and "secondary" nomenclature for other texts). Finding out about research through such resources is perfectly acceptable, but then you need to find the actual study, read it, and cite that source. Some examples of derivative documents:

- **magazines, newspapers, and news blogs**, such as *Psychology Today*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Africa Is a Country* blog, and so on
- **encyclopedias**, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or Wikipedia, which has an explicit policy of "no original research" (of course, some encyclopedias include original works of research, with information that appears nowhere else, such as many articles in the magisterial *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, and therefore must be cited)
- **textbooks**, which depend on original studies but are not themselves original studies
- **websites** that report on scholarship that appeared elsewhere, such as websites for classrooms, CliffsNotes, disciplinary gossip, and scholars' blogs

One common mistake that novice authors make is citing derivative documents instead of the scholarly literature they depend on. For instance, you can't cite the *Washington Post* as a source on inflammation and disease, a classroom website as a source for a quote from the scholar Imani Perry's 2018 book *Vexy Thing*, or an individual's blog as a source of statistics about a nation's car ownership rates. Derivative documents are never an adequate source for experimental data or quotations from scholarship. The real source of the information is not the magazine or website but the articles in journals or the scholarly books that they're quoting.

Of course, sometimes derivative documents are your exhibit or primary sources. That is, if your journal article is about *representations* of inflammation and disease in popular media, or *the spread of quotations* by Imani Perry online, or *popular perceptions* of car ownership, then cite these sources, because for you they're not derivative sources. They're your exhibit or primary sources, the materials you are studying.

Do I cite derivative documents in this article? If so, do I need to upgrade and/or remove the source(s)?

### Advice for Scholars at Resource-Poor Institutions

Let me take a moment to address some challenges in accomplishing the tasks in this chapter. Scholars in many parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America do not have large libraries or accessible online archives. Neither do Euro-Americans at institutions whose libraries are underfunded. If you're a scholar at a resource-poor university, you're restricted in obtaining the full text of materials, but there are some steps you can take. Many of them depend on having some internet access, but not all of them do.

**Search engines.** You can use academic search engines to locate peer-reviewed journal articles and books. The best are Google Scholar and Google Books, but multidisciplinary BASE, which searches academic open-access web resources; multidisciplinary JURN, a dedicated journal searcher; and massive multidisciplinary bibliographic databases such as Scopus and WorldCat are also helpful. Discipline-based databases like PsycINFO can be useful as well. Other search engines like Microsoft Academic Search and RefSeek, touted as for "academic research," are aimed at those in secondary schools and so do not provide the precision needed for postgraduate scholarly work, in my experience. Search engines will occasionally locate materials that are freely available online. You simply click on the result and start reading. Many times, however, that search will locate materials that are behind paywalls. There are several techniques for gaining access to these articles.

**University library websites.** Sometimes, if you do the exact same search at your university library website, you'll find access to the articles through a proxy server.

**Academic social networks.** Many authors post their articles for free at academic networking websites like Academia.edu, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. If you find a useful article through a Google search but discover that it's behind a paywall, try going to these