From the Executive Editor's Desk [1]

Dissertations vs. Journal Articles[2]

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Regular readers may recall that the purpose of these notes is to offer some basic advice for authors of papers submitted to PMWJ, particularly those who wish their work to be peer reviewed. The notes are aimed at those starting out on their writing career, rather than experienced authors. What I hope to do is make the process easier by explaining what we look for and how this helps ensure that readers actually read your work.

For many authors, myself included, the starting point for their article is a dissertation or some other form of academic writing. A dissertation has a well-known structure, and this framework should be the same for a journal article, whether or not the author wishes it to be peer reviewed.

Having said that, there are some distinct differences between a dissertation and a journal article. Their audiences are different and they serve different purposes. The major academic publishing houses often list these differences, and I have consulted one of the best known to compile the following list of differences.

Dissertation Characteristics	**Journal Characteristics**
• Meets academic requirements • Reviewed by supervisor and marker • Audience is the dissertation committee (narrow audience) • Several aspects of a topic are discussed • Contains chapters • Max length 20,000 words (approx.) • Table of contents • Lengthy & comprehensive research of literature • Ethics approach explained in detail • Description and copies of tools used • All findings presented • Verb tenses may vary	• Meets journal's focus and scope • Reviewed by a panel of blind peer reviewers • Audience is scholars in the field (wider audience) • A single aspect of a topic is discussed • Contains sections • Max length 8000 words (approx.) • Journal format • Succinct research of literature • Ethics approach summarised • Essential tool information • Selected findings presented • Verb tenses are consistent

[1] From the Executive Editor's Desk is a short monthly editorial for authors and potential authors by Dr. Miles Shepherd, PMWJ Executive Editor and Director of the PMWJ's Peer Review program. Each article is a reminder of what to do or not to do when compiling or submitting a manuscript for publication. Dr. Shepherd's author bio can be found at the end of this article.

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The key point to remember is the audience. The PMWJ's audience is eclectic, a mix of academics, students and practitioners. The principal aim of a dissertation is to show an understanding of research methods and literature, while a PMWJ article aims to make an original contribution to the field. A dissertation is typically longer, has more detail and is more in-depth. A PMWJ journal article is concise and focused on new findings or insights.

Authors of PMWJ peer review articles face a difficult set of issues when drafting their work as they need to be concise but say enough for the non-specialist reader to understand the problem, how it was addressed and what was found – all in about 20 pages! Structurally, the framework is very similar and follows the following sequence:

Title – Keep it short! Less is more and your dissertation title sets the scope to some extent. In a journal, it is aimed at attracting a range of readers to your work. A highly geographic title will guarantee to limit global interest,

Abstract – we discussed this briefly in Issue 167. We expect a solid block of text summarising ALL the sections of the paper.

Key Words – These help readers when searching for relevant papers to read. We do not accept more than 6 key words and will follow the practice newspaper editors by cutting off any in excess of this limit.

Introduction – This should set the scene, explaining the topic addressed and why it is important (briefly). This often means aim and objectives in bullet form.

Literature – Explain how the literature was identified, what you took from it. What we DON'T want is to know what other people said, we want to know how you interpret their thinking. Do not think you have a systematic literature review unless you are doing a fully bibliometric study.

Method – Tell your readers how you did your research. Readers will expect a simple outline of the data needed, how you gathered it and how you plan to interpret it.

Results – Summarise what you found. Tables are good so long as they are readable, are properly captioned and rows do not break across pages (more tips on layout next month).

Analysis – this is sometimes combined with the Result but must include something on what you did in practice, as opposed to what you planned to do – were there any problems, how you overcame them etc.

Conclusions – This closes out the paper and is a brief summary of what you found out and any implications. Don't just repeat your results or analysis. Recommendations are not essential so long as you explain how you achieved your objectives.

Key Point – Your paper is bringing new knowledge to your readers. They want a good read which tells them something they did not know or had not articulated before, but they do not want you to preach to them. Nothing kills a paper quicker than repetition and unsupported claims.

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Looking Ahead

There is a great deal more to say about the production of Journal papers, but I plan to look at some of the less popular aspects including formatting, different types of paper and use of AI in writing. If there is anything you would like to know more about how we look at PMWJ published papers, please let me know. While we aim to provide papers that stand scrutiny, we want to get more people writing.

Last, if in doubt about any aspect of PMWJ, please get in touch either with the Managing Editor or with me.

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About the Author



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Dr. Miles Shepherd is Executive Editor, Advisor and International Correspondent for the *PM World Journal* in the United Kingdom. He retired from a 30 year career in the British Army in 1994. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 35 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. His consulting work has taken him to Japan, Taiwan, USA and Russia. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was, for seven years, a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He served on British Standards Institute project management committee (2002 – 2026) including 5 years as Chair. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.

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