# Guide to pre-writing your manuscript

**This step-by-step guide will prepare you
to write the first draft of your manuscript.**

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**SUMMARY**

See subsequent pages for explanations and tools. "Month" may mean any block of time that works for you. This manuscript is a project with a series of tasks.

| SUMMARY OF PRE-WRITING TASKS | COMPLETED? |
|---|---|
| **Month 1** | |
| Determine who will be a co-author and assign each author's role in preparing the manuscript. | |
| Meet with a librarian to do a literature search. | |
| **Month 2** | |
| Identify the gap your research fills. | |
| Clearly articulate your research question (the purpose of your manuscript). | |
| Select a journal and read the author guidelines. | |
| **Month 3** | |
| Assess your data. | |
| Sketch your visuals (tables, figures). | |
| **Month 4** | |
| Draft structured abstract using the Abstract Tool. | |
| Complete any unfinished tasks. | |
| **Month 5** | |
| Set aside blocks of time or attend a writing retreat, where you will work on drafting your manuscript. | |

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**1. Identify authorship and define author responsibilities.**

Early on, determine who will be a co-author on your manuscript. A co-author can be anyone who contributes meaningful input to the manuscript. This can occur not only through writing the paper but also by obtaining funding for or contributing original ideas to the research, such as by conceiving and developing the idea for the research, designing the experiments, or gathering and analyzing the data. You can consult Jefferson's authorship policy here: tjuh.jeffersonhospital.org/policy/index.cfm/universitypnp/view/id/10043.

Next, define each author's responsibilities. Responsibilities include the literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript editing, and submission to the journal. In particular, think about whether one author will write the first draft or if multiple authors will write it (such as one author writing the introduction, another the results, and so on). Also, who will take on corresponding author duties? This job often includes acting as leader on communication with co-authors (about completing, reviewing, revising, and submitting the manuscript) and with the journal editor.

List out each author's responsibilities at the outset like this: JFW will be responsible for…; SLN will be responsible for…; and so on. Responsibilities can change over time as needed, but this provides clarity from the start.


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**2. Conduct an updated literature search.**

An updated literature search is important, even if you are highly knowledgeable about research being conducted on your topic.

Meet with a Scott librarian to conduct an updated literature search to ensure that you've performed a thorough literature search. To schedule a meeting, fill out the consult request here: https://library.jefferson.edu/help/consultation.cfm.

**Month 2**

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**1. Identify the gap your research fills and define the research question.**

Identifying a research gap is one of the most important steps in writing a research paper. A clearly defined gap conveys why your research is needed and thus deserves to be published.

The description of the gap appears in the introduction section, which introduces the topic of the manuscript, summarizes the literature on what is known about the topic, and then identifies what is not known (the gap!). The final paragraph of this section then states how your research aims to fill this gap: this is the research question. The rest of the manuscript develops this research question, so make sure it is clear and precise. Write it down and keep it close to help you stay focused when writing. **Use the following tool to get started:**

| How to define the gap and generate the research question | |
|---|---|
| **Describe the gap in the literature:** What missing or insufficient information in the literature prompts pursuit of your topic? | |
| **Present the purpose:** How does the research presented in the manuscript aim to fill that gap? This purpose statement may start something like this: "To investigate the role of…" or "We sought to determine…". | |

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**2. Select a journal and read its author guidelines.**

| Questions to consider when selecting a journal for your research |
|---|
| 1. Which journals in your field publish high-quality articles? |
| 2. Which journals are the best established in the field of your manuscript? |
| 3. Which journals are read frequently by the target audience of your manuscript? |
| 4. Which journals publish articles of the type and length you wish to publish? |
| 5. Which journals have the best editors in your field? |
| 6. Which journals provide a prompt, fair, and helpful review process? |
| 7. Do any of your target journals charge fees that you do not have the resources to meet? |

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This journal selection tool can be helpful: http://jane.biosemantics.org.

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## Month 3

### 1. Assess your data.

Take some time to assess your data and determine what the findings show. How do your results answer your research question?

Start taking notes on data that you will include in your results section.

- Think about how the results section will be structured (will it have subsections? if so, what will those be?).

- Think about what statistical analyses and interpretation are needed to report the findings meaningfully.

- Make a plan for getting any further analysis done, if needed.

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### 2. Sketch your visuals.

Consider what visuals you will use to represent your work and highlight your findings. Figures, tables, and graphs are useful for gathering large amounts of information into one place that you can then reference in the text of your article.

Research articles should use tables, figures, and/or graphs to:

- present the data clearly

- summarize the research findings and analysis

- guide the interpretation of the outcomes

- offer better understanding of the overall study

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**1. Complete the elements of the abstract tool.**

| Elements of the abstract | |
|---|---|
| **Introduction:** Write 2-3 sentences stating the background, gap, and purpose of the study. | |
| **Methods:** Write 1-2 sentences describing what you did. | |
| **Results:** Write 1-2 sentences reporting the findings. | |
| **Conclusions:** Write 1-2 sentences highlighting what the findings mean (i.e., the implications). | |

Note: An abstract should:
- Give brief background information for context.
- State the thesis or purpose of the work.
- Summarize using key words and phrases.
- Follow the submission guidelines.
- Be complete enough to stand on its own (often read without the rest of the document).

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**2. Complete any uncompleted tasks.**

If you are struggling in any way with the development of your manuscript, of if you would just like to talk about your manuscript, don't hesitate to schedule time to meet with Pam Walter or Liz Declan.

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