



How to Write a Criminal Justice Research Report

Stan Orchowsky
Research Director
JRSA

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Introduction/Context

- What is the problem and why is it important/being studied?
 - Why is this problem important?
 - How does the study relate to previous work in this area?
 - What are the hypotheses and objectives of the study and what, if any, are the links to theory?
 - How do the hypotheses and research design relate to one another?
 - What are the theoretical and practical implications of the study?

Most Common Sources for SAC Research Topics

- Self-generated
- Parent agency (State Administering Agency)
- Request from Governor's office
- Request from state legislature
- Request from other state or local agency (corrections, law enforcement)

Introduction/Context

- What is the problem?
- Who requested the study and why?
- What parameters/constraints, if any, were placed on the problem or study by the requestor?
- How and why was the scope of the study expanded beyond the original problem (if applicable)?
- What are the research questions?

The Literature Review

- Summarizes the body of knowledge so that the reader can see how the current study contributes to (adds to or expands upon) “the growth of a cumulative science”
- Demonstrates the “logical continuity” between previous and present work
- Shows what was done previously AND HOW IT WAS DONE (variables, methods, analyses)

Methods

- Describes in detail how the study was conducted:
 - How key elements were conceptualized (program success defined as reduced recidivism)
 - How key concepts were operationalized (recidivism defined as rearrest within six months)
- The reader can:
 - Evaluate the appropriateness of the methods used;
 - Assess the validity and reliability of the results;
 - Replicate the study.

Methods

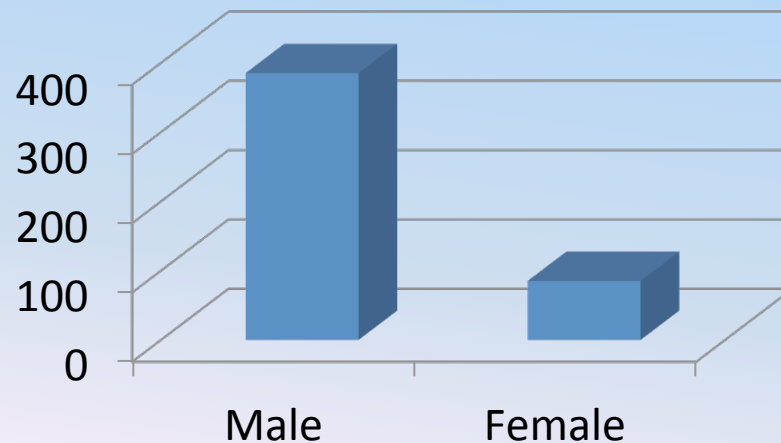
- Participant characteristics
- Sampling procedures and size
- Measures/data sources
- Procedures (how data were collected and prepared)
- **FIND THE RIGHT LEVEL OF DETAIL**
 - There's no whining in research report writing

Results

- Describe missing data and other anomalies
- Organize by hypotheses/research questions
- Test for statistical significance where appropriate
- Present data, but don't discuss or present conclusions
- Use graphics effectively and judiciously

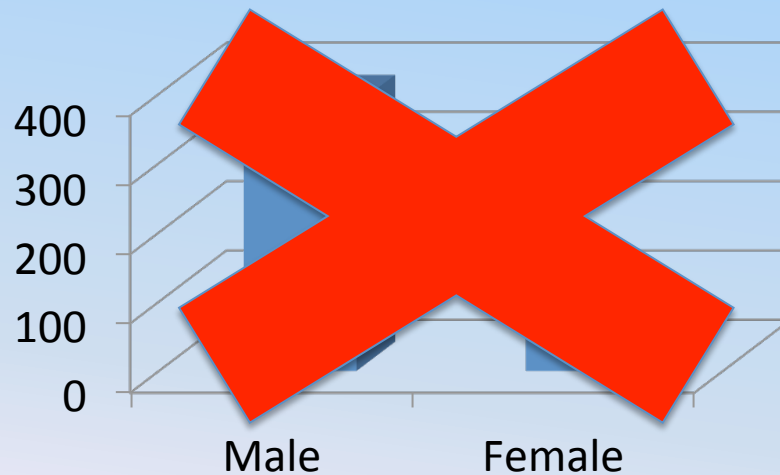
Use Graphics Effectively and Judiciously

- If a picture is worth 1,000 words, you don't need a picture AND 1,000 words
- Not everything deserves a graph



Shameless Plug

Displaying Data Webinar
Thursday, October 20, 2:00 PM EDT



Discussion

- Evaluate and interpret the implications of findings
- Organize by hypotheses/research questions
- Relate to literature
- Acknowledge limitations of study/findings
- Avoid presenting new data/analyses

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Conclusions should be offered if they were not covered in the discussion section
- Recommendations should be offered if possible/ appropriate

Report Content/Formatting

- Consider using technical appendices for:
 - Lit review
 - Methodology details
 - Statistical analyses
- Or consider putting this material online
- Write for a wider (national) audience
- Include date on cover page (month, year)
- Include funding source and required disclaimer



Writing Style

- Report writing is formal writing
 - This is different than speech
 - Writing must be formal to ensure the reader understands what is being communicated
- Passive voice should be avoided (You should avoid using the passive voice)
- Good writing tells a story (the story of your research project)

Writing Style

- Each paragraph starts a new topic/aspect of the topic
 - the last sentence should not “launch” the next topic/paragraph
- The first sentence of the paragraph states the new topic/aspect
 - Subsequent sentences clarify, expand upon, explain the topic
- Maintain continuity of ideas through the use of transitional devices like:
 - Time links (*then, next, after, while, since*)
 - Cause-effect links (*therefore; as a result*)
 - Addition links (*in addition, moreover, similarly*)
 - Contrast links (*conversely, nevertheless*)

Writing Style

- One thought per sentence
- The thought can be clarified (*and, since, especially*) or qualified (*but, although, unless*) using a comma or semi-colon
- Sentences are complete when they:
 - Contain a subject and a verb
 - Can stand by themselves.

Writing Style

- Not so good:

The project employed a “train the trainer” model. Meaning, stakeholders are trained to become trainers for other stakeholders.

- Better:

The project employed a “train the trainer” model; that is, stakeholders are trained to become trainers for other stakeholders.

The project employed a “train the trainer” model in which stakeholders are trained to become trainers for other stakeholders.

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes (a layperson's perspective)

- Single vs. plural possessive
 - The juvenile's parents were...*
 - The juveniles' parents were...*
- Past tense is used to refer to an action or condition that occurred at a specific time in the past, including:
 - Literature cited [*Orchowsky (2016) used the same method...*]
 - Your own results (*inmates' behavior changed...*)

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- When using pronouns, be sure your subject is clear

*The goal of this project is to identify the needs of crime victims and train the service provider community to leverage **their** skills to meet **their** wide range of needs.*

- *Which vs. that: (that = essential info; which = further info)*

–The study used an experimental design, which involved randomly assigning subjects to conditions.

–The study used an experimental design that was implemented across three sites.

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- Anthropomorphism: attributing human characteristics to inanimate sources

The program was pressured by judges to accept low-risk offenders IS INCORRECT

The program staff were pressured by judges to accept low-risk offenders IS CORRECT

SACs reported a variety of technical assistance needs.

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- Subject-Verb Agreement

- Singular and plural must agree, even when there's an intervening phrase beginning with words like *together with, including, plus, and as well as*.

- The number of offenses **as well as the seriousness of offenses** increases with age.*

- Misplaced Modifiers

- Staff interviewed victims using their new listening skills.*

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- *i.e.* vs. *e.g.*

- *i.e.* = *id est* (that is): used to elaborate, explain or clarify an idea or point that has been expressed

The state-mandated age of consent (i.e., 18 years of age)
...

- *e.g.* = *exempli gratia* (for example): providing an example (one of many) to illustrate an idea or point

The state-mandated age of consent is an important consideration in a number of legal instances (e.g., charging in sexual assault cases).

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- *me* vs. *I* when referring to more than one
What's correct for one is correct for more than one

My fellow authors and I would like to thank...

The editors invited my fellow authors and me to attend a signing party.

Common Grammar/Usage Mistakes

- Quotation Marks

- Periods and commas are placed inside quotation marks. Other punctuation marks are placed inside quotation marks only when they are part of quoted material.

- *The “placebo effect,” which was a critical component of this study...*

- *We attribute this finding to the so-called “placebo effect.”*

- *What exactly is the “placebo effect”?*

- *Orchowsky (2016) asks: “what is the placebo effect?”*

- Footnotes: all punctuation goes before footnotes.¹

Common Spelling Mistakes

- *principal* vs. *principle*
- *capital* vs. *capitol*
- *stationary* vs. *stationery*
- *affect* vs. *effect*
- Spell out numbers one through nine
- Prefixes that are not hyphenated:
 - *Bi* (*bilingual*)
 - *Co* (*coworker*)
 - *Extra* (*extracurricular*)
 - *Meta* (*except meta-analysis*)
 - *Multi* (*multivariate*)
 - *Non* (*nonsignificant*)
 - *Pre and post* (*pretest; posttest*)
 - *Quasi* (*except quasi-experimental*)
 - *Re* (*reevaluate*)
 - *Socio* (*socioeconomic*)

Final Thoughts on Style

- Be consistent with formatting, spelling, use of tenses, etc.
- Don't be afraid to rewrite (if you're having trouble with a word, consider rewriting the sentence)
- Proofread (multiple times, and get someone else to proofread)
- Prepare an outline of the final report at the outset of the study
- The goal of good writing is to make the report easy for the reader to understand; the writing should not distract from the findings

