

How to Block a Manuscript

Blocking is an effective technique to initiate writing a manuscript. It captures how successfully published manuscripts are constructed, so that you can easily and effectively structure your own manuscript. Blocks are essentially sections of a manuscript and can be represented visually as rectangles.

10 Steps to Blocking a Manuscript

- 1. Select and print 2-3 published manuscripts from your target journal.** These articles should closely resemble the way you would like to structure your own manuscript.
- 2. Draw rectangles around each major section or "block."** For example, in an IMRaD manuscript, these sections would be Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion.
- 3. Note commonalities and consistencies across published articles.** For example, how big are the blocks? How many paragraphs are in each block? Are there subheadings? Is there a separate Conclusions block at the end of the article?
- 4. Write down the key themes or central points you notice for each block in the margin.** For example, for an Introduction block, you might write: "provides background on significance of problem," "defines key terminology," "identifies gap in research," "describes aim of study." Draw smaller rectangles around each of these key themes. **Pay special attention to specific phrasing** that is used to introduce key points and sections. For example: "The purpose of this article is to..." or "In conclusion..."
- 5. Look for patterns in how the arguments are constructed in the articles.** Do the articles introduce the significance of the problem in a similar way? How much literature review is included in the Introduction? What types of studies are cited? How much detail is given in the Methods? In the Discussion, how are the findings placed within the context of the literature? How are the limitations of the study addressed?
- 6. Write your research question on the top of a separate piece of paper (or a whiteboard).** Then, **using the target articles you just blocked as a guide**, map out the major sections of your own manuscript. For example, if the 3 articles you blocked are in the IMRaD format, they all have 5 common sections: "Introduction," "Methods," "Results," "Discussion," and "Conclusions." On your paper, you should draw 5 blocks, labeled with these same headings.
- 7. Make smaller sub-blocks for each key point or central theme you want to address in each section or block.** At this point, your entire project should be mapped into blocks. If any large component is missing, rearrange or add blocks. Don't worry about how the rectangles are ordered yet, simply get them onto paper.
- 8. Take a picture and save the paper. Set this work aside for a few hours, or even a day, and then return to it.** Revisit. See how your blocks relate to the main research question you wrote at the top of your paper and to the other blocks. Have fun arranging them into a coherent argument. If any of the blocks don't fit, decide whether you really need to include those points in your manuscript.
- 9. Block your manuscript again before you write, ensuring your argument is blocked the same way as the sample articles you blocked earlier.** If you construct your blocks well and keep working within them, even if you change them, your narrative will make sense (flow logically), and your argument will be clear and persuasive.
- 10. Write the first draft.**