

## Editorial: Journal Article Reporting Standards

This issue of *American Psychologist* (*AP*) features a pair of important articles related to newly updated standards for reporting research in psychology in scientific journals, covering both quantitative (Appelbaum et al., 2018) and qualitative (Levitt et al., 2018) research. The increasing breadth and complexity of research, and the importance of communicating it effectively, requires user-friendly resources that can be applied widely to scientific studies. These two articles are intended to serve that purpose, and to encourage thoroughness and accuracy in research reporting, for psychologists and other scientists in broader academic communities.

The articles, known as the Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) reports, are based on the work of a task force appointed by the American Psychological Association (APA) Publications and Communications Board in 2015. The respective quantitative and qualitative working groups of the task force were charged with updating the existing JARS report focused on quantitative methodologies (APA Publications and Communications Board Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards, 2008) and generating for the first time a JARS report dedicated to qualitative research, including modules on qualitative meta-analysis and mixed methods research.

Each working group reviewed existing literature related to quantitative or qualitative methodologies, met in person, and conferred extensively to determine the coverage of the standards and the structure of the text and tables of the documents. The completed reports were circulated to the APA Council of Editors for feedback. These original reports were then prepared as manuscripts and submitted to *AP*, where they were peer-reviewed independently. In addition to changes generated in the peer review process, the *AP* editorial team requested minor changes to facilitate a complementary structure between the two articles, particularly with respect to the tables, which are key resources in both articles.

Ensuring rigor, methodological integrity, accuracy, and clarity in science is of paramount importance. Most (if not all of us) learned to understand and/or conduct research and to read and/or write research reports that strived to contain all the information necessary to understand, evaluate, and potentially replicate studies. Although research questions, scientific environments, and methodologies necessarily evolve over time, the importance of writing clearly and reporting science in a way that can be readily comprehended is unchanging. The growth in psychological research and its proliferation in publication and other distribution outlets makes our ability to evaluate and

communicate science and assure commitment to rigor critical imperatives for our field.

Indeed, psychological research has much to offer contemporary society. Assuring that our science remains important, innovative, and applicable rests upon our published literature. This has arguably become more complex with the growth of team science, translational research, evidence-based practice, and the resulting diversity of methods. As Appelbaum et al. (2018) summarize, there are a significant number of topics added or covered more explicitly now that were not present in the earlier version, topics that illustrate the complexity and diversification in science. These include observational studies, clinical trials, longitudinal studies, replications, *N* of 1 studies, data sharing, and attention to statistical methods with specific reporting requirements. The article links to other standards and reporting requirements when possible and has redesigned tables for ease of use.

The growth of qualitative methods in psychology is impressive, and important. One measure of the increasing integration of qualitative methods in psychology is the dramatic increase in the number of articles with the word *qualitative* in the title or as a keyword in PsycNET.<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1990s there were fewer than 200 articles per year (see Figure 1). But there was a 3.8-fold increase from 2006 to 2016, with a fairly dramatic increase in the past 5 years. It is critical that the standards for rigorous qualitative research, and the many variants of qualitative methods, including qualitative meta-analysis and mixed methods, be defined. A strength of the qualitative reporting standards is their ability to provide guidance across a broad range of qualitative methods (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenological, narrative, thematic, and discursive methods). Levitt et al. (2018) is an excellent reference for this purpose and marks an important historical development for psychology in recognizing the important contributions of qualitative research.

Together, these two JARS reports are intended to improve the quality of published research for all stakeholders. Understanding that science is diverse and expanding rapidly, these are not intended to be simple or invariant checklists. Rather the articles offer a means to facilitate the communication of science. For readers and consumers of research, the articles will help assure that reported research includes most, if not all, of the information necessary to understand and apply research, as well as facilitate replication of a given study. For those conducting systematic reviews, meta-

<sup>1</sup> Data retrieved on July 31, 2017.

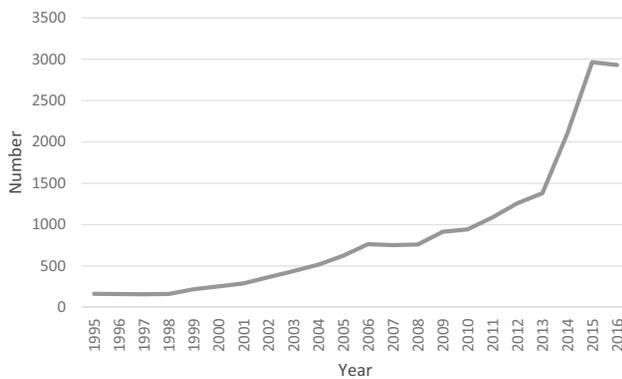


Figure 1. *Qualitative* in title or keywords in PsycNET 1995–2016. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

analyses, and other integrative research, adherence to the standards can facilitate the retrieval of information necessary to aggregate data and advance knowledge in this way. For editors and reviewers, adherence to these standards can help assure that all the information to understand and evaluate a manuscript is provided. Familiarity with the reporting standards at preliminary stages of research formulation may also help guide the design and execution of research. For students and trainees, these articles provide a valuable resource for understanding the diversity of topics and approaches in psychological science.

Assuring that the JARS articles are accessible to the broadest possible audience is essential. Therefore, the articles are provided as open access and are available without

charge on the *American Psychologist* web page. The articles and related user-friendly materials will be available on a JARS website, accessible through a link on the APA website and will also be incorporated into future versions of the *APA Publication Manual*. The dedicated website will provide ancillary resources, including checklists for the tables, examples of JARS reporting in the text of manuscripts, and links to educational opportunities to learn more about JARS. It is hoped that these standards will become essential materials for investigators as they design research and prepare their work for submission to peer-reviewed journals.

## References

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