

SAMPLE TEMPLATE FOR REVIEWING ARTICLES

The comments below refer to a paper I reviewed for a journal. The paper actually sucked (as you'll see in my comments). However, I include them so you can appreciate the level of detail/discussion I expect from you.

.....

<Editor's Name>

<Journal Name>

<Postal Address>

Dear <Editor's Name>:

Below are my comments on "Racial Markers and Oppression" For purposes of clarity, throughout my comments, 12/4/5 will mean page 12, paragraph 4, line 5 of the manuscript sent to me.

Abstract

1. The abstract is awkwardly presented. It should be at most 150 words and:
 - a. within the first two sentences, provide the research question/problem
 - b. then describe the sample as well as methods used
 - c. then briefly state the main findings, being sure to tie them into the research question/problem
 - d. end with an implication or conclusion given the findings.

Background

2. The entire section from 6/last/last to 7/1/all needs to be rewritten. It needs references and should not speak about these experiences in such a monolithic nature.
3. The author decides to limit the word Hispanic to mean Mexican or Mexican-American because 90% of their "Hispanic" sample comes from the Southwest.
 - a. That is a horrible (and bordering on racist) justification.
 - b. If that's the case, then use Mexican-American and not Hispanic.
4. "The disinclination to use racial terminology that began after the revolution in Mexico has penetrated the Mexican American population in the United States, where it persists ..." (9/4/5-7).

To make that statement, I have to assume the author has spoken to every Mexican

American, and they all agreed with this assessment. If not, the author needs to qualify it; if not remove it.

5. The author combines Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and other South Asians into one group. This is justified with "... they share enough similarities, both in their homelands and in their experiences in the United States, that it makes sense to combine them for the present analysis" (10/2/3-4).
 - a. That is not true.
 - b. To some in general, and to me in particular, that statement is both insensitive and racist.
 - c. Before combining the groups, analysis needs to be done to ensure they are indeed the same.
6. And speaking of (possible) racist vocabulary, to refer to Chinese, Koreans (a group not even under investigation), Japanese, and Indians as "commerce-oriented groups" (10/4/5) is completely unacceptable.

Is any group of people more commerce-oriented than the largest economic market in the world – Americans?

7. When discussing multi-race and multi-ethnic people, the author chooses to use phrases like "... importance to emphasize the unmixed members of the group from the rest" (emphasis added; 10/5/last).

I won't bother mentioning how that sounds.

8. The author chooses to go on and on (and sometimes erroneously) about the Asian population in their sample. This seems like a lot of work for about 64 cases. I would start by eliminating most of the latter half of 11/1.

Analysis

9. Data from Arizona State University was chosen for this analysis? Why that institution? How generalizable is the data to other locales? Would similar results come from using other schools, states, or federal data?

In other words, how representative are college students from the Southwest versus, for example, non-college educated people from the Northeast?

This needs to be considered and addressed.

10. How can someone be "born abroad in the United States" (12/2/5)?

11. The author claims "... it is difficult to assess [the] representativeness" (12/2) of her/his sample.

If it's difficult for her/him, it's easy for me. The sample is not at all representative. The author needs to include that in the study's limitation section.

12. The author wonders if their research "carries any promise" (12/2/7). Why do research which carries no promise. If it carried no promise, it should not be submitted for publication.
13. Delete the sentence "Observe ... groups" (12/3/6-7).
14. I would flip the dependent variables such that higher scores meant something was more important (12/3/last). That makes interpretation more intuitive.
15. The author refers to "the average White" person (13/2/2). However, the average White person was not sampled, nor analyzed. Instead, some college students at a school with five percent African American, 12% Hispanic, and eight percent Asian students were sampled.

How "average" is that?

Discussion

16. This section of the paper needs to better:
 - a. summarize the results
 - b. inform the reader of what these results mean; what is their larger implication
 - c. tie the results back into the literature and theories discussed in the background/literature review.
17. The distinction between racial category and racial markers (16/last/last) needs to be better defined/described and moved to the very beginning of the paper.
18. What "other applications are possible" (17/3/2-3)?
19. The limitations section of the paper is, well, too limited (see my comments throughout).

Misc.

20. There were far too many grammatical and stylistic mistakes for a paper submitted to an academic journal. For example (and there were more):
- a. "... tying to enter ..." (11/1/5)
 - b. "... and the rest White" (12/2/4)
 - c. "... the White segment of the sample" (12/4/1); some would call them students
 - c. "Let us peruse the responses ..." (12/5/1)

My favorite example at how poorly this paper is written – 14/3/1-4.

- a. I would avoid the term "Black dummy," especially in Race & Society.
 - b. The sentence is too long.
 - c. The denominator of comparison is not clear.
21. The author needs to decide if s/he wants to use the term Black or African American. Though it may mean the same thing to them, to other parts of the United States (and the world for that matter), these terms have very distinct meanings.
22. Overall, I'm very concerned about the way the theories are presented. At times, especially in the early stages of the paper, it doesn't look like the author is writing a research paper in as much as an opinion/editorial piece for a newspaper.

For the readers of Race & Society, it's a safe bet that they'll believe slavery was bad, racism still exists, etc., etc. However, they'll also be acutely attune to if an author is out to do quality research, or out to make a point.

More specifically, in research, hypotheses are stated which have the possibility of being proven false. In journalism, the point is to confirm an already preconceived notion. Journalists tend to ignore information that doesn't support their theory; researchers attempt to avoid this trap.

For example, the author states that "... the signatories of the Declaration of Independence ... regarded ... slavery as normal" (4/5/last). Many historians, including Thomas Jefferson himself, would challenge this assertion. It's one thing to say they had slaves – research; it's another to say they thought slavery was normal – journalism.

For a few other examples (and there were far too many more), see #23 below.

23. Along the lines of #22 above, the author repeatedly engages in historical inaccuracies. This may be fine for journalism, but is irresponsible in research.

- a. “White-on-Black racial oppression began ... with the introduction of slavery” (5/last/last). Again, I strongly suggest the author consider a history book or offer a specific academic reference that would support this point.

I’m convinced that research has shown that White-on-Black racial oppression in the United States began long before slavery.

- b. “... the subjection of other groups occurred against a background of White-on-Black oppression.” (6/2/1).

Feagin and Kim are offered as supports for this argument. First, I would disagree with that ‘reading’ of their work. More important, however, many have argued that the first time racial hostility (as its currently defined at least) started when Columbus attacked and killed Native Americans – note, that’s long before Blacks had their turn at racial oppression on U.S. shores.

24. The tables are not as ‘tight’ as they could be. For samples of tables that might be useful check out <http://www/hss/oregonstate.edu/hdfs/acock/tables/>.

Most specifically, on Table II, I could not tell if there were any statistical differences between the numbers provided.

25. Finally, I want to explicitly state what I’ve implied several times in this document. Given what/how the author wrote this paper, her/his racial politics seem VERY problematic to me.

One can easily get something published independent of their politics. However, I’m convinced that in the case of this paper, there is a gap between the political intention (racial empowerment) and the political impact (arguably, racism).

I would encourage the author to spend some time on this paper closing that gap.