



# FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

## Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project

# The art of research discovery and writing good articles

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# 1. “Enter into Form, in order to Exit from Form”

Is article writing: (1) creative magic? Or (2) mechanical form/structure?

... my path first struggle then victory writing articles

... Secret is dual approach: use form/structure THEN use creativity guided by the form

... you have 2 step goals: (1) convince 2-3 reviewers FIRST; (2) then excite the world and affect it and get citations

## 2. General structure, “form”

- a) **Introduction:** 2 pages: literature steps to gap, research questions (RQs), hypotheses, contribution: huge importance to sell the article
- b) **General theory/model** (from literature) to test hypothesis; 1-3 pages (length depends on contribution type)
- c) **Context** (3-4 key points to justify approach/questions/hypotheses) from literature and rapid recon & **descriptive statistics from your data** with text focusing on 3-4 key findings that help explain results: 3-4 pages

d) **Specific methods/application:** econometric specification (with link to **literature**) specific variables and their hypotheses, data and sampling method, estimation method: **3-4 pages**

e) **Results of regressions** or experiment: tightly linked to set of research questions; key 3-5 results with explanation (with comparison with **literature**); **3-4 pages**

f) **Conclusions and implications: ONLY from the article's results, NOTHING else;** no opinions or general thoughts; comparison with **literature**; **1-1.5 pages**

### **3. Things to avoid in the overall approach**

Note what is MISSING from my list and “don’t do’s”

- a) Don’t talk down to the reviewer:** Do not explain “Nigeria” (or whatever study place) in detail as if to someone who does not know it: reviewers know the place well; all readers know Africa, Asia well now
- b) Don’t have a section on “objectives”!** Your objective is to answer the research questions...
- c) Don’t deviate from the tight focus of the research questions** in ALL the rest of the paper

- d) Don't have a "review of literature" section; EVERY section must draw on the literature**
- e) Don't have a "problem statement"; just the lead up to the GAPS; and don't talk about general problems not specific to your paper (general issues of poverty, governance, whatever)**
- f) Don't assume that because issue is important in your place, or first time done there, that reviewer will think it is a contribution to the INTERNATIONAL literature → so strong introduction is key**

## 4. Focus in on Introduction

### a) Gap/s in literature as the problem statement

... state as “**cascade**” from earlier to later, one solving gap from earlier but leaving finally an important gap

Example from RNFE determinants/impacts

... labor supply to z goods (early)

... labor supply to ag wage labor (early)

... labor supply to migration (long)

... gap left on labor supply to RNFE

... or RNFE on income but not on ag technology, or processed food

## **b) State 2-3 “research questions” (causal...)**

... not factual questions (flow from RQ)

... not policy questions (RQ justified by & flow to policy questions)

**Examples RQs:** What are the determinants of supply of labor to RNFE? What are the impacts/effects of RNFE choice on ag tech adoption? On processed food consumption?

... Justification in terms of policy questions/research debates; example from RNFE, explain disadoption SRI (Barrett)



**c) Key hypotheses testing** (ambiguous or “2 options” hypotheses are best!)

Example from RNFE, incentives vs capacity

**d) Key methods used and data (unique?)**

**e) Make explicit what contribution making**

... different types of contributions need to pinpoint: cascade

... Product cycle & journals & justification

# 5. How to create a RQ

a) Shock → behavior → outcome

... think of shock as variation in right-hand side variable affecting behavior

b) **Key method**: use “toggle switch” to create new RQ’s and hypotheses!

... AND this is good for “mapping” literature for gap

c) **Variations on shock** (cascade ... drought, inter-household, natural experiment/policy, choice experiment)

c.1) nature of shock (risk vs climate change (level or continuity of shock), 2000s

c.2) Energy as shock vs energy as outcome, traditional vs transforming system

**d) Variation on outcomes (categories):**

income,

nutrition;

ag tech diffusion;

levels (inter and intra HH)

## e) Variations on behavior (categories) (unpack the categories)

Examples from the literature of **toggle**

e.1) **functional form** of behavior: Roumasset: GR, linear vs safety first 1970s, explain paradox

e.2) **sectoral level**: Nerlove supply response aggregate vs disaggregate 1970s

e.3) **level of actor** (farm vs coop vs intra-household); 1980s 1990s

e.4) Nature of costs RHS supply & demand functions (de Janvry “peasant paradox” 1990s)

e.5) **sector**: farm vs. nonfarm farm employment

Review example, and extension to whole research program (series of articles):

... Hymer & Resnick, not just z goods but sold nonfarm 1970s

... farming systems 1970s/1980s role of nonfarm in livelihoods but not econometric tests

... migration literature

... nonfarm labor supply (function of incentives & capacity)... contradictory hypotheses on wealth 1990s

... nonfarm income on farm technology adoption  
(multisectoral opportunity cost of time & capital...  
conservation investments; SRI), 1990s/2000s

... capital thresholds/investment poverty → poverty  
traps, asset portfolio strategies (ag→nonag

## 6. “Speed writing” method

- a) Speed mapping of literature in flow chart using shock-behavior-outcome
- b) Speed Dense and denser outlines
- c) analysis
- d) “blue book exam” you write and answer