



Challenges in Research Writing: Strategies to Overcome Them

Imteyazul Haque

Department of Library and Information Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Corresponding Author:

Email: imteyazahmad54@gmail.com

Article Information

<https://doi.org/10.69798/10124957>

Copyright ©: 2026 The Author(s).

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY-4.0) License, which permits the user to copy, distribute, and transmit the work provided that the original authors and source are credited.

Published by: Koozakar LLC. Atlanta GA 30350, United States.

Note: The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of their affiliated organizations, the publisher, the editors, or the reviewers. Any products discussed or claims made by their manufacturers are not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Guest Editors:

Dr. Abiodun Egbetokun

Dr. Oluseye Oludoye

Abstract

Research writing is a demanding scholarly practice that requires far more than the ability to assemble information. It involves conceptual clarity, methodological judgement, critical engagement with existing literature, ethical responsibility, and the capacity to communicate knowledge in a coherent and persuasive form. For many researchers, particularly early-career scholars, the writing process is complicated by poorly defined research problems, weak alignment between objectives and methods, limited experience in critical synthesis, language-related constraints, uncertainty about publication norms, and inadequate mentoring support. This invited editorial article examines these recurring challenges and proposes practical strategies for addressing them. It argues that stronger research writing emerges when authors approach writing as an iterative, evidence-informed, and ethically grounded process supported by mentorship, peer feedback, and sustained scholarly practice.

Keywords: Academic Writing; Research Methodology; Scholarly Communication; Publication Ethics; Mentorship; Early-career Researchers

INTRODUCTION

Research writing occupies a central position in production and communication of knowledge. It is the medium through which scholars define problems, justify methods, interpret evidence, and contribute to disciplinary conversations (Amiolemen, 2026). Yet, despite its importance, research writing remains one of the most difficult aspects of academic work. Many researchers enter the writing process with substantial subject knowledge but limited preparation in how to transform that knowledge into a clear, rigorous, and publishable manuscript.

The difficulty of research writing should not be understood simply as a problem of grammar or vocabulary. At its core, research writing is an intellectual activity that requires authors to make decisions about focus, argument, evidence, structure, ethics, and audience. A manuscript may be grammatically acceptable and still fail to persuade if the research problem is unclear, the methodology is poorly aligned, or the discussion does not demonstrate the significance of the findings (Egbetokun, 2026). Conversely, a promising study may be undervalued when its contribution is hidden beneath weak organization or insufficiently developed argumentation.

To this end, this article discusses major challenges commonly encountered in research writing and outlines strategies for overcoming them. The emphasis is especially relevant for early-career researchers, postgraduate students, and scholars working in contexts where access to sustained mentorship, editorial training, or publication support may be limited. The article proceeds from the position that research writing can be improved through deliberate practice, structured guidance, ethical awareness, and critical engagement with the standards of scholarly communication.

Conceptual Clarity and the Definition of the Research Problem

One of the most persistent challenges in research writing is the inability to define a clear and researchable problem. A manuscript often loses direction when the author begins with a broad topic but fails to identify the precise gap, question, or scholarly tension that the study seeks to address. This weakness affects the entire manuscript

because the introduction, literature review, methodology, and discussion all depend on a well-formulated research problem.

Conceptual weakness is frequently reflected in vague objectives, overly ambitious claims, and research questions that are not sufficiently connected to the literature. In such cases, the study may appear descriptive rather than analytical, and the reader may struggle to understand why the research matters. A strong manuscript should make the problem visible early, explain its relevance, and show how the study contributes to existing knowledge.

Researchers can address this challenge by engaging in careful preliminary reading before writing. Rather than merely collecting sources, authors should examine how previous studies define the problem, what assumptions they make, where they disagree, and what remains unresolved. This process helps the writer move from a general area of interest to a focused researchable question. Mentorship is particularly valuable at this stage because experienced scholars can help authors refine broad ideas into coherent objectives and defensible conceptual frameworks.

Methodological Alignment and Research Design

A second major challenge concerns the relationship between research questions and methodology. Weak manuscripts often reveal a mismatch between what the study claims to investigate and the methods used to generate evidence. Such misalignment may appear in the selection of inappropriate research designs, unclear sampling procedures, poorly justified instruments, inadequate analytical techniques, or insufficient explanation of how data were interpreted.

Methodological weakness reduces the credibility of findings. Readers and reviewers expect authors to demonstrate that their methods are appropriate for the stated objectives and that the analytical procedures are transparent enough to support the conclusions. When this alignment is missing, even interesting findings may be viewed as unreliable or insufficiently substantiated.

To improve methodological rigor, researchers should treat method selection as an argument rather than a routine description. Authors need to explain

why a particular design is suitable, how data were collected, how analytical choices were made, and what limitations should be acknowledged. Training in research methodology, consultation with supervisors or methodological experts, and close reading of high-quality empirical studies can help authors understand how rigorous methodological reporting is achieved. A publishable manuscript should show not only what was done, but also why it was appropriate.

Academic Expression, Structure, and Argument Development

Language barriers are often cited as a major obstacle in research writing, especially for authors writing in English as an additional language. However, weak writing is not always a purely linguistic problem. In many cases, the deeper difficulty lies in poor organization, weak paragraph development, unclear transitions, and the absence of a sustained argument. Academic writing requires precision, but it also requires structure and logic.

An effective manuscript should guide the reader from problem to evidence and from evidence to interpretation. Each section should perform a clear function, and each paragraph should contribute to the development of the central argument. Excessively complex vocabulary does not guarantee scholarly quality. In fact, clarity, coherence, and disciplined argumentation are often more persuasive than ornate expression.

Researchers can strengthen academic expression by writing regularly, revising deliberately, and using established structures such as the IMRAD format where appropriate. Authors should pay attention to paragraph unity, topic sentences, transitions, and the relationship between claims and evidence. Peer feedback, writing groups, editorial review, and responsible use of grammar-support tools can improve presentation, but they should not replace critical thinking. The aim is not merely to correct sentences, but to make the argument more intelligible and convincing.

Literature Review and Critical Synthesis

The literature review is another area where many manuscripts encounter difficulty. A common weakness is the tendency to summarize sources one after another without explaining how they relate to the study's problem, theory, or contribution. Such reviews may demonstrate that the author has read

widely, but they do not necessarily show critical engagement.

A strong literature review should synthesize rather than list. It should identify patterns, disagreements, methodological trends, theoretical developments, and gaps in existing scholarship. Critical synthesis allows the author to establish the intellectual basis of the study and to justify the need for the research. Without this analytical function, the literature review becomes descriptive and disconnected from the rest of the manuscript.

To overcome this challenge, researchers should organize the literature around themes, debates, or conceptual categories rather than around individual authors alone. They should compare findings, note contradictions, identify limitations, and show how the current study responds to an unresolved issue. Reference management tools such as Mendeley or Zotero can support organization, but the intellectual work of synthesis remains the responsibility of the author.

Ethical Responsibility and Academic Integrity

Ethical concerns are central to research writing and publication. Plagiarism, improper citation, duplicate submission, authorship disputes, selective reporting, and data manipulation can damage the credibility of both the author and the scholarly record. Some ethical breaches arise from deliberate misconduct, but others result from poor training, inadequate awareness, or misunderstanding of citation and authorship practices.

Academic integrity should therefore be treated as a foundational element of research writing rather than a final technical check before submission. Authors must acknowledge sources accurately, represent data honestly, disclose conflicts of interest where relevant, and ensure that authorship reflects genuine intellectual contribution. Ethical writing also requires transparency about limitations, uncertainty, and the boundaries of evidence.

Institutions, supervisors, and journals have a shared responsibility to strengthen ethical awareness through training, clear guidelines, and consistent enforcement of standards. For authors, the practical strategy is to maintain careful records, cite sources

diligently, use similarity-checking tools responsibly, and seek clarification when uncertain about ethical expectations. A manuscript gains credibility when its claims are not only well written but also ethically defensible (Egbetokun, 2026).

Publication Readiness and Engagement with Peer Review

The movement from manuscript preparation to journal publication introduces another set of challenges. Authors may struggle with selecting an appropriate journal, interpreting submission guidelines, formatting references, preparing cover letters, and responding to reviewer comments. Rejection, revision, and delay can also discourage researchers, particularly those who are unfamiliar with the publication process.

Publication readiness requires strategic judgement. Authors should select journals whose aims, scope, audience, and article types align with the manuscript. They should also follow submission instructions carefully, because non-compliance with formatting, referencing, ethical declarations, or file requirements can delay editorial processing. A strong manuscript may still face difficulty if it is submitted to an unsuitable journal or presented in a form that does not meet basic editorial requirements.

Reviewer feedback should be approached as an opportunity for improvement rather than as a personal criticism. A careful response to reviewers should be respectful, detailed, and evidence-based. Authors should explain how each comment has been addressed, indicate where revisions have been made, and provide reasoned justification when a recommendation is not adopted. Developing resilience in response to peer review is an important part of becoming a mature scholar.

Mentorship, Peer Learning, and Institutional Support

Many of the challenges associated with research writing are intensified when researchers work in isolation. Lack of mentorship can affect problem formulation, methodological choice, writing confidence, ethical awareness, and publication strategy. Early-career researchers often need more than technical correction; they need developmental guidance that helps them understand the logic and culture of scholarly communication.

Mentorship plays a transformative role in research writing because it provides structured feedback, models scholarly judgment, and helps researchers navigate the uncertainties of publication. Effective mentors do not merely edit manuscripts; they help authors think more clearly, argue more carefully, and revise more strategically. Peer learning also matters, as writing groups, seminars, and collaborative review sessions can expose researchers to diverse styles of argument and critique.

Institutions should therefore invest in writing support systems, research methodology training, publication workshops, and ethical guidance (Amiolemen, 2026). Such support is especially important for researchers in resource-constrained environments, where barriers to publication may include limited access to current literature, weak editorial support, and inadequate exposure to international publication standards. Strengthening research writing is not only an individual responsibility; it is also an institutional and scholarly community obligation.

Practical Strategies for Strengthening Research Writing

Improving research writing requires a disciplined and iterative approach. Authors should begin by clarifying the central problem, defining specific objectives, and ensuring that the research questions are aligned with the selected methodology. They should then develop a writing plan that organizes the manuscript into coherent sections and assigns a clear purpose to each part of the article.

Revision should be understood as a core part of writing, not as a final correction stage. Good manuscripts are rarely produced in a single draft. Authors should revise for argument, structure, evidence, style, and compliance with journal requirements. Reading the manuscript from the perspective of a reviewer can help identify gaps in logic, unsupported claims, unclear methods, and weak transitions.

Finally, researchers should cultivate habits that sustain long-term improvement: regular reading of high-quality articles, consistent writing practice, engagement with mentors and peers, ethical attentiveness, and openness to criticism. These habits gradually build the confidence and

competence required for effective scholarly communication.

CONCLUSION

Research writing is a complex but learnable scholarly practice. Its challenges are not limited to language or formatting; they include conceptual uncertainty, methodological weakness, limited critical synthesis, ethical vulnerability, publication anxiety, and insufficient mentorship. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines intellectual clarity, methodological discipline, ethical responsibility, and sustained revision.

For early-career researchers, the path to stronger writing begins with recognizing that a manuscript

is not merely a document to be submitted, but a scholarly argument to be developed. Authors who define their problems clearly, align methods with objectives, synthesize literature critically, write with coherence, and respond constructively to feedback are better positioned to produce publishable and impactful research.

Ultimately, improving research writing contributes not only to individual academic growth but also to the quality of knowledge available to the wider scholarly community. When supported by mentorship, institutional resources, and ethical publication practices, researchers can transform writing from a source of anxiety into a powerful instrument for intellectual contribution.

Table 1: Common Research Writing Challenges and Practical Corrective Strategies

Challenge	Common Manifestation	Practical Strategy
Conceptual clarity	Vague problem statement or unfocused objectives	Refine the research gap through preliminary reading and mentorship.
Methodological alignment	Mismatch between objectives, design, and analysis	Justify the design and ensure methods directly answer the research questions.
Academic expression	Weak flow, unclear paragraphs, or overcomplex language	Revise for clarity, coherence, paragraph unity, and evidence-based argumentation.
Literature synthesis	Descriptive listing of sources rather than critical engagement	Organize literature thematically and identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps.
Academic integrity	Improper citation, plagiarism, or unclear authorship contribution	Follow ethical guidelines, cite carefully, and maintain transparent records.
Publication readiness	Poor journal fit or incomplete response to reviewer comments	Select an appropriate journal and prepare a detailed point-by-point response.
Mentorship gap	Low confidence and weak revision strategy	Seek structured feedback through mentors, peer groups, and institutional writing support.

Note: The strategies listed are illustrative and should be adapted to the author’s discipline, research design, institutional context, and target journal requirements.

REFERENCES

Amiolemen, S. (2026). Beyond the thesis: Building a research identity that matters globally. *Nature and Trends in Science & Technology*, 2(1), 39–40.

Egbetokun, A. (2026). Editorial responsibility: A primer. *Nature and Trends in Science & Technology*, 2(1), i–iv.