

From an Exam Paper to an Informative Article

KONTUR's editorial staff gladly runs articles based on students' exam assignments. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that articles and term papers are two distinct genres; and that the latter must therefore be significantly revised if it is to be converted into the former. Here's some advice on how to go about it.

Keep your target audience in mind.

Exam papers are written with the professor/censor as an audience, and they must document that the student has a handle on the academic requirements set forth concerning theory, method, content and form. An informative article for a medium like KONTUR, on the other hand, is directed towards a target audience with a more general interest in the subject area, who are not specialists, and who should not have to be, to be able to read the article. In other words, they'll stop reading if they get bored!

The news first.

A term paper is often structured so that the conclusion comes last, after all the underlying assumptions are set forth by way of a discussion of theory, method and research. The paper might also have a great number of footnotes and a long bibliography in order to demonstrate the writer's scholarship. This approach makes perfect sense if one is expecting to be graded for his/her work, but with an article, the point is to maintain the reader's interest throughout. It is therefore a good idea to introduce the "news" first, and then substantiate the argumentation afterwards. This compels the writer to remain clearly focused: what is the most important thing to tell my audience at this time?

Avoid wordiness

Even though a meta-text between different segments is a good thing to have in an article (to the extent that it guides the reader through the text), one does not necessarily need to have all calculations included. Nor is it necessary to explain one's choice of methods and analytic considerations, or to go into detail as to how one arrived at one conclusion or the other. To the writer's advantage, this is often "hidden" a bit behind his/her version of events. It is also important to remember that too many footnotes can be annoying, and that the bibliography should be limited to the literature that is actually referred to in the text.

Eye catchers

The article's headline (and abstract, for that matter) functions as the writer's first chance to catch the reader's eye, so make it a bit catchy and "journalistic" – otherwise the reader might be lost from the get-go. And steer clear of boring subheadings like, "Introduction", "Method" or "Conclusion and Discussion" in the article. Properly-spaced subheadings make reading easier, but think of them as markers that should perk the reader's interest.

For further reading...

The best way to learn how to write an article is to read a whole lot of them in order to pick up different authors' literary tricks. This includes the best articles in KONTUR. One can easily see the difference in those articles in which the author has thought extensively about the means of communication, and those that are simply hastily-edited exam papers. In addition, there is plenty of literature to be found on communication in general, and writing articles in particular. One title worth referring to is: Conrad C. Fink: *Writing to Inform and Engage* (Boulder: Westview 2003).