Topic Selection Strategies for Library Science Journal Papers: Postprint

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Abstract

High-quality research papers should exhibit several essential attributes regarding research topic selection, research process, and research outcomes, with topic selection being the foremost concern. An inability to select appropriate topics precludes meaningful research and, by extension, scholarly writing. Topic selection and writing are influenced by disciplinary development characteristics, though individual capability exerts a more significant influence. Library science papers feature three primary categories of topics: academic (theoretical) topics, professional (practical) topics, and topics integrating academic and professional dimensions. Efforts should be directed toward achieving an organic synthesis of professional competence and academic capability in topic selection and writing.

Full Text

Topic Selection Strategies for Library Science Journal Papers

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Abstract: Good academic papers should possess several fundamental qualities in research topic selection, research process, and research results, with topic selection being the foremost concern. Without the ability to select topics, one cannot conduct research, let alone write papers. Paper topics are influenced by disciplinary development characteristics and, more importantly, by individual capabilities. Library science papers feature three major types of topics: academic (theoretical) topics, practical (business) topics, and topics combining academic and practical aspects. Researchers should strive to organically inte-

grate business capabilities with academic abilities in paper topic selection and writing.

Keywords: Academic papers; Paper topic selection; Topic selection strategies; Library science

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Academic papers represent a crucial form of scientific research output. Scientific research is invariably problem-oriented, following the process of "posing questions, analyzing questions, and solving questions." A good academic paper (referring here to journal articles) should meet certain requirements (qualities) in research topic selection, research process, and research results. The primary issue is topic selection—posing the research question. Without the ability to select topics, one cannot conduct research or write papers. Topic selection determines the significance and importance of the research question. From the topic alone, one can preliminarily assess the paper' s value and innovativeness; the quality of topic selection largely determines the paper' s caliber, and the ability to select topics reflects the author' s research competence to some extent. Topic selection shapes the "first impression" and initial judgment of editors, reviewers, and chief editors.

1 Basic Characteristics of Good Papers

All authors hope to write good papers, and journal editors hope to read them. Good papers are often favored by journals and readers and are more likely to be accepted and published. It seems that every journal has no shortage of papers but lacks good ones. What constitutes a good paper? Authors, reviewers, editors, and chief editors each have their own criteria and perceptions. Generally speaking, good papers receive widespread recognition from readers and the academic community. The "Publishing Ethics Statement" issued by the *Journal of Library and Information Science* in February 2020 addressed authors' publishing ethics, including: emphasizing the importance of research significance, clarity of research objectives, cutting-edge nature of topic selection, rigor of research design, scientific nature of research methods, normativity of research process, reliability of research data, correctness of research results, and innovativeness of research conclusions—constituting nine basic characteristics of good papers.

1.1 Research Significance Must Be Important

The selected research topic must first possess significant research meaning. It should have theoretical or academic significance, or practical and applied value, or both. From the perspectives of editors, reviewers, and chief editors, regardless of the field or type of research, the first step is to examine whether the author' s paper and research have value—whether they are worth researching, writing, and publishing. This is the first and most critical step in paper review.

1.2 Research Objectives Must Be Clear

Journal paper topics should be appropriately narrowed down, focusing on a specific point (a relatively small research theme), and should not be too broad. A single journal paper (often with limited word count) should be able to thoroughly explain a particular issue in depth, enabling readers to clearly understand what the article studies and what problem it solves. If the theme involves too many aspects or is too large, the research will inevitably be superficial. The problem with journal paper topics is often not that they are too small, but that they are too large. Therefore, topic selection must avoid overly broad themes; it must focus clearly, with explicit research objectives that allow readers to immediately understand what issue the paper addresses and what problem it ultimately solves.

1.3 Research Topics Must Be Cutting-Edge

Research frontiers often represent emerging areas within a field, with few or no researchers and few or no published articles, yet they typically indicate promising research prospects and possess pioneering, leading, and demonstrative qualities within the research domain. The cutting-edge nature of research topics means that based on a clear understanding and grasp of previous research, researchers identify unresolved questions with good research significance. Cutting-edge topics effectively avoid research on outdated or obsolete issues and prevent low-quality, repetitive research. It is important to note that cutting-edge topics are not necessarily hot topics, though hot topics may be cutting-edge. Hot topics can be selected, but cutting-edge topics are more encouraged—those that carve out new paths and lead academic development.

1.4 Research Design Must Be Rigorous

A study or paper begins with overall design and architecture. Designing the research process, path, and plan must follow principles of rigor. Researchers must determine what kind of study to conduct, how to conduct it, and what research approach to follow—all requiring top-level design that is scientifically sound and systematic. The more rigorous the research design, the smoother the subsequent research work will be. Time and effort should be invested in the research design phase, carefully considering every detail, especially key research points and potential difficulties. For example, in survey research (such as questionnaires), the survey purpose, subjects, scale, process, tools, and timeline must be clearly defined, and reliability and validity tests should be conducted to demonstrate the survey' s credibility. Survey questions must be organically integrated with the overall research to better support the research conclusions with questionnaire data.

1.5 Research Methods Must Be Scientific

Research methods are crucial support for a study or paper. Scientific research is built upon scientific research methods. Scientific research methods must be employed to explore and solve problems. If the research method is wrong or unscientific, then regardless of the conclusions drawn, the research will be unreliable and untrustworthy, potentially causing scientific misguidance. Therefore, everyone engaged in scientific research and paper writing must first master the methodology of scientific research. Without understanding, knowing, or being familiar with research methods, one should not rashly conduct research and writing. "To do a good job, one must first sharpen one' s tools." When reviewing a paper, editors, reviewers, and chief editors will certainly examine whether the methods are appropriate and properly applied.

1.6 Research Process Must Be Normative

How researchers pose, analyze, and solve problems is not arbitrary but must follow rules—namely, academic norms. The entire research process must adhere to established academic normative requirements. For instance, there should be explanations of research background and significance, introductions to research process and methods, and interpretations of research results and conclusions. Journal papers have requirements for format, word count, data, references, and research integrity (academic ethics). Academic norms are consensus constraints developed over time in academia. Since engaging in scientific research, one must follow academic norms and undergo rigorous training in them; otherwise, one lacks the basic qualifications for research and paper writing. Poorly written papers and even academic misconduct result from not understanding or following academic norms, inevitably leading to serious consequences.

1.7 Research Data Must Be Reliable

Research data forms the foundation for research results. A study often involves processes of observation, investigation, and experimentation, generating certain data. Scientific research has evolved from experimental science and theoretical deduction to computer simulation and into a fourth paradigm: data-intensive scientific discovery. Data-driven research has become a prominent feature of contemporary scientific research. Research data in papers must be based on authenticity and reliability—objective data obtained by researchers through personal observation, investigation, or experimentation. Only with reliable data can research produce convincing conclusions; if research data is erroneous or false, the entire research built upon it will be untrustworthy, irresponsible, and may even constitute academic misconduct.

1.8 Research Results Must Be Correct

Research results represent the ultimate outcome of the entire research process, manifested as a large amount of data or facts. The correctness and reasonable-

ness of research results directly determine the success or failure of the research and paper. Correctness of research results reflects certain academic value (theoretical significance) or practical value (applied significance), providing readers with deeper thinking, more meaningful inspiration, or more valuable references, rather than misleading them or wasting their time and energy. Correct research results depend on scientific research methods and reliable research data. Correct results are not often the researcher' s subjective assumptions but rely on collective academic judgment. Even if results deviate from the researcher' s expected goals, they should be reported objectively, as even incorrect results help prevent future researchers from repeating the same mistakes.

1.9 Research Conclusions Must Be Innovative

Research conclusions further refine research results, excavating the highlights and value embedded in them, demonstrating how the study differs from, surpasses, or even subverts previous research. Research conclusions correspond to research objectives. Conclusions may be brief but serve as highly condensed summaries of the entire study, playing a crucial finishing touch. Only when research conclusions are innovative—surpassing, breaking through, or even subverting previous research (disruptive innovation) and producing unprecedented conclusions—can the value and significance of the research be ultimately proven, revealing the true charm of scientific research and academic papers.

2 Topic Selection Requirements for Good Papers

"Everything is difficult at the beginning." Topic selection, as the "beginning" of a paper, is the most difficult and critical step, representing a scientific question in itself. Only when a researcher has unresolved questions in mind will topics emerge. A good topic selection accounts for half of a good paper' s success. Good topic selection makes paper writing more efficient; poor topic selection inevitably makes it less effective. Generally, editors, reviewers, and chief editors can preliminarily judge a paper' s value and innovativeness from its topic. If a paper studies what has already been researched by others, it becomes meaningless.

2.1 General Requirements for Good Paper Topics

Topics must have research significance, reflecting novelty, uniqueness, originality, and cutting-edge nature. Research objectives must be clear, meaning the research question is well-defined and focused, with explicit problems to be solved. There should be independent thinking and academic insights. A broad academic vision and solid preliminary research foundation are necessary. Topics should have academic value, making contributions in viewpoints, theories, techniques, or methods, or have applied value, solving problems or challenges in library practice. Topics should suit one' s actual circumstances (knowledge level and capability, previous research foundation, personal research expertise, etc.). Top-

ics should be relatively stable, with continuous research forming one' s advantageous capabilities and influence. Journal paper topics should avoid being too broad and empty (avoid large topics with small treatment) and strive to be small yet substantial (small topics with large treatment). Critical thinking is essential, moving from "taking it for granted" to "critical thinking." There must be passion, interest, and research motivation for the selected topic.

2.2 Originality Requirements for Good Paper Topics

The foundation of a good paper is a good topic, which first requires originality. As the result of an author' s scientific research or practical application, a paper must be the author' s original work, representing the author' s exploration of a scientific question in a particular field through years of professional study, scientific research, and business practice, using scientific thinking, methods, or tools to pose, analyze, and solve problems. Specifically: academic viewpoints are independently created, research design is self-proposed, research data is personally obtained, research conclusions are self-refined, and the academic paper is self-written. In other words, the paper writing process involves no plagiarism, falsification, fabrication, alteration, ghostwriting, paper trading, or other academic misconduct.

2.3 Innovation Requirements for Good Paper Topics

Academic research includes both knowledge creation—innovation, discovery, and invention, exploring the unknown world and its laws—and knowledge organization—analyzing and organizing existing knowledge to make it standardized and systematic, inheriting established knowledge. Innovation runs through the entire process of academic research and paper writing, such as proposing new academic ideas, scientific concepts, hypotheses, theories, theorems, and laws; designing new observation methods and experimental means; establishing new scientific models; developing new products; designing new technological processes; and discovering new species. The value of academic papers lies in exploring the unknown and discovering patterns and characteristics in scientific development. Academic papers should embody necessary rigor and exploratory nature, achieving transcendence, breakthrough, or subversion of existing knowledge on the basis of originality, discovering unprecedented scientific questions, proposing unprecedented analytical arguments, and drawing unprecedented scientific conclusions. There are four types of academic papers: research papers, data papers, application papers, and review papers. The first three primarily create knowledge, while review papers mainly organize knowledge.

2.4 Quality Requirements for Good Paper Topics

Good papers must demonstrate research, clearly reflecting: the research problem to be solved, the research 思路和方法 proposed for the problem, the specific research work conducted, the research results obtained based on the work, and

appropriate discussion of the results. Good paper topics should entail substantial follow-up work, completing research in one or more aspects such as analysis, design, implementation, experimentation, or application. Good topic selection also requires high-quality writing, including clear concepts, complete structure, logical organization, fluent language, and standardized format. Good paper topics should involve certain research difficulty, with challenging problems that cannot be easily solved, requiring comprehensive application of basic theories and specialized knowledge to address issues. Papers should have certain technical advancement, offering independent insights or technological innovations regarding some aspect of the topic problem.

2.5 Creativity Requirements for Good Paper Topics

Good topics often come from good ideas, which may be a thought, a framework, an approach, or a spark of inspiration. Good ideas include unique thinking perspectives, accurate thematic judgment, application of advanced technological methods, and the importance of the problem considered. With ideas, one can summarize, refine, and condense them into a topic using concise language. Without ideas, there are no topics. Ideas may come from independent thinking, team discussions in research groups, conference presentations, classroom teaching, literature reading, practical insights, sudden inspiration, and other sources, requiring authors to possess unique thinking, good information literacy, skill in intelligence analysis, solid knowledge accumulation, and diligent, in-depth contemplation. Topics (ideas) can be based on different starting points: Blind spots: research areas not discovered by predecessors—most difficult but most valuable and innovative; Misconceptions: issues studied by predecessors but proven inaccurate or unscientific, requiring correction or falsification; Controversial areas: issues studied by predecessors but still disputed, requiring timely correction or revision through research.

3 Factors Influencing Topic Selection and Writing

The difficulty of paper writing first manifests as the difficulty of topic selection. Why is topic selection and writing so difficult? It is mainly influenced by two factors: disciplinary characteristics and individual capabilities. From a disciplinary perspective, like many other disciplines, library science is evolving from a traditional, single discipline toward interdisciplinarity and integration, with increasingly obvious cross-penetration between disciplines. Database searches also reveal that many issues in library science have been studied by others for years, making it exceptionally difficult to find entirely new research areas. Meanwhile, researchers entering the library science field are becoming increasingly multidisciplinary and diversified, bringing many new ideas and research methods. Library science research topics are also increasingly influenced by technological and epochal changes, with the discipline showing a more pronounced technological trend.

Everyone faces the same disciplinary characteristics, so why can some people

write many high-level papers while others cannot, with their submissions being repeatedly rejected? The more important factor lies in individual capabilities: professional knowledge capability, scientific research capability, business development capability, literature reading capability, academic inheritance capability, knowledge innovation capability, thinking and logical capability, and written expression capability.

3.1 Professional Knowledge Capability

Library science is a discipline that requires necessary professional knowledge foundations and technical capabilities. Without having studied core library science courses and lacking understanding of basic concepts, theories, methods, and history of library science, it is difficult to enter the research field of library science and write academic papers with disciplinary depth. The lack of professional knowledge capability is an important factor affecting paper writing, especially for personnel with other disciplinary backgrounds entering library work. The solution is to make up for deficiencies through self-study, attending academic conferences, reading professional literature extensively, and seeking continuing education opportunities.

3.2 Scientific Research Capability

Scientific research capability is the ability to discover, analyze, and solve problems, specifically manifested in obtaining research funding, writing research reports, applying for patents, and publishing papers, with innovation at its core. Possessing such capability is not achievable merely through professional knowledge but requires strengthening training in research capabilities. Based on academic inheritance, one must learn rational thinking, questioning, and critical thinking. It is necessary to strengthen learning and training in research methodology and academic norms, maintaining curiosity and an exploratory spirit in scientific research.

3.3 Business Development Capability

Library science is an applied discipline. Whether the discipline develops well is directly related to whether the library profession develops well. Library science research is not abstract but is situated within specific library contexts and development environments. Problems should be identified from practice (not just from books) through practical insights. Therefore, librarians with frontline practice have inherent advantages in library science research. Business development capability and academic research capability complement each other, are mutually causal, and mutually reinforcing.

3.4 Literature Reading Capability

Reading is the primary way to enhance knowledge and capability, and effective, purposeful reading is one of the essential abilities for librarians. Through ex-

tensive professional literature reading for knowledge accumulation and 沉淀, one can continuously optimize their knowledge structure and professional capabilities, facilitate continuous thinking and analysis, inspire writing inspiration, and condense good paper topics. Reading is a slow process requiring perseverance. It should combine extensive and intensive reading, trace-back reading and up-to-date reading, and deep reading. Enjoy the pleasure of reading, understand the essence of the profession, and enhance topic selection and research capabilities.

3.5 Academic Inheritance Capability

Research requires standing on the shoulders of giants and cannot be separated from inheriting previous excellent achievements. The literature review section in papers aims to 梳理 previous research work in the field, research progress, and thereby discover 荒区, misconceptions, or controversial areas in predecessors' research. Without academic inheritance, there is no academic innovation. Thick accumulation enables 薄发. Academically, one must first solidly master professional fundamentals (undergraduate, master' s, doctoral levels) without rushing, as learning cannot be 速成. As the saying goes, "Ten years of cold bench, not a single empty word in writing" —this is true scholarship.

3.6 Knowledge Innovation Capability

Innovation is the core meaning of academic research and paper writing, and innovativeness is also an important standard for measuring paper quality. Innovation can involve discovering new research results from existing research materials, providing new evidence for existing research results, or proposing new thinking and insights in practice. Innovation is reflected in all aspects of the research process, representing transcendence, breakthrough, or even subversion of existing research. Innovation capability is an essential capability for today' s researchers. Innovation does not arise from thin air; it requires not only academic inheritance but also innovative capabilities, including innovative thinking and methods, innovative technologies and tools, and innovative insights and inspiration. Innovation is the soul of a paper.

3.7 Thinking and Logical Capability

Thinking and logic issues should not be problems, yet many papers do suffer from confused thinking and unclear logic, making them unreadable. Thinking and logic have inherent consistency: thinking is the cause, logic is the effect. Thinking and logic are basic capabilities involving the analysis and summarization of the whole and development patterns of things, following methods such as induction and deduction, abstraction and generalization, analysis and synthesis, and causal reasoning. Whether for 学位论文, monographs, research reports of hundreds of thousands of words or journal papers of about ten thousand words, the overall structure (research background, significance, literature review, methods, process, results, conclusions, limitations, suggestions, references, etc.) and arrangement of each part reflect the rationality of thinking and logic. Papers

with good thinking and logic provide readers with clear, smooth, memorable, and thorough reading experiences.

3.8 Written Expression Capability

Relative to thinking and logic, written expression should be even less of a problem—it is the most basic of basics—yet some papers are indeed rejected due to poor writing quality. The writing level of some papers does not match their academic level; the academic content is at the graduate level, while the writing is at the primary or secondary school level. Specific manifestations include: inaccurate concept explanations, inappropriate argumentation, unclear language expression, incoherent context, and non-standard punctuation. No matter how good the paper, poor written expression creates reading difficulties and obstacles, preventing acceptance and publication.

4 Characteristics of Library Science Paper Topics

Library science research papers mainly include academic (theoretical) papers, practical (business) papers, and combinations of the two. These three types each have different emphases, though they are sometimes difficult to separate completely, especially for library science, where academic and practical aspects have inherent connections. What type of paper to write is related to the author' s professional background, career experience, academic training, and personal capabilities.

4.1 Characteristics of Academic Paper Topics

Academic papers primarily discuss macro-level issues of disciplinary development from a disciplinary perspective, possessing certain theoretical and disciplinary development significance. They focus on the evolutionary process of academic thought, condensation and summarization of disciplinary theoretical ideas, construction and introduction of models and methods, and application and development of technical means. Such articles may not necessarily aim to solve practical library problems or address immediate library needs, but by examining and analyzing the external manifestations or internal issues of libraries from macro domestic and international perspectives, they reveal and explore the characteristics and laws of library career development, thereby possessing certain theoretical research significance and academic value.

Authors of such articles often have profound theoretical foundations, broad academic vision, unique academic viewpoints, and strong academic insight, able to discover characteristics and laws from common library phenomena and explore the inherent attributes and innovative driving forces of library development. In today's context of "new liberal arts,"interdisciplinary cross-fertilization is increasing, and the introduction of new theories and technologies has unique research value in this era. Transplanting theories, technologies, or methods from related

disciplines into library science to solve theoretical and practical problems in library career development has significant practical and strategic implications for both library science theory and library practice. However, purely academic library science research should not depart from a practical foundation; otherwise, it becomes "metaphysics"—appearing academic and dazzling but fundamentally solving neither theoretical nor practical problems. "Nihilism" in library science research should be opposed.

4.2 Characteristics of Practical Paper Topics

Practical papers primarily address business problems in library frontline practice, possessing strong business innovativeness and guidance, with certain business uniqueness and competitive advantages. Such papers closely align with the actual needs of library business development, are very grounded, and are often popular among frontline librarians. Library science research also needs to come from practice and return to practice. Practice is fertile ground for library science research. Many libraries and frontline librarians, through extensive long-term practice, have rich experience accumulation, bold innovative exploration, and profound practical insights, demonstrating good practical exemplarity, leadership, and foresight. They are well worth writing into good papers that become industry models or paradigms, directly impacting and contributing to the innovative development of the library profession.

Authors of such articles are often frontline librarians who, despite rich practical experience and actual work effectiveness, are often limited by "practical experience" and "work summaries," producing papers that lack necessary academic quality, generalizability, and broader reference or inspiration. Therefore, it is necessary to break free from the constraints of "experience summarization," starting from a broader academic vision, from previous research and practical progress, and from scientific questions, to examine the universal significance of topics based on one' s innovative work for others, other libraries, the industry, the profession, and academia. Following basic academic paradigms and requirements, strengthening theoretical summarization and academic condensation ultimately achieves the sublimation from individual practice to general theory.

4.3 Characteristics of Combined Academic and Practical Paper Topics

Combined academic and practical papers have relatively higher requirements, focusing not only on important academic and theoretical issues in library science but also on practical and realistic needs in library business—the best model of integrating theory and practice. This should also be the basic requirement for all library science papers. However, it is difficult to achieve, and because not every author can bridge these two levels, the resulting papers tend to emphasize either theory or practice. Such papers should examine and study issues from the combination point of theory and practice, with topics possessing both theoretical significance and applied value, beneficial to library science discipline

construction and promoting actual library work. This type of paper is not uncommon among published journal papers; one should be good at discovering and reading more such potentially classic papers.

Authors of such papers may come from university teachers and students with practical experience or frontline librarians with library science disciplinary training. They can recognize problems in library and library science development from a more macro perspective, apply theoretical research to practical work, and condense practical work into theoretical issues, triggering deeper thinking. Both academia and the profession can benefit, promoting both theory and practice. When writing such papers, one must avoid the disconnect between theory and practice, not forcing connections artificially but naturally establishing organic links between the two. Undoubtedly, such articles and topics have the highest value, are most welcomed by journals, and often represent excellent papers.

Topic selection and writing for library science papers are not easy tasks. They may seem simple, but whether for frontline librarians or university teachers and students, all need to start from scientific questions, be good at discovering, analyzing, and solving problems, and require solid academic research foundations and long-term professional accumulation. It is recommended that all colleagues dedicated to library science research and paper writing engage in more professional learning, more thinking, more practical innovation, and more academic accumulation. Actively apply for research projects, form teams, and produce systematic and in-depth series of research results. Write more good papers, using paper writing and publication as the primary means to enhance research capabilities. Do not fear rejection, as it is also a learning opportunity. Cultivate learning abilities, continuously optimizing one' s knowledge structure and professional capabilities. Be willing to invest time and effort. Paper writing and research capability improvement are slow processes— "success comes naturally when effort is sufficient." Organically integrate business capabilities with academic capabilities to become experts who contribute to the library profession and library science discipline.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.