

Symbolic Interaction FAQs

1. How do I get published in your journal?

The first thing to do is to write a paper that is targeted at this journal (and its close competitors). Never write a paper and then wonder where to publish it because you will only have to do a lot of extra work when it comes back from the editors and reviewers.

2. How do I target your journal?

Read our author guidelines and follow them. We have good reasons for setting a word limit, formatting citations in a particular way and so on. If your paper does not follow these, our Managing Editor may well send it straight back without ever showing it to us. It is also a good idea to look at recent issues and at our editors' statement in Vol 35, 1 because there have been some significant changes in the definition of what we are doing and what we are looking for, with the encouragement of the journal's owners, the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction. Another good way to learn about what we are looking for is to volunteer as a reviewer. This gives you an opportunity to see all the mistakes other people make!

3. You have a limit of 8,000 words – is this really fair to qualitative researchers?

This is a longer limit than many journals offer and we are not completely inflexible. If you think you have a good case for a longer paper, email us before you submit the paper. Sometimes, word counts are misleading when you are dealing with transcripts, for example. Occasionally, we may offer you more words when we have had feedback from the reviewers so you have space to make changes in response to their reports.

If you just have a very long paper, it will have to be exceptionally good and receive particularly strong support from our reviewers.

4. Isn't the whole principle of a word limit wrong?

Not if you are a reader – and most authors want to be read as well as published. What we found was that a lot of papers were taking so long to get to the point, with lengthy literature reviews and methodological justifications, that we were really losing interest by the time we got to the author's news. We are expected to read everything so if we felt like giving up, we suspect that most other readers will actually stop before they get to the good bits. Having a word limit encourages authors to focus on what they have to say that is new and important. We think that it is also a matter of fairness to other authors. We have a fixed page budget for each volume and giving one person a bigger share of it, without a specific reason for doing so, means other people get excluded inappropriately. This way, everybody has a more equal chance of getting their paper accepted.

5. Don't you want us to include literature reviews and methodological justifications?

Of course, literature reviews are important – but early career authors, in particular, need to appreciate the difference between the review chapter in their dissertation and the review section of a paper. In a dissertation, it is important to show that you have read widely in the field and that you have a broad competence as a social scientist. In a paper, you just need to cite enough work to set up the specific thing that the paper is about.

Where does your work place a new brick in the wall of what we know about a topic?

What studies are you engaging with, either to confirm their analyses or to propose revisions to our understanding? Similarly, readers of Symbolic Interaction do not require

lengthy justifications of qualitative methods, although they do need to know very clearly what you have done. If you claim to have used a grounded theory approach, you don't need to justify this, but you do need to show that you have actually done that, rather than, say, analytic induction or phenomenological reduction. As a rule of thumb, if you find that you have written more than 25 per cent of your paper before you get to your own analysis and findings, you have probably given too much space to literature review and methodology.

6. Why did you ask me to read the first and last page together?

We get a lot of papers where the conclusions don't match the introduction! If you say on p.1 you are going to deliver something at the end – and you don't – then of course your paper won't be accepted. Really, of course, journal papers should get their final revision before submission by working backwards. Just as you always write the introduction to a dissertation last – so you can miraculously deliver in the conclusion all the things you promised – so, too, should you make sure that the paper ends up by achieving the goals you set. It's also important that the conclusion tells the reader where to go from here. What is the news in the paper? How should we understand differently some corner of the empirical or theoretical world from now on because you have written this paper? Remember that you are writing for a sociology journal and engaging with sociological issues here. We are not so interested in the policy or the normative implications of your work as a different kind of journal might be. You don't need to give these a lot of attention but you do need to tell us how you have changed a little space in sociology by means of what you have done.