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2-2003

Writing for *Cornell Quarterly*: What I Look for in a Submission

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Abstract

[Excerpt] In the last issue I provided some information on the review process for *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*. In this issue I am providing some information specifically on issues related to writing manuscripts and how the content can be communicated in such a way so as to improve the probability that papers will be accepted for publication.

Keywords

writing manuscripts, publications, Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly

Disciplines

Hospitality Administration and Management

Comments
Required Publisher Statement

Writing for *Cornell Quarterly:*
What I Look for in a Submission

From the Editor

Michael C. Sturman

IN THE LAST ISSUE I PROVIDED SOME INFORMATION on the review process for *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*. In this issue I am providing some information specifically on issues related to writing manuscripts and how the content can be communicated in such a way so as to improve the probability that papers will be accepted for publication.

There are four characteristics that I look for and that I advise my reviewers to look for when reading any submission to *Cornell Quarterly*. These are (a) the appropriateness of the topic for the journal, (b) the technical adequacy and rigor of the article, (c) the clarity of presentation, and (d) the significance of the paper's contribution to the field. It is worth elaborating on each of these items.

First, the topic must be appropriate for the journal. This is more than simply being able to answer "yes" to the question "is it hospitality related?" The real question is, "Does this article help improve practice for those in the hospitality industry?" My goal is for each published article to help at least some readers by providing information that is useful and that they did not know previously. This may entail revealing new information about a particular functional area, such as a specific finance paper that improves on an existing forecasting model. Or it may be a topic that adds breadth, such as a paper that helps present new variables to consider to help understand the psychological processes involved in the delivery of services. Additionally, I feel that it is critical that writers make this point clear, right up front in the paper. As *Cornell Quarterly* is a journal aimed at informing practice, it is important that articles get right to the point as to their potential contribution. Read-

ers should not be expected to have the patience to try to figure out why an article might be of interest to them. Let us all know, right away, how your paper will ultimately advance hospitality practice.

Second, the article must be technically adequate. Most of the articles in *Cornell Quarterly* are empirical. Any data analysis, be it quantitative or qualitative, must be handled in a way that (a) is technically appropriate, (b) presents enough information for readers to form their own judgments, and (c) is thorough enough to rule out obvious alternative explanations. Related to this point, authors should not overinterpret their research findings. For example, authors should not discuss how a correlation between two variables is evidence of causation, and should not equate statistical significance with practical significance. Non-empirical papers are also welcome at *Cornell Quarterly*; however, they, too, have technical requirements to make them appropriate. Specifically, theoretical or descriptive papers must develop significant new insights for practice. The arguments developed in a non-empirical paper must help provide a new framework, perspective, or overview that can influence the way practicing hospitality professionals perform their work. For both empirical and non-empirical papers, it is not enough to simply describe a situation; the logic or analyses must help paint a picture that can guide behavior beyond the specific context of the presented study.

Third, submitted papers should be clearly written. *Cornell Quarterly* is in an unusual position: its mission is to present research-based insights to a practitioner audience. Writing for *Cornell Quarterly*, therefore, presents a special challenge. As mentioned above, papers must be technically adequate and survive the scrutiny of

trained social scientists, but the message must be communicated in a way that is valuable and accessible to practitioners. There is often a fine line between too much discussion of methods, too much literature review, or too much theory and what constitutes a rigorous research-based paper directed at practitioners. The writing should be active and interesting. It is often valuable to put major methodological portions in sidebars or footnotes to maintain the paper's proper flow. Specific, practical examples are also valuable. Authors should not assume that statistical results presented in a table necessarily speak for themselves; researchers must communicate to the reader how their findings are practical, keeping in mind that *Cornell Quarterly's* audience is practitioners. Every paper should clearly articulate how it helps inform practice.

Finally, every paper is evaluated in terms of its potential contribution to the field. In essence, I ask reviewers to evaluate, "How much does this paper really matter?," or, more succinctly, "So what?" Few papers can change the world, but can they change something. Ideally, a paper published in *Cornell Quarterly* should contribute to the field by changing the way a practitioner does, or thinks about, an issue of concern to those in the hospitality industry. This may be by presenting a new tool that can be used to address recurring problems for the industry; developing a new framework to conceptualize, describe, or categorize major developments; or offering new insights into how to resolve certain issues. It is on this fourth point that many descriptive papers falter. They may address a topic that is appropriate to *Cornell Quarterly*, thoroughly analyze the situation, and clearly present the information. Many descrip-

tive papers, however, do not provide any meaningful insights that are applicable beyond the specific context that was described. Such papers ultimately make little contribution to practice in hospitality. In short, being interesting is not enough. Our goal is to help improve practice.

In conclusion, it should be noted that this editorial is not intended to discourage potential writers. Almost all of the submitted papers I read, even the ones that are immediately rejected, have the potential to satisfy all the criteria for publication. But there is much art to the science of applied hospitality research. Authors need to make sure that they find the questions that are appropriate for the journal; they need to answer the question using appropriate logic, data, and analytical techniques; they need to communicate their question, its importance, their approach to answering it, and its implications in such a way as to be technically accurate, complete, interesting, and useful to practitioners; and the papers need to make a difference for practice. Altogether, the journal's mission constitutes a challenge for the authors, editorial staff, editorial board, and reviewers. By striving to meet this challenge, however, I hope to continue the tradition of serving up valuable work communicated through *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly.—M.C.S.*