**Editorial**

# How to Write an Article for Comparative Population Studies[*]

## Philip H. Rees

**Abstract:** This editorial is written by Philip Rees, Professor Emeritus in Population Geography at the University of Leeds, UK, drawing on his experience as external editor for Comparative Population Studies (CPoS) in 2019 and as a writer of research papers for 6 decades. He spent a busy year of emails and reviews at his desk in Leeds as part of the CPoS editorial team, with visits to Wiesbaden for editorial meetings. This experience was good preparation for the necessity of home working in 2020 and 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. This article provides guidance for aspiring authors of CPoS articles in preparing and revising a submission. The advice includes sticking precisely to the CPoS guidance, writing clear and concise prose, being selective in your citations, focusing on originality and relevance, and responding in full to all issues raised by the reviewers of your paper. Then you will be able to benefit from the online publication of your paper, avoiding the article charges levied by commercial publishers, rapid turnround, meticulous sub-editing, assistance if English is not your native language and wise advice from a succession of external guest editors.

**Keywords:** Guidelines · Citations · Plagiarism · Responses · Review

## 1 Introduction

This editorial is a contribution to the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Comparative Population Studies journal (*CPoS* 2025). The journal has many advantages for publishing work in the field of demography and population research, for both early career and experienced researchers. The Federal Government of Germany has an admirable policy of supporting research institutes of high quality, including the Federal Institute for Population Research (*Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung, BiB,* Wiesbaden). BiB publishes CPoS. Although the institute mainly focuses on

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[*] This article belongs to a series celebrating the journal's 50th anniversary.

demographic developments in Germany, BiB encourages submissions from authors all over the globe. Since 2019 CPoS has appointed external editors both in Germany and other countries to ensure scientific independence, transparency and scientific quality. CPoS offers quick turnaround of submitted papers and their revisions, and, in this day of pressured research budgets, no article charges! CPoS staff carry out meticulous sub-editing. Help is available if English is not your native language. CPoS is an online journal, which can be freely accessed by anyone interested in your research. This contributes to reducing an author's carbon footprint and thus to the green energy transition, so vital in slowing down global warming and the extreme weather events which threaten lives and livelihoods.

## 2    General considerations

So, what steps should an aspiring author take to prepare a submission to CPoS? These steps are common to leading social science journals. Your paper should be original, rigorous, interesting, and, if possible, relevant to current policy design which is affected by demographic factors. What does "Comparative" mean in the journal title? It means authors are encouraged to include comparisons between different populations, distinguished by one or more of the dimensions of demographic enquiry such as sex, age, education and location, sub-national or international. If your work is based on survey data, the list of attributes will be much larger.

## 3    Paying attention to the Guidelines

You should read guidelines very carefully. Important elements to pay attention to are the word limit and the word equivalent assigned to tables and figures. There may be a limit to the number allowed. CPoS sets a limit of 8,000 words (6,000 words for descriptive papers). However, CPoS editors can be flexible if you need additional words, given publications are published online. Extra space can be requested using a convincing argument (e.g. *Rees/Lomax* 2019). Whereas a paper publisher incurs an extra cost for each page of an article, an online publisher's costs are much smaller. Libraries are increasingly adding only online publications because they have filled most of their shelf space.

## 4    Word limits

CPoS guidelines recommend that the main text does not exceed 8,000 words (6,000 words in the case of descriptive papers). It is easy to get carried away and realise you are over the limit. Don't panic. A careful edit can reveal surplus words (such as too many adjectives) and texts can be shrunk without loss of meaning and gain in understanding for the reader.

## 5      Role of the Abstract and Introduction

The Abstract is the most important part of your paper, because a good abstract will prompt a reader to tackle your full article. The Abstract should cover aims, context, data, analysis, results and interpretation in clear prose in as few words as possible. It should be a micro version of all the ingredients of your paper not a ramble about the topic. I confess to checking current practice in *Demographic Research* published by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (MPIDR), the leading German online competitor. Choose the key words by designing terms that can be successfully searched.

   The Introduction should do what "it says on the tin". You should identify your topic, provide a set of aims and/or research questions, describe the general argument to be developed in the paper and list the contents of the sections of the paper that follows. The introduction should not be an excuse to launch into a review of prior literature on your topic or research question. That belongs to the review section which should follow.

## 6      Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves copying text from other publications without citation and placement in quotations. This constitutes theft of copyrighted material and could mean you might lose your job. Politicians world-wide seem to be prone to this misdemeanour. The problem can be solved by re-writing your text from notes on the material, citing the source and running the text through a plagiarism checker, of which there are many available online such as Turnitin or Grammarly.

## 7      Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism is a lesser sin, for which eminent professors have been criticised. It is not good practice and will be detected using a plagiarism search engine. Again, the solution is to read your previous work, make notes, close the file and write new text with suitable citations. Check whether the journal requires you to withhold self-citations until acceptance in order to avoid bias if your authorship is revealed.

## 8      Review of the literature

The literature review should cover the publications relevant to your topic but should also be informative. Declaring a finding and then citing a long list of research papers is sub-optimal. Which one does the busy reader go to for insight? Do they all report the same finding? My preference is for a short sentence describing the relevant findings of each key reference. To help the reader, current practice should be to link the citation to the online version of the article, which the busy reader can easily

access and read. Sometimes it will be necessary to provide a specific page number where the finding you are describing can be found. When citing a book, this is essential and will save the reader valuable time.

## 9     Responses to editors

There are two keys to speedy passage through the submission and revision process: pay very careful attention to the CPoS guidelines and take very seriously responses to reviewer and editor comments and requirements. I recommend an article by *Donovan* (2005) with the title "How to Alienate Your Editor", which may shock you or provide a good laugh.

## 10     Responses to reviewers

Take the comments of the reviewers seriously when preparing a response document. Write your response after each point raised. Do not dismiss it. If you think the reviewer's comment or requirement is unreasonable, then make a strong case for not implementing. In a recent review, which covered the European locations of ancestors of the American cohort with immigrant origins, the author ignored my recommendations not to locate the mean ancestor location in the Atlantic Ocean but to instead add a map of Europe showing their birth locations. This recommendation was ignored, on the grounds that it would involve too much extra work. This is not a good argument when you want to convince the reviewer.

## 11     Contributions of each author

Citing the individual contribution of each author is a requirement of most scientific journals and is becoming more common among social science journals. In reviews of research achievements by funding bodies, such as the Research Excellence Framework used by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funder this may become a required feature as team work and multiple authorship increases. CPoS is happy to include such information in your research article.

## 12     Publishing and referencing your data

In your article, you may have used many data sources as input to your work and produced output data. The input data should be fully cited and referenced. The output data should be deposited in a safe repository for further use. Any program code that you have written should also be deposited. Examples of data repositories include academic data archives (e.g. *UK Data Service* 2025, *Wittgenstein Centre* 2025), and table builders produced by official statistics agencies (e.g. *ABS* 2025; *ONS* 2025).

Code repositories, where you can place and describe novel software and data used in your analysis (*GitHub* 2025; *Zenodo* 2025) are also important.

## 13  Use of supplementary or supporting information

If you run out of words but still have lots of details or data that would be of interest, you can add extra information via these documents linked to your paper. CPoS usually reviews these documents.

## 14  Final remark

I hope you find this editorial helps in preparing your submission of a research paper to CPoS. The journal welcomes submissions at any time and is looking forward to your innovative research.

## References

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