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# How to Select Topics for Publications in Top Journals

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# Introduction

- Personal background and research experience
  - Majored in BA and Economics
  - PhD in Entrepreneurship
  - Broad range of interests at the intersection of innovation, entrepreneurship, strategy, sustainability
  - I can be stubborn (+ persistence; - resistance to feedback)
  - Learned a lot from failure and from my peers
- Objectives of today's session:
  - Learn effective topic selection strategies
  - Identify methods for engaging with scholarly debates
  - Explore use of AI for research topic generation (and how not to use it)
- Why topic selection significantly impacts publishing success

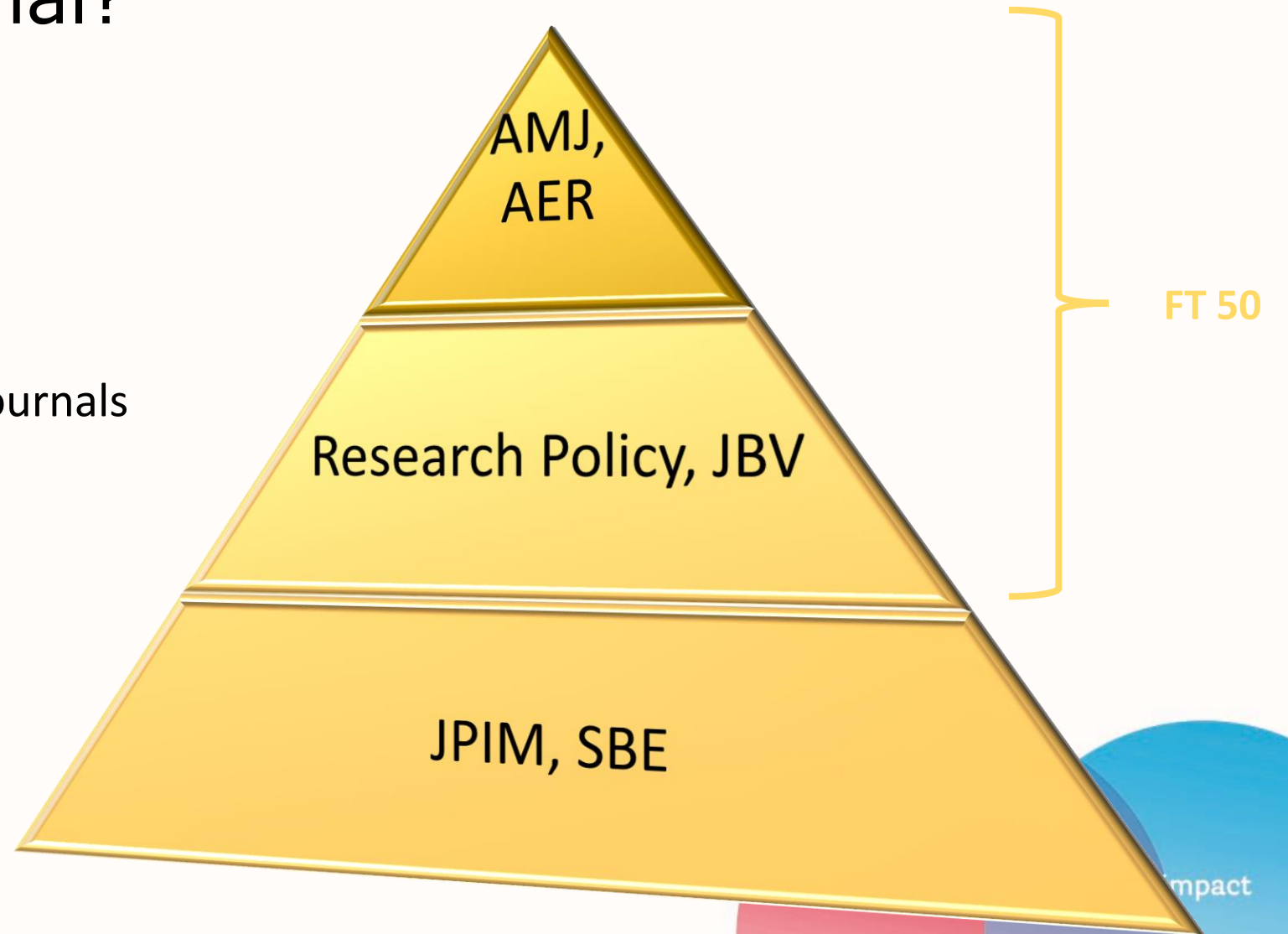


# What is a Top-Journal?

Top-Tier Disciplinary Journals  
(Top of the pyramid)

Field-Leading, Cross-Disciplinary Journals  
(Middle layer)

Top Field-Specific Journals  
(Base layer)





# The basics of a good research question

## Clear & Focused

- Clearly states what you're investigating
- Avoids vague or ambiguous terms

## Well-Scoped

- Not too broad: Can't explore everything at once
- Not too narrow: Leaves room for exploration

## Challenging but Doable

- Not too easy: Encourages deep thinking
- Not too hard: Can realistically be addressed with available resources

## Researchable

- Based on evidence, data, or scholarly sources
- Not just opinion-based or speculative

## Analytical, Not Just Descriptive

- Goes beyond describing facts
- Involves examining, comparing, or evaluating





# Aligning Interests & Expertise

- Importance of Passion in Innovation & Sustainability Research:
  - Sustains motivation and productivity
  - Enhances creativity and innovation
- Leveraging Existing Skills and Knowledge:
  - Builds on your strengths
  - Increases efficiency in research execution





# Identifying Literature Gaps

## Techniques for Gap Identification:

- Conducting Systematic Literature Reviews:
  - Structured steps for comprehensive coverage
  - Tools and databases for literature review
  - Citation and keyword analysis
- Cross-Disciplinary Exploration
- Identification of conflicting findings and synthesis methods
  - Learn to identify tensions, paradoxes and trade-offs
    - *Example:* Innovation paradox—firms need stability to exploit existing knowledge but must embrace uncertainty to explore new innovations.





Think about your current or potential research topic:

*Can you identify at least one key paradox, tension, or trade-off that could provide a compelling angle for your research?*

*Reflect individually for 1-2 minutes.*

Share briefly with your neighbor:

- What is the paradox or trade-off?
- Why is it relevant or interesting?







# The Importance of a Strong Theoretical Foundation

- Guides Research Questions and Focus
  - Clearly defines and sharpens research questions.
  - Ensures relevance and coherence of research objectives.
- Facilitates Meaningful Contributions
  - Helps identify and articulate the research gap clearly.
  - Enables significant theoretical advancement.
- Enhances Credibility and Rigor
  - Demonstrates rigorous intellectual grounding and scholarly maturity.
  - Strengthens argumentation and justification of research choices.
- Improves Research Communication
  - Provides a common language to effectively communicate with academic peers.
  - Positions research clearly within existing scholarly debates.
- High-impact journals prioritize theoretically robust studies.
  - Strong theoretical framing can differentiate your research from others.





# Assessing Practical Relevance

## Bridging Theory with Current Global Challenges:

- Identifying practical implications of your research

- Linking research to global issues (SDGs, climate change)

## Maximizing Impact Potential:

- Focusing on topics with broad applicability

- Ensuring relevance for policymakers and practitioners





# Evaluating Feasibility

- Resources and Data Availability:
  - Assessing access to quality data sources
  - Securing necessary resources early in the process (e.g. via co-authors)
- Time Management and Scope:
  - Creating realistic timelines
  - Balancing depth and manageability of the project



# Engaging with Current Debates (Part 1)

- Systematic Journal Monitoring
- Set up alerts through platforms like Google Scholar, Web of Science, or journal websites.
  - *Example:* Receive automatic email alerts for newly published articles in *Research Policy*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *AoM Journal*
- Regularly check journals with editorial scope aligned to your interests.
  - *Example:* Read the "Aims and Scope" section of *Journal of Business Venturing* to identify fit with entrepreneurship-related topics.
  - *Read editorials to spot topics.*
- Track Influential Researchers





# Engaging with Current Debates (Part 2)

- Special issues often highlight emerging research areas and debates.
  - *Example:* Recent special issue in *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal* on “Entrepreneurial Responses to Grand Challenges”.
  - Editorial articles provide overviews of current research debates.
  - *Example:* Editorial insights in *Academy of Management Journal* regularly summarize trending topics and research gaps.
- Conferences offer direct insights into the hottest research topics and emerging debates.
- Utilize keynote speeches, panels, and networking to refine topic relevance.
  - *Example:* Attend keynotes or panels by leading scholars understand where the field is moving.
- Remember: Knowledge recombination is key



# My Journey of Publishing in Top Journals

- Deep Understanding of Your Field of Expertise
  - Thorough knowledge of existing literature and theoretical foundations.
    - *Example:* Leveraging extensive expertise in “collaborative approaches in innovation and entrepreneurship” when selecting topics
  - Broader Awareness of Ongoing Debates
  - Identify relevant discussions in adjacent fields and integrate insights.
  - *Example:* Drawing on insights from knowledge-spillovers to contribute to debates on innovation and sustainability → global challenge vs localized knowledge production.
- Cross-field Insights as a Source of Innovation
  - Search related disciplines for innovative concepts and methods.
  - *Example:* Applying insights from the literatures on “economic geography” & Attention-based-view to understand the firm decision to acquire an alliance partner.





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*Can anyone share experiences of how insights from other disciplines helped identify novel research gaps?*



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# The Elephant in the Room

- AI is a Tool, Not a Substitute for Knowledge
  - AI suggestions depend heavily on your ability to guide the inquiry effectively.
  - Good AI interactions require clear, informed prompts.
- Importance of Solid Literature Knowledge
  - Understanding existing literature ensures accurate interpretation of AI-generated ideas.
  - Helps you critically evaluate AI outputs and avoid superficial conclusions.
- Awareness of Current Debates is Essential
  - AI does not inherently prioritize emerging trends or debates—human judgment is key.
  - Without context, AI may suggest outdated or irrelevant topics.
- Limitations in AI Understanding
  - AI may overlook subtle theoretical nuances or practical implications.
  - Deep knowledge of your field helps detect and correct AI-generated misunderstandings.







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## Social Innovation Skill & Learning Advisor

Von F. Noseleit &

Helps with research on social challenges, identifying skills and learning techniques.

What skills are  
needed to tackle  
climate change?

How can  
empathy be  
effectively taught?

What are the best  
learning techniques  
for critical thinking?

Which skills  
are crucial for  
improving public...

Stelle irgendeine Frage



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# Using AI as a Sparring Partner for Topic refinement

- Refining Research Questions
  - Use AI to iteratively sharpen research questions.
  - Example: "Refine this research question to better address current debates on sustainability transitions."
- Cross-disciplinary Insights
  - Prompt AI to explore how concepts from other fields might enrich your topic.
  - Example: "How could theories from environmental economics inform entrepreneurship research on sustainability?"
- Critical Reflection and Dialogue
  - Engage interactively with AI to challenge assumptions and uncover overlooked issues.
  - Example: "What potential paradoxes or trade-offs could arise in studying sustainability-oriented innovations in startups?"





## Recognizing Pitfalls:

*Can you recall or imagine an example where the identified research gap was either too broad or lacked novelty?*

*What made it problematic for the research?*

## Strategies to Overcome Pitfalls:

*What practical steps or strategies could help you avoid common pitfalls (such as overly broad or incremental gaps) when defining your research gap?*





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# Thank you for your attention

Questions? Comments? Please reach out!

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