

Toward a good scientific writing

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Some editors point to the “lack of style” as a major deficiency of the manuscripts submitted for publication. Producing an adequate text is an arduous and time-consuming task, even for those who have mastered the scientific language. We should revise what we wrote many times to achieve an acceptable product. Scientific language should be clear, objective, written in proper sequence, with short sentences and long paragraphs. The following points are some practical guidelines to start writing in a good scientific style.

1. Before starting, organize a plan with the ideas and the order in which they are presented. Establish a logical plan for your text. Only write with clarity after having clear ideas in mind.
2. Keep a grammar book and a dictionary at your side and do not hesitate to consult them whenever questions arise. If you are using a word processor, use the “Spelling & Grammar” and “Thesaurus” resources.
3. Always write in the direct expression: subject + verb + complement. Avoid starting a sentence using “While”, “Although”, “Despite the fact that”, “Whereas”, “Though”.
4. Always write short and simple phrases. Phrases with more than 20 words should be rewritten or divided.
5. Aim to set a period and start a new phrase rather than using commas. A phrase full of commas is demanding a period. When in doubt, use a period.
6. Avoid inserted clauses, indents and divisions in items inside of the phrase.
7. Cut all of the useless words or any that add little to the content.
8. Avoid minor fragments in the middle of the sentences, such as “which”, “that”, “although”, “where”, “when”. These stretch phrases in a confusing and tiresome manner. Use one per phrase at the maximum.
9. Only use essential adjectives and adverbs. Eliminate all of the adjectives and adverbs as possible.
10. Only use precise and specific words. Among them, always aim for the more simple, usual, and shorter words.
11. Avoid repetition. Aim to not use the same verbs, nouns, augmentatives, diminutives and superlatives more than one time in the same paragraph.
12. Aim for affirmative phrases. Never use two negatives in the same sentence.
13. Use active voice. Written phrases in passive voice are justified only when the object of the verb is more important than the subject or when it is not important who did the action.
14. Always avoid words and phrases that convey regionalisms, jargons, fads, common place, abbreviations and acronyms that are not well known. Also avoid long words and long phrases.

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15. A paragraph is a unit of thinking, which should start with a topic sentence. This is an emphatic phrase that contains the main information, summarizing the general idea of the paragraph as a whole. The others should be articulated in a manner to corroborate (or refute) the content presented in the topic sentence. Do not add any other information, which was not comprised in the topic sentence!! The last phrase should serve as a connection with the next paragraph. It can contain a conclusion of information presented in the previous statements. In science, long- and well-structured paragraphs are used in a logical form.
16. A paragraph should contain three phrases at minimum. Paragraphs with one or two phrases are exceptions and should be avoided. Use two of these small paragraphs at maximum in an article.
17. The paragraphs should interconnect each other in a logical flow.
18. A paragraph only becomes good after reading and correcting many times. Revise each paragraph in separate. Check if it is all in direct expression. Search for repetitions, inserted clauses and subordinate fragments; eliminate these whenever possible. Cut all of the unnecessary words without mercy; eliminate all of the adjectives and adverbs as possible. Search for spelling errors, typing and grammatical errors, such as from regency and concordance. Finally, check if the information is correct and if it is really written as what you understood from what you had read.
19. After the correction of each paragraph, separately, read all of the text and observe if the text is organized according to a logical plan. Observe if the paragraphs interconnect adequately. See if there are no repetitions of the same information at different points of the text. Cut, without mercy, all of the paragraphs that contain irrelevant information or are off topic to the text. See if the division in items and sub-items is well structured, if the titles within the text (titles of each topic) are concise and reflect the content of the information in the following paragraphs.
20. Finally, check all of the information, over all of the numerical values, dates, equations, symbols, citations from tables and figures and bibliographic references.

Always remember that it is impossible to produce a good text while neglecting revision. Well written texts need much work and several revisions! Revise your text as many times as is necessary. After finalizing your text, read the text one last time and enjoy! Be sure that your hard effort will be rewarded when you submit your manuscript.

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