

## Intensive Course in Research Writing

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## Intensive Course in Research Writing: Session 2 (28 June 2016)

### Today

- Workshop: Instructions to authors
- Presentation: Approaching a writing project
- Discussion: Writing in English as a foreign language
- Presentation: Writing the methods section
- Presentation: Providing feedback on drafts
- Workshop: Class members' abstracts

### Workshop: Instructions to Authors

- How long are the instructions that you found?
- What subjects do they address?
- What other observations do you have about them?
- What questions do you have about them?

Which of the following questions do  
the instructions answer?

### Some Questions the Instructions May Answer

- What categories of article does the journal publish?
- What is the maximum length of articles?
- What is the maximum length of abstracts?
- What sections should the article include?  
What are the guidelines for each?
- Does the journal have a template for articles?  
If so, how can it be accessed?

### Some Questions (cont)

- What guidelines should be followed regarding writing style?
- How many figures and tables are allowed? What are the requirements for them?
- In what format should references appear?
- Does the journal post supplementary material online? If so, how should it be provided?

### Some Questions (cont)

- In what electronic format should the paper be prepared?
- How should the paper be submitted?

For which journal do you think you'll write your paper? Why?

Do you have its instructions to authors? If not, please obtain them.

### Approaching a Writing Project

- Establishing the mindset
- Preparing to write
- Doing the writing
- Revising your work

### Establishing the Mindset (Attitude)

- Remember that you are writing to communicate, not to impress.
- Realize that those reading your work want you to do well.
  - Journal editors
  - Peer reviewers
  - ProfessorsThe purpose of their constructive criticism is to help you succeed.

### Preparing to Write

- Obtain and review instructions.
- Use published or accepted items as models.
- Perhaps get a style manual—for example:
  - [The ACS \(American Chemical Society\) Style Guide](#)
  - [AMA \(American Medical Association\) Manual of Style](#)
  - [The Chicago Manual of Style](#)
  - [The MLA \(Modern Language Association\) Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing](#)
  - [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#)
  - [Scientific Style and Format](#)

### Preparing to Write (cont)

- While you are gathering content, write down ideas that occur to you.
- Do lots of “prewriting”—for example:
  - Stack papers in the order you plan to cite them.
  - List points you want to make.
  - Perhaps make an outline.
- If you’re having trouble formulating ideas, perhaps do something else for a while.

### Doing the Writing

- Schedule specific times to write.
- Start with whatever part you find easiest.
- Don’t interrupt your writing to search for small details.
- Realize that often in writing there is no “one right way” but rather a series of problems with more than one solution.

### Revising Your Work

- Note: Good writing is largely a matter of good revising.
- First revise your writing yourself. Then get feedback from others and revise more.
- Consider having an editor help you.
- Avoid the temptation to keep revising your writing forever.

### Questions to Consider in Revising

- Does the piece of writing contain everything it should?
- Does it contain anything it shouldn’t?
- Is all the information accurate?
- Is the content consistent throughout?
- Is everything logically organized?
- Is everything clearly worded?

### Questions (cont)

- Does the level suit the intended readers?
- Is the writing concise? (Are points stated briefly, simply, and directly?)
- Are grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word use correct throughout?
- Are all figures and tables well designed?
- Does the manuscript comply with the instructions?

### Writing in English about Your Research

## The Essentials

- The essentials are **content, organization, and clarity**.
- If a paper has excellent content, is well organized, and is clear, it is likely to be accepted even if the English is so-so.
- If a paper has poor content, is badly organized, or is unclear, it is likely to be rejected even if the English is excellent.

## Cultural Differences to Consider

- Level of detail?
- Directness of expression?
- Attitudes toward time?
- Attitudes toward using material taken from others' writing?

## Some Common Language Challenges

- Verb tenses
- Prepositions
- Articles (the, a, an)
- Sentence structure
- Sentence length
- Spacing
- Other

## Some Strategies

- Compiling lists of words and phrases commonly used in your field
- Writing simply
- Having people with a strong command of English review your drafts
- Other

## Some Resources

- *The Elements of Style* ([www.bartleby.com/141/](http://www.bartleby.com/141/))
- Lessons on Scientific English (<http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/1064/>)
- Getting the Most out of Words (<http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/652/>)
- Academic Phrasebank ([www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk))
- Grammar Girl ([grammar.quickanddirtytips.com](http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com))

*Scientific English* (book)

## Writing a Scientific Paper

### Some Questions to Consider

- In what order(s) do you read the parts of a scientific paper? What does that imply?
- In what order do you like to write the parts of a scientific paper? Why?

### One Common Order for Writing a Paper

- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Introduction

### The Methods Section (or the equivalent in papers not in IMRAD format)

### Purposes of the Methods Section

- To allow others to replicate what you did
  - In order to test it
  - In order to do further research
- To allow others to evaluate what you did
  - To determine whether the conclusions seem valid
  - To determine whether the findings seem applicable to other situations

### Methods: Basic Information to Include

- In most cases, overview of study design
- Identification of (if applicable)
  - Equipment, organisms, reagents, etc used (and sources thereof)
  - Approval of human or animal research by an appropriate committee
  - Statistical methods

## Methods (cont)

- In some journals, may include subheads
- May include tables and figures
  - What are some purposes for which tables and figures can be used in methods sections?
- Should be written in past tense
- Helpful to use papers published in the same journal as models

## Methods: An Issue— How Much Detail to Provide About

- Well-known methods
- Methods previously described but not well known
- Methods that you yourself devised

## Exercise

- Look at the methods section of at least one article in a journal provided in class.
- What do you notice?
- What questions do you have about how the methods section is written?

## Some Homework

- Look at some papers in the journal for which you are writing a paper.
- Notice how the methods section of the paper is written. Be ready to share your observations in class.

## More Homework

- Please draft the methods section of your paper.
- (Also, please remember to read the assigned chapters.)

## Providing Feedback on Drafts

- Find out what level of feedback is being sought.
- Remember to identify strengths. Don't only focus on weaknesses.
- Consider serving a criticism sandwich: praise, criticism, praise.
- Express criticisms as perceptions, not facts.
- Criticize the work, not the person.
- (For more on giving and receiving feedback, please see <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1058/> and <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1059/>.)

### Workshop: Class Members' Draft Abstracts (Suggested Procedure)

- Read your group members' abstracts quickly, to get the general meaning.
- Read each abstract more carefully, and write comments on each abstract.
- Discuss each abstract, noting strengths and then providing suggestions.
- Give the commented-on abstracts to the authors.

### A Few Teaching Points

(based mainly on abstracts received other years)

- If your spellchecker is set for another language, set it for English.
- Use past tense to report methods and results.
- If acronyms are used, remember to define them.
- Beware of misusing semicolons.
- Use *i.e.* and *e.g.* carefully (or, perhaps better, avoid them).
- Normally, don't begin a sentence with a numeral.
- Normally, don't cite references in an abstract.