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Basic rules of manuscript language

Manuscript language: overview



Manuscript language should be:

Accurate



Concise



Clear



Objective

Prevent spelling errors by using
a spellchecker in English.
Additionally, other common language errors
involve:



- Tense

- Sentence

- Grammar

- Paragraph

You should always read the journal's Guide
for Authors to check for any additional
language specifications.



Manuscript language: tenses

Take care to use the proper tenses when describing your work and findings.

Being consistent and correct in your use of tenses makes your paper easier to understand.



Present Tense



Use the present tense for known facts and hypotheses, for example, "*the average life of a honey bee IS 6 weeks...*"

Past Tense



Use the past tense for describing experiments that have been conducted and the results of these experiments, for example, "*The average life span of bees in our contained environment WAS 8 weeks...*"

REMEMBER!

Avoid shifting tenses within a unit of text: paragraph, sub-section or section.

Manuscript language: grammar

1. Use the active voice to shorten sentences.

The passive voice can be used in the Methods section of a paper but otherwise, the active voice will usually shorten sentences and make them more dynamic and interesting for the reader.

Use *the active phrase* "we found that..." freely, which is a quick signal to the reader that you are describing one of your results. This expression is also much more concise and to the point than writing in the passive voice, as in, for example, "it has been found that there had been..."

Manuscript language: grammar

2. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.



Avoid contractions such as "it's", "isn't", or "weren't" which are not often used in professional writing.

- Avoid abbreviations/acronyms except for very well-known ones.
- Avoid acronyms as replacement for citations.
- Avoid acronyms in the abstract and conclusion.

Manuscript language: grammar

3. Eliminate redundant words or phrases.

- due to the fact that → because or since

- immediately apparent → apparent

- in the case that → in case

- and also → and

- in order to determine → to determine

- to try and determine → to determine

4. Double-check unfamiliar words or phrases.

Manuscript language: sentence

To write a successful manuscript, first be aware of the sentence structure you use

1. Write direct and short sentences.

The average length of sentences in scientific writing is only about 12-17 words.

2. Include only one piece of information per sentence.

Sentences should be constructed in short, factual bursts. Long and complicated sentences tend to confuse readers.

Manuscript language: sentence

3. Avoid making multiple statements in one sentence

Convey only a single idea per sentence. Link sentences together within a paragraph to provide a clear story-line.

4. Keep related words together

Closely place the subject and verb to allow the reader to understand what the subject is doing.

Manuscript language: sentence

5. Pay attention to the order in which you write a sentence

The "stress position" within a sentence contains new information to be emphasized. The "topical position" contains "old" information leading up to the point of emphasis. The topical position comes before the stress position.



Avoid: "This ocean basin was warmer during 2012 than any period found in the observational database, based on our analysis of recent ship-based measurements."

Write: "Based on our analysis of recent ship-based measurements, this ocean basin was warmer during 2012 than any period found in the observational database."

Manuscript language: sentence

6. Put statements in a positive form.

- **Positive:** "He usually came late."
- **Negative:** "He is not very often on time."

Manuscript language: *paragraph*

- Have one paragraph for each distinct topic.
- Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence, and end in conformity with the beginning.
- Avoid a succession of loose sentences.
- Parallel structures are simpler to parse as a reader. Retain consistent tenses within each paragraph.

Manuscript language: *paragraph*



- Provide a logical transition from one paragraph to another to render a clear flow, thus guiding the reader from one topic to another.
- Paragraphs are similarly constructed to sentences, bringing the reader from the "familiar" at the start to new ideas towards the end.
- Fill logical holes empathizing with a smart reader who genuinely wants to understand the flow of ideas.

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Class Errors To Avoid

1. Avoid using "this" unqualified.

Avoid: "We found this to be the most important facet of the ocean's dynamical response."

Write: "We found this feature of the thermocline to be the most important facet of the ocean's dynamical response."



- What does "this" refer to? If the reader must guess, then the guess could be wrong.
- Even when it is "obvious" what "this", "that", "these", or "those" refer to, the author serves the reader well by clearly qualifying.

2. Avoid too many successive prepositional phrases.

Avoid: "We ran a model simulation of the ocean for research into the evolution of the thermocline."

Write: "We ran an ocean model simulation to conduct research into thermocline evolution."



- Run-on prepositional phrases are awkward to read.
- They can rapidly lead to reader fatigue.

3. Avoid subjective or redundant words or phrases that will date the paper.



- "high resolution"
- "new result"
- "latest finding"

4. Avoid subjective or judgmental adjectives.

Avoid: "We use a simple model of the ocean's thermocline to describe the dynamical response."

Write: "We use an idealized model of the ocean's thermocline based on approximating the continuous stratification with two immiscible fluid layers to describe the dynamical response."



- "Simple" has meaning to the reader only when the authors explain the opposite "complex" or "realistic" or "complete".
- Readers should not be asked to read the mind of the authors, nor to share the authors' opinion.

5. Avoid expressions of belief

Avoid: "We believe this model result to be true."

Write: "We show through our analysis that this model result is consistent with the empirical evidence."



- Communication of science is not about conveying belief.
- Rather, it is about logically developing lines of evidence that lead one to a hypothesis, theory, or conclusion based on the evidence.

6. Avoid loose statements and back to back adverbs.

Avoid: "The ocean model simulation ran quickly and cheaply."

Write: "The ocean model simulation required 1200 hours using 100 computer processors."



- What is "quickly" and "cheaply"?

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Always Remember
Your Reader



1. Abstract: the key points

- The abstract provides a concise summary of the key aims and results.
- If it is not clear and interesting, readers often will read no further.



2. What am I about to read?

The introduction

- The introduction should lay the ground-work for why the paper is worth reading, and describe where the work fits within the existing literature.
- Introduce the novel elements of the paper in the introduction, thus providing motivation for the reader to penetrate the main text.
- Do not over-burden the reader by making the introduction too long. Get to the key parts of the paper sooner rather than later.



3. What did I just read?

The discussion and conclusion

- Readers need to know what they have read and why it was significant.
- Remind the reader why this paper was worth reading and publishing.
- Concluding sections also provide a venue to set the stage for future research directions.