

# Presentation techniques & scientific writing

September 2016

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# Overview (Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> September - Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016)

1. Introduction in presenting science
2. Rules on how to write
3. Guidelines on how to edit
4. Peer-review process
5. Rules and recommendations, summary and final examn

# **III. Guidelines: How to write the paper**

## 3. Editing the paper

- 29. Editing strategy
- 30. Guide for authors
- 31. Language & style revision
- 32. Collegial proofreading

## **Part III**

### **Editing the paper**

## **29. Editing strategy**

# Why are we editing?

- gross & raw work is done
- now manuscript needs to be transformed into a readable & interesting text
- helps to avoid two main sins of a writer:
  - (1) writing in a style that the **reader does not understand**
  - (2) **bore** the reader

# Editing strategy

- Keep writing and editing separate
- Come with a fresh mind to editing & revising
- easier to edit once you have some distance to the paper
- You will need several rounds of editing & revision



## **30. Guide for authors**

# Guide for authors

- each journal provides authors with manuscript preparation and submission guidelines
- see journal volumes and journal website for details
- authors are asked to follow these guidelines strictly

# Why guide for authors?

- rules and conventions vary between journals/communities
- proper formatting speeds up reviewing and production time
- manuscripts not formatted properly will be returned to the authors regardless their content

# General guidelines

- double spaced
- font size 2 or larger
- font type with serifs for main text
- font type without serifs for headings
- large margins
- page numbers + line numbers
- blank rows before and after headings

## **31. Language & style revision**

# Rule 1: good English

- quality of English is important criteria in review process
- use English spelling-control
- learn to write in English
- avoid writing in mother tongue and translate
- ask a native-English speaker or use professional help
- not every English-speaking colleague writes good English

## Rule 2: inclusive language

- avoid racist, sexist or any other form of exclusive language
- “humans” instead of “man”
- “he or she”, “s/h” instead of solely “he”
- use of plural helps also (e.g. “farmers manage their land” instead of “the farmer manages his/her land”)

## Rule 3: active vs. passive

- use active instead of passive voice (= “I/we show” instead of “It was shown that ...”)
- it shortens and simplifies sentences
- it clarifies who did what
- only in methods and results sections the passive voice is generally more effective



## Rule 4: abbreviations

- avoid extensive use of abbreviations (max. 2-3 per manuscript) unless it is unavoidable
- It CAN but not does NOT always increase readability of a manuscript

## Rule 5: avoid use of ...

- “often” because it is not clear enough
- “and/or”
- “only”
- “quite”
- “editorial we” in place of “I” for a single author

## Rule 6: one expression

- avoid synonyms to achieve elegant variation (e.g. project, study, research, investigation)
- stick to one expression throughout manuscript

## Rule 7: read out loud

- read out loud what you have written
- helps identifying difficult and awkward phrases

Example:

“The scenarios are methodologically supported by the application of the method of multi-criteria assessment...”

## Rule 8: provide evidence

Provide evidence of what you are writing

Example:

“The local effects of urban developmental activities on natural and semi-natural ecosystems have been analysed in numerous studies. These kinds of studies have plainly demonstrated that such activities have serve consequences for areas such as biodiversity and habitat suitability, hydrological balance and microclimate.”

## Rule 9: use of tenses

- refer to own results in **past** tense
- refer to established knowledge in **present** tense

## Rule 9: use of tenses

Section	Tense	Why?
Abstract	Past tense	Refers to work done
Introduction	Present tense	Refers to the problem
Methods	Past tense	Refers to work done
Results	Past tense	Refers to work done
Discussion	Present tense	Refers to established knowledge
Conclusion	Present tense	Refers to the problem

## Rule 10: use of numbers

- spell out small numbers ( $< 10$ )
- express numbers in figures ( $> 10$ )
- spell out all numbers at the beginning of a sentence or restructure sentence
- decimal sign in English is a point, not a comma (0.3 not 0,3)



## Rule 11: shorten

- short manuscript has higher chance to be read
- editor may like your manuscript but still ask to cut down by as much as 50%
- use short sessions (20-30 min.) for self-editing and shortening of sections
- check whether all sentences in a paragraph are needed

## **32. Collegial proofreading**

# Purpose

- pre-review of your manuscript
- aims to **avoid mistakes** and lack of clarity
- helps to **increase quality** of manuscript
- helps to **increase the chances** to pass peer-review

## Ask non-experts

- share early drafts with non-experts (colleagues in different disciplines, family members, undergraduates)
- biggest communication problem in academic writing is overestimating what your reads know
- non-experts can inform about missing clarity without losing face because of being unformed

## Ask experts

- give an advanced draft of the manuscript to an experienced colleague (= one who has published)
- colleagues may identify lack of clarity, inconsistencies and other flaws in the manuscript

# Guidelines: proofreading

## How to get more out of it?

1. ask “proofreaders” specific questions:

“what passages were hardest to understand?”

“where did you feel unsure about where the paper was going?”

2. avoid “yes/no” questions

## Guidelines: proofreading

3. Limit the amount of work you ask a colleague
4.           target on a specific question or section
5.           ask for a “quick read” of 20 min. = quicker response
6.           ask to make annotations in the manuscript and return it to you
7.           only give a clean and readable manuscript to a colleague (font size  $\geq 12$ , large margins)

# Reader's advice

## **General rule:**

### **The reader is always right!**

- you may think you are clear enough but if the reader feels you are not, don't argue but revise
- you might be the expert in the field, but the reader is the sovereign