

Some Advices in Paper Writing (in progress)

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Useful books

- Everyone should read the following three.
 - Strunk Jr., William and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, fourth edition, Longman.
 - McCloskey, Deirdre N., *Economical Writing*, second edition, Waveland Press.
 - Chaubey, Varanya, *The Little Book of Research Writing*.
- Useful, but biased towards the theory field.
 - Thomson, William, *A Guide for the Young Economist*, MIT Press.
- This is useful for references.
 - Hefferman, James A.W. and John E. Lincoln, *Writing: A Concise Handbook*, Norton.

First of all

Writing matters a lot. The content of the paper is of course important, but how to write it is equally important. One can always work on it to improve.

Construction of a paper

Usually a paper consists of title, abstract, introduction, contents, conclusion, references, and appendix. I will talk about it one by one.

- *Title*. I don't have a strong opinion about it. One can try to find a clever and catchy title, or one can go for a plain and descriptive title. It doesn't mean that it is unimportant; quite the contrary. A good title helps the paper to "stick." "A, B, and C" is the style of the title many non-native speakers fall in love with, but it tends to be boring.
- *Abstract*. Some journals limit the abstract to 100 words. For a job market paper, a bit longer abstract seems standard.
- *Introduction*. This is the hardest part. Don't be afraid of rewriting many times. Be clear about what is new in this paper compared to the literature. Some papers put literature review in a separate section, but try to avoid it first. (It is better if it is integrated to your motivation/result in the Introduction.)
- *Contents*.

- *Equations*. Don't put equation numbers on the equation that you don't refer to.
- *Figures*. Maximize the data-to-ink ratio. (See Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Graphics Press.)
- *Conclusion*. Most of the time you practically end up repeating the same contents (what you do and your main results) in Abstract, Introduction, Contents, and Conclusion, but preferably you should do it with different words. In Conclusion, you can also talk about what is left for the future research.
- *References*. Only put the papers that you refer to in the paper.
- *Appendix*. Now it is very common for people to use the Appendix extensively. It will help the main text to look better if you use it wisely.

A little more about introduction

Chaubey's book advocates the RAP method—R for research question, A for answer, and P for positioning. These are three important elements in the paper in general, but it matters the most for writing the introduction.

Typically the introduction goes like this:

1. Big picture. This part motivates and positions your topic of inquiry and provide some context. Typically it goes from a big-big picture to narrower topic. This is “positioning.”
2. What you do. State the research question.
3. A bit more detail on methodology and execution. Mention the novelty of the approach.
4. Main findings. Answer the research question. It doesn't have to be super detailed, but you can spend several paragraphs.
5. What is new, and what is value added. This requires describing the literature. Especially pay attention to two or three recent papers that can be competing. Emphasize the novelty. A bit of a repeat of above, but more concrete and more detailed.
6. If you want to go back to the big picture, and emphasize the importance of the question and finding, you can do it here.
7. Outline of the paper.

Things that often show up

- *“I” or “we.”* Some people prefer to use “we” even in a single-authored paper (e.g. Thomson). I prefer to use “I,” but either is acceptable in general.
- *Past or present tense.* Usually the present tense is used in a paper. It is kind of weird to refer to past work in the present tense but you'll get used to it. You can use the past tense in the Conclusion if you feel that it is more natural.
- *et al.* When you refer to a paper with three or more coauthors in the text of the paper, you can use et al. to shorten it. (Of course you have to list them all in References.) Some people prefer to refer to list all authors. It is up to you.

Things I am obsessed about

- Use \LaTeX .
 - For the presentation,
 - * Beamer is probably the safest choice, and I like the plain-vanilla one (one of my coauthors like to change the shape of item-dots, which is fine). Some Beamer formats include a lot of bells and whistles, but most of them are unnecessary. There are two things I sometimes use and sometimes don't. One is the slide number. I used it a few times and then decided to take it out. One benefit is that the audience knows how much time is left and how many slides are left, so that they could take them into account when questioning, but in the end I found it unnecessary, because you should be managing the questions and time in any case.
 - * I don't like the default Beamer fonts and I always put `\usefonttheme{professionalfonts}` in the beginning.
 - * Use only `\normalsize` as the font size (if the font becomes smaller with the Beamer setting, adjust it back to `\normalsize`).
 - * I have mixed feelings about transitioning. There are some contexts it is useful, but I'd try to minimize it.
 - * Everything in the figure has to be readable to the audience. It means you may have to draw different figures just for the presentations. Don't put too many figures in one slide.
 - * Don't put too many numbers in the tables. If it is unavoidable, color (or bold) the few numbers that are important.
 - * Time management is very important. Don't write too many slides. My rule of thumb is one slide per minute is the upper bound. Note that if you put equations, you have to explain all notations, which means it takes time.
 - * Bring your own clicker to wherever you go.
 - * Practice, practice, practice.
- A, B, and C is the American Style, and A, B and C is the British style. Either way is fine, but be consistent. (The first is often called "Oxford comma.")
- "." is American Style and " ". is British Style.
- "On the other hand" should (almost) always be accompanied by "on one hand." Sometimes what you mean is "in contrast."