

Paper writing checklist and advice

This is a checklist for academic paper writing. The document covers text flow, style, figures and table formatting. This document is based upon a number of references, combining the most actionable items into an easy checklist. A printable pdf version of this file can be downloaded from the repository.

Text

Flow

Language

- ☐ Use active language
- ☐ Avoid long sentences (12 to 17 words max)
- ☐ Simplify your language (dead to the thesaurus)
- ☐ Check for spelling / grammar mistakes
- ☐ One paragraph communicates one important idea
- ☐ Connect paragraphs and ideas in a logical order
- ☐ Use the present tense for facts
- ☐ Use the past tense to describe results
- ☐ Avoid informal language, superlatives
- ☐ Limit the use of conjunctive (connecting) words (e.g. however, moreover)
- ☐ Limit repetitive words (don't substitute using the thesaurus, re-evaluate the sentences)
- ☐ Don't use spoken abbreviations (e.g. it's)
- ☐ Single-digit numbers should be spelled out; numbers of two or more digits should be expressed as numerals

Page Layout

- ☐ 12 point font (preferably a serif font)
- ☐ Double spaced lines
- ☐ Number pages
- ☐ Number lines continuously
- ☐ Avoid "widows or orphans" or small parts of a larger paragraph remaining at the bottom of a previous page
- ☐ Follow the author layout guide of the journal, most often the schemes:
 - Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion
 - Introduction, Results, Discussion + Conclusion, Methods

References

- [] Check references
- [] Check the reference style required

Figures

- [] Figure components are legible in print and on screen
- [] All axis are named
- [] Figures are colourblind friendly (for colour schemes see: ColorBrewer)
- [] The use of symbols and line types is preferred over colour
- [] The caption explains the purpose and content of the figure
- [] All figures have the same axis orientation
- [] Figures with the same (x/y) axis are combined in a single panel
- [] Limit the number of pictures in the main manuscript
 - Additional figures can go in the Appendix

Tables

- [] The caption explains the purpose and content of the table
- [] Limit the number of tables in the main manuscript
 - Additional tables can go in the Appendix

References

Writing a science paper some dos and don'ts

Experimental Biosciences writing science

11 steps to structuring a science paper editors will take seriously