Career Development Workshop
Editing Your Own Papers and Proposals:
How to Wow Reviewers and Aid Readers
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Some Basic Checklists

(Please add to these lists or otherwise adapt them to suit your needs.)

Scientific Papers: Content and Organization—20 Questions (including 3 of your own)

1. Does the title accurately and concisely reflect the content?
2. Are the appropriate people listed as authors?
3. Does the introduction provide sufficient context?
4. Does the introduction make clear what gap the current research is intended to fill?
5. Does the introduction indicate the objectives, hypotheses, or research questions?
6. Does the methods section provide sufficient information to replicate the research?
7. Does the methods section provide sufficient information to evaluate the research?
8. In the methods section, were sources of equipment, organisms, reagents, etc identified?
9. If the research was on humans or animals, were appropriate approvals noted?
10. Are the results presented in a logical order?
11. Are the results presented in appropriate detail?
12. Were appropriate statistical methods used?
13. Does the discussion address the questions or hypotheses posed in the introduction?
14. Does the discussion put the results in sufficient context?
15. If appropriate, does the discussion address strengths and weaknesses of the research?
16. Have the appropriate parties been acknowledged?
17. Does the abstract accurately indicate the content of the paper?
18.
19.
20.

Grant Proposals: Content and Organization—20 Questions (including 3 of your own)

1. Are the goals or hypotheses clear?
2. Is the originality of the work apparent?
3. Is the proposed work clearly relevant to the mission of the funding source?
4. Is the importance of the proposed work explained?
5. Is sufficient context provided?
6. Is the amount of proposed work realistic?
7. Is it clear that the personnel are capable of doing the proposed work?
8. Are sufficient justifications provided for choices?

9. Is sufficient supporting evidence included?
10. Is sufficient justification provided for budgetary items?
11. If there will be cost sharing, is sufficient information provided about it?
12. If preliminary studies are required or advisable, is there enough information on them?
13. If a timeline would be advisable, is one included?
14. If evaluation plans are needed, are they sufficient?
15. If dissemination plans should be included, are they sufficient?
16. Does the title clearly and accurately convey the content?
17. Is the abstract informative and clear?
18.
19.
20.

Crafting of the Document

1. Are ideas presented in a logical order?
2. Are there clear transitions from idea to idea?
3. Are overviews presented before details?
4. Are paragraphs an appropriate length?
5. Do paragraphs have strong topic sentences?
6. Are sentences an appropriate length?
7. Are the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage correct throughout?
8. Are the antecedents of all pronouns clear?
9. Are appropriate verb tenses used?
10. Are citations and references in the required formats?

Other Aspects

1. Do the content and technical level suit the audience?
2. Is all the logic clear and correct?
3. Is the information consistent throughout?
4. Are all the figures and tables necessary?
5. Should any figures or tables be added?
6. Are all cited items listed in the reference list?
7. Are all items in the reference list cited in the paper or proposal?
8. Are you comfortable with everything about the paper or proposal?
9. If the journal or funding agency provided a checklist, did you use it?
10. Have all instructions been followed?

10 Common Writing Problems to Avoid or Remedy

1. pompous wording
2. excessive jargon
3. excessive use of acronyms (especially newly coined ones)
4. failure to define acronyms
5. wordiness
6. overly long and convoluted sentences
7. lack of focus
8. poor parallelism
9. failure to follow good models
10. failure to follow instructions

Pointers for Writing Readably

1. Provide sufficient context.
2. Provide overviews before details.
3. Use structural devices such as headings, white space, and numbering.
4. Consider using italics or boldface (for example, for key terms).
5. Make effective use of parallelism.
6. Follow expected formats.
7. Use a standard typeface.
8. Avoid small type and small margins.
9. If possible, use an unjustified ("ragged") right margin.
10. Follow the tips below for making wording more concise.

Tips for Making Writing More Concise

1. In general, use the shorter word.
2. Condense wordy phrases.
3. Delete redundant words.
4. Use verbs, not nouns made from them.
5. Say what things are, not what they're not.

Suggestions for Non-Native Speakers of English

1. Read, read, read in English.
2. Remember: Content, clarity, and organization are the key.
3. Prepare a personal glossary of common terms and phrases in your research area.
4. Write simply.
5. Be alert for aspects of English wording that may tend to pose problems (for example, articles, prepositions, verb tenses).
6. Be aware of English-language norms for sentence structure and sentence length.
7. Realize that writing in English is more direct than that in many other languages.
8. Take special care to avoid plagiarism.
9. Check spacing when proofreading your work.
10. Learn from revisions that editors have made in your work.

Some Resources

Journals' Instructions to Authors

- available on journals' websites
- should be followed carefully

Style Manuals—for example:

- *The ACS Style Guide* (from the American Chemical Society)
- *AMA Manual of Style* (from the American Medical Association)
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*
- *Scientific Style and Format* (from the Council of Science Editors)

The Elements of Style (http://www.bartleby.com/141/)
First edition of a classic book on basics of English-language writing.

OneLook Dictionary Search (http://www.onelook.com/)
Website for looking up English-language words in multiple dictionaries.

Grammar Girl (http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl)
Website providing guidance on grammar, punctuation, word choice, etc.

Basic Punctuation (http://www.uvu.edu/owl/infor/Basic%20Punctuation%202013.pdf)
Handout on use of punctuation marks in English-language writing. Includes examples.

Academic Phrasebank (http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/)
A collection of many phrases useful in writing in English about research.

UsingEnglish.com (http://www.usingenglish.com/)
Resource for non-native users of English.

Writing Centers Online (http://writingcenters.org/resources/writing-centers-online/)
Links to websites of academic writing centers. Many resources can be accessed through the writing-center websites.

How to Recognize Plagiarism (http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/712/)
Tutorial on avoiding plagiarism.

AuthorAID (http://www.authoraid.info/en/)
Project primarily to help researchers in developing countries to write about and publish their work. Website includes resources that can help authors in any country.

Also: Any of the many good books available on scientific writing.

Thank you!