

AuthorAID Workshop on Research Writing

Nepal

March 2011

Some Aspects of Writing Style;
Writing in English
about Your Research

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
Texas A&M University
bgastel@cvm.tamu.edu

Style for Research Writing: General Guidelines

- Write simply and directly.
 - Readers should notice mainly the content, not the language.
 - Remember that many readers are not native speakers of English.
 - As stated earlier: Write to communicate, not to impress.
- Follow instructions (and conventions) regarding structure.

Style for Research Writing: General Guidelines (cont)

- If appropriate, use subheadings to guide readers.
- Organize information carefully.
- Provide overviews before details.
- In general, avoid very long paragraphs.
- In general, avoid very long sentences.
- Use mainly simple sentence structures.

Style for Research Writing: General Guidelines (cont)

- Where possible, use common words.
- Define terms that might be unfamiliar to readers.
- In general, use only standard acronyms.
- Remember to define acronyms.
- Write concisely.
 - Saves space
 - Helps readability

Writing Readably: A Brief Exercise

- Using simple, common words
 - attempt→ fundamental→
- Deleting needless words
 - red in color→ totally destroyed→
- Condensing wordy phrases
 - at this point in time→ in the event that→
- Using verbs, not nouns made from them
 - produce relief of→ provide an explanation→

Writing in English about Your Research

The Essentials

- The essentials are **content, organization, and clarity**.
- If a paper has excellent content, is well organized, and is clear, it is likely to be accepted even if the English is so-so.
- If a paper has poor content, is badly organized, or is unclear, it is likely to be rejected even if the English is excellent.

Cultural Differences to Consider

- Directness of expression?
- Amount of detail
- Attitudes toward time?
- Attitudes toward using material taken from others' writing?

Some Common Language Challenges

- Verb tenses
- Prepositions
- Articles (the, a, an)
- Sentence structure
- Sentence length
- Other

Some Strategies

- Compiling lists of words and phrases commonly used in your field
- Writing simply
- Having people with a strong command of English review your drafts
- Other

Some Resources on Research Writing

- Resources on use of English
- Other resources

Some Resources

- OneLook Dictionary Search (www.onelook.com)
- Academic Phrasebank (www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk)
- Grammar Girl (grammar.quickanddirtytips.com)
- *The Elements of Style* (www.bartleby.com/141/)
- English Communication for Scientists (<http://www.nature.com/scitable/ebooks/english-communication-for-scientists-14053993>)

More Resources

- Scientific English (set of lessons accessible through www.authoraid.info/resource-library/china-medical-board-program-resources/cmb-lessons-in-scientific-writing/folder_contents)
- Getting the Most out of Words (www.authoraid.info/resource-library/Editing%20and%20Publication-Chapter%202.pdf/view)
- AuthorAID at INASP (www.authoraid.info)

AuthorAID at INASP

- A project to help researchers in developing countries to write about and publish their work
- Main components
 - Mentoring
 - Workshops
 - Openly accessible content

Thank you!