

## Some Writing Skills

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## Some Possible Topics for Sunday Lectures

- Writing a review article
- Giving presentations (poster and oral)
- Preparing a curriculum vitae
- Writing and publishing a book
- Journal editing
- Other



## Overview

- Approaching a Writing Project
- Writing Accessibly About Science
- The AuthorAID Web Site

## Approaching a Writing Project

- Establishing the mindset
- Preparing to write
- Doing the writing
- Revising your work

## Establishing the Mindset (Attitude)

- Remember that you are writing to communicate, not to impress.
- Realize that those reading your work want you to do well.
  - Journal editors
  - Peer reviewers
  - ProfessorsTheir constructive criticism is to help you succeed.

## Preparing to Write

- Obtain and review instructions.
- Use published or accepted items as models.
- Perhaps get a style manual—for example:
  - [ACS Style Guide](#) (American Chemical Society)
  - [Scientific Style and Format](#) (Council of Science Editors)
  - [The Chicago Manual of Style](#)
  - [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#)
  - [AMA Manual of Style](#) (American Medical Association)

## Preparing to Write (cont)

- While you are gathering content, write down ideas that occur to you.
- Do lots of “prewriting”—for example:
  - Stack papers in the order you plan to cite them.
  - List points you want to make.
  - Perhaps make an outline.
- If you’re having trouble formulating ideas, perhaps do something else for a while.

## Doing the Writing

- Schedule specific times to write.
- Start with whatever part you find easiest.
- Don’t interrupt your writing to search for small details.
- Realize that often in writing there is no “one right way” but rather a series of problems with more than one solution.

## Revising Your Work

- Note: Good writing is largely a matter of good revising.
- First revise your writing yourself. Then get feedback from others and revise more.
- Consider having an editor help you.
- Avoid the temptation to keep revising your writing forever.

## Questions to Consider in Revising

- Does the piece of writing contain everything it should?
- Does it contain anything it shouldn’t?
- Is all the information accurate?
- Is the content consistent throughout?
- Is everything logically organized?
- Is everything clearly worded?

## Questions (cont)

- Does the level suit the intended readers?
- Are points stated briefly, simply, and directly? In other words, is everything concise?
- Are grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word use correct throughout?
- Are all figures and tables well designed?
- Does the manuscript comply with the instructions?



## Writing Accessibly about Science

- Definition
- Why write accessibly about science?
- General pointers
- Pointers: writing for non-native speakers
- Pointers: writing for the public
- Discussion

## Preliminaries

- Writing accessibly: writing in a way that is easy to understand
- Why write accessibly about water resources research?

## Why write accessibly about science?

- Facilitates understanding by peers (and peer reviewers)
- Helps those outside your specialty to understand
  - Researchers in related fields
  - Policymakers
  - Journalists
  - End Users
  - Others
- Helps non-native speakers to understand
- Establishes rapport
- Minimizes misinterpretation
- Minimizes editorial distortion
- Clarifies one's own thinking
- Other

## The pointers—some caveats

- Guidelines, not rules
- Not exhaustive
- Varied amounts of research support
- Yet, well worth considering

## General Pointers

- Provide multiple “points of access”—for example:
  - Title
  - Abstract
  - Introduction
  - Headings
  - Graphics
  - Italics or boldface (sparingly used)

## General Pointers (cont)

- Make the structure clear at a glance—for example, with
  - Headings
  - Bullets
  - White space
- Avoid very long paragraphs and very long sentences.

## General Pointers (cont)

- Minimize use of jargon.
- Remember to define unfamiliar terms.
- Minimize use of abbreviations and acronyms. If you use them, define them.

## General Pointers (cont)

- Write simply and concisely:
  - Use simple, common words.
    - attempt→ fundamental→
  - Delete needless words.
    - red in color→ totally destroyed→
  - Condense wordy phrases.
    - at this point in time→ in the event that→
  - Use verbs, not nouns made from them.
    - produce relief of→ provide an explanation→

## General Pointers (cont)

- Offer access to further information—for example, through
  - References
  - Links
  - Resource lists

## Pointers: Writing Accessibly for Non-Native Speakers of English



## Pointers: Writing Accessibly for Non-Native Speakers

- Use largely subject-verb-object sentence structure.
- Use mainly simple verb forms.
- Try not to use words with multiple meanings—even if doing so means (oops! requires) using a longer word.

### Writing for Non-Native Speakers (cont)

- Beware of literary allusions, sports metaphors, etc.
- Beware of irony and humor.
- Write dates in formats interpreted consistently (for example, 5 January 2008, not 1/5/08).

### Writing for Non-Native Speakers (cont)

- Retain optional words, such as “that,” if they clarify sentence structure.
- To guide readers, punctuate liberally.
- See *The Elements of International English Style* by Edmond H. Weiss (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

### Pointers: Writing Accessibly for the Public



### Pointers: Writing Accessibly for the Public

- Provide human interest—for example, by including
  - Researchers
  - Technology users
  - Others
- Use some narrative.

### Writing for the Public (cont)

- Provide overviews before details.
- Relate the unfamiliar to the familiar—for example, through analogies.
- Include examples.
- If appropriate, intersperse quotes, anecdotes, etc.

### Writing for the Public (cont)

- Introduce new terms gently—for instance:
  - “a new type of water filter, known as \_\_\_\_\_”
  - “a serious waterborne disease called \_\_\_\_\_”
- Make relationships clear:
  - Make reasoning explicit.
  - Use transitions effectively.

## Writing for the Public (cont)

- Present numbers and sizes effectively:
  - Use familiar units.
  - Compare sizes with those of familiar items.
- Counter misconceptions respectfully.
  - Acknowledge plausibility of the belief.
  - Show the belief's inadequacy.
  - Show the merits of the more scientifically founded view.



## Accessing the AuthorAID Web site

[www.authoraid.info](http://www.authoraid.info)

*Thank you!*



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