

Effective Writing for American Journals

Presentation to the Faculty and Students of
Huazhong University of Science and Technology
Wuhan, Peoples Republic of China
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Acknowledgement

This presentation originally was prepared by
Dr. Trudy Bers and Richard A. Voorhees in 1990
as a workshop at the annual meeting of the Association for
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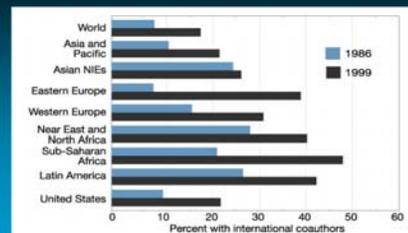
It has been updated to match emerging technology and the
needs of the faculty and students at National Tsing Hua
University in Taiwan



An Expanding Universe of Publication



International coauthorship of scientific papers



NOTES: Asian NIEs are the newly industrialized economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Asia & Pacific excludes these countries.

SOURCE: National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators-2002*



Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to

- a. Identify the belief set that underlies submission, i.e., expression of something new, important, or useful
- b. Explain how to match journals and submissions
- c. Identify the usefulness of the abstract as a focus for the work
- d. Research prospective US journals for which they would like to submit an article for publication



Learning Objectives (continued)

- e. Identify the style manual in use by the selected journal(s)
- f. Write an appropriate editor query
- g. Describe the importance of a support network to filter potential journals and to peer review papers before submission
- h. Describe the criticality of accurate referencing
- i. Describe the "dos" and "don'ts" of article submission



Identify Your Audience

- ✓ Who will read your manuscript after it is published?
- ✓ How will they use it?
- ✓ What do they already know about your topic?
- ✓ What do they not know, and what do they need to know?



Identify Your Audience

(continued)

- ✓ What specialized terms are needed? Which are not needed?
- ✓ What will your manuscript contribute to scholarship and/or to practice
- ✓ What are the differences between conference and publication audiences?



Elements and Integration of a Manuscript

- ✓ Abstract
 - ✓ Most authors wait to last to write this.
 - ✓ It should be one of the first writing acts
- ✓ The abstract is a very brief overview of your ENTIRE study. It tells the reader WHAT you did, WHY you did it, HOW you did it, WHAT you found, and WHAT it means. The abstract should briefly state the purpose of the research (introduction), how the problem was studied (methods), the principal findings (results), and what the findings mean (discussion and conclusion). It is important to be descriptive but concise--say only what is essential, using no more words than necessary to convey meaning.



Elements and Integration of a Manuscript (continued)

- ✓ Introduction
 - ✓ Specifies why a work is important
 - ✓ States the thesis of the work in clear terms
- ✓ Review of the Literature
 - ✓ Anchors the work in a larger context
 - ✓ Sets the stage for questions to be addressed



Elements and Integration of a Manuscript (continued)

- ✓ Methodology
 - ✓ Acquaints the reader with the mechanics of the study
 - ✓ Who or what was studied (population v. sample)
 - ✓ What method of inquiry was used?
 - ✓ Quantitative
 - ✓ Qualitative
 - ✓ Were there special conditions?



Results

- ✓ Presents findings in light of questions asked



Discussion

- ✓ Ties the entire manuscript together
- ✓ Highlights new findings
- ✓ Provides possible new explanations
- ✓ Suggests fruitful areas for new research



The Abstract

- ✓ The abstract is the reader's first encounter with your paper, and is the chief means by which scientists decide which research reports to read in their entirety. The abstract should provide a brief summary of the findings of the paper, and should be a stand-alone document that can be understood without reading the paper.



The Abstract (Continued)

Elements of an Abstract

- Project Title
- Introduction (motivation)
- Hypothesis (problem statement)
- Methods (approach)
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion



Formal Abstract Example

A Test of The Competitive Exclusion Theory in Two Related Species of Butterflies. Sarah Dioski, 135 Main Street, Oil City, PA 16215. Oil City High School, Oil City, PA.

Teacher and/or Sponsor: Mrs. Georgiana Spallanzi/Mr. Joseph Pascale.

The food habits of larval butterflies of two related species, *Papilio splendens* and *Papilio blanchii* in a zone of overlap near Oil City, PA were examined. The theory of competitive exclusion predicts that food habits of closely related species should not overlap significantly where the differing species occur together. Transects in five different habitats were used to determine food and habitat preferences in wild populations. Captive caterpillars were offered various foods in the laboratory; weight changes of foods and caterpillars were examined daily. Food habits in overlapping habitats were significantly different between the two species (ANOVA $p = 0.001$). Food habits in non-overlapping habitats were not significantly different (ANOVA $p = 0.52$). There were no differences in food preferences (ANOVA $p = 0.76$) or growth rates (ANOVA $p = 0.88$) from different foods used in laboratory maintained populations. These species are able to coexist because they are not competing for the same and limited food resources in the same area. These results support the theory of competitive exclusion because the two species did not use the same food resources in the same habitats



Words

- ✓ Style
 - ✓ results from choices made in words, sentence structure, and punctuation. Style reflects the writer's personality and relationships he or she wishes to establish with the audience. In academic publications, some styles are sanctified by custom rather than effectiveness



Words (continued)

- ✓ Grammar
 - ✓ Is concerned with correct words and sentence structures according to established norms.
- ✓ Usage
 - ✓ Is concerned with appropriate words, often according to a discipline or taste.
- ✓ Jargon
 - ✓ Can be confusing or hard-to-understand language, or simply the specialized language of a field. To monitor the proper use of jargon, use common sense and continued audience analysis



Words (continued)

- ✓ Sexism
 - ✓ Is discrimination based on gender: pronouns are especially troublesome. Three hints:
 - ✓ Use "he" or "she" or explain away the use of the masculine only as "traditional" in a footnote or use the feminine to remind readers that their assumptions of the masculine should be questioned.



Time for some fun
with words....



Numbers

- ✓ Spell out a number beginning a sentence.
 - ✓ RIGHT: Twenty-seven hundred students enrolled.
 - ✓ WRONG: 2,700 students enrolled.
- ✓ Spell out round numbers.
 - ✓ RIGHT: About a thousand students enrolled.
- ✓ Spell out numbers to prevent misreading
 - ✓ RIGHT: We ordered one thousand 8-page brochures



Numbers (continued)

- ✓ Spell out numbers less than ten—unless the sentence or paragraph contains larger numbers referring to the same units
 - ✓ RIGHT: We included six measures of satisfaction in our design
 - ✓ RIGHT: We had 18 questions on the survey, but 4 were eliminated because they were confusing.
 - ✓ RIGHT: Each of the three courses had more than 100 students



Numbers (continued)

- ✓ Numerals
 - ✓ Use numerals for numbers larger than nine
 - ✓ Use numerals when the number is connected to a unit of measure, whether expressed in an abbreviation or symbol or in words
 - ✓ Each course costs \$455.00 NT
 - ✓ We found a mean grade point average of 2.79



Numbers (continued)

- ✓ Numerals
 - ✓ Use numerals for decimal numbers and fractional numbers greater than one.
 - ✓ The telephone system handles 6.8 calls per minute
 - ✓ What good is a 6½ page abstract?



Numbers (continued)

- ✓ Use a combination of numerals and words to express very large numbers in a context that is primarily verbal rather than numerical, specially in reference to money
 - ✓ RIGHT: The president recommended a university budget of \$25.7 million.
 - ✓ WRONG: The president recommended a university budget of \$25,700,000.



How to Say It with Statistics



Help your reader spot trends

- ✓ Point out the major finding(s) in tables and graphs; e.g., if you list the amount of money students spend per month on incidentals, and find out that women outspend men by a margin of 2:1, then say so in the text. "Women spent twice as much as men on incidental expenses."



Pick the Right Average

- ✓ The mean is a statistical average; it shows what things would be like if each person got an equal share. "The mean age of students was 28.2 years."
- ✓ The median shows the case that's in the middle between two extremes. "The median age of students was 39 years." Half are below, half are above
- ✓ The mode shows the pattern followed most often. "The modal age of the students was 21 years."



Help Your Reader Identify

- ✓ The range of data
 - ✓ "Students ranged in age form 16 to 75"
- ✓ The exceptions
 - ✓ "While the mean age of students was 28 years, more than 100 were over the age of 65."



Don't Bury Figures in the Text

- ✓ Spare your readers this type of paragraph
 - ✓ "Among women respondents, 44.6 percent carried fewer than 6 credit hours for the semester; 17.8 percent carried between 6 and 11 credit hours; 25.2 percent carried between 12 and 18 credits; and 12.4 percent carried more than 18 credits."



Beware of Tables

- ✓ Cut tables to a minimum



More on Numerals

- ✓ You don't always have to use numerals in the text
 - ✓ Instead of 84.7 percent, say "five out of six"
- ✓ Round your numerals appropriately
 - ✓ Round to the whole number of decimal place that tells your story best. For example, we're accustomed to GPA calculations to the nearest hundredth (GPA=2.79)



Pictorials

- ✓ Keep them simple
- ✓ A picture of a diploma can signify graduates. You don't need to add caps and gowns and boring graduation speakers and relieved parents
- ✓ Don't use pictorials statistics for two things at once
- ✓ Don't include little pictures of males and females and pictures of graduates to represent the ratio of male and female graduates



Tables for Non-statistical Information

TABLE 2. Current and Future Systems in Community Colleges

	Current	Future
Educational Delivery	fixed entry/fixed exit semester based credits grades single mode	open entry/open exit modular certification skills/competencies multimodal
Instruction	instructors focus method curriculum/development	content deliverers teaching single mode specialized faculty
Support Services	delivery customer time	decentralized students continuous
Staff	faculty contract workload compensation hiring	9 months fixed formula integrated
Planning	process goal unit of analysis model of analysis	prescriptive incremental improvement existing market/competitors benchmarking
Assessment	timing customer unit of analysis	periodic/episodic faculty-staff programs/services
		year round flexible incentive-based integrated/virtual
		exploratory create new futures market foresight challenging orthodoxies
		continuous students/community institution

Source: Alfred, R.L. and Carter, P. (1999). New colleges for a new century: Organizational change and development in the community college. In J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education, Handbook of Theory and Research*. Agathon, New York.



Online Writing Laboratory

Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL)

Purdue's OWL has been serving the Purdue community and the rest of the world over the Internet since 1993. We offer:

- a [web site](#) with materials and resources
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Handouts, materials, and resources for students and teachers, including:

- [general writing concerns](#) (such as the writing process and writing about specific topics)
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- [research and documenting sources](#) (including MLA and APA styles)
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- [PowerPoint presentations](#) on writing skills, research and documentation styles, grammar and mechanics, and business/ professional writing

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Online Writing Laboratories

Sentence Clarity and Combining

Documenting Sources: Using APA Format

The Purdue University Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>



The Community College of Denver's OWL

Features papers and paragraphs written by undergraduate college students, ranging in experience from beginning native and ESL speakers to senior-level students

http://owl.ccd.ccooes.edu/owl/paper_bank/

The Community College of Denver's OWL

Paper Bank • Paragraph Bank
Where knowledge is ready for withdrawal!

The Paper Bank

The Paper Bank offers sample papers and paragraphs written by undergraduate college students, ranging in experience from beginning native and ESL speakers to senior-level students. Along with the sample student papers and paragraphs are comments written by Community College of Denver Writing Center tutors. The comments point out successful, and occasionally unsuccessful, writing patterns, techniques and strategies.

Use this site to:

- discover helpful writing hints, strategies, patterns and techniques.
- gain a better understanding of typical composition models or patterns.
- read student writing to know what it looks like in a variety of forms and at a variety of levels.

The Paragraph Bank

The following student examples illustrate different paragraph styles and techniques. Like the clothes we wear, each student paragraph fits the writing situation. That is, the form, such as moving from the general to the specific, matches the content, or what the writer wants to say. You wouldn't, after all, wear a cocktail dress to the dentist. Likewise, it is necessary to pay special attention to the organization of your paragraph to make sure it "suits" the topic. And while you may be able to get away with sloppy dressing in real life, in academic writing, sloppy paragraphs with no organization are always a writing don't!

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http://owl.ccd.ccooes.edu/owl/paper_bank/

Now What?

Revising

The **first** revision should be from your perspective

- ✓ Informational changes—add essential information and delete excess
- ✓ Organizational changes—rearrange sentences, paragraphs, and sections to present your points in logical order, with a beginning, middle, and end to each point
- ✓ Stylistic changes—attend to tone, variety, rhythm of sentence, words, phrases, use or elimination of jargon
- ✓ Holistic changes—re-examine overall approach and presentation



Revising (continued)

The **second** revision should be for the reader

- ✓ Mechanical changes—spelling checks, punctuation checks, typos, etc.
- ✓ Grammatical changes—subject-verb agreement, passive to active or vice-versa, pronoun agreement
- ✓ Continuation and transitional changes—remind the reader what has happened and what is coming next
- ✓ Cosmetic changes—use white space, wide margins, be neat



Style is Critical

The proper use of style shows the credibility of writers; such writers show accountability to their source material.

Purdue's Online Writing Laboratory has a great tutorial on using APA style
Citations
Building Reference Lists



First Cut by an Editor/Reviewer

- ✓ Appropriateness of article for journal
 - ✓ Subject
 - ✓ Methodology
 - ✓ Approach
- ✓ The reference list, literature grounding, should include citations to the journal to which the manuscript is submitted and other related journals.
 - ✓ That shows that journal readers are or have been interested in your proposed work.
- ✓ Discussion section does not hang together well
- ✓ Operationalization of concepts



First Cut by an Editor/Reviewer

(continued)

- ✓ Persistent errors in style, grammar, and subject-verb agreement
- ✓ Length of paragraphs
- ✓ look at the journal and follow the guidelines to authors. If it looks odd, it probably is.
- ✓ Do I have to be esoteric to figure out this work?
- ✓ Can it be said with fewer words...economy, economy, economy



Publication Tips Your Mentor Never Taught You

- ✓ The outside world sees only the articles and books that you publish. Only you and your ego (and maybe your secretary) know about your rejections.
- ✓ If you're not sure whether a paper will be of possible interest to a particular journal, write or call the editor. A quick query can save nail biting months of waiting for the results of a full review.



Publication Tips Your Mentor Never Taught You

(continued)

- ✓ Whatever journals say about the length of time for a review to be completed, there is an error margin of \pm two standard deviations. You'll hear sooner or later than you expect, but hardly ever on time.
- ✓ Some editors acknowledge the receipt of your ms. Others don't. When in doubt call.



Publication Tips Your Mentor Never Taught You

(continued)

- ✓ The same research project/findings may be appropriate for multiple publications. Note: this does not mean the same article. Rather, a scholarly, quantitative article may be appropriate for one journal, and a descriptive article that focuses primarily on actions taken as a result of the research may be appropriate for another.



Publication Tips Your Mentor Never Taught You (continued)

- ✓ Learn from others: There is a difference between sincere imitation of style and organization, and plagiarism. Imitate.
- ✓ Consider finding someone with whom to argue; this may help you to formulate and present your major points.



Publication Tips Your Mentor Never Taught You (continued)

- ✓ Cultivate shadow reviewers—colleagues who will read and critique your work off-the-record, before you submit it for review by a publication.
- ✓ Use a conference presentation as the first outing for your paper-in-progress; audience questions and comments by discussants can be very useful in identifying ways to improve your work.



The Query Letter

Most queries look and read the same, your query letter must stand out.

- ✓ Your query letter should be no more than a page or a page and a half, and should contain a brief introduction as to why you're writing that specific journal.
- ✓ Mention your expertise or interest in your proposed topic, and include one or two ideas.
- ✓ Send your query to the right editor. Use a specific name for your specific topic.
- ✓ Narrow your angle.
- ✓ Study the journal thoroughly before querying. Take time to know what the journal wants and doesn't want.



The Query Letter (Continued)

- ✓ Don't be presumptuous. Avoid even an appearance of cockiness or arrogance.
- ✓ Don't be sketchy. Outline your idea in sufficient depth to give the editor a clear picture of your idea and what you intend to do.
- ✓ Don't offer to write an article to specification
- ✓ Never apologize or give a lame reason for wanting to write your article
- ✓ Querying by phone is OK, but be sure your ducks are lined up!



Sources and Resources

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