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Section I: Basic rules of manuscript language

Manuscript language: overview

Manuscript language should be:

→ **Accurate**

→ **Concise**

→ **Clear**

→ **Objective**

Prevent spelling errors by using a spellchecker in English. Additionally, other common language errors involve:

- Tenses
- Grammar
- Sentences
- Paragraphs

You should always read the journal's Guide for Authors to check for any additional language specifications.

Manuscript language: tenses

Take care to use the proper tenses when describing your work and findings. Being consistent and correct in your use of tenses makes your paper easier to understand.

Present tense:

Use the present tense for known facts and hypotheses, for example, *"the average life of a honey bee IS 6 weeks..."*

Past tense:

Use the past tense for describing experiments that have been conducted and the results of these experiments, for example *"The average life span of bees in our contained environment WAS 8 weeks "*

Remember:

Avoid shifting tenses within a unit of text: paragraph, sub-section or section.

Manuscript language: grammar

Use the active voice to shorten sentences.

The passive voice can be used in the Methods section of a paper but otherwise, the active voice will usually shorten sentences and make them more dynamic and interesting for the reader.

Use the active phrase *"we found that "* freely, which is a quick signal to the reader that you are describing one of your results. This expression is also much more concise and to the point than writing in the passive voice, as in, for example, *"it has been found that there had been "*

Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.

- Avoid **contractions** such as *"it's"*, *"isn't"*, or *"weren't"* which are not often used in professional writing.
- Avoid **abbreviations/acronyms** except for very well-known ones.
- Avoid acronyms as replacement for citations.
- Avoid acronyms in the abstract and conclusion.

Eliminate redundant words or phrases.

- *due to the fact that → because* or *since*
- *immediately apparent → apparent*
- *in the case that → in case*
- *and also → and*
- *in order to determine → to determine*
- *to try and determine → to determine*

Double-check unfamiliar words or phrases.

Section I: Basic rules of manuscript language (continued)

Manuscript language: sentences

To write a successful manuscript, first be aware of the **sentence structure** you use.

Write direct and short sentences.

The average length of sentences in scientific writing is only about 12-17 words.

Include only one piece of information per sentence.

Sentences should be constructed in **short, factual bursts.** Long and complicated sentences tend to confuse readers.

Avoid making multiple statements in one sentence.

Convey only a single idea per sentence. Link sentences together within a paragraph to provide a clear story-line.

Keep related words together.

Closely place the subject and verb to allow the reader to understand what the subject is doing.

Pay attention to the order in which you write a sentence.

The "stress position" within a sentence contains new information to be emphasized. The "topical position" contains "old" information leading up to the point of emphasis. The topical position comes before the stress position.

Avoid: *"This ocean basin was warmer during 2012 than any period found in the observational database, based on our analysis of recent ship-based measurements."*

Write: *"Based on our analysis of recent ship-based measurements, this ocean basin was warmer during 2012 than any period found in the observational database."*

Put statements in a positive form.

- **Positive:** *"He usually came late."*
- **Negative:** *"He is not very often on time."*

Manuscript language: paragraphs

- Have one paragraph for each distinct topic.
- Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence, and end in conformity with the beginning.
- Avoid a succession of loose sentences.
- Parallel structures are simpler to parse as a reader. Retain consistent tenses within each paragraph.
- Provide a logical transition from one paragraph to another to render a clear flow, thus guiding the reader from one topic to another.
- Paragraphs are similarly constructed to sentences, bringing the reader from the "familiar" at the start to new ideas towards the end.
- Fill logical holes empathizing with a smart reader who genuinely wants to understand the flow of ideas.