How to write a good scientific paper for publication

Writing Compelling Papers

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Talk content

- **Scientific Manuscripts:**
 - Research papers
 - Ethical conduct
- **Preprint servers**
 - AfricArxiv
 - bioRxiv
 - medRxiv
 - ChemRxiv
- **Publishers & Standalone journals**
 - Identifying predatory journals
 - Choosing the right journals

Scientific Manuscripts: Research Papers

Umar Ahmad

The writing guide

1) Preparation	Steps	Discussion & Content
	Concept	Get idea, List experiments/dry lab work, Present to group, Prioritize the experiments, Gather reagents/tools for analyses, Make a timeline for completion, Ask, “Is this experiment or approach necessary and will it answer the questions”?
	Data collection	Present goals to group, assemble figures as you go, paper quality images, controls, perform similar experiments together, set up meetings, finalise data with the Team and PI.
	Transition	Decide where to publish, confirm data is sufficient for the journal.

The writing guide...

2) Writing Steps Discussion & Content

	Figures	List key points for figure, determine order, rationale for order and confer with colleagues.
	Outlines	Choose a title, list sections, theme sentences, and figures. Remember to describe in this order. <i>“Why you did it, How you did it, and What you learned”</i> . Don’t write the section, until the outline is OK by the PI or project leader.
	Meeting with PI	<u>Technical issues:</u> I) Figures, II) Content, III) Order, IV) Story, V) Spin <u>Management issues:</u> I) Journal, II) Date of the final draft, III) Agreement on responses and submission dates, and IV) Authorship- List authors’ contribution and agree on order.

The writing guide...

2) Writing Steps Discussion & Content

Writing

Take control, Conform to journal's requirements, Write in this order:

I) Results, II) Methods, III) Discussion, IV) Introduction, V) Abstract.

Reduce writing delays by remembering not to write the perfect sentence the very first time. First put down all you wanted to say and then tighten text. Get acceptance of other authors on the authorship order and their critique. Get it read by a few lab mates.

Submit to PI

Should be in the final stages (references, number of words, and figures).

While waiting to hear from PI, learn on-line submission requirements, assemble a list of potential reviewers, and draft a cover letter. Print check figures and get them ready for online submission.

The writing guide...

3) Post-submission

Steps

Discussion & Content

Under
review

Perform experiments that you couldn't include but anticipate reviewers might demand

Think of alternate plans (journals with similar style/length, more experiments/analysis, strategy) in case of a rejection.

Review

If accepted and revising, have a MS word file of all modifications as you make them for the cover letter to the editor:

Be prepared for rapid response; at galley stages, if out of town, leave contact info with someone in the lab as the journal want a quick response.

Who are we writing for?

- Scientific community
- The journal editors
- 2 – 3 peer reviewers and (perhaps) 1 biostatistician
- Fellow researchers, scientists and clinicians
- Your own self

Authorship

- Finalise before you begin writing
- Read the ICMCJE standard requirements
- Ask about your departmental policy and develop a project-based on its
- Decide and finalise authorship with supervisor, HOD and research team.

IMRaD format

Title, authors and affiliation etc	1 page
Introduction	1 to 2 pages
Materials and Methods	2 to 4 pages
Results	2 to 4 pages
Discussion	2 to 3 pages
Figures and Tables	Maximum of 6
References	20 – 35 lists

Results

Overall: -

- The major scientific contribution of your study
- Answer the aims directly
- It represents the core findings that may be of interest to scientific community
- Do not repeat numbers from the tables in the text.
- Create scientific table & quality figures figures

Content :-

- Results section should report
 - Your main findings and important ones
 - Point or direct the reader to the data shown in figures and tables
 - Include control results
 - Place results that answer the question of the paper at the beginning
 - Report from most to least important findings
 - Interpret the data for the readers
 - State purpose, background experiments, approach, results and interpretations
 - Used past tense for results but present tense for descriptive papers

Organise the results into segments

Each segments should cover one long paragraph that contains ***four essential components***:

- Background of experiment (when needed but optional)
- Purpose
- Experimental approach
- Results
- Interpretations of results

Good examples of data interpretation

Wrong

Presenting data without interpretation

Heart **rate was 100 beats per minute** after digitalis was added (Figure 3)

Correct I

Heart rate ***increased to 100 beats per minute*** after digitalis was added (Figure 3)

Correct II

Heart rate ***increased from 60 to 100 beats per minute*** after digitalis was added (Figure 3)

Signals for the reader in **Results**

Purpose/Questions	Experimental approach	Results	Interpretations
To establish if...	..we did ...	We found...	, indicating that...
To determine ...	X was subjected to...	We observed ...	, consistent with...
Substance X was tested to....	..by/using ...	We detected ...	' which indicates that...
For the purpose of XYZ...	ABC was performed.. Experiment X showed ..	Our results indicated that...	' This observation indicates that...

Good examples of data interpretation I

Correct

To examine whether the recombinant Newcastle disease virus (rNDV) AF2240 bearing a transgene of green fluorescence protein (GFP) (rNDV-GFP)(X. Cheng et al., 2016) will persistently infect the established persistent bladder cancer cell lines, both TCCSUPPi vs TCCSUP (control) and EJ28Pi vs EJ28 (control) were re-infected with rNDV-GFP at MOI of 1. Since the recombinant NDV carries an inserted GFP within its genome, it is expected that the persistent cell lines will express the green fluorescence upon viral replication in the cells. At 24 hours post-infection, the cells were monitored for detecting the expression of GFP. As shown in Figure 4.13, control cells (TCCSUP and EJ28) were mostly infected by the rNDV especially the EJ28 cells as demonstrated by the large majority of GFP-expressing cells (top right panel A & B). Conversely, the persistently infected cells (TCCSUPPi and EJ28Pi) showed low level of GFP-expressing cells, indicating that some of the viral persistent cells are either resistant to re-infection by rNDV-GFP or are unable to express the GFP transgene within the 24 hours post infection (Figure 4.13; bottom panels A & B).

Common problems in **Results**

The most common problems in results are

- Adding irrelevant information
- Missing the components mentioned above
- Excessive details of experiments
- Inclusion of comparisons with previous studies

Materials & methods

Overall: -

- Describe the experimental approach
- Reviewer carefully read it to evaluate your scientific claims
- Write this part with great care and ensure it is reproducible
- Paper get reject if methods section are not carefully written or the study is not design well.

Content & Organization:-

- Methods section should cover
 - Materials (buffers, drugs, culture media, apparatus)
 - Subjects (patients, experimental materials, animals, plants etc)
 - Details study design
 - Procedure (what, how and why you did something)
 - Follow guidelines on ethical conduct
 - State what you did that yielded the results section.
 - Explain the purpose of each procedure whose function is not clear
 - Always read *Instructions to Authors* of your target journal.

Example of good reporting in methods section

Referring to previous described methods

- 1) Plasmids were isolated according to Braun [19]
- 2) For numerical calculations involved in this study, we developed at the National Centre for Atmospheric Research [22].

Referring to described methods that were modified

Plasmids were isolated according to Braun [19] with minor modifications. Instead of dissolving DNA pellets in sterile water, pellets were dissolved in buffer A.

Common problems in methods

The most common problems in methods section are

- Omission of experimental purpose
- Insufficient details
- Excessive length
- Switching between past tense and present tense
- Interchanging between passive and active voice

Passive voice is most preferred when writing method section of a research paper

Discussion

Overall: -

- The hardest section to define and write
- Bad discussion results in paper rejection
- Good style and logical presentation is important in discussion

Content :-

- Discussion section should report
 - Your key findings by providing answer to the research question
 - Summarise and generalise
 - Organise in *Pyramid structure*

First paragraph

Tell your reader what your key findings were and what they mean. Do not begin ***Discussion*** with second ***Introduction***.

State the answer based on your findings in opening sentence of the Discussion.
Restate the purpose of the study (optional).

Middle paragraphs

Explain how your findings fit into what is known in the field. Tell your readers what you think your results mean and how strongly you believe in them.

Organise it from most to least important and explain the science
Compare and contrast your results with those found by others

Last paragraph

Analyse the most important results and the significance of your work

Summarise and generalise why the contribution of your study is important overall, in your field, outside your field, and for society.

Signals for the **Discussion I**

Answer	Key findings	Summary	Significance
In this study, we have shown that...	In our experiments...	In summary...	
Our study shows that...	We found that...	To summarize our results...	We recommend that X is... Y should be used for
In this study, we found that	can be attributed to...	In conclusion... Finally... Taken together..	Our finding will serve to... can be use...
Our findings demonstrate that...	Our data shows that....has been demonstrated by...	We conclude that...	Y indicates that X might ...

Signals for the Discussion II

Comparisons	Conflicting Results	Limitations	Unexpected Findings	Proposed hypothesis
...consistent with ..(ref.) Similar to...(ref.)	However, other studies found that... (ref.)	..was not possible..	Surprisingly... To our surprise..	Our results lead to the conclusion that...
...has also been observed by ... (ref.)	...is controversial..(ref.) ...does not agree with ... (ref.)	...could not be measured... ...was limited by...	was not expected.	From these data we hypothesize that...
X has been demonstrated ... (ref.)	...has also been reported...(ref.)	Further observations are needed to..		We proposed the following new principle....

Common problems in & Best ways in **Discussions**

The most **common problems** in Discussion are

- Not providing the answer/interpretation of your findings in the first paragraph
- No concluding paragraph is provided
- Inclusion of irrelevant or peripheral information
- Repeating results in the Discussion.

Best ways

- Interpretation/answer
- Key findings
- Comparison with previous findings
- Comparisons with models of others
- Suggested hypothesis
- Summary
- Significance of the finding/work

The Introduction

Overall: -

- Begin with the **broadest scope** and get **progressively narrower** but do not review literature
- Provide contextual background information for the readers
- Tell the reader why you did the study
- May contain or repeat some parts of the Abstract

Content & Organization:-

- Follow "funnel" structure by including:
 - Background
 - Unknown/Problem
 - Questions/study aims/purpose
 - Experimental approach
 - Results /Conclusion/Significance (optionally).

The Introduction...

Keep it short: -

- One to two double-spaced pages (about 250-600 words)
- Check the *instructions to authors* of your target journals to ensure you are within the word limits.
- Most research papers are *investigative*

General Content & structure:-

- **Background**
 - broad and specific background info and previous research in the area under study.
- **Unknown/Problem**
 - Problems of previous work and unknown factors in the research area.
- **Purpose of the study**
 - addition made by your research
- **Experimental approach**
 - approach taken toward this addition.

Example of good Introduction

Broad background

In mammals, the auditory hair cells of the inner ear are the sensory receptors of the auditory system. Two functionally and anatomical distinct types of mammalian auditory hair cells exist; inner and outer hair cells. Outer hair cells do not send neural signals to the brain, but they mechanically amplify low-level sound that enters the inner ear [1]. The amplification is powered by an electrically driven motility of their cell bodies [2].

Specific background

The molecular basis of this mechanism is thought to be the motor protein prestin, which is embedded in the lateral membrane of the outer hair cells. Mammalian prestin is an 80kDa, 744 amino acid membrane protein whose function appears to depend on chloride channel signaling [3,4]. Although prestin has been researched

Unknown/Problem

intensively, its molecular function has not been fully established.

Example of good question/study aim

- ❑ To determine if the triggered cellular processes **affect** the rRNA structure and folding dynamic **in vivo**,...
- ❑ Here we asked how rheumatic fever **influences** heart rate
- ❑ In this study, we show that a sequential scheme of phosphorylation and dephosphorylation **can** generate circadian oscillations.
- ❑ Here we examine the effects of total carbon concentration on U(VI) adsorption.

In case of a **descriptive** papers

New discovery or novel apparatus: -

- Describe new findings, unknown disease or a novel apparatus
- Slightly different from funnel structure done for investigative paper
- The expected elements are differed

Expected Content:-

- **Background**
 - background info and previous research in the area.
- **Discovery statement**
 - New discovery made or found in your search.
- **Experimental approach**
 - methods taken toward analyzing the new discovery
- **Description**
 - description of the new findings or elements.
- **Implication**
 - Importance of the findings

Example of **discovery** statement

- ❑ We **discovered** a new toxigenic seragroup, O210, of *Vibrio cholerae*. O210 can produce cholera toxin (CT) and cause severe symptoms.
- ❑ Here we **describe** a novel bacterial protease, Ecpro-3.
- ❑ We **examined** the structure of the bacterial ribosome in complex with tetracycline.

Template and common problems in **intro**

Paragraph 1:
What we know

Paragraph 2:
What we don't know

Paragraph 3:
Why we did this study

The most common problems in Introduction are

- Overview sentences
- Too narrowed background/context
- Excessive length
- `Missing elements such as; problems, questions, experimental approach.

Always report the science not the scientists

Abstract

Overall

- Covers all the main information in the paper in a single paragraph
- Abstract should interest the reader
- Knowing how to write an abstract is one of the most important skills in science.
- Do not include or refer figures
- No references should be included

General Content

- **Background**
- **Question/Aim/objectives**
- **Methods (or experimental approach)**
- **Results**
- **Conclusion/implication**

Structure or informative abstract (for research papers)

Example of good Abstracts

Structure or informative abstract (for research papers)

Abstract

Background: Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), is the fifth most common cancer in the world and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths. Over 500,000 new HCC cases are diagnosed each year. Combining advanced genomic analysis with proteomic characterization not only has great potential in the discovery of useful biomarkers but also drives the development of new diagnostic methods.

Methods: This study obtained proteomic data from Clinical Proteomic Tumor Analysis Consortium (CPTAC) and validated in The Cancer Proteome Atlas (TCPA) and TCGA dataset to identify HCC biomarkers and the dysfunctional of proteogenomics.

Results: The CPTAC database contained data for 159 patients diagnosed with Hepatitis-B related HCC and 422 differentially expressed proteins (112 upregulated and 310 downregulated proteins). Restricting our analysis to the intersection in survival-related proteins between CPTAC and TCPA database revealed four coverage survival-related proteins including *PCNA*, *MSH6*, *CDK1*, and *ASNS*.

Conclusion: This study established a novel protein signature for HCC prognosis prediction using data retrieved from online databases. However, the signatures need to be verified using independent cohorts and functional experiments.

Keywords: Hepatocellular carcinoma, Proteomics, CPTAC, TCPA, TCGA, Prognosis

Indicative (for review papers)

Abstract

The nervous system is intimately involved in physiological processes from development and growth to tissue homeostasis and repair throughout the body. It logically follows that the nervous system has the potential to play analogous roles in the context of cancer. Progress toward understanding the crucial role of the nervous system in cancer has accelerated in recent years, but much remains to be learned. Here, we highlight rapidly evolving concepts in this burgeoning research space and consider next steps toward understanding and therapeutically targeting the neural regulation of cancer.

Gillespie and Monje 2019

Scientific Manuscripts: Ethical Conducts

Umar Ahmad

Follow guidelines on ethical conduct

- Ethical, legal and regulatory requirements should carefully be studied
- Check each countries or international requirements before reporting your findings
- Journal editors required authors to seek for an approval by ethics committee.

Guideline on ethical conduct

Guidelines/Mandate	Source	Purpose	Url (site)
Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Biomedical Journals	International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)	Statement of ethical principles in the conduct and reporting of research and recommendations relating to specific elements of editing and writing.	http://www.icmje.org
Declaration of Helsinki	The World Medical Association		https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/
Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals	Institute for Laboratory Animal Research of the National Research Council		https://www.nap.edu/authors/ILAR/division-on-earth-and-life-studies/institute-for-laboratory-animal-research

Preprint servers

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-
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View by Month

* The Clinical Trials and Epidemiology subject categories are now closed to new submissions following the completion of bioRxiv's clinical research pilot project and launch of the dedicated health sciences server medRxiv (submit.medrxiv.org). New papers that report results of Clinical Trials must now be submitted to medRxiv. Most new Epidemiology papers also should be submitted to medRxiv, but if a paper contains no health-related information, authors may choose to submit it to another bioRxiv subject category (e.g., Genetics or Microbiology).

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Page: 1 of 19 Automatic Zoom

1 African Neuroscience on the Global Stage: Nigeria as a Model

2 Maina MB^{1,2,12}, Yunusa MG^{2,3,12}, Bukar AM⁴, Ahmad U^{5,6}, Salihi AT⁷, Ibrahim HA⁸,
3 Muhammad A⁹, Hamidu SK^{2,12}, Yaro AU¹⁰, Awadelkareem MA^{11,12}, and Baden T^{1,12}

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5 1: School of Life Sciences, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom; 2: College of Medical Sciences, Gombe
6 State University, Gombe, Nigeria; 3: International Max Planck Research School, University of Konstanz, Germany.
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11 Department of Biochemistry, Bayero University, Nigeria; 10: College of Medical Sciences, University of Maiduguri,
12 Nigeria; 11: Faculty of Medical Laboratory Sciences, Al-Neelain University, Khartoum, Sudan; 12: TReND in Africa
13 gUG (www.TReNDinAfrica.org)

14

15 sCorrespondence should be sent to MB Maina at m.bukar-maina@sussex.ac.uk

16

17 16 Pages, 4657 words (excl. references)

18 4 Figures (3 colour, 1 black and white)

19 1 Table

20 Full Dataset (Supplement)

21

22

23 Abstract

24 Several challenges contribute to Africa's trailing position in the global production of knowledge.
25 Decades of focused work through international and local programmes have thus far been
26 unable to lift the continent onto its scientific feet. To learn more about the strengths and
27 weaknesses of neuroscience research carried out on the continent today, that would enable
28 the development of robust programmes focusing on specific needs, a strategy is required to
29 extract information about specific contributions of African laboratories. Nigeria, Africa's most
30 populous nation, is among the top beneficiaries of international programmes promoting
31 neuroscience research in Africa. Therefore, to establish and test a framework for evaluating
32 neuroscience output from the continent, we here focussed on Nigeria's neuroscience
33 publications over the past two decades. Using PubMed key-word search and defined

Maina et al - Main.pdf

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Abstract

Several challenges contribute to Africa's trailing position in the global production of knowledge. Decades of focused work through international and local programmes have thus far been unable to lift the continent onto its scientific feet. To learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of neuroscience research carried out on the continent today, ...

[See more](#)

Supplemental Materials

osf.io/2eg5m/

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Choosing the right journals

Umar Ahmad

THINK

Are you submitting your research to a trusted journal or publisher?

Is it the right journal or book for your work?

- More research is being published worldwide.
- New journals are launched each week.
- Stories of publisher malpractice and deception are also on the rise.
- It can be challenging to find up-to-date guidance when choosing where to publish.
- How can you be sure the journal you are considering is the right journal for your research?

CHECK

Reference this list for your chosen journal to check if it is trusted.

- Do you or your colleagues know the journal?
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Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses?
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If you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions on the list.

- Complete the check list and submit your article only if you are happy you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions.
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- Publishing in the right journal for your research will raise your professional profile, and help you progress in your career.
- Your paper should be indexed or archived and be easily discoverable.
- You should expect a professional publishing experience where your work is reviewed and edited.
- Only then should you submit your article.

Alternatively

The screenshot shows the ISI Master Journal List homepage. The header includes the Web of Science Group logo, 'Master Journal List', and navigation links for 'Search Journals', 'Match Manuscript', 'Downloads', and 'Help Center'. There are 'Login' and 'Create Free Account' buttons. The main content area has a dark blue background with white text that reads: 'Browse, search, and explore journals indexed in the Web of Science'. Below this, a paragraph explains the Master Journal List's purpose. A search bar with the placeholder 'Search Journal, ISSN or title word...' and a 'Search Journals' button is present. A section titled 'Already have a manuscript?' includes a 'Match Manuscript' button and a brief description of the Manuscript Matcher tool. A 'Feedback' button is located on the right side.

ISI journals master list link: <https://mjl.clarivate.com/home>

The screenshot shows the Scopus Preview website. The header includes the Scopus logo, 'Preview', and navigation links for 'Author search', 'Sources', and a 'Create' button. The main content area is titled 'Sources' and features a search bar with a dropdown menu set to 'ISSN' and a 'Find sources' button. Below the search bar, there is a section titled 'Improved Citescore' with an information icon. The text in this section states: 'We have updated the CiteScore methodology to ensure a more robust, stable and comprehensive metric which provides an indication of research impact, earlier. The updated methodology will be applied to the calculation of CiteScore, as well as retroactively for all previous CiteScore years (ie. 2018, 2017, 2016...). The previous CiteScore values have been removed and are no longer available.' A link 'View CiteScore methodology.' is provided.

Scopus Index journals link:
<https://www.scopus.com/sources>

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Questions?