

Writing

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1 Writing

- (1) As a researcher, writing is your primary job.
 - a. It is scary, and takes time, to finish up a paper.
 - b. But everybody has to go through this process.

2 Writing clearly

- (2) Always present your argument first
 - a. A lot of projects start as a reaction to some proposals out there.
 - b. You should not reflect this diachronic story in your paper.
 - c. How can readers evaluate alternatives unless they know your proposal first?
 - d. I have reviewed papers that go something like this: “I think X is wrong, and here is the evidence, my theory? not really fully developed”.
 - e. You can probably guess what my recommendation to the editor was.
- (3) Don’t report your personal history
 - a. “This is the first idea that I had. And I tried it out and it didn’t work (or more often, my experiment showed something else). So here’s the alternative. It turned out that this worked better”
 - b. For the reason stated above, this is not a good idea. “The alternative” should be presented first and explain later why your original hypothesis was wrong.
- (4) Proofread, proofread, proofread
 - a. Proofreading only helps.
 - b. Proofread with a printed copy.
 - c. Do “stylistic proofreading”. Ignoring contents, check section settings, captions, formatting, etc.

3 Stylistic tips

- (5) Don’t use endnotes. Use footnotes.
- (6) Figures, Tables, tableaux

- a. Use them well
 - b. Be consistent.
 - c. When submitting your papers for review, you don't have to put them at the end of your paper (unless explicitly required to do so).
 - d. No journals I know ever require you to put tableaux at the end (and it only bothers your reviewers).
- (7) Watch out for intensifiers
- a. This pattern “directly” refutes Theory X.
 - b. This result “strongly” suggests that...
 - c. My proposal has “important” consequences...
 - d. X “correctly” points out....
 - e. Your statements sound usually stronger without them. Readers can decide how strong your argument is.
- (8) When arguing against alternatives
- a. Name the alternative and discuss that theory, not the author (depersonalize!).
 - b. Try to be nice as much as possible.
 - c. You should try to illustrate the virtues and the problems of the alternatives.
 - d. Never guess the author's mental state: “When X says Y, X must think...”
- (9) Minimize the effort on the readers' side
- a. Do not start a sentence with “This” without a key pronoun.
 - b. Do not say “see below” or “see above”. Say where they are (e.g. see section 3.1).
 - c. Do not say “see Kawahara (2006)”. Tell the readers why they should see Kawahara (2006).
 - d. “cf Kawahara (2006).” means “compare this statement with Kawahara (2006)”, but “see”. Again tell the readers why they should make that comparison.
- (10) Formatting
- a. Section headings
 - b. hyphens
 - c. Captions
 - d. Cross-references
 - e. Bibliography
 - f. Most of the above can be automated if you use L^AT_EX.

4 Circulation

- (11) Getting comments from other people often result in improvement.
- a. Get comments from your main advisor first.
 - b. It is ok to send your paper to those who would be interested in reading your paper.
 - c. Send them an email explaining why the paper may be interesting for them.

- d. Do not send multiple versions (unless they are your main advisors or they specifically ask for a new version).
- e. Offer to read your colleagues' papers. Practice giving comments.
- f. Find colleagues that you can exchange your work. I have a few and benefit a lot from them.