

Academic and Research Paper Writing in Layman's Language

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The Temptation of Overcomplication?

Teachers are familiar with the tricks their students attempt to use when looking to hit targets of a specific number of words for an assignment. All of a sudden, the word 'now' becomes "at this precise moment in time." Why use one word when six would do?



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Academic writers can fall victim to a similar problem. The pressure of writing for a [prestigious journal](#), combined with a self-imposed expectation of making the research sound as technical and imposing as possible, can lead to unnecessary verbosity in an attempt to impress colleagues, peer reviewers, and journal editors.

While understandable, this practice is disrespectful to your larger audience who may lack the familiarity with the technical jargon with which you are so eager to impress them. There is also a potential concern for your consideration. As Albert Einstein was quoted as saying: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

Allocentric vs. Egocentric Style of Writing

After spending months immersed in the data and mechanics of a research study, it can be deceptively easy to slip into an egocentric writing style where you document everything from your perspective as the researcher rather than from the perspective of the reader of your paper.

In contrast, maintaining an allocentric writing style forces you to remember that your reader may know nothing about your topic whatsoever.

The subscribers of a specific journal are likely to be very familiar with the precise terminology of the field, but to make such an assumption in your writing presents challenges to other readers who may be looking to expand their knowledge in that same field.

What Is a Layman?

Whether you prefer the term layman or layperson, such a person is defined as not having the technical knowledge of an expert. All of, to some degree, are forced to read materials as a layperson at some point in our daily life, simply because we cannot be an expert in everything.

The challenge, of course, is to remember that these readers are not lacking in intelligence, they simply lack the familiarity with the material and the terminology that you have developed over years of study. As such, they have perfectly valid reasons for reading your impressive [research paper](#). They may be personally interested in expanding their general knowledge, or they may be seeking to follow the same track as you, and develop an expertise in the field at some point in the future.

Eventually It's about Professionalism and Integrity!

As academics, we spend a lot of time and attention on [research integrity](#) in terms of ethical conduct in the face of the temptations of [plagiarism](#) and fabrication of data that is conveniently explained away under the guise of pressure to "[publish or perish](#)." Making sure that your writing is allocentric enough to be comprehensible to laypersons and should be an equal component of research integrity.

Your commitment to science may focus on adding to the body of knowledge through your research, but you can also contribute to science by supporting the accessibility of your work to future scientists from every walk of life, rather than those who swallowed the same glossary of terms as you.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, Academic and Research Paper Writing in Layman's Language. Enago Academy. 2015/11/19. <https://www.enago.com/academy/academic-and-research-paper-writing-in-laymans-language/>