Description

Whether concerning physics or psychology, academic writing has the reputation of being dense and impenetrable. Rumor has it that only six people in the world understood Einstein's first paper on relativity, and the term "psychobabble" summarizes popular attitudes towards behavioral science. But this reputation is exaggerated. Einstein's papers were not hard to understand, just hard to believe. The best academic writing is both profound and accessible, deep but not obscure. Here are some ways academics can improve their writing style.

Role models

Periodically you will come across an article that is beautiful in its clarity of exposition, organization, and expression. Make a copy of it. Refer to your file of well written articles whenever you need to write an article of your own and borrow the best style elements from each that suit your purposes.

Guidebooks

There is no shortage of manuals that tell you how to write well. I have half a dozen on my shelves. Scan through them and reread them at odd times. Pointers will start to stick in your mind—omit unnecessary words, vary long and short sentences. You'll begin to catch yourself making these mistakes in time to change.

Courses

I took a course in scientific writing in college and found it to be of some help. When I moved to my current hometown, I discovered several writers groups—short fiction, science fiction, and a catch all group that welcomed academic writers. These groups were a fun way to improve by being critiqued and critiquing others. If there are no writers groups like this in your area, why not start one?

Practice

You don't have to wait until you have a paper to write to practice developing style. There are drills you can do on your own at any time. For example, when you come across a well written paper, make notes describing a page or so of it, enough to give an outline of the content. Put away the notes for a month. Then, when you have forgotten the details, review the notes, try to recreate the section, and compare it to the original. I've done this several times and found it gave me a real appreciation for the skill of the author and how the piece was effective.

Which Style is the Best?

No writer should slavishly imitate another's style. Role models are only a starting point for development of your own style. Some writers construct long sentences that are easily understandable; others lose

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track of meaning when trying this. Some can use a light touch or interject humor into a serious academic subject; others don't have this knack. There is not one good style; there are many. Find one that works for you.

For an inspiring account of how one young man developed his writing style, see "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Part One." The writing drill I describe came from this work.

> Click to download a free eBook on "**How to Write a Research Paper**", which can ensure successful dissemination of your research paper.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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