Description

In our last post, we talked about the purpose and criteria of journals. Here we will discuss the actual preparation of the manuscript, rightly called “Manuscript Preparation.” We will cover points such as manuscript order, manuscript format, and style. This article will also give a glossary for some difficult terms found in these sections and MS Word tips!

Manuscript Order

You will organize the final version of your manuscript in the pattern usually recommended by the journal. Generally, for most manuscripts, the following structure is followed:

1. Title page
2. Abstract/Summary
3. Main Text
4. References and Footnotes
5. Legends, Figures and Tables

Some journals reject a manuscript outright if this sequence is not followed.

Title page

This usually includes the title of the paper, contains names of all authors and their complete mailing addresses and identifies who will receive all correspondence regarding the manuscript, and a running title.

Tip 1!

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A running title is a short version of the title printed at the top of each page and is restricted in length (40–60 characters)

Abstract/Summary

This section should succinctly and clearly describe the major findings reported in the manuscript. It is also usually restricted by a word limit (250 words) and sometimes also has a defined structure. Keywords also usually follow this section. Most journals specify the number of keywords they require (usually 5).

Main Text

The most popular organizational structure used to report experimental research in many scientific disciplines is the IMRAD format: Introduction, Methods, Results And Discussion. Although the main headings are standard for many scientific fields, details may vary. You will usually find these standard headings in the instructions to authors section. The Conclusion and Acknowledgements when present also form a part of this section.

Tip 2!

References

Correct and consistent use of a standard referencing convention is essential in producing a report, thesis, or paper. Some popular referencing styles are Harvard and Vancouver. There are two parts to referencing: “in-text” citations (the number or author–year formats) and “end-list” references, which follow a host of formats. All Instructions to Authors provide detailed guidelines on this. Follow them very carefully, and especially look out for the placement of all the punctuation marks. For example, there are four different punctuation marks used in the following reference: Huang, Jing, Zweig, Geoffrey (2002): “Maximum entropy model for punctuation annotation from speech,” In ICSLP-2002, 269: 917-920.

Legends, Figures, and Tables

The information on figures and tables should be looked into very carefully. Journals provide information on

1. Number of figures and tables
2. Type of illustrations accepted (e.g., line art, photographs)
3. Resolution and size of illustrations
4. Row and column format of tables
5. Numbering style (e.g., Arabic or Roman)

Tip 3!

Arabic: Tables I, II, and III; Roman: Tables 1, 2, and 3

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Most journals request that figures and tables be numbered consecutively in the order in which they appear in the text.

Manuscript Format

The next point to consider is the “appearance” of the manuscript. While manuscript order gives the structure, manuscript format considers the design.

Manuscript Length

Journals define the manuscript length by page or by word. Either the entire manuscript is limited by word count or some sections have limited word counts. In the Instructions to Authors look for specifications on all or a combination of the following:

1. Title
2. Running Title (in characters/not words)
3. Abstract
4. Main Text (some journals give a section wise breakup as well)
5. Number of figures
6. Number of tables
7. Number of references

Paper and Font size

There are two standard recommended paper size formats: letter (8.5? x 11?) or A4. Font sizes also vary depending on the size of the manuscript but usually 10 or 12 pt. “serif fonts” are used.

Tip 4!

In typography, serifs are non-structural details on the ends of some of the strokes that make up letters and symbols. A font that has serifs is called a serif font (or seriffed font). A font without serifs is called sans-serif, from the French sans = without.

Margins

Most journals specify that a “liberal” margin should be left on both sides to provide room for editorial instructions or slight corrections. A “liberal” margin is usually 1 to 2 inches.

Spacing

Double spacing is usually recommended at the time of submission. Short footnotes, however, are usually single spaced.

MS Word Tip

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To double space your manuscript in Word, follow the following instructions:

1. **Press Ctrl + A**
2. **Go to Format -> Paragraph**
3. **Under “Spacing” select “Double” under “Line Spacing”**

Numbering

Most journals recommend that the pages of a manuscript be numbered consecutively throughout the text in the upper right-hand corner of pages.

MS Word Tip

To insert page numbers, please follow the following instructions:

1. **Go to Insert -> Page Number**
2. **Click on the dropdown arrow**
3. **Select where you want your page number to appear**

Templates

Some journals provide their own templates where all of the above points are pre-defined, and the authors simply have to write over the text. For example, see https://www.ieee.org/portal/cms_docs_iportals/iportals/publications/journmag/transactions/TRANS-JOUR.doc

Style

Now that we have dealt with the design, style takes care of the details while writing a manuscript. Although there are some standard style guides used in academic publishing, every journal contains its own specific guidelines usually covering the following points:

Spelling

It is desirable to make spellings conform to a dictionary—Century, Webster, Oxford, etc. The recommended dictionary is usually provided in the Instructions to Authors. Also, some journals prepare and recommend a “House Style.”

Tip 5!

House Style: The style of preferred spelling, punctuation, hyphenation and indentation used in a publishing house or by a particular publication to ensure consistent typesetting

Punctuation

A writer should give careful regard to punctuation, for the clearness and force of his writing may be

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spoiled by misuse of punctuation or a failure to observe established conventions. Rules for the use of punctuation marks are given in most style guides.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are usually spelt out at first occurrence in the manuscript. Thereafter they are used without further definition. Some journals give a list of abbreviations that need not be spelt out at all, while others also recommend that abbreviations not be used in the title or abstract of a paper.

Other issues dealt with under style are

- Number style: should I spell out 5 (five) in “5 subjects”?
- Use of symbols and units: should I follow SI units?
- Capitalization: should I capitalize the “e” in “Earth”?
- Italics: should I capitalize gene names?

In our next post, we will talk about the manuscript submission process and tips on how to prepare a cover letter.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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daveishan

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