Writing a Successful Manuscript

The idea of sitting down and putting “pen to paper” can be very intimidating. After months of experiments, finding the way to fit it all in less than 30 pages seems like a joke. *How much writing is enough? How can I be certain? What can I do to make my content stand out? Will anyone be interested?*

The most important question of all: Where do I start?

The answer? Not necessarily at the beginning.

**I. Organizing/Preparation**

* Prior to writing your manuscript, **check your Journal’s author guidelines/instructions.** Each publisher has its own style preferences and requirements.
* Prepare your **Tables & Figures**. **These are the most efficient way to present results, as data is the driving force of your paper.**

**II. Writing**

1. **Title**

* **Keep title succinct, informative, interesting.** Remember, this might be the only information someone sees when conducting a literature search. Make it catchy!
* **Avoid** starting the title with a preposition or an article, using cliché words like “novel,” or acronyms

1. **Author List**

* Immediately follows the Title
* **The order is important.**
* **1st** – lead person who developed the study idea; does the most work and writing
* **2nd** – sometimes reserved for the biostatistician or a very involved co-author who does not quite meet the criteria for senior author
* **Last** – senior author, supervising the group, provides guidance and key insights; content expert or senior person working the most behind the scenes to make project happen
* **Correspondence address**
* **Word count**

1. **Abstract**

* It is a **summary, not an introduction to the text**
* **Clear writing; attention to detail and organization**
* If you list certain topics or outcomes in a specific order, **keep this order throughout – verify if journal asks for sub-headers**
* Anything that makes your paper easier to read increases the chances for acceptance (sequential order, consistency, organization)
* The abstract may be used in abstracting journals; therefore, **it should be self-contained** (i.e., no numerical references)and substantive in nature, **presenting concisely the objectives, methodology, results, and significance**

1. **Introduction**

* Purpose of the paper
* Concise writing; organized from the global to the particular
* **Builds your case:** What is the problem? Are there any existing solutions? Which is the best? What is the main limitation? What do you hope to achieve?
* **Should convince readers that you know why your work is useful**
* **No spoilers!** Save the detailed exploration for the Discussion
* Generally, three paragraphs long (verify if journal requires sub-headers). ¶1: Background, ¶2: Importance, ¶3: Goals/Objectives

1. **Methods**

* How did you study the problem?
* Include **detailed information so the experiment can be reproduced**
* Relevant details of the study setting: Why was this site, facility, or hospital chosen?
* Do **NOT** repeat details of **established** methods
* **List methods in the same order they will appear in the Results section** (in the logical order in which you did the research)
* **Avoid adding comments, results, or discussion in this section**
* **Use citations for methods** whenever possible
* **Suggested sub-headers** for clarity when writing: study setting & design, patient population (inclusion and exclusion criteria; justify the criteria and the patient sample), variables (there should be **no** variables in the Results that were not mentioned here), outcomes (primary and secondary, rationale for using these outcomes, supporting references), statistical analysis (software, describe models used, how they were built and selected)

1. **Results**

* **Essential for the discussion**; main results
* General discussion of the **sample and primary and secondary outcomes, presented in logical order of data**
* Minimize redundancy between results presented in text versus those provided in the Tables & Figures section. Highlight key findings, as needed.
* **Your results,** not references
* Usually summarized in 4-5 paragraphs

1. **Discussion**

* **Most important section; sell your data!**
* **Explain the results: What do they mean?**
* **Corresponds with the Results but does not reiterate them**
* Never ignore work in disagreement with yours; convince the reader whose is best
* Avoid unspecific expressions (“higher temperature” / “highly significant”) and sudden introduction of new terms/ideas
* Generally, 4 paragraphs:   
  ¶1: briefly summarize the study findings, set the stage for the rest of the discussion   
  ¶ 2: place/interpret results in context of existing literature regarding the topic, describe why they are important  
  ¶ 3-4: why did this study/these results matter? Focus on studies directly related to your project

1. **Conclusion**

* **Brief and clear justification for your work**, suggest future experiments
* Supported by **Results**

1. **References**

* Numbered in order of citation
* **Verify journal guidelines**

1. **Tables & Figures**

* **Verify journal guidelines**
* Clear and informative; translate key findings into a graphic format to maximize the amount of information available without confusing readers
* Every Table and Figure should be able to “stand alone”
* Avoid crowded plots and long, boring tables (can be put in supplemental material)

1. **Editing**

* This is step is critical and REQUIRED. Another pair of eyes can be vital for your manuscript and could be the determining factor for publication.
* The PRI Editing Department can spot mistakes in both grammar and comprehension, two very important elements when submitting a manuscript for publication.