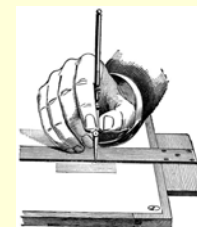
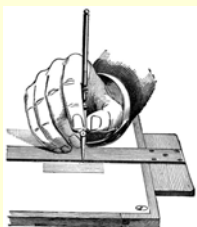


**Ishfahan University of Medical Sciences**  
**Vice-Chancellory for Research**  
**Ishfahan, Iran**  
**13-14 May 2009**



**Workshop**

**Manuscript editing and  
research publication**



**Karen Shashok, Granada, Spain**  
**AuthorAID in the Eastern Mediterranean**  
**[kshashok@kshashok.com](mailto:kshashok@kshashok.com)**

# Part 1

International scientific, technical and medical research publishing: current aspects and readers' needs



**M. Xeridat, in Van Kolschooten F. Can you believe what you read? Nature 2002;416:360-363**

# 1. Science journals: service to the research community or profit-making product?



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“NPG journals had the **highest rated impact factor** in every discipline in which we publish; the newly-launched Nature Reviews showed **impact factors 2-3 times higher** than their long-established **competitors** which have been published for over 15 years, and Nature Materials debuted with an **impact factor** of 10.8, **outstripping its main competitor**, Advanced Materials, by over 3 points to be not only the **highest ranked journal** in Materials Science but in all of physics.”

(Charkin 2004)

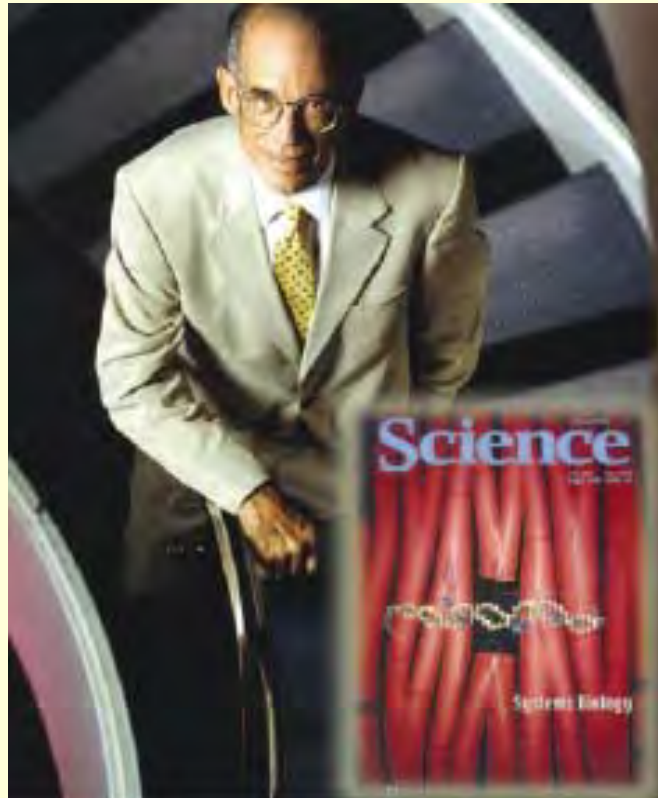
In July 2007 AAAS, publishers of *Science*, removed this journal from JSTOR.



**M. Xeridat, in  
Van  
Kolschooten F.  
Can you believe  
what you read?  
Nature  
2002;416:360-363**



In January 2008 the AAAS quietly agreed to allow *Science* to be included in JSTOR again, but gave no information about the terms.



**M. Xeridat, in Van  
Kolschooten F.  
Can you believe  
what you read?  
Nature  
2002;416:360-363**

Two main economic models:  
**Commercial vs. society (not-for-profit) publisher.**

Both produce good journals to attract good manuscripts.

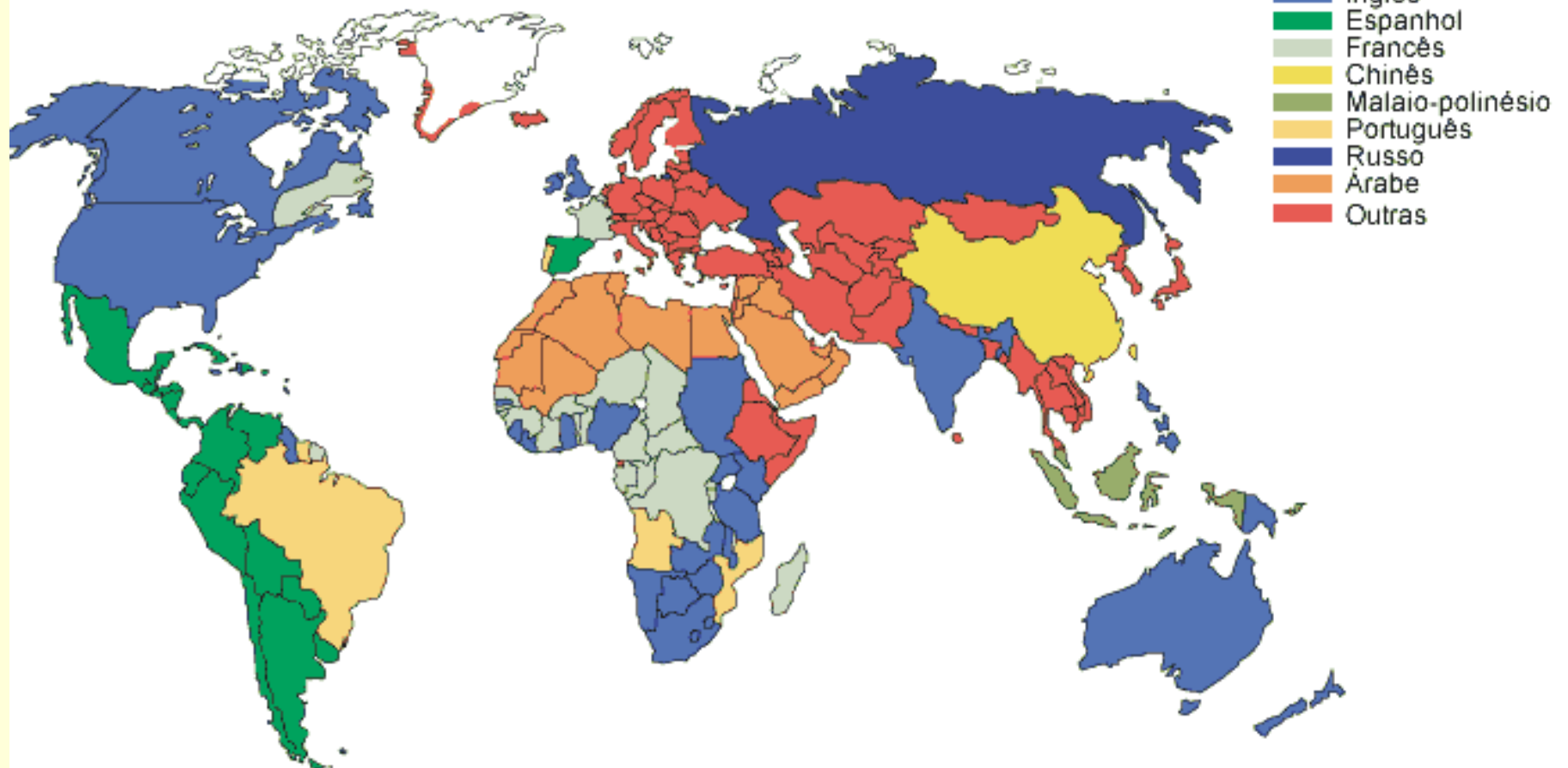
Insight into their policies can help authors select target journals with better chances of **success**:

- more favorable reception
- faster review and publication



## 2. Anglocentrism and globalization

Mapa Lingüístico e suas principais línguas



English linguistic imperialism:  
“the dominance asserted and  
maintained by the establishment and  
continuous reconstitution of structural  
and cultural inequalities between  
English and other languages”

**(Anonymous, Wikipedia, citing Robert Phillipson)**

“It appears that Google [is] beginning to evolve into a one-stop place for research despite the severe limitations of Google’s search technology, especially for the academic community.”

**(Esposito 2008)**

More information (too much!),  
therefore less time to analyze  
information critically.

Increasing dependence on  
information technology.

Literature review strategies  
narrower and less complete than in  
the pre-Internet era.

# **Consequences for literature searches:**

Important sources tend to be overlooked:

- 1. older studies (pre-Internet publishing technology)**
- 2. studies not available online (access policies)**
- 3. studies not in English**

Therefore:

To reach the right **readers**,  
researchers need to have

1. good research skills
2. good information-seeking skills
3. good writing skills
4. a publication strategy



What should **authors** want?

An optimal match between your work and the journal's mission

(Guyatt and Haynes, 2006)

How can the article be exposed to the greatest number of most interested **readers**?

# Part 2. What do editors want?



**M. Xeridat, in Van Kolschooten  
F. Can you believe what you  
read? Nature 2002;416:360-363**

**The Guardian**



# Pressure to publish

“Whether based on impact factor, reputation or expertise, the venue chosen for publication can have a significant impact on the visibility of the study [...]. The prestige of the journal has become a surrogate for the quality of the work itself.”

**Casadevall A, Fang FC. Is peer review censorship? (Editorial). Infect Immunol 2009. DOI: 10:1128/IAI.00018-09. Downloaded iai.asm.org 3 March 2009**

# **Criteria gatekeepers use to accept and reject manuscripts**

# **Manuscripts that**

- 1. report original research**
- 2. are not being considered by other journals simultaneously**
- 3. are written in English good enough to be understood by non-native English peer reviewers**

## **Manuscripts that**

- 4. follow the journal's rules for format and style**
- 5. are of interest to the journal's readers (Aims and scope)**
- 6. do not have ethical problems**
- 7. have high "priority"**



## **Priority:**

“an imprecise term that is meant to convey importance, preference, suitability, and interest to the readership”

**Casadevall A, Fang FC. Is peer review censorship? (Editorial). Infect Immunol 2009. DOI: 10:1128/IAI.00018-09. Downloaded iai.asm.org 3 March 2009**

At ***BMJ***:

- sound science and statistics
- new information
- papers that will be read and cited
- papers that are well written

(Langdon-Neuner 2008)

## At *JAMA*

- original material
- clear writing
- appropriate methods, valid data
- reasonable conclusions supported by data
- important, general medical interest

## At *The Lancet*

- original
- advances or illuminates medical science or practice
- educates or entertains readers
- international, general, medical

## At *Diabetologia*:

- tell a story
- message communicated in 2-3 sentences
- new, interesting
- basic information for a sensible and intelligent reader unfamiliar with the subject area

(Gale 2008)

# Articles likely to

1. have a high impact
2. receive media coverage  
(controversial, current topics)
3. have high citation potential
4. increase the impact factor

(Chew, Villanueva and Van Der Weyden 2007)



# **How to satisfy the gatekeeper's expectations**

1. Make sure the subject of your research fits the journal's **Aims and scope**.

Read the **Aims and scope** or review the **Table of contents** of several recent issues.

2. Follow the **Instructions to Authors** (Guidelines for manuscript preparation)

For resubmittal to a **different journal**, follow the new journal's Instructions to Authors.

Less work for the editorial office means more work for authors.

“Journal instructions are usually not helpful for authors; they are designed to make sure the journal has as little work to do as possible in adapting the paper.”

**Heseltine E. Do non-native English scientists learn how to write in English? EASE-Forum posting, 6 April 2009**

**3.** Don't submit a draft. Submit the most perfect manuscript you can, to make a good first impression.

- in-house peer review
- review by an intelligent reader (not necessarily a subject expert)
- good editing and proofreading, **especially the references**

# Part 3

## Choosing the right journal



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# 1. Choosing the **right journal:** **exposure to the greatest number of** **most interested readers**

Ask yourself:

Who needs to know this information to become a better practitioner or researcher?

What journals do these people **read**?

Aim for “an optimal match between your work and the journal’s mission”  
(Guyatt and Haynes, 2006)

If the match is good, your article will be exposed to the **greatest number of most interested readers.**

**Look for the readers who need to know what you found.**

- Readership, relevance, scope, editorial board members, usefulness, applicability**
- Research evaluation and grant committees**

## 2. Dissemination and access

Write to satisfy the **readers' expectations.**

Write specifically for the type of article (original research, short communication, case report, letter, review, meta-analysis, editorial, etc.)

## **2. Dissemination and access**

Publish in an **open access** journal.

Colleagues in settings with limited resources can obtain your article.

## **2. Dissemination and access**

Publish in **another language in addition to English.**

Users who cannot read English fluently can obtain access to your findings and insights.

## 2. Dissemination and access

Users who cannot read English fluently can obtain access to your findings and insights.

- Lay public (patients)
- Journalists
- Primary care, general practitioners, nurses, other care providers

### **3. Tools to find the right journal**

- Reference list
- PubMed search
- Table of contents of candidate journals
- Editorial boards
- List of approved journals for academic credit



### **3. Tools to find the right journal**

What about the Impact Factor?

- Criteria not transparent and not consistent
- Higher IF reflects size of citing population, not quality of the articles

Would you make a clinical decision based on an indirect or surrogate indicator?

## Part 4

Writing to make your results easy to understand



1. A **title** that reflects the contents

What subjects? What population?

What conditions? Where?

What setting (local, national,  
regional, international)?

Experimental or observational  
(noninterventive)?

When?

# 1. Title

Emphasis on the hypothesis, the method, or the results?

Should the title state the conclusion?

Consult examples in your **target journal**.

2. An **abstract** that reflects the contents.

Re-revise the abstract after the main manuscript is completely finished.

## **2. Abstract**

No discrepancies in the information in the abstract, main text, and tables or figures for:

**terminology, sample size, population size, numerical data.**

3. An **Introduction** that attracts attention and identifies the **target population** of readers

- Interesting first sentence
- Identify the problem or gap in knowledge.
- State your proposed solution.
- Say how you tested your solution.

### 3. Introduction

Should the Introduction end with a summary of the conclusions?

Often, in social science and humanities journals.

Usually not, in science, technical or medical journals.

Check your **target journal**.



## 4. **Methods** that don't keep secrets.

No secret ingredients or secret techniques please!



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## 4. Methods

Supplementary information?

Internet publishing means unlimited space *but* readers don't have unlimited time to search and read everything.

5. **Results** that focus on the question asked in the Introduction.

**Figures and tables** that focus on the question asked, and the data that help readers answer it for themselves without reading the Discussion.

**5. Results that focus on the question asked in the Introduction.**

If you present data clearly, the readers will be able to foresee your conclusions, and your article will be more convincing.

6. A **Discussion** that **explains** what your findings mean.

Answer the **question** you asked in the **Introduction**.

6. A **Discussion** that is **critical** of your own study.

- Identify the limitations.
- Explain how far the conclusions can be generalized.
- Suggest new studies that could help answer questions that require more data.

6. Should the **Discussion** begin with a summary of the results?

It depends on the discipline and the editor's preference. Check your **target journal**.

## 4. EXERCISE

Please write a title for the abstracts.

What specialty do you think the articles are from?

What specialists need to read this article to improve their research or clinical care?



## 4. EXERCISE

1. Interaction between p53 codon 72 polymorphism and melanocortin 1 receptor variants on suntan response and cutaneous melanoma risk

*British Journal of **Dermatology***

2. Germline and somatic c-met mutations in multifocal/bilateral and sporadic papillary renal carcinomas of selected patients

*International Journal of **Oncology***

3. Mechanism of hypotensive transients associated with abrupt bradycardias in conscious rabbits

*Canadian Journal of **Cardiology***



**Who** can help you improve your writing?

Native speakers of English?

Specialized translator or author's editor?

Scientific peers and subject experts?

## ***1. Language and usage:***

Grammar and syntax

Specialized terminology and usage

## ***2. Content and writing:***

Organization and logical flow

Rhetoric and persuasiveness

*Grammar, syntax:*

Well-educated native speaker,  
preferably with specialized  
knowledge

*Terminology, usage:*

Subject expert or specialized  
translator or editor

*Organization, logical flow:*

Reviewer or well-educated native speaker, translator/editor

*Rhetoric, persuasiveness:*

Reviewer or experienced translator or editor, preferably with specialized knowledge

## **Local peers and advisors**

Experts in the scientific content

## **Author's editors**

Experts in written communication

When? Before manuscript submittal

# **Author's editors**

- help authors to produce writing that will effectively communicate their message to the target audience
- help ensure that the text is read with respect for and attention to the content



Good language professionals are more sensitive to and tolerant of alternative uses of English than journal gatekeepers are.

Language professionals usually know more about good English than the reviewers and editors.

If you are able to identify the types of problems in the writing, you will be able to identify the best person to help you.

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## 5. EXERCISE

Please analyze the sample manuscript to see if it satisfies the goals for clear writing.

Please identify different types of writing problems: use of “the English” (language and writing) or scientific content and logic.

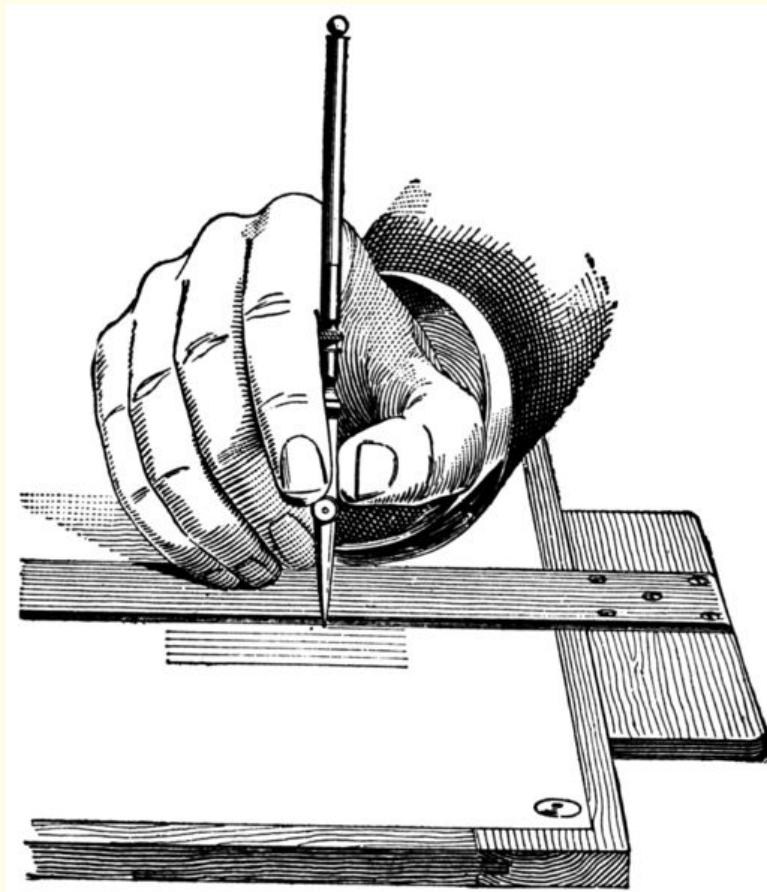
## 5. EXERCISE (cont.)

Do you think the readers of the article will be confident in the study and convinced about the findings?

Please note places where the manuscript 1) inspires confidence or 2) may lead the reader to have doubts.

# Part 6

Good scientific English style  
Some practical examples



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# Goal: a text that is clear and accurate, not a work of art

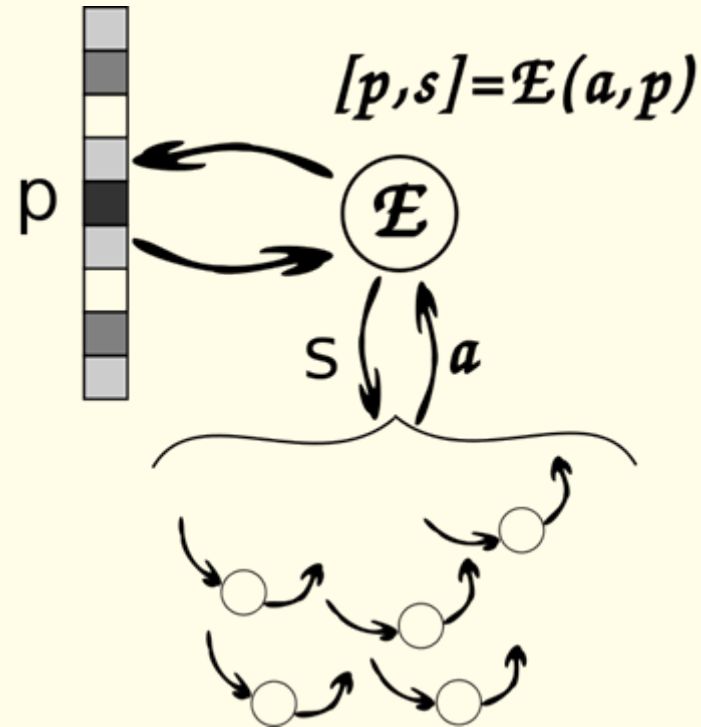


EL SEQVENTE triúpho nó meno mirauagliofo d'l primo. Impo che gli hauea le q̄tro uolubile rote tutte, & gli radii, & il medittullo defu fco achate, di cãdide uẽule uagamẽte uaricato. Ne tale certãnte gẽstoe re Pyrho cũ le noue Muse & Apolline i medio pulsãte dalla natura ip̄sso.

Laxide & la forma del dicto q̄le el primo, ma le tabelle eraõ di cyaneo Saphyro orientale, atomato de scintillule doro, alla magica gratissimo, & longo acceptissimo a cupidine nella finistra mano.

Nella tabella dextra mirai exscalpto una insigne Matrõa che dui oui hauea parturito, in uno cubile regio colloca ta, di uno mirabile pallacio, Cum obstetricẽ stu pefacte, & multe altre matrone & astante Nymphe Degli quali uscua de uno una flammula, & delaltro ouo due spectatissime stelle.

\* \*  
\*



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# How do I start writing?

- Use whatever strategy works for you.
- Be prepared to think hard about who your **readers** will be and what they need to know.
- Be prepared to make many changes.

# Writing strategies

- Make notes or draft parts of the text any time you have an idea.
- Make an outline.
- Make a list of references that should be cited.
- Write the easy parts first and the hard parts last.



Make English your ally for clear communication, not your opponent.

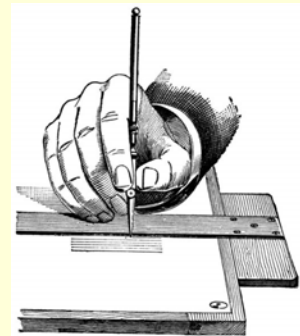
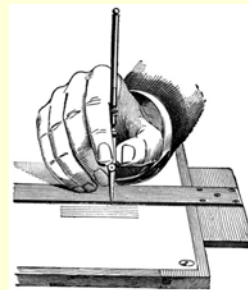
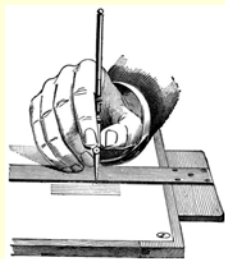
The reader needs to be convinced that your findings are **logical, valid, and supported by solid evidence**, not impressed by your writing style.



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1. A simple and boring text is better than a complex, “interesting” text that is hard to understand.

2. Revise, correct and rewrite patiently.  
It is normal for a good article to be rewritten many times before it is clear enough for **readers** to understand easily.



3. Ask a specific **question**. Provide a specific **answer**.

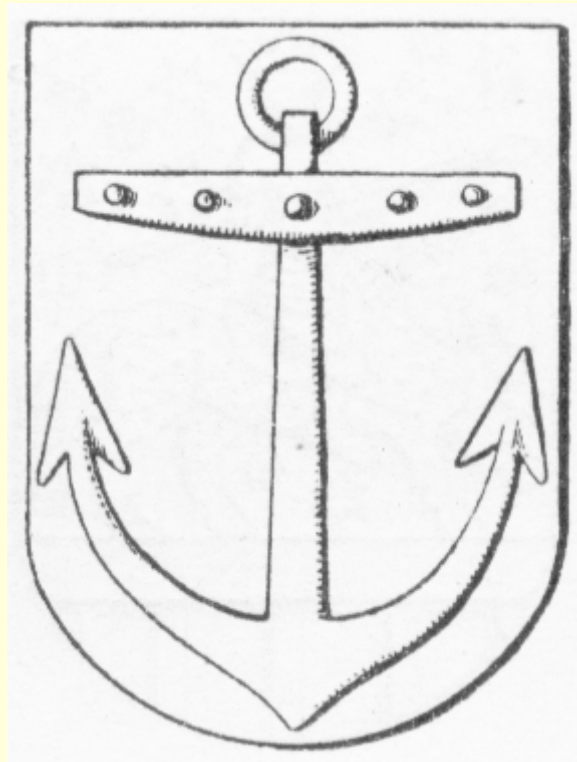
Your **statement of purpose** (at the end of the Introduction) is the anchor for the whole article.

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3. Refer to your **statement of purpose** often while writing and revising, to stay focussed on the aim of the study and the new, original, key results.

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4. What are your **results** and **what do they mean for other researchers?**

**Eliminate** discussion and references that are not related to the research question posed in the Introduction.



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5. Relate the **conclusions** explicitly to the **aim of the study**.



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Tell a simple story to explain and convince, not to deceive or oversell.

The human element is okay.

A narrative sequence that mentions surprises, insights or even errors helps to keep the **readers** interested in the conclusions.

**How does your research story end?**



6. **Don't copy and paste** from other articles. The English may not be very good.

Many articles in an unreadable writing style are published even in top journals.

would tell us that writing well can boost the authors' chances of getting published. Even so, attention to language among scientists is still scant, which would account for the number of unreadable articles published even in top-tier journals. In a Letter published in the *British Medical Journal*<sup>6</sup>, the author reports that "over the past 20 years..." many articles have shown "that medical information (such as journal articles, informed consent forms) is written in an 'unreadable' writing style." Among the authors of such texts are NES researchers, as even those writing in their mother tongue can be poor writers. However, improving writing skills in the native

Vasconcelos SMR. Writing up research in English: Choice or necessity? Rev Col Bras Cir 2007; 34:1-2

## 6. EXERCISE

Please edit sentences or paragraphs from the sample manuscript to make the text easier to understand.

## **Part 7**

Peer review, feedback, and manuscript revision:

Accept good advice but resist bad advice.

“Researchers overwhelmingly (90%) said the main area of effectiveness of peer review was in improving the quality of the published paper, and a similar percentage said it had improved their own last published paper, including **identifying scientific errors and missed and inaccurate references.**”

(Ware 2008)

“Our experience is that **substantial improvements** on the basis of reviewers’ comments **are unusual, but do happen on occasion.**”

(Guyatt and Haynes 2006)

## **Competencies:**

Scientific expertise or  
language/writing expertise?

Are reviewers always right about  
the English, the language and the  
writing?

For most researchers, and therefore most reviewers, English is not their first language.

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**Even manuscripts written by native speakers of English are frequently criticized for poor English.**

It has frequently been said that despite the fact of having English as their first language, authors who fulfil this criterion may nonetheless receive frequent negative feedback due to the unfeasibility of discerning the meaning in their written communications.



“Far from this being an occasional occurrence, it seems that the **excuse of poor English is used as a way of rejecting manuscripts**, a handy tool to have in these days of heavy submission loads and the need to ‘cull’ manuscripts before peer review.”

(Cooter 2008)

“Through the Anglo-American hegemony, UK- and US-based referees’ comments often not only force a non-native English-speaking author to rewrite his/her paper, but also increase the ‘creative destruction’ of a paper.”

**Aalbers MB. Creative destruction through the Anglo-American hegemony: a non-Anglo-American view on publications, referees, and language. *Area* 2004; 36: 319-322**

# Revising for resubmittal

“If I believe a **referee is mistaken** in his/her concern, and I know a way to defuse that mistaken concern without telling the referee that he/she is mistaken, then I will use that way because the probability of surviving the review process decreases when referee concerns are challenged rather than accepted.”

(Wright and Armstrong 2008, quoting an anonymous researcher)

If the **gatekeepers** responsible for editorial quality control are **not trained in quality control skills**, we cannot assume they are all skillful editors or reviewers, even though they are very skillful researchers and subject experts.

Gatekeepers are usually happy to learn.

But gatekeepers may assume omniscience and overestimate their expertise.

**(Shashok 2008)**

## 7. EXERCISE

What should you do if you disagree with a reviewer's criticism or request for modification in the manuscript? Why?

# Conclusions



[www.shirazcity.org](http://www.shirazcity.org)

Every journal is different, every editor is different, but good writing is the same: **clear, rigorous and convincing.**

Impartial Judgment by the “Gatekeepers” of Science: Fallibility and Accountability in the Peer Review Process

## Methods

### Participants and procedures

To measure mortality we did a national cross-sectional cohort study of deaths from January, 2002, through July, 2006. Household information was gathered about deaths that occurred between January of March 18, 2003, in all households compared with deaths that occurred through to the date of 12000 was calculated to doubling of an estimated pr

AT<sup>1\*</sup>, JOSEPH S. GONNELLA<sup>1</sup> and H<sup>2</sup>

## RESULTS

### Methodological and Statistical Content Study

Less than half of the 166 journals provided information on statistical methods (Table 1). Eighty-seven percent (13/15) of general journals and 36% (54/151) of specialty journals made reference to ICMJE uniform requirements.<sup>11</sup> Fifty-three percent



## Clear:

The **reader** doesn't need to read the same sentence or paragraph more than once, and can navigate all parts of the article easily.

## **Rigorous:**

- The results (including tables and figures) follow from the methods.
- The discussion follows from the introduction.
- Limitations and possible additional studies are noted.

# Convincing:

- Focus on answering the question asked in the introduction.
- Don't overstate or exaggerate your conclusions.
- Search for and correct technical errors.

# Convincing:

Be confident in the interest and usefulness of **your** findings.



**Thank-you very much for your participation.**

**AuthorAID in the Eastern Mediterranean**