

Sentence Structure in Scientific Writing

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Scientific writing must be precise, often requiring a fine level of detail. Though careful description of objects, forces, organisms, methodology, etc., can easily lead to complex sentences expressing too many ideas without a break point, scientific writing should be in easily understood complete and simple sentences.

Nearly every form of scientific communication is space-limited. Grant proposals, journal articles, and abstracts all have word or page limits, creating a premium on concise writing. Furthermore, adding unnecessary words or phrases distracts rather than engages the reader. Your reader will decide whether or not your paper is interesting based on the content, not on the complexity of your sentences.

Here are some suggestions regarding sentence structure to ensure you are constructing precise and easily understood sentences:

1. Create sentences using carefully chosen subjects and strong verbs to express your central meaning.
2. Omit needless words and empty phrases such as "the fact that," "it should be noted that," and "it is interesting that" (see our newsletter on word usage at <http://www.sfcedit.net/newsletters.htm>).
3. Use definite, specific, and precise language, avoid overuse of figurative language and technical jargon. Scientific terminology carries specific meanings - use it appropriately and consistently.
4. Choose a familiar term instead of a technical or obscure term. The more familiar term is preferable when it doesn't reduce precision.
5. Use quantitative rather than qualitative descriptions whenever possible.
6. Use the active voice and active constructions as much as possible, the passive voice only sparingly.
7. Keep related words together. Subjects should be close to their verbs, modifiers near the words they modify.
8. Express parallel ideas in parallel form. Parallel ideas are ideas equal in logic and importance.



9. Include only interesting and noteworthy information.

10. Write simple and direct sentences. English is easiest to understand that way.

For more detailed information regarding writing a manuscript for publication, please review some of our other articles at <http://www.sfcedit.net/newsletters.htm>. These articles approach such subjects as Writing the First Draft, Writing Effective Results, Methods and Materials, Discussions, Selecting a Journal, Responding to Reviewers, etc.