

WRITING TIPS

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0. BACK UP YOUR WORK IN MULTIPLE PLACES. Email yourself a copy. Keep one copy in one city and another copy on the other side of the country, that way in case of a nuclear war you may at least salvage your work!

1. When writing papers, abstracts, talks, etc., ALWAYS append a version number and save EVERYTHING until you are done. There are several reasons. First, if the software corrupts your file, the only copy you have is gone. Second, if you save over previous versions, then you may later wish to go back and get some text you had deleted. This is not possible if you do not save the work by a different name at every step.

I add three hyphens and then 001. This allows for 999 versions. On one paper, my colleagues and I got up to something like 253 versions!

2. There are two spaces between sentences. This is debated in modern writing. I still find it easier to read. Its best to make it easy for me, as my grading tends to be better when I am happy.

3. ALWAYS check MSWord complaints (red or green). Right-click on each one to find out the problem. Fix it if necessary. Click ignore if it does not need fixing (be careful doing this as you may have missed the problem). There is nothing more annoying than proofreading a paper filled with spelling and grammatical errors which MSWord has kindly and obviously underlined, but that the writer after careful proofreading has somehow missed.

4. It is not about writing. It is about re-writing. Go over it---not once---not twice, but many many times.

5. Also, when several words are used together to act as a single adjective, they should be hyphenated.

6. Never start a sentence with an equation or a number.

7. Integers less than 10 should be written using the word.

Example: I have 10 frogs, one wart and zero princes!

8. Equations should enter into text as a phrase enters a sentence. They should be punctuated as such, with a comma or period.

9. Label all figure axes. Captions should describe the figure. Captions, labels, and the figure should be clear and readable. ALL figures and tables should be explicitly discussed and referred to in the main text. The caption is not your document's main text.

10. Define all acronyms. Use acronyms only if necessary.

11. Make sure that you notation is consistent. Example: X-ray imaging is performed by subjecting an object to a beam of x rays. Can you find the inconsistency?
12. Be mindful of significant digits, and always compute and present your uncertainties.
13. Be sure to properly cite your references. Failing to properly cite your references is regarded as plagiarism.