Effective and efficient writing: tips for your first to your \( n \)th article?

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1. Writing is hard...why bother?
   a. Nobody is born with an innate ability to write...it is a learnt skill.
   b. Some have learnt to do it and so can you
   c. There are many rewards to writing...

2. Tips for writing more efficiently
   a. Build good habits
   b. Make a schedule that includes dedicated writing time
      i. Is there a day and time when you are always free?
      ii. Identify the time of day that you write best (usually early in the morning, but everybody is different)
   c. Remove distractions, including email, phones, TV, family, friends, pets, etc.
   d. Set clear and realistic goals
      i. Focus on the parts rather than the whole
      ii. Set a daily goal (e.g., write 200 words, complete a paragraph, finish a figure, etc.)
      iii. Establish a writing group and hold each other accountable
   e. Make a start

3. Tips for writing more effectively
   a. Writing order differs from publication order
   b. Writing order = methods, results (methods tweaking), introduction, discussion, abstract, title
   c. Methods
      i. Use notebook during study (backed-up electronic notes are best)
      ii. Write sequentially in order of that data is presented
      iii. Methods need to be sufficiently detailed to allow replication, yet brief...do not need to extensively describe standard, well-accepted techniques (focus on study specific deviations)
      iv. \( \leq 4 \) double-spaced pages are ideal
   d. Results
      i. Clear and succinct data presentation is critical
      ii. Always start with tables and figures...text writes itself around the tables and figures
      iii. Use a dry-erase board to map flow and appearance
      iv. Let the data tell the story
      v. No such things as ‘trend’ or ‘approaching significance’
   e. Introduction
      i. Keep it short!! (general rule: \( \leq 2 \) double-spaced pages; up to 5 paragraphs
      ii. Paragraph examples: 1) What is the question/issue; 2) relevant previous research findings; 3) limitations of previous research and need for further study, and; 4) purpose of current work
      iii. Tell a story that provides rationale for the current work...do not report every previous study
   f. Discussion
      i. Keep it short!! (general rule: \( \leq 4 \) double double-spaced pages
      ii. Paragraph examples: 1) overall summary of findings, without simply restating the data, 2-5) relationships to other findings and what current study adds, 6) modest strengths [one sentence] and open discussion of study limitations, and; 7) short concluding re-summary and future directions
The peer review process and the reviewer’s contribution
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The Review Process:

1. Author Submits Manuscript
2. Are Journal Requirements Met?
   - Yes: Invites External Peer Review
   - No: Inform Author
3. Manuscript is Pre-screened?
   - Yes: Invites External Peer Review
   - No: Reject Manuscript
4. If Rejected, End of Process
   - Yes: Paper Returned to Author
   - No: Inform Author
5. Paper Returned to Author
6. Author Submits Revised Manuscript
7. Revised Manuscript Sent to Reviewers & EBM
8. Reviewers send Comments to Editorial Office & EBM
9. EBM & Editor Communicate to Author; Thank Reviewers
10. EBM Reviews Paper and Reviews, Makes Recommendation to Editor
11. Editor Decides Disposition
12. If Rejected, End of Process
   - Yes: End of Process
   - No: Further Revisions Requested
13. If Further Revisions Requested
14. Revised Manuscript Sent to Reviewers & EBM
15. EBM Reviews Paper and Reviews, Makes Recommendation to Editor
16. Editor Decides Disposition
17. If Rejected, End of Process
18. If Further Revisions Requested, End of Process
19. If Revised Manuscript Accepted, End of Process
The Reviewer’s Role:
Adapted from: https://science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/scientific-experiments/scientific-peer-review1.htm

Peer review, also known as refereeing, is the cornerstone of science. It is a process whereby a scientist's research is assessed for quality before it is published. The "peer" in peer review means that the scientist in question will submit his work to other experts in the field. It's the job of the reviewers to comment on the quality, significance and originality of the research. Reviewers aren’t the ultimate arbiters about whether research should be published, but their comments inform the editorial decision makers.

Questions to Ask When Reviewing a Research Paper:
Does the paper fit the standards and scope of the journal it is being considered for?
Is the research question clear?
Was the approach appropriate?
Is the study design, methods and analysis appropriate to the question(s) being studied?
Is the study innovative or original?
Does the study challenge existing paradigms
Does the study add to existing knowledge in a meaningful way?
Does it develop novel concepts?
Are the study findings impactful?
Are the methods described clearly enough for other researchers to replicate?
Are the methods of statistical analysis appropriate?
Could presentation of the results be improved?
Do the study results answer the research question(s)?
If humans, human tissues or animals are involved, was ethics approval gained and was the study ethical?
If a clinical trial, was it registered?
Are the conclusions appropriate?

What Should One Review?

Peer Review Offers....
**Time to reflect:** The process provides a reviewer with the opportunity to reflect on someone else’s work and to provide thoughtful comment using his/her own knowledge and expertise of the subject.

**Research quality:** Peer review provides some quality assurance to consumers of research.

**Understanding our ethical responsibility as researchers:** Health care research may impact people’s lives. The way in which we conduct research and the basis upon which we make claims should therefore be subject to scrutiny. Authors and reviewers share this ethical responsibility.

**Training:** Engaging in the process of peer review as a reviewer contributes to your training and development as a researcher. Reviewing the work of others has helped one think more critically about one’s own work.

**Helping each other:** Peer review makes one part of the scientific community. There is some satisfaction in knowing that one’s input may improve a piece of research, and that others may do likewise for you.

**Types of Peer Review:**

**Single blind review**

The names of the reviewers are hidden from the author. Pros and cons:

- Reviewer anonymity allows for impartial decisions.
- Authors may be concerned that reviewers in their field could delay publication, giving the reviewers a chance to publish first.
- Reviewers may use their anonymity as justification for being unnecessarily critical or harsh when commenting on the authors’ work.

**Double-blind review**

Both the reviewer and the author are anonymous in this model. Pros and cons:

- Author anonymity limits reviewer bias, for example based on an author’s gender, country of origin, academic status or previous publication history.
- Articles written by prestigious or renowned authors are considered on the basis of the content of their papers, rather than their reputation.
• Reviewers can often identify the author through their writing style, subject matter or self-citation

**Triple-blind review**

Reviewers are anonymous and the author's identity is unknown to both the reviewers and the editor. Articles are anonymized at the submission stage. Pros and cons:

• Minimizes any potential bias towards the author(s).
• The complexities involved with anonymizing articles/authors to this level are considerable
• There remains a possibility for the editor and/or reviewers to correctly divine the author’s identity from their style, subject matter, citation patterns, etc.

**Open review**

Open peer review is an umbrella term for many different models aiming at greater transparency during and after the peer review process. The most common definition of open review is when both the reviewer and author are known to each other during the peer review process. Other types of open peer review consist of:

• publication of reviewers’ names on the article page.
• publication of peer review reports alongside the article, whether signed or anonymous.
• publication of peer review reports (signed or anonymous) together with authors’ and editors’ responses alongside the article.
• publication of the paper after a quick check and opening a discussion forum to the community who can comment (named or anonymous).
You Have Your Reviewers’ Comments, Now What?

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1. Read them over, then put them away for a day or two
   a. Begin by assuming that the reviewer may be correct
   b. Important to remove emotional response to criticism
      i. The reviewer is not “an idiot”
   c. If the reviewers “didn’t get” the message you were trying to convey, the delivery needs to be revised
      i. the average reader is likely to misunderstand the message as well
      ii. clarity of writing relative to the target audience
   d. A timely resubmission is to your advantage
2. papers that have undergone multiple rounds of peer review fare better in terms of citation counts than those quickly accepted
3. You must respond to all comments
   a. Be polite and respectful
      i. Vast majority of reviewers are volunteers
   b. It’s okay to disagree, but you must justify
      i. Provide objective reasoning, if possible
         1. May involve a secondary analysis that is not included in the paper
   c. Pick your battles
      i. Make the changes that are an obvious improvement
      ii. Make the changes that are a minor improvement
      iii. Make the changes that are of no improvement, but does no harm
   d. Make it clear and easily found
      i. Copy-paste each reviewer comment and provide your written response directly after it
         1. Quote the changes directly in the response
         2. Saves time for the reviewer and reduces the likelihood of finding new concerns
         3. Use a clean format for the response
      ii. Indicate where in the paper the changes can be found (line numbers)
      iii. Depending on the journal, indicate the changes directly in the text (e.g., highlight, underline) but avoid using track-changes unless allowed by the journal
   e. Respect the word limits of the submission
      i. Adding information in response to reviewers comments is not permission to exceed the word limit
4. Simple take home: construct your response as if you were the reviewer

References:


van Hilten L. 3 top tips for responding to reviewer comments on your manuscript. Posted Feb 22, 2015.
https://www.elsevier.com/authors-update/story/publishing-tips/3-top-tips-for-responding-to-reviewer-comments-on-your-manuscript