



Tips for Better Research Writing

Some tips and reminders to help improve your research writing:

- Know who you are writing for. Whether you are writing a proposal, a scientific paper or a report, identify your readers and keep them in mind throughout the writing process. If you are unsure about a publication's audience or purpose, take time to find out.
- Write for your audience, not beyond. Tailor information to your audience. What is appropriate for a proposal or scientific paper is likely to be ineffective for more general audiences. Are your readers familiar with the subject? What *do* they want and need to know? What *do* they *not* need to know? What is the best way to present this important information?
- Organize your thoughts. Clear thinking is crucial to clear writing. Before you start, identify your most important points. Outlining your main points helps organize your thoughts, but don't overdo. A simple checklist suffices as a handy reference.
- Follow directions. Read all instructions before you begin and recheck your finished proposal or article to ensure it matches these requirements.
- Think big picture. Stick to your key points and eliminate unnecessary words and information. Knowing what to leave out is as important as knowing what must stay. Don't force readers to absorb too much information or they will miss your overall message.
- Translate for understanding. Be vigilant about interpreting your work to make it most useful to your audience. If you are writing for people outside your field, explain technical phrases, terms or practices.
- Keep it clear and simple. Help readers make sense of complex or unfamiliar information by simplifying it whenever possible. Explain research in everyday terms and use familiar examples readers can relate to their lives.
- Focus on outcomes. Concentrating on results, outcomes and potential applications makes information relevant to readers. Tell readers what your research means in practical terms.
- Minimize jargon. Plain English and everyday language are powerful. Unfamiliar, foreign terms alienate readers. Every specialty has its own jargon, but such words become barriers to clear communication. Find and use words all readers understand.
- Less usually is more. Don't use big, fancy words when small, plain words will do. The same goes for sentences and paragraphs. Big words and complex sentences confuse, frustrate and exclude readers. Even experts in the field appreciate clear, simple information.

- Use active language. Active voice energizes your writing and boosts readability. Scout your copy for passive voice sentences and rewrite them in active voice whenever possible.
- Finish and walk away. When you finish your article, put it aside for a day or two, if possible. When you return to it, forget you know anything about this topic and read with a fresh, critical editor's eye. Look for anything that is redundant, unclear or extraneous and fix it. Better yet, have someone else read it.
- Good writing is not easy. Just because something reads easily does not mean it was easy to write. The opposite often is true. Good writing demands discipline, diligence and a willingness to scrutinize your work.