

Planning a Paper

Professor Judy Williams

*Head of the Centre for Academic and
Researcher Development
Deputy Associate Dean for Staff Development
Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health*

Judith.williams@manchester.ac.uk



“Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead”

Gene Fowler

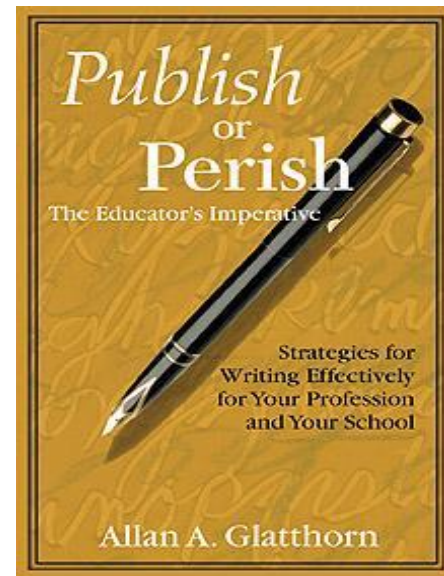
So why write and publish research papers?

Ideally:

- To share research findings and discoveries
- To solidify research ideas and generate new ones
- Advance the field and improve healthcare.

Practically:

- To make your viva easier
- To get a job
- To get promoted



Your experiences

- What makes a high quality research paper?
- What makes a poor research paper?



Overcoming the emotional challenges of academic writing

- View writing as a conversation not carving in tablets of stone
- Progression operates against depression
- Get into a rhythm - safeguard your '2 golden hours'

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgance/ntre/methods-and-resources/av-resources/the-emotional-challenges-of-writing>

What makes a poor research paper?

Most common reasons for rejection

- Confirmatory (not novel)
- Poor experimental design
 - Poor controls
 - Hypothesis not adequately tested
- Inappropriate for journal
- Poorly written

What makes a good research paper?

- Good science
- Good writing
- Publication in good journals

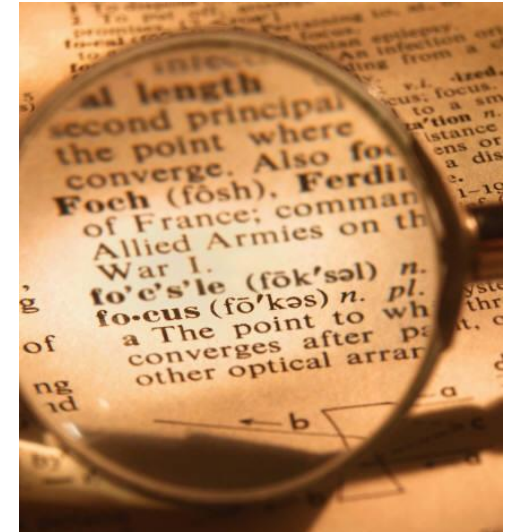
The first step to an effective publication

1.

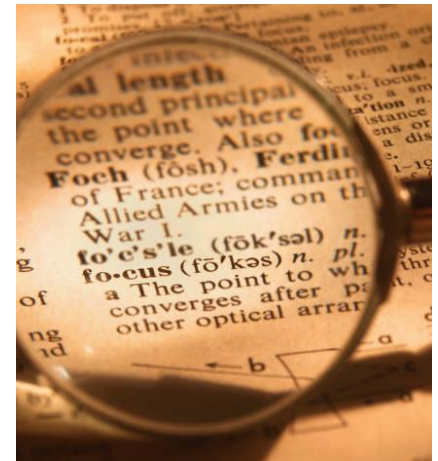
Key message statement

You need a key message statement to stay focused

- A simple concise statement
 - summarises what your results show
 - their broader implications
 - what is novel about your findings
 - why your research advances the field



Start writing your key message statement



- A paragraph that sums up your research
 - Spend 2 minutes working on your ideas
 - Discuss them with the person next to you
 - Was it easier to explain your work than write it?
 - If so then go about the process differently



The second step to an effective publication

1. Key message statement

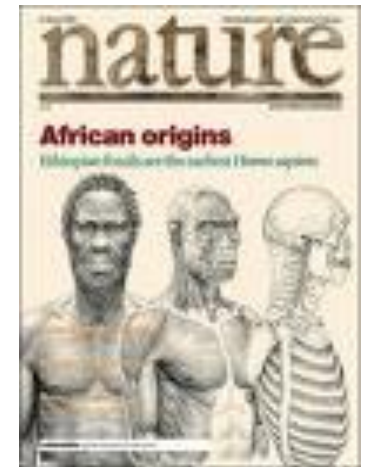
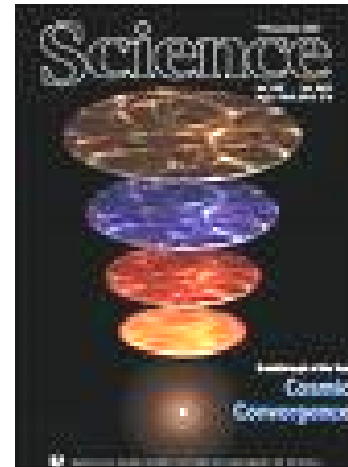
2. Appropriate target journal

What constitutes a good journal?

Impact factor – average number of times published papers are cited up to two years after publication

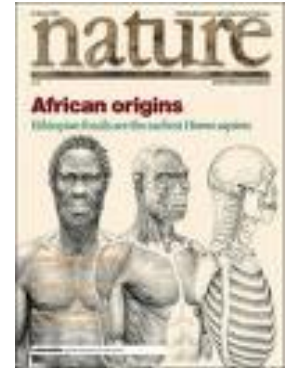
Circulation – how many readers and how widely the journal is circulated

Specialist versus
more general journal?



Choosing a target journal

- Aim high for your first submission
 - but be pragmatic
- **READ** and get to know the journals in your field
 - scope and audience
 - the kinds of papers they publish
 - average time between submission and publication
- Consult with more experienced colleagues
- Contact the journal editor or send a pre-submission query



Greatest challenge is deciding what to include and exclude

Take your reader on a journey with you...
but what kind?



For your downdraft ignore academic writing style

Titles

- Introduction = What I read
- Methodology = What I did
- Results = What I found
- Discussion = What I reckon

Introduction – Editor's 'dos and don'ts'

**Do keep it relevant,
up-to date & brief**

**Don't make
too long**



**Do end with
an hypothesis**

**Don't use the paper
to publicise
your own work**

Methods – Editor's 'do's and don'ts'

Do describe how the sample was recruited, highlighting representative nature of sample



Do end with a statistical section

Results – Editor's 'dos and don'ts'

**Do present data
indicating nature
of sample**

**Don't present
unreadable data
and p values**



**Do include
response rate**

**Don't present
irrelevant results**

Discussion – Editor's 'dos and don'ts'

Do state whether hypothesis upheld or not

Don't get carried away!



Do count pages and consider reducing text and figures

Don't go beyond/overstate your results

Abstract – Editor's 'dos and don'ts'

Do make abstract match your results



Conclusions must arise from results

An effective title

Histone H3 tail positioning and acetylation by the c-Myb but not the v-Myb DNA-binding SANT domain

Concise

Tom Cruise is dangerous and irresponsible

J. Clin. Invest. **115**:1964–1965 (2005)

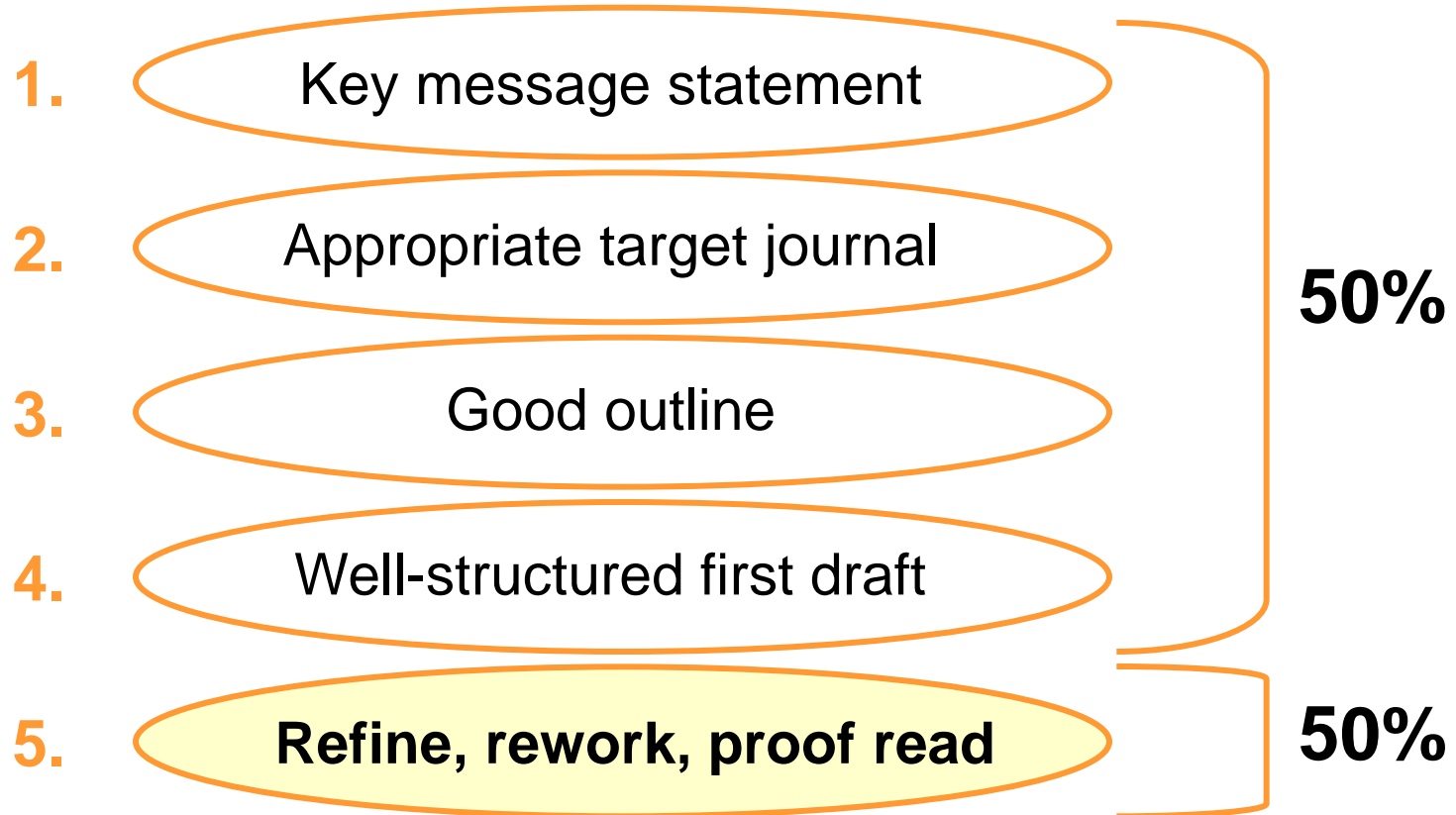
Catches the reader's interest

- Will determine whether paper gets read
- Gives an overview of your study, results and conclusions
- Avoid long titles
- Make it appropriate for the target journal
- Avoid abbreviations

References

- Use an electronic database e.g. Endnote or Refman
<http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/trainingteam/postgraduateskills/>
- Relevant and recent
- Be highly selective
- Read the references
- Do not misquote
- Use correct style for journal

Leave plenty of time for the finishing touches



General writing tips to help you refine and rework your manuscripts.....

- Read well written articles
- Learn from reviewing other peoples work
- Online academic writing support

<http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/trainingteam/postgraduateskills/AcademicWriting/Default.aspx>