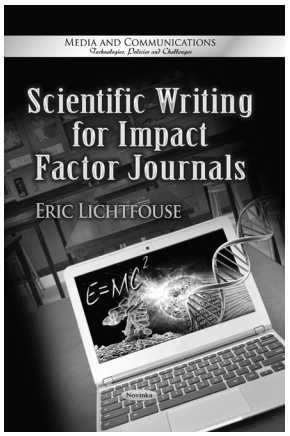
Scientific Writing for Impact Factor Journals

Eric Lichtfouse, Nova Science Publishers, 2013.
Book website: https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=42211
E-book: https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=42242
Book presentation: http://fr.slideshare.net/lichtfouse/scientific-writing-for-impact-factor-journals
Micro-article tool: http://fr.slideshare.net/lichtfouse/micro-arten



In this concise book of 87 pages, Lichtfouse writes to young researchers who assume that the "point of research is to conduct experiments and obtain 'good' results." Furthermore, they assume that once they have the results, the writing will take care of itself. This assumption is far from true: it leads to many blunders. As a journal editor, Lichtfouse advises authors on how to avoid these blunders and write articles that achieve their need—get published— as well as the journal's need—raise its impact factor.

Reformulation

He presents three stages of steps in preparing an article: before, during, and after the experiment. Before the experiment, the author should draft the hypothesis, experimental plan and assessment/analysis. During the experiment, the author should take notes on data measurements, other observations, and assess/analyze them. The step after the experiment includes analysis of results, and article preparation. The value of Lichtfouse's strategy lies in its iterative approach—reformulating main concepts before the student is at the end of his/her thesis period. This requires authors to be alert and open to results that may considerably differ from originally expected, or hoped-for, results. This is, indeed, an excellent strategy that I also find to be effective.

Micro-article

As part of his strategy, Lichtfouse advises authors to write a one-page "micro-article" that summarizes the main messages that will appear in the final article. To do that, an author selects the one main [innovative] result and focuses the micro-article on it—from title to conclusion. In contrast to most books on scientific writing, Lichtfouse clearly describes this very effective technique. And to further sharpen the focus, Lichtfouse gives examples of graphs and figures that present that one main result. Other tips for sharpening focus and avoiding blunders are clearly described in various sections of the book.

Too much information kills information

In a section entitled *Focus*, Lichtfouse nicely suggests ways to avoid blunders. "Too much information kills information," is one such blunder. Young researchers often include too much information and/or unrelated information. I fully agree with Lichtfouse that our educational system trains students to commit this blunder. They learn to demonstrate their knowledge rather than focus on their work. Lichtfouse points out, "their main finding is then hidden amongst a dozen other results." He presents tips and examples that illustrate how an author can more sharply focus on his/her main finding.

Education and dissemination

In this section of the book, Lichtfouse points out that an article is an educational instrument. Especially non-specialist readers want to learn something related to their own work. The general tips in this section, however, could have been better supported with specific examples showing HOW to "educate and disseminate." Although the advice is excellent, I am afraid that without how-to-do-it examples, young researchers will infer that "educating the reader" requires a "textbook" style of writing. And that style can lead to "too much information that kills the information."

Identify the main innovative finding

The advice in *Scientific Writing for Impact Factor Journals* seems to focus on the agricultural and environmental sciences. Some of the advice, however, may not apply to other fields, especially the health-related fields. For example, throughout the book, the young authors are advised to "identify the main innovative finding" and focus on it "because it is all your reader will remember." This overemphasis can mislead young researchers in health-related sciences. In the health-related field, innovative findings are only a means to achieve the higher goal of helping to solve a health-related problem. And those authors should focus on the health-related problem and how their innovative results lead toward solving that problem.

How to write boring articles

In an appendix, Lichtfouse highlights the out-of-date writing style of most scientific articles that we read—a style that does not fit the needs of 21st century science. In that appendix, he has reproduced (with permission) a humorous article that helps authors to write "technical, impersonal and boring papers." In effect, that article points out that published articles do not have to be impersonal and boring. I agree completely, but I wonder if personal and exciting articles would be accepted by peer reviewers and journal editors. But that is a different topic.

In summary, Lichtfouse has written a very readable little book full of excellent advice and tips for young researchers. And, indeed, the size of the book is certainly attractive to young researchers who, just like the rest of us, have little time to read!

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