Academic writing tends to be conventions that are meant to optimize effectiveness (quality of finding) and efficiency (how easily the reader can find what they need).

This Map brings together a number of lessons, tips, and hints about communication in general and academic writing in particular, paying special attention to the (formally oriented) skills and needs of designers as writers and readers.

Many of the principles in here are not just for academic papers. Also infographic posters, presentations, videos, and even agendas have to be clear, offer something new, true, and relevant, and do well to spark a like. But they have different makeup formats, and different opportunities for interaction and visual language.

Don’t expect to get it right in one go. Write, then review it as a reader. Then write. Let it lie down for a night. Then rewrite. Even experienced writers will have a dozen or more draft versions in writing a paper.

DON’T DROWN IN RULES AND TIPS

Write!

In browsing for information, we all use quick scanning to pick up promising bits. Visually-oriented people (designers?) even more so. Even in a text-dominated channel, such as an article, it helps to “catch the eye.” Visually can also organize a complex set of data, give a visual summary of an argument, or give a feel for the ‘real thing.’

Your title appears in a table of contents. Will your reader find it? And notice what it is about?

The keywords are a mini-summary, just like terms in a search query.

The abstract summarizes the entire paper, not just the introduction, but also the findings and conclusions.

A visual can attract attention and summaries or highlight important text. The caption leads the interested reader to a further explanation.

Academic reading (dis)orders

Not everyone reads from the beginning through the end. For a piece of fiction, you, but not you, the reader, no. It may help you to know how your readers navigate your work:

The novice

The strategy is to read from the beginning through the end. The text is a whole fabric; there are no gaps. All parts are integrated. The reader will meander, but the fabric will not unravel.

The expert

The expert delves deeply into the text. He or she reads line by line, takes notes, and embarks on a journey that is as much about the reader as it is about the text. The expert seeks to use the text to gain knowledge, to gain insights, to understand the world. The text is a conversational partner.

The casual reader

The casual reader may skim or scan the text, looking for particular keywords or phrases, looking for particular ideas or themes. The casual reader may not be interested in the text itself, but rather in the ideas or themes that the text presents. The casual reader may be more interested in the text as a whole, rather than in the specific parts of the text.

The genre

The genre of the text also affects how the reader reads it. For example, a scientific journal article will likely be read differently than a novel. The reader of a scientific journal article is more likely to read the text line by line, looking for specific information. The reader of a novel may be more likely to skim or scan, looking for particular themes or ideas.

The purpose

The purpose of the text also affects how the reader reads it. For example, a text that is meant to inform will likely be read differently than a text that is meant to persuade. The reader of an informative text is more likely to read the text line by line, looking for specific information. The reader of a persuasive text may be more likely to skim or scan, looking for particular themes or ideas.

The reader

The reader of the text also affects how the text is read. For example, a reader who is familiar with the topic of the text will likely read the text differently than a reader who is unfamiliar with the topic. The reader who is familiar with the topic is more likely to read the text line by line, looking for specific information. The reader who is unfamiliar with the topic may be more likely to skim or scan, looking for particular themes or ideas.

FIGURES, TABLES, CAPTIONS

Especially in academic publications, there are rules to use figures (graphs), tables, and captions. Why do we use these? Your answer is likely to be predictable.

Visuals

Diagrams highlight abstract relations in a argument.

Tables allow for comparison in several directions. Photos and quotes, can show evidence and explanation as instances for an abstract claim. Use these deliberately: eye-candy (just pretty pictures, not connected to the content) is likely to damage your message (unless maybe if you are making a commercial brochure, but that doesn’t count as academic communication).

Make a Thumbnail Sketch

Designers often are visual thinkers. Academic writing formats are often very fixed (e.g., 4 pages, 2 columns fontsize 10). Before you start writing, think of which core photos, diagrams, and tables you need to mark your point, and make thumbnail sketches to see how large the different sections can be.

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**Academic writing** uses a standard construction to make it more efficient for readers to navigate the document according to titles, subsections, and other common features of the genre. The Academic Phrasebank can be a valuable tool for students who are learning how to write in English for academic purposes.

**TIPS PER SECTION**

- **What (function of the section)**
- **How (tips for writing it)**

**Title**

- The title is the first thing people will see; make it appealing and informative (APA).
- Readers will see the title in a table of contents, so imagine how your title links in a field.

**Authors and Affiliation**

- It is common to say your name, where you work, and provide contact information.
- Academic writing is anonymous; this information should not be in the paper.

**ABSTRACT**

- General papers, overviews, examples from general, – present (general, – only new)
- Don’t forget to place this in the relevant field, and relate your

**Introduction**

- The introduction leads into the problem field where the paper is situated; it starts in general terms, and explains why the paper’s question addressed.
- It can flow directly into the state of the art and new directions.
- In writing the introduction, do not assume that the reader has read the abstract.

**Review and New Ideas**

- When you have indicated your question/thesis/problem, explain the state of the art; what is already known about this in the literature, maybe discuss existing products, etc. This part makes clear what the contribution of your paper is.
- Usually these parts are in a section or in another section of the introduction, and carry a heading that indicates the content, e.g. “Gift-giving in Western culture.”
- It often works best to start with the research questions, then expand your main point, and then show how it fits in and adds to that.
- If you write an empirical paper testing a hypothesis, that hypothesis is explained here.

**Method**

- The method section describes what you did with enough detail for the reader to understand where your results came from – repeat the essence of your method and find results that can be compared to yours.
- Don’t give too much or too little.
- The method is a description of what you did in the past, so, use the past tense (we asked five people).
- This methods section should show the reader that your method was appropriate for the goal of your study (to explore an area widely, or to test a specific hypothesis).

**Literature review**

- The literature part describes how you sought, found, and selected the sources that you reviewed.

**CONCLUSION**

- Esp. especially in empirical papers reporting a quantitative measurement or test of a hypothesis, results can be straightforward, and their summarizing statistics, presented as such, presented as a fact, without discussion.

**Discussion**

- In the discussion, you interpret the results, and make sense of what they mean for your story.
- For exploratory, qualitative studies, separating data and interpretation can become very difficult for both reader and writer, and a single section finds and Discussion is made.
- Still helps the readability if the author clearly separates data from interpretation.

**Conclusion**

- The conclusion is the last section of the paper.
- If in, you move back to the general level of the introduction, explain what the importance of what it is, and indicate broader impact of the work, and possible steps for research or application.

**ABSTRACT**

- Gifts improve the human condition. Recent theories have started to address this. This paper reviews recent literature, and discusses the applications of giving gifts.

**DISCUSSION**

- People are often only as shy as they are in the presence of a positive. This paper focuses on giving gifts.

**INTRODUCTION**

- The findings of gift-giving is given in another place.

**NEW IDEA**

- A new idea can be something that adds to that.

**METHOD**

- A better world with digital flowers

**REFERENCES**

- There are hundreds of role sets, one of the most common formats is the APA style used in the paper.

**REFERENCES**

- The references appear at the very end of the paper, and are structured following the rules of the journal.

Do you need to use “Introduction, review, method...” as headings for your sections? It depends. If you are sending this to a journal or conference, these will have explicit instructions, down to the level of qualifications, and spacing.

- Unless specific headings are specifically asked, you can vary, but notice that they serve a function and that hypothesis is explained here.

**REFERENCES**

- TIPS: There usually are not explicit headings for Review papers.
- For writing the introduction, do not assume that the reader has read the abstract.
- In writing the introduction, do not assume that the reader has read the abstract.

**ABSTRACT**

- We made flowers, gave them to food, health, peace.
- Ways of making people happy

**DISCUSSION**

- People are often unhappy. Many things have been tried, especially

**INTRODUCTION**

- Jack Jones, Delft University of Technology

**NEW IDEA**

- A better world with digital flowers

**REFERENCES**

- A new contribution to the specific topic. The author’s new contribution is to

**METHOD**

- Making people happy

**REFERENCES**

- A better world with digital flowers

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