Twelve Tips for Terrific Texts

The cheat sheet to help you communicate your science!

Planning

Stories
Make your information form a narrative. Tell a story! Everybody loves stories.

Scope
Talking to the public? Stick to your results and their implications. Talking to other academics? Include some details and methods.

Tenses
Project proposals: future tense. Descriptions of your work: present or past tense, depending on your audience and intent.

Journal origin
Are you submitting to a journal based in the US? Use American English and style choices. England? Go with British English. Canada? Well… both. (Google is your friend.)

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Writing

Jargon
Talking to the public? Get rid of it. Talking to other academics? Minimize it.

Spelling & grammar
Spelling mistakes and run-on sentences distract the reader and reduce clarity. MS Word can do basic checks, and services like Grammarly and freelance editors can dramatically improve your writing.

Active voice
“I jumped out of a plane” is shorter and more interesting than “A plane was jumped out of by me.”

Acronyms
An FAQ page or *a* FAQ page? Vowel sounds at the start of acronyms (e.g. *eh*F-A-Q) pair with *an* (and vice versa).

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Polishing

Data
Is it plural or singular? Yes. In technical writing, usually plural. Colloquially, it can be either.

Brevity
Choose your words with intention to keep your article short and easy to read. Sentences should generally be less than two lines on a typical page.

Units
There should be a space between the number and unit: 5 km, 7 mL, 22 W. Except for degrees (C or F) – check your preferred style guide.

Consistency
When in doubt, pick a spelling or a style (Oxford comma, anyone?) and stick with it until you’re told otherwise.

Icons: Science and Technology Smooth Line Icon collection by Vectors Market from the Noun Project

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