

Guide to Scientific Writing Style:

Scientific writing is expected to be clear, concise, and straightforward.

In general:

- use correct grammar and a style appropriate for formal writing, without colloquial phrases (slang) or contractions (don't say don't.)
- use a clear, straightforward style -- say what you mean plainly without being cute, grandiose, meaninglessly catchy, or unnecessarily dramatic. (e.g. avoid things like "the antelope hopping up and down like jack-in-the-boxes" or "this paper is of earthshaking importance if we are to comprehend the disaster overshadowing the red-cockaded woodpecker" or "the authors set off fearlessly to the wilds of Kenya" or "have you ever wondered about the amazing colors found in birds?")
- be concise (do not use a whole lot of extra words like these that do not do a great deal to add to the meaning of any particular sentence but rather detract from the general overall clarity of the paper in question).
- use simple, straightforward language -- if you have a choice between a simple, widely understood word and a complex, rarely used word, use the simple word (elucidating the purport of sentences like this one is an ineluctably intractable problem.)
- avoid being redundant (just say each thing once, don't repeat it over and over, don't keep saying the same thing in different places, don't repeat yourself like this).
- use active voice for a clear, snappy style that focuses the reader on the action (e.g. say "The authors made mistakes" rather than "Mistakes were made by the authors.")
- avoid the use of synonyms; it's clearer to reuse a word throughout your report than to try to come up with different ways to say the same thing (if you say something is "interesting" in one sentence, that something else is "important", that a third aspect is "fascinating" people will be confused, trying to figure out the distinction between these. If you mean the same thing for all of them, use the same word.)
- write in 3rd person for most of the paper. You can use the 1st person for describing what you did and found, but otherwise use the 3rd person. DO NOT use the 2nd person -- avoid "you" and do NOT write in a style in which you are giving instructions (write a paper, not a lab manual or instruction list like this.)
- do not use "filler" sentences that have no additional meaning of their own. (e.g. don't say "The authors used several methods to study woodpeckers." DO say "The authors studied (some specific aspect of) woodpeckers by (fill in the specific methods)."