

Publishing your work in English in international journals

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Background

In my experience as the editor of a large and important international journal I have noticed over the last few years a huge increase in the number of papers that we have received submitted from scientists in China. I understand that there is tremendous pressure on people here to publish their work (in English) in reputable international journals. This presentation has been produced to try to provide some assistance to people in the difficult task of preparing their papers in a suitable style for submission to these journals.

Outline

Why publish your work?

Various kinds of publication

Choice of publication; choice of journal

Preparation of manuscript

Abstract

Figures

Tables

Equations

Conclusion

References

Appendices

Why publish your work?

- **Completing the job.**
- **To share new knowledge or discoveries and add to the whole body of human knowledge.**
- **To prevent someone else from wasting their time discovering it again.**
- **Publish or perish.**
- **Immortality.** Maybe - particularly with books rather than papers.
- **To make money** – again with books rather than papers.
- **To help students/lecturers/teachers,** i.e. by writing textbooks.

The various kinds of publication (1)

- **Thesis – MSc or PhD.**
- **Internal Reports.**
- **Conference Proceedings.**
- **Regular papers in refereed journals.**
- **Letters in refereed journals.**
- **Technical Notes or Short Communications in refereed journals.**

The various kinds of publication (2)

- There are other examples which are unlikely to affect you while you are a postgraduate student, but if you continue in the academic or research world they may be relevant to you later on:
 - **Review Articles.**
 - **Chapters in edited books.**
 - **Monographs and books.**

Choice of publication

One needs to choose (a) what type of publication and (b) then, for a given type of publication, which particular publication.

- The choice of what type of publication to opt for is governed by various factors:
- the intrinsic nature of the work being described or reported
- urgency or otherwise
- career prospects and institutional policy.

Choice of publication (continued)

- Conference Proceedings, or
- Journal, or
- Other (thesis, internal report, edited book, etc.)?
- The answer will depend on institutional policy among other things

Choice of publication (continued)

- The research paper is the standard form of publication, but sometimes a Letter or a Technical Note or Short Communication may be more appropriate.

Choice of journal

- Relevance is the key factor. If it is primarily a remote sensing paper then one could reasonably try a remote sensing journal. On the other hand if it deals with a particular application in oceanography one might reasonably try one of the specialised oceanography journals.

? Irrelevant papers ?

- SF₆ Leak Detection of High Voltage Installations using TEA- CO₂ Laser Based DIAL
- A System Theoretic Approach To Array Processing

Choice of journal (continued)

- Suppose one has decided to write a paper for a journal then one has to decide which particular journal to submit it to.
- But, beware, some journals impose page charges; such journals should normally be avoided
- **The choice of journal may affect the style and some of the details of the content of the paper.** it will certainly affect the format of the paper. The paper will need to be prepared according to the instructions for authors issued by the journal that you have chosen.

One extra point

You must not submit your paper to more than one journal at the same time

Originality etc.

Your paper needs to make a *substantial* new contribution to knowledge. i.e. it must be original.

It must also be a *significant* contribution to knowledge.

Preparation of manuscript

Format of manuscript

You need to pay attention to the

- *The structure of the paper
- *Grammar and spelling
- *Style

Structure - 1

There will be a number of sections, for example:

Title

Abstract

Introduction

Methodology

Study area / data used

Procedures

Results

Discussion of results

Conclusion

The title page

These days people often use search engines (Google, etc.) to find papers and therefore it is important that your title accurately reflects the subject matter of your paper.

Chinese names

Chinese form:

Shen Guozhen, Li Junqing, An Li, Chen Youping

English/international form:

G. Shen, J. Li, L. An, Y. Chen

or

Guozhen Shen, Junqing Li, Li An, Youping Chen

My preference is for the latter

Abstract *versus* Introduction

Quite a few people get these confused. The abstract should be a summary of the whole of what is in the paper. It should include a summary of the results and conclusions. It is meant to be a stand-alone thing. People should be able to read it and to tell what is in the paper and be able to decide whether they want to look at, or read, the full paper. It should not include the citation of any references.

Abstract *versus* Introduction (continued)

The introduction should be adequate to indicate the general background and to summarise previous work, but really for someone who already has a general familiarity with the subject. It is not being written for the general scientific reader. It should include the reasons for having done the work. It should NOT state the results.

The abstract (1)

The abstract is NOT part of the paper.

The abstract must be able to stand alone from the paper – and indeed it often does. If you are doing some kind of online search you may find that access to the abstract is free but that if you want to see the whole paper you will need to pay some money.

Also the paper must also be able to stand alone from the abstract.

The abstract (2)

The abstract should not be confused with either the Introduction or the conclusion.

The abstract should be a ***summary*** of the whole paper, i.e. stating what is the problem that has been studied, how it has been studied, what were the results and what conclusions were drawn from the results.

One usually writes the abstract after the paper has been written, or at least after the first draft has been written.

It should not contain any references.

Abstract *versus* Introduction (continued)

The introduction should be adequate to indicate the general background and to summarise previous work, but really for someone who already has a general familiarity with the subject. It is not being written for the general scientific reader. It should include the reasons for having done the work. It should NOT state the results.

The Introduction (1)

Assume the reader has not read the abstract (remember that it is not part of the paper).

You need to explain:

- what is the background to the problem/piece of research
- what is the problem
- how you have gone about tackling the problem

You should ***not*** anticipate the results or the conclusion

The Introduction (2)

Try to choose the right level. You should assume that the reader has expertise in a field that is not too far removed from that of the research described. As an oceanographer one's papers are not going to be read by philosophers or historians, they will probably be read by other oceanographers, they might (depending on the topic) be read by some civil engineers or some biochemists. They are not going to be read by the general public, whether sophisticated city slickers in Shanghai or farmers in Urumqi.

Structure and content

Structure -

Introduction

Study area / data

Methodology/procedures

Results and Analysis

Discussion of results

Conclusion

The main body of the paper

- Study area / data used
- Procedures
- Results
- Discussion of results

It is important to distinguish clearly between these different sections

Methodology

- If the equipment, method of analysis, etc. that you are using is new then it needs to be described.
- If it is not well established but has been used by a few people before, then you should make a few very brief remarks about it and give one or more references so that someone who is not familiar with it can easily find out about it.
- If you are using standard equipment, calculations or statistical analysis etc. it is not necessary to describe it in detail.

Study area – data used

- The location of the study area needs to be given – in enough detail that anyone anywhere in the world can see where it is.
- You need to say what data you have used, whether you collected it yourself or obtained it from some other source, how you have analysed it and what results you obtained.

Procedures/methodology

- The procedures differ from the methodology.
- The methodology is the general approach
- The procedures are what you actually did.

Results and discussion of results

- These may be two separate sections or they may be rolled into one.
- But there is some logic in saying that you should present the results first and then discuss them after that.
- You should discuss the errors in your results and their significance.

The Conclusion

- “This is what it says. It is the **conclusion** – the new information/discovery/knowledge that comes out of what you have done. It is not a summary. The summary really belongs as - or in - the abstract.”

Tables

Is the material you are proposing to tabulate really necessary? Is anyone going to read it? Is anyone going to use it? Is it necessary for your argument that you print this? Tables which are appropriate for a thesis may not be appropriate for a journal paper – that amount of detail may not be necessary.

Figures

Again, are all your figures really necessary? Do you want to use colour? Some journals may refuse to publish in colour. Others may publish in colour. Some journals may publish in colour but impose a charge for doing so.

Figures (continued)

- Figures should be legible – bearing in mind the reduction factor that a typesetter and printer are likely to use. Lettering of the wrong size is common. (3rd generation) photocopies of topographic maps are very unlikely to be suitable for reproduction.
- Maps and images need to show (a) the location in terms of geographical coordinates and (b) scale bars. Quoting a scale like “1:1,000,000” is no use because the figure may get reduced or enlarged, in which case this scale will not still apply!

Figures (continued)

- The labelling on a figure should be compatible (font, size of type, etc.) with what is used when the text is typeset.
- All axes on graphs need to be labelled with the quantity that is being plotted. Similarly with histograms. Where appropriate, the units should be given as well as the labels.
- If several graphs are plotted on a common set of axes it is common these days for people to use different colours for the various graphs. To avoid problems over colour printing one should try to find some other (more conventional) way to distinguish between the different graphs.

Equations

You need to be especially careful with these, both in the original typing and when correcting the proofs. You need to make sure that the notation, font, etc, etc. of symbols used in the equations are the same as those used in the text.

References

In very many papers the references are defective, for example:

- References are sometimes cited in the text and not listed at the end of the paper
- References are sometimes included in the list but not cited in the text
- The bibliographic details in the reference list are sometimes incomplete – and sometimes even wrong.

References (continued)

- Have you actually looked at, let alone read, all the references you quote?
- Are you trying to be helpful to the reader by giving the references you cite? (Which is good). Or are you simply trying to inflate your image by quoting an enormous list of references – most of which you have probably never even looked at? (That is bad).
- Why are references quoted? It is to identify a source, or justify a statement. Or to suggest a source where someone can follow up something in more detail.

Appendices

Some people frequently use appendices, e.g. for a long mathematical derivation. On the other hand some people do not approve of using appendices at all. They argue that if material is sufficiently important then it should be included in the main body of the text, or if it is not important then it should be left out completely. It may be that a reference could be given, e.g. to a textbook or a thesis, where the derivation could be found.

Particular problems facing Chinese scientists

- **Problem no. 1** concerns the use of the **English language**.
- **Problem no. 2** relates to the **structure and content** of a paper.

The use of the **English language.**

- Subeditors/copy editors are not usually experts in your particular scientific field and they may not even be scientists.
- They can only make small corrections and they can only do this so long as the *meaning* of your original text is clear. If the meaning is not clear then they cannot help you.
- If your English is not too good then I would strongly encourage you – if it is at all possible – to find a native-English speaker (not necessarily a scientist) and persuade him/her to read your paper for you.

Submitting your paper

The electronic age

Referees' reports

Editorial decisions

Rejection

Acceptance

Proof reading

The electronic age

- Many journals expect you to submit your paper electronically. This leads to faster processing than when hard copy was used.
- It is likely that, in a few years, hard copy published journal may disappear completely and be replaced by electronic-only journals. We are not there yet.

Referees' reports, editorial decisions

- Referees offer advice; some of this advice may be confidential to an editor and some of this may be passed on to the author of a paper.
- Referees may make recommendations, but they do not make decisions, though their recommendations may contribute to decisions.
- However, referees' reports are sometimes conflicting, one may say that a certain paper is very good while another may say that is rubbish and should not - on any account- be published.

Referees' reports, editorial decisions (2)

- Neither the editor nor the referees are guaranteeing that the results, deductions, views expressed – or whatever – in an article are right or correct or true. Referees are not asked if a paper is right. They are asked whether (to their knowledge):
 - Is the work described original?
 - Has work described has been carried out scientifically?
 - Is the paper well prepared and well presented?
 - Is the paper to be of interest to the readers?

Referees' reports, editorial decisions (3)

- The responsibility for the work described in a paper remains with the **author**. If that work is subsequently challenged by someone, then it is the author who has to be prepared to defend his or her work.
- Referees are not meant to be copy editors, correcting spelling, punctuation, other points of grammar, style, etc.; a good publisher will have its own copy-editing staff to do this anyway. It is, of course, the author's job to try to get these things right in the first place.

Your response to the referees' comments

How should you respond to the referees' comments?

The referee is an experienced scientist who has devoted a considerable amount of effort to looking at your paper - often to help you to improve it. **You should therefore pay serious attention to the referee's comments.** I don't say you must make all the changes the referee suggests. However, you should certainly make some or most of them. And if you disagree with the referee (and you may well be right) then you need to explain to the editor why you are not making his/her suggested changes. **You must not ignore what the referees say.**

Rejection

- Your paper is rejected. This has happened to all of us at some time or another. **Do not despair.**
- You should ask yourself the question “is it (in your own view) actually worth publishing?” If the answer is “yes” then try another journal.
- Before sending it elsewhere try to see if it can be improved, either in the light of your own thoughts (since it was originally submitted) or in the light of the referees’ comments.
- If the paper gets rejected several times in succession what should you then do? Give up? Probably yes! Maybe it was not worth publishing after all.

Acceptance

- Your paper is accepted. That's not the end of the story.
- The editor or referees may suggest some revision; if so this should be done quickly.
- Proof reading. This is important. Even these days when electronic versions are submitted and your paper is not re-keyboarded by a typesetter, there may be mistakes you did not notice before. Or, regrettably, new mistakes may have crept in.

Final Comment

You will probably, as long as you are actively engaged in scientific research, continue to write papers etc. You can always try to think of ways to improve your papers. You also have to be aware of trends and changes in publishing and to think of ways to adapt to them.

Conclusion

This was just meant to be an overview. I have got an exercise or two for you to do and if you submit your answers I will look at them next week and let you have them back with my comments.

I have brought a few examples of papers that have problems associated with them.

I have produced a list of questions you should ask yourselves when you are looking at them.

All jumbled up

What do I mean by this? What I mean is that people don't always go through things in this logical order.

PAP-2006-0382, which I am going to distribute (actually it was written by an overseas Chinese!), I would like to ask you to look at for 10 minutes or so and just answer one question.

Consider the question “has this author proceeded logically through the sequence I have described for the main body of a paper?”

Editor's response

“I would like to suggest that you make the following changes to the article:

1 -4 ... deleted ...

5. More seriously, I felt that section 2, section 3 and the appendix were all jumbled up. I would favour first a section, section 2, describing your methodology in general terms (including whatever may be necessary from the appendix, thereby eliminating the appendix) without any reference to your particular data set and then another section, section 3, describing your data and what you are doing with it. Followed then, of course, by a section of results (as your present section 4 is in fact). I believe this would make the paper a lot easier for people to read and to understand what you are doing. “

I did not send the paper to referees at that stage but waited until the paper had been revised along these lines. After substantial revision, it was eventually accepted.

Another example

I am providing you with a paper:

MS: PAP-2005-0521

“Sandy deserts and desertified lands surveying in northwestern China by remote sensing.”

I want you to look at this and answer a number of questions, preferably writing you answers on a piece of paper and handing them in at the end.

Questions to consider relating to the papers you are looking at:

- Q1. Is the abstract a “good” abstract, i.e. does it provide a complete summary of the paper and it is independent of (i.e. stands alone from) the paper?
- Q2. Do you think that the first section, the Introduction, is (a) written at the right level, (i.e. for the right scientific audience), (b) of the right length and (c) contains sufficient references to background literature that the readers might like to consult?
- Q3. Do the main sections of the paper (including figures and tables) (a) contain enough information or (b) contain superfluous material/detail that is not appropriate?
- Q4. Is the material of the main sections presented in the correct logical order?
- Q5. Do you have any comments on the quality of the science, including a proper assessment of the errors involved?
- Q6. Is the conclusion (a) justified, (b) useful?
- Q7. Are the references (a) adequate, (b) too few or (c) too many?
- Q8. Any other comments? For instance why do you think the paper was not accepted for publication in its present form?

And, if there is time there is a second paper for you to do the same thing with.

MS: PAP-2005-0435

Sediment concentration and bed form structures of Gulf of Cambay from remote sensing.

Do the same as with the previous paper.

Good Luck

The End

Thank you – the end

Good luck

The end