

Writing a Scientific Paper

A practical online course for researchers in the life sciences who want to write clear, reader-focused papers. You work on your own paper while you learn: by the end, you will have drafts of several sections.

8 modules

about one module per week

Your own pace

self-study: speed up or take more time

Online, 24/7

asynchronous; no fixed meeting times

Small tasks

most activities take under 20 minutes

Feedback

from peers and on your writing assignments

The learning route

1 • Plan writing process, strategies	2–4 • Structure storyline, paragraphs, cohesion	5 • Draft results and discussion	6–7 • Style readability, word choice	8 • Edit grammar, punctuation, tenses
--	---	--	--	---

Modules and learning objectives

1 Basics of scientific writing

The writing process, writing strategies and the roots of writer's block.

- Apply effective writing strategies to your own process
- Plan and prepare the writing of a paper

Lectures · video by Simon Peyton Jones · your next two "tiny steps"

2 Building an introduction and a discussion

Reader's questions and the Question Tool as a blueprint for your storyline.

- Use reader's questions to outline your first draft
- Recognize the typical moves of an introduction and discussion

Article analysis · prepare your own introduction

3 Paragraph structure

Topic and key sentences; the pyramid, the funnel and the bookcase.

- Identify topic and key sentences and judge their quality
- Use them to signal your storyline

Writing assignment 1: your introduction

4 Text cohesion

Linking sentences and guiding the reader through your text.

- Use the four main tools for cohesion
- Check your drafts for flow; outline a discussion

Peer feedback · outline of a discussion

5 Writing the results and the discussion

Tables, figures and results, with guest lectures by Kristin Sainani; growing your discussion.

- Present your results clearly in text, tables and figures
- Write the opening paragraph of your discussion

Discussion: the first paragraph · feedback on a table or figure

6 Academic style 1

What makes writing 'scientific' – and still readable?

- Adjust and vary sentence length to its function
- Make an informed choice for the passive or active voice

How reader-friendly are you? · peer feedback

7 Academic style 2

Noun style, concision, and the strength of your claims.

- Recognize unnecessary nominalizations; cut the clutter
- Hedge and boost your claims effectively

Assignment: hedge or boost · peer feedback

8 Editing your paper

The final stage: punctuation, verb tenses and common pitfalls.

- Apply the rules of English punctuation and choose the right tenses
- Repair pitfalls such as dangling participles and 'that' vs 'which'

Checklist for paper and abstract · linguistic review of an article

At the end of the course you will

- understand the writing process and the criteria of an excellent paper
- be able to design, write, analyze and edit a paper with an eye for cohesion, clarity and conciseness
- know the most important features of a scientific style
- have more confidence in writing – and drafts of several sections of your own paper

Join the course

PhD candidates at the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek / NKI can register for free at the AvL Academy. Others can join individually or with peers.

Course book: Adrian Wallwork, *English for Writing Research Papers* (Springer).

Annemarie van der Zeeuw · am.zeeuw@gmail.com · 06 22 499 397