Overview

- The importance of writing well
- General writing skills
- Writing for academia – especially qualitative research
- What to watch out for / how to review your own work
- How to instruct an editor and get the best out of process
- Resources and tips
The importance of writing/communicating well

- How you communicate says a lot about you and your work
- More likely to convey your ideas
- More likely to transfer knowledge to others
- More likely to lead to research impact
- More likely to get published
- More likely to lead to … promotion???

Tip: The key to good writing is to keep reading and keep writing

Understanding the impact of poor writing

“if it’s not really really good, and you come across errors or faults in the documentation, you just lose confidence in the whole proposal. … Can kill a really good idea really quickly.”

Dr Jason Brown, RMIT
On the Reg (podcast)

Oppenheimer, D (2005), Consequences of erudite vernacular utilized irrespective of necessity: Problems with using long words needlessly, Applied Cognitive Psychology, 20, 2, 139-156

Tip: Know your weaknesses
General writing skills – *On Writing Well* (Zinsser)

- Simplicity over clutter (language and content)
- Clear thinking leads to clear writing
- Be mindful of style and audience
- Suggests imitating “good writing”
- Understand the words you are using
- Unity (consistency) in pronouns, tense, and tone
- Importance of the opening sentence to engage the reader, and the exit

Tip: Keep examples of good writing and re-read them

General writing skills – before you start

- Know your audience (expert/non-expert)
- Understand the style requirements
- Think about the key messages, and how much someone is willing to read, level of detail required
- Think about the capacity of the reader, knowledge and language
  - Students, society, academics, business
- Formatting can be critical
- Not conforming is a risky game (*Thesis Whisperer*)

Tip: Read a couple of RECENT publications so you know what to aim for
General writing skills – structure

• So you have a blank page...
• Different techniques at different points (brainstorming, structuring content)
• Common theme is they help organize thoughts and content
• Templates
• Structure within a structure
• Start, middle, ending – think of the story arc

Tip: Good to go back over structure (e.g. contents page) to ensure flow logical

Gather and organise ideas

Tip: Doing this by hand is good as it slows you down
Story arcs: developing, rather than losing the plot

Tip: More linear story arcs also useful to identify/check path through article

General writing skills – navigation

- Some journals are very traditional: Introduction, literature review, method, sample, data, findings, etc.
- Use headings to:
  - Break up long passages, help reader consume content
  - Communicate/highlight content
  - Help navigate content
  - BUT don’t go wild – 3 levels maximum (think of them like NVivo codes)

Tip: Be mindful of heading format and length of headings for contents pages
General writing skills – content

• Story line, make it compelling to read – story arc
• Language – spelling, tense, simple language, no cliches, length
• One point per paragraph, no single sentence paragraphs
• Point first – in sections and paragraphs – explanation, evidence, link (to point and to central argument)
• Transitions (logical but not patronising)
• Appeal to skimmers and detailed readers alike
• Effortless to read

Tip: Language and writing styles evolve, so keep your skills up to date

General writing skills – know the rules

• To capitalise or not, to italicise or not
• Abbreviations and contractions, define on first use
• Tense (literature review v findings) – if unsure, look at a journal article
• Verb conjugation; e.g. Bates finds (singular), Bates et al. find (plural)
• Parallel language – spot the odd one out: going, talking, make
• Conventions – e.g. Legislation in Title Case and Italics year (Jurisdiction)
• Language can vary depending on who you are writing for and when – grammar rules and social rules: meet the expectation of the reader

The standard for Australian Government writing and editing

Style Manual is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users.

About
Use Style Manual when creating Australian Government content.

Getting started
How to find what you need in Style Manual.

Changelog
Stay up to date with revisions and additions to Style Manual.

User needs
Follow this guidance to understand users and how they engage with your content.

User needs
Accessibility and inclusion

Format, writing and structure
Use this guidance to create content that’s clear, inclusive, accessible and findable.

Content formats
Plain language and writing style

Structure

Style rules and conventions
Reference this section for definitive rules and examples of Australian Government style.

General conventions, editing and proofreading

Times, dates, forms of address

IF YOU WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, BE CONSISTENT.
Journal articles – Title and abstract

• Academic writing – formal, logical, impersonal, highly objective

• Importance of title and abstract

• The dark art of title writing

• The difference between a good abstract and a bad abstract

• Clear research question – and make sure you answer it

• Playing the long game

Tip: Title and abstract opens the door to reading your article

Journal articles – Structure and content

• Structure
  • Look at style guide for requirements
  • Look at recent examples – be consistent with journal expectations

• Content
  • Template / check list
  • Headings to help the reader access content
  • Balance content
  • Use language consistent with the literature

Tip: The opening sentence/paragraph should encourage the reader to continue
Journal articles – Style and length

• Style and length
  • Journal style guide – lots of rules (but honestly, never comprehensive)
  • Recent articles

• Language
  • Language – English, Australian English, American, etc.
  • Specialist language, norms (not necessarily grammatically correct)
  • Avoid idioms, expressions and cliches as they often don’t translate literally

Tip: Compliance with style guide shows you are not just shopping around

Journal articles – common issues

• Technical language – write so that everyone can understand
• Repetition – sentences, expressions, words
• Overly long sentences – be clear and to the point
• Inconsistent use and presentation of terms
• Inconsistent tense and tails
• Overly complex, indigestible language – need to be able to understand on first read

Tip: Go back to Zinsser’s principles of writing well – they apply here too
Journal articles – common issues in qual

• Formatting quotes
  • Length - enough to make sense, but brief as possible
  • General rule is ‘to use single marks and then “double” within the quote’
  • General rule is block quote 40+ words (no quote marks unless within, then single). (Source after full stop)
  • BUT if quoting interview data, block quote for less
• Avoid using same quote twice
• Remember ethics – deidentified, anonymised, enough to provide context of quote

Tip: Search for case org name or key identifiers before submitting

Other considerations in qual research

• Include research instrument – questions/guide/vignette
• Identifying case org or participants – yes/no
• Validating transcripts or findings or both
• Providing meaningful report back to participants
  • Research question
  • Who participated (to show representation)
  • What you found
  • Why this matters
  • What next
Editing your own work (or a colleagues)

• Review **structure**:  
  • Check story arc – is it still there, are you telling the story (start, middle, end)  
  • Length and balance – read out loud  
  • Check headings, footnotes, appendices, figures and tables  
  • Presentation and style  

• Review **content**:  
  • Develop your own style guide for language and presentation for each document  
  • Check language and sense, remove clutter  
  • Citations and references (and format)  
  • Check accuracy of data

Tip: Allow time – have breaks – but maintain momentum and ownership

Instructing an editor

• Using an editor to address the ‘curse of knowledge’.  
• Instruct (don’t over instruct) them based on your needs and budget  
  • Form of editing (written, track, notes) and feedback  
  • Level (language, sense)  
  • Citations/references  
  • Style/format (give them style guide and recent papers)  

• How to save time and money (and eyesight of the editor)  
  • Format tables properly  
  • Use referencing software  
  • Plan ahead

Tip: Don’t be surprised at the work involved for both you and the editor
Addressing comments

• Don’t freak out – you are the expert
• Style is individual but aim for your work to be accessible
• If you don’t agree with suggestions, treat them as a red flag
• Ensure you make changes throughout document (editor may flag once)

Tip: Don’t ignore feedback, but there may be many ways to improve your work

Create your own resources / self help

• Develop your own style guide – consistent language and presentation
• Know your weaknesses, write a list of your common errors – remember to address them
• Skill up with Word
  • Headings, Cross references, Formatting, Control F, View
• Skill up with referencing software
  • Citations, Formatting (don’t assume imports are correct)
• Keep examples of good writing
• Create your own template

Tip: Invest some time in building your own resources – it will pay off quickly
Resources

- Books: Style Manual (Australian Gov), On Writing Well (Zinsser)
- Dictionary
- Journal style guides and recent articles
- Writing tips
  - ThinkWrite – sign up to email (simple but good tips)
  - Thesis Whisperer
  - Blogs, podcasts
  - Websites: https://www.inklyo.com/category/grammar/, Grammarly
  - If in doubt, google
- Training: Linked in Learning?

Tip: Have some good resources to hand but never stop growing as a writer

Thank you

The importance of communication

Two Ronnies
“Four Candles”
1976

https://youtu.be/gi_6SaqVQSw

Enjoy!

Shona can be contacted at shonabatesis@gmail.com