

Writing Tips

1) Avoid the passive voice.

NO I was bitten by the dog.
YES The dog bit me.

NO Models have been designed
YES Economists have designed models

2) Avoid unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.

NO little universal consensus has been achieved
YES little consensus has been achieved
oh, wait...that's passive. Better:
economists have not come to a consensus

NO it is very likely
YES it is likely

NO of utmost interest
YES of interest
oh, wait...even better:
interesting

3) Avoid fancy, big, odd words

Always ask: is there a shorter word that means the same thing?

As much as possible, avoid using words you don't use in ordinary conversation.

Diction

"A majority" is not same as "most,"
Usually, "most" is right.

Words that do not mean "find"
(as in, "Hall & Jones find that...")
indicate imply affirm

Relate to, correlate with.

Compare with

vs.

compare to

Examine similarities
& differences
You do this frequently.

"A compares to B"
means "A is as good as B"
or "A is as bad as B"

You do this rarely.

Proves vs. is consistent with

A statistical pattern can never prove something is true.
At best, a statistical result "is consistent with"
a hypothesis.

Don't speak of "levels" of "growth rates."

Introduction

The first sentence is the hardest. Do not start with philosophy, "Financial economists have long wondered if markets are efficient." Do not start with "The finance literature has long been interested in x." Your paper must be interesting on its own, and not just because lots of other people wasted space on the subject. Do not start with a long motivation of how important the issue is to public policy. All of this is known to writers as "clearing your throat." It's a waste of space. Start with your central contribution.

Most introductions (paragraph or section) should take this form:

- 1) State some things established in existing literature.
- 2) Point out an unanswered question (or questions)
- 3) Preview your answer. "In this paper I...."

Introduction

The introduction should start with what *you do* in this paper, the major contribution. You must *explain* that contribution so that people can understand it. Don't just state your conclusion: "My results show that the pecking-order theory is rejected." Give the *fact* behind that result. "In a regression of x on y , controlling for z , the coefficient is q ."

Proofread

I strongly recommend you print out on paper for final proofreading.

Check for run-on sentences,
incomplete sentences.

Make sure every paper or book cited in text is in reference list.

Organize the paper in "triangular" or "newspaper" style, not in "joke" or "novel" style. Notice how newspapers start with the most important part, then fill in background later for the readers who kept going and want more details. A good joke or a mystery novel has a long windup to the final punchline. Don't write papers like that - put the punchline right up front and then slowly explain the joke. Readers don't stick around to find the punchline in Table 12.

Each paragraph should convey one chunk of argument.

First sentence states point. Remainder of paragraph makes the point.

No!

Dogs are friendly.

Dogs protect the horse,

Therefore dogs make good pets.

Yes!

Dogs make good pets.

Dogs are ----.