

Academic Writing 1 for Accounting, Economics & Psychology

Session 4: Structure of a Paper

Prof. Dr. Dominika Langenmayr

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Agenda

1 Academic Writing

2 What Goes Into the Paper?

3 Writing Well

4 L^AT_EX vs. Word

Why Writing Well Matters

- Good writing is necessary (but not sufficient) for publications.
- Only well-written papers are read.
- The insights of your paper will first be judged by how you present them—if your paper seems unprofessional, your empirical work or mathematical models will be regarded with more scepticism.
- It is one of the parts of a PhD that many find very difficult.

Some General Tips

- Writing is re-writing!
- Writing a very rough first draft is helpful.
- Even experienced authors rewrite their papers multiple times.
- Sometimes it is hard to dismiss pages full of hard work, but most often it is worth it.
- Be very critical with your own papers. Let others be very critical.
- Try to tell a story.

Causal Language

- Economics, finance and accounting all have clear (although slightly different) standards whether evidence can be considered causal.
 - ▶ Usually defined as in the Rubin (1974) potential outcomes framework.
 - ▶ ATE, ATT, ITT, LATE—know what you are estimating
- Be honest about identification issues—descriptive papers can make valuable contributions as well.
- Only use causal language if you are convinced to show a causal effect.
 - ▶ Effect, determine imply causality.
 - ▶ Association, correlate do not.

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Structure

- Structure is always similar and mostly depends on methodology (more on this in Session 6).
- Check a few other articles in the journal you aim for to find out about idiosyncrasies
 - ▶ How long are introduction/conclusion?
 - ▶ Is there a separate literature section?

Storyline

- **Tell a story.**
- Show only those results that directly contribute to your story.
 - ▶ Stuff does not belong in the paper just because it was a lot of work.
 - ▶ Maybe you have two papers.
 - ▶ Or appendices (which are not intended for publication). Or just a sentence in a footnote.
- Don't write a mystery novel. A paper is closer to a newspaper article—the punchline needs to come early.
- A good paper is not a travelogue of your research process. The reader doesn't care how you came to figure out the right answer or the hundreds of things you tried that didn't work.

How to Do This?

- Figure out the one central and novel contribution of your paper.
- Write this down in one paragraph. As with all your writing, this must be concrete.
- It will cause some pain, because you will realize how much you're going to have to throw out, and which analysis are still missing.
- Your own presentation slides are often a good starting point for writing the paper.

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- Good writing style is **very** important.
- Good writing takes a lot of practice.
- Try to imitate papers you enjoyed to read (esp. by native speakers).
- Read a book about writing style...
 - ▶ e.g. Deirdre McCloskey's "Economical Writing",
 - ▶ or Steven Pinker's "The thinking person's guide to writing in the 21st century".

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- Do not use the passive voice. Really.
- Use “I” when you mean “I” and use “we” when you mean “we”. For instance, you might use “we” to talk about something that everyone could be expected to appreciate (“We expect that highly selective colleges enroll few students who had low grades in secondary school”). In a single-authored paper, use I to talk about what you did (“I use data from....”).

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- Always go from most to less important (yet, your least important should be very important!).

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- The word “very” is very often very unnecessary.

Some Tips

- Read **printed** drafts of your paper. Try reading aloud.
- Go through your paper only focussing on language several times. Perhaps focussing on only one or two rules (e.g. passive voice).
- Change the font or font size between readings.
- If I'm unhappy with the structure, I often cut the paper into individual paragraphs and sort them on the floor into the right order.
- Get feedback on your writing (and accept it!).
- Stick to the “rules”, even if experienced writers tell you that rules can be broken (e.g. no passive). As non-native speakers, we usually cannot tell if a rule should be broken in that case.

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- L^AT_EX is a typesetting system where you write “code” and then produce a pdf.
 - ▶ Very well suited to produce nice equations and tables.
 - ▶ Easy to learn (and to google solutions to problems).
 - ▶ To use it, you need to install MikTeX (freeware) and a latex editor (I like WinEdt). There are also WYSIWYG-editors such as Lyx.
 - ▶ [Oetiker et al. \(2018\)](#) is a helpful introduction.

Some tools for L^AT_EX

- Manage references with bibtex. It is compatible with reference managers like Mendeley or Jabref.
- TikzEdt is a great tool for graphs.
- Learn how to output L^AT_EX tables from Stata.
- Some researchers have templates online, e.g. [Chad Jones](#) from Stanford

Should you use L^AT_EX?

- Very common in economics → if submitting to an econ journal, you should write in L^AT_EX.
- Less common (but not unheard of) in accounting.
- Most journals by now accept pdfs for first submissions.
- These slides are also typeset in L^AT_EX. The norm for using L^AT_EX for presentations is less strong, but I guess that at econ conferences, about 80% of presentations will also be in L^AT_EX.