

Effective English writing for SCI-journal article acceptance

A little about Gareth Dyke...



AMERICAN MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY



UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

UNIVERSITY of
DEBRECEN

Most-read articles



ARTICLE

Received 10 Jun 2013 | Accepted 22 Aug 2013 | Published 18 Sep 2013

DOI: 10.1038/ncomms3489

Aerodynamic performance of the feathered dinosaur *Microaptor* and the evolution of feathered flight

Gareth Dyke^{1,2}, Roeland de Kat², Colin Palmer^{1,4}, Jochen B. Heers^{1,5} & Bharathram Ganapathisubramani^{1,3}



View Article Online for full article details (http://www.nature.com/ncomms3489)

'Good' journals

Skin pigmentation provides evidence of convergent melanism in extinct marine reptiles

Johan Lindgren¹, Peter Eklöv², Ryan M. Canopy³, Nir Krutli⁴, John A. Gosw⁵, Gareth Dyke⁶, Raquel Schultz⁷, Matthew D. Shawkey⁸, Kenneth R. Benbow⁹ & Michael J. Poyser¹⁰

Article 506, 484 | 484-507 | February 2014

0022-2833/14/020506-12\$09

Download via

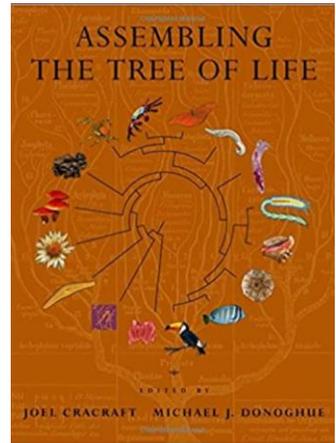
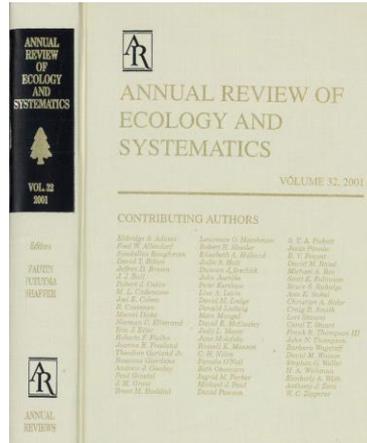
Research Square

Received: 05 October 2013

Accepted: 22 November 2013

Published: 08 January 2014

Permissions

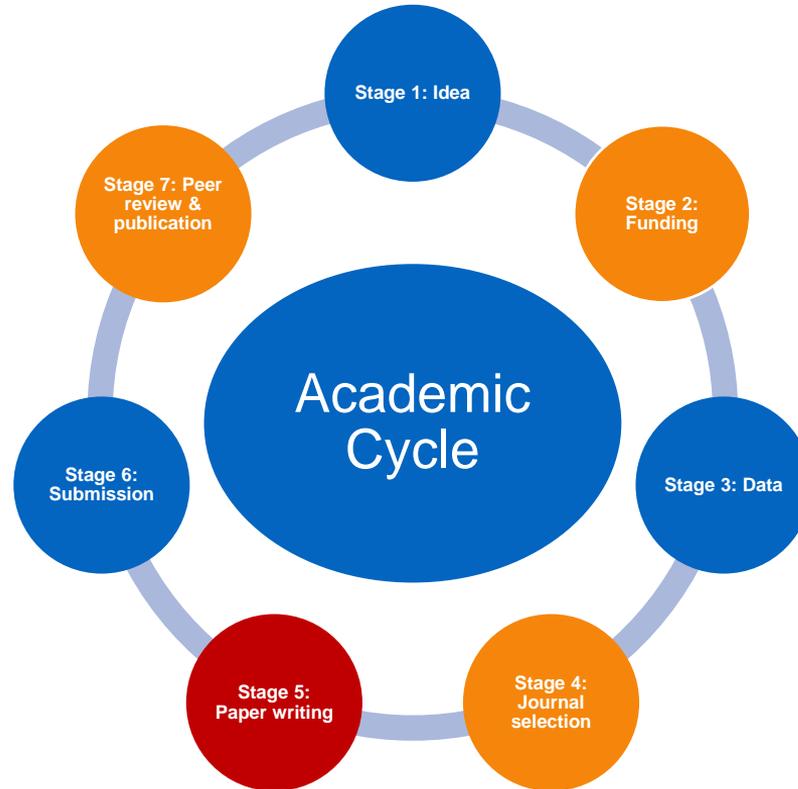


The academic publishing cycle

Communication
and Writing

Article Structure

Submission and
Communication



A photograph of a sunflower field. In the foreground, a single sunflower is in full bloom, showing its bright yellow petals and dark brown center. To its left, a monarch butterfly with orange and black wings is perched on a green sunflower bud. The background is filled with many more sunflowers, some in bud and some starting to open, creating a dense green field. Two white boxes with red text are overlaid on the image: one in the top left corner and one in the bottom right corner.

30,000

2,000,000

English academic communication



Dear Sir,

Many thanks for asking whether we would like to publish your paper.

Your paper is **good** and **original**, but unfortunately we are simply not willing to publish it.

The trouble is that the **good bits were not original and the original bits were not good.**

Yours faithfully,

The Editors

We asked publishers: Why reject papers?

'Excellent research is being submitted'

International publishers often reject our 'excellent' research. **Why?**

Publisher surveys reveal several key issues:

Papers outside the journal scope

Plagiarism

Incorrect formatting

English problems

Reviewer responses

Recycled submissions



What's different about academic English?

English is the universal language of scientific communication

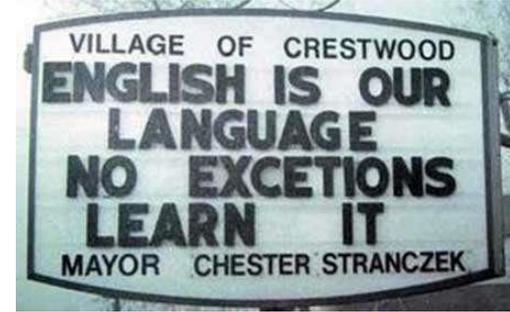
Academic papers need to be well-written
(often to a higher standard of English than in other writing)

The writing process can be beneficial to future scientific work
as an intellectual activity in its own right

But: *How?*

Avoiding those tricky issues: Internet fun

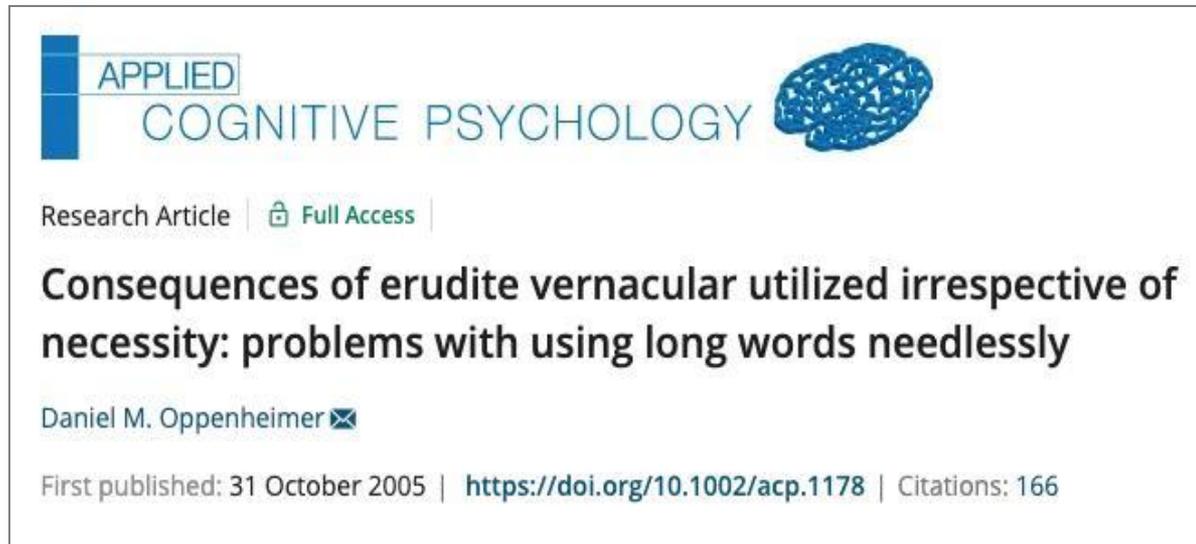
Don't let your academic research message be buried in language issues



Plain English”: What’s that?

Commentators identify six features of good, plain English:

1. Short sentences
2. No unnecessary words
3. Familiar words
4. Prefer the active to the passive voice
5. Appropriate style
6. Good punctuation



APPLIED
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 

Research Article |  Full Access

Consequences of erudite vernacular utilized irrespective of necessity: problems with using long words needlessly

Daniel M. Oppenheimer 

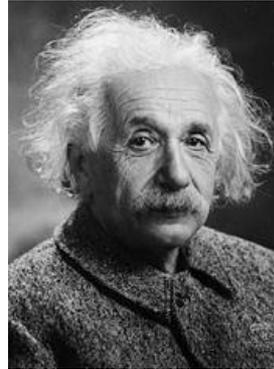
First published: 31 October 2005 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1178> | Citations: 166

Avoid complex writing

Write **clearly and simply** to be accessible to readers in other disciplines and to readers for whom English is not their first language.

Question: Will using simple language in my writing make me appear less intelligent?

Answer: Not at all: The majority of academic papers are read by non-native speakers and so **it's important to be simple and direct.**



“The definition of genius is taking the complex and making it simple.”

– Albert Einstein

STRUCTURE your paper

Guiding your readers

What is the research question?

- Why is it *important*?
- Is it *unknown*, *limitation*, or *controversy*

What are your aims?

- What do you plan to *achieve*?
- How is it directly *related* to the problem?

What is the conclusion?

- How does it *answer* the question?
- How does it *advance* the field?

PREPARATIONS

The general structure of a full article

- ▷ Title
- ▷ Authors
- ▷ Abstract
- ▷ Keywords

Make them easy for indexing and searching!
(informative, attractive, effective)

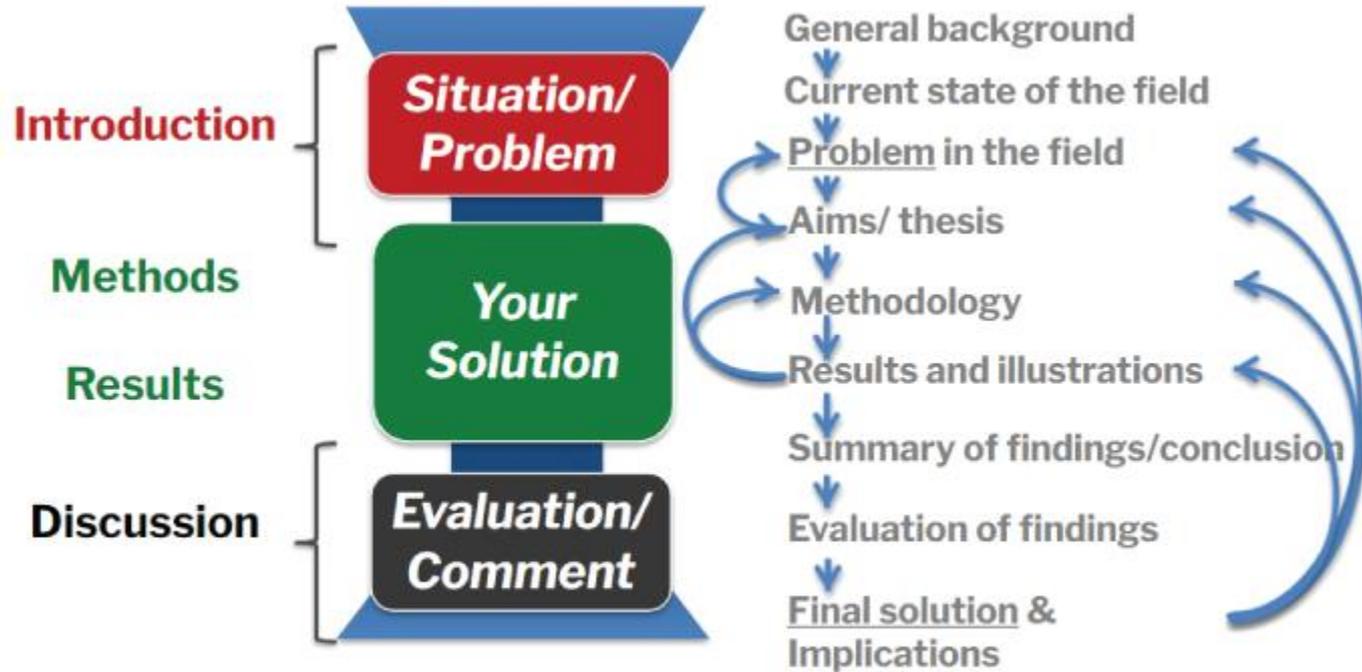
Main text (IMRAD)

- ▷ **I**ntroduction
- ▷ **M**ethods
- ▷ **R**esults
- ▷ **A**nd
- ▷ **D**iscussion (Conclusions)

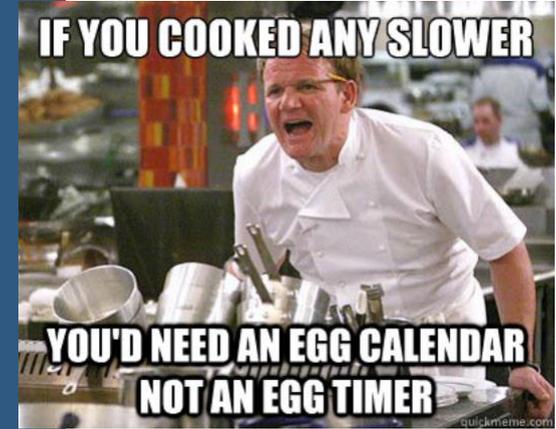
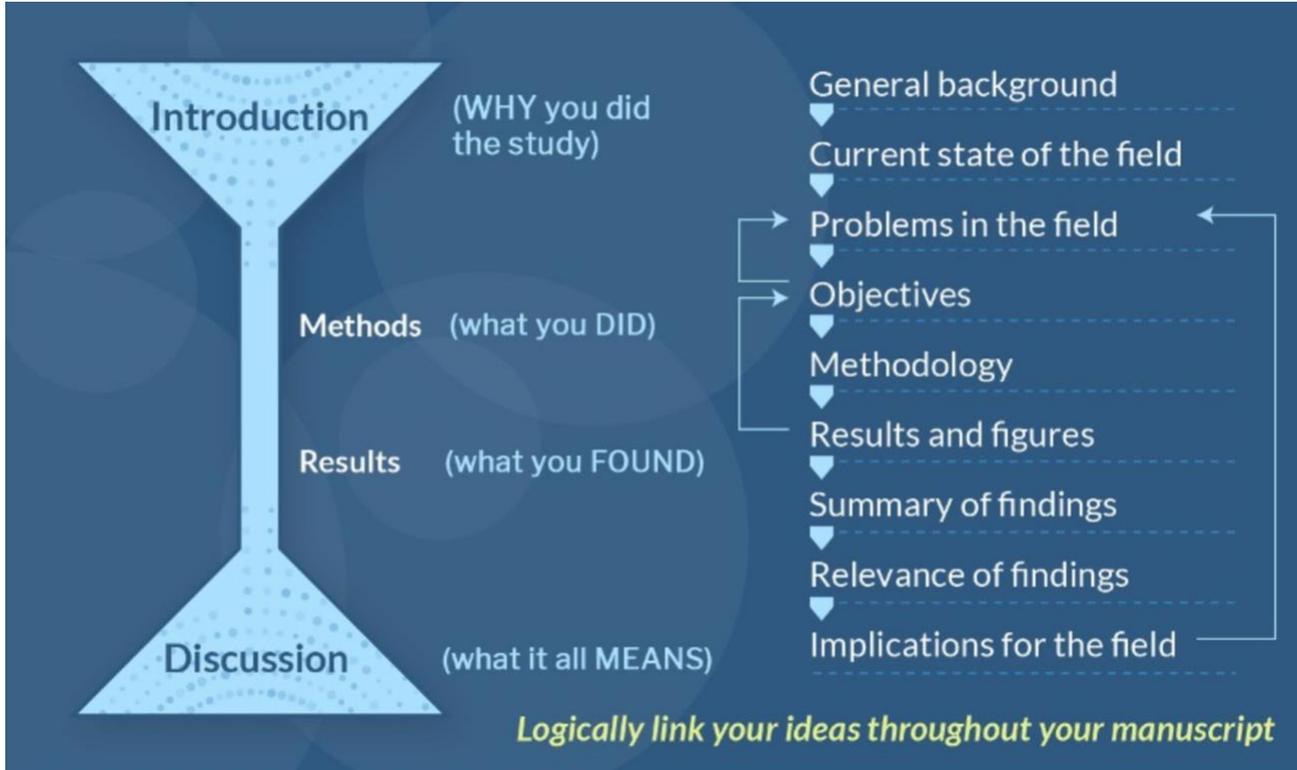
Each has a distinct function.

- ▷ Acknowledgements
- ▷ References
- ▷ Supplementary materials

STRUCTURE your paper



The shape of academic papers: The old egg timer diagram



Start of your articles in the Introduction then by being broad: talk about the wider question, the bigger picture.

WRITING your paper

Order in the paper

Introduction

Methods

Results

Discussions

Writing order

Methods

Results

Discussion

Introduction

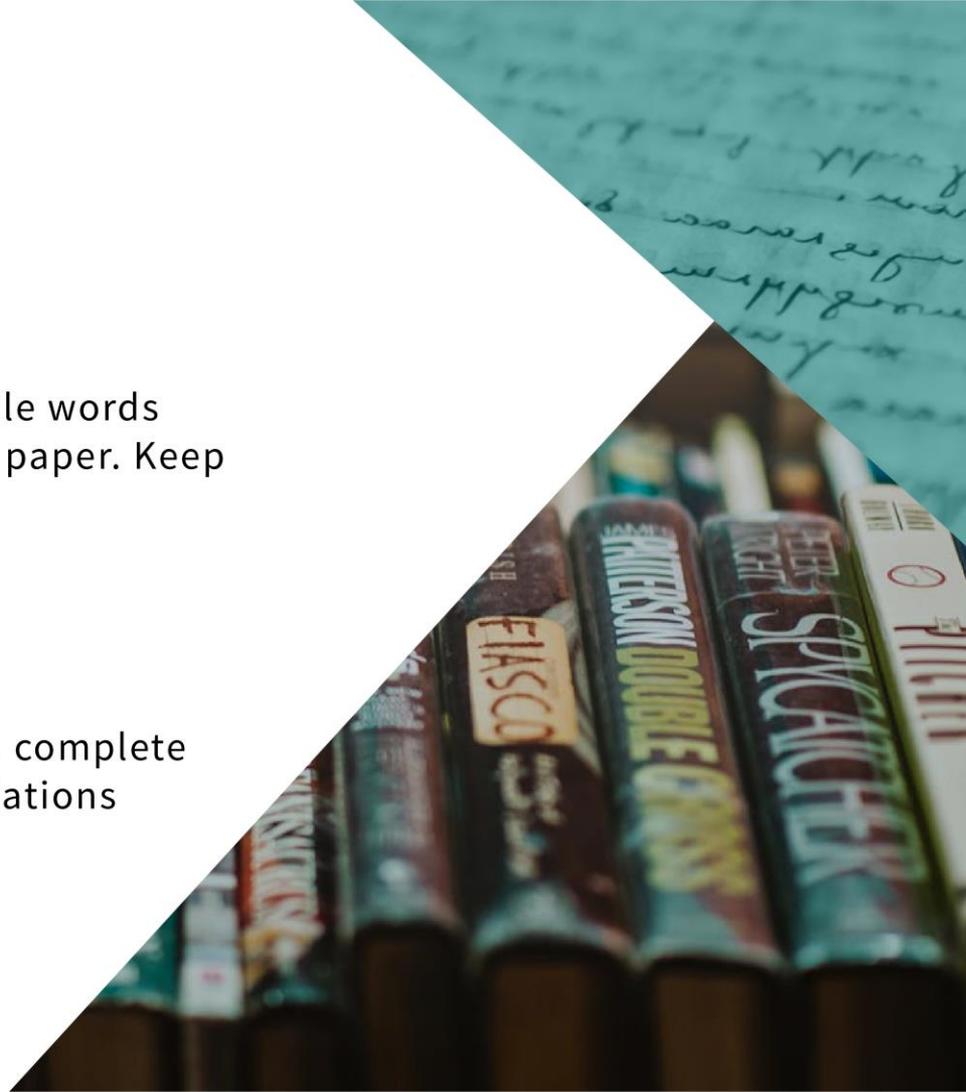
PREPARATIONS

Title

A good title should contain the **fewest** possible words that **adequately** describe the contents of the paper. Keep your title short!

Effective titles

- ▷ Identify the main issue of the paper
- ▷ Begin with the subject of the paper
- ▷ Are accurate, unambiguous, specific, and complete
- ▷ Do not contain infrequently used abbreviations
- ▷ Attract readers



TITLE: MAKE IT COMPELLING



Concise and informative



Should contain the **most important words** related to the topic



Entices the reader without giving away the punch-line

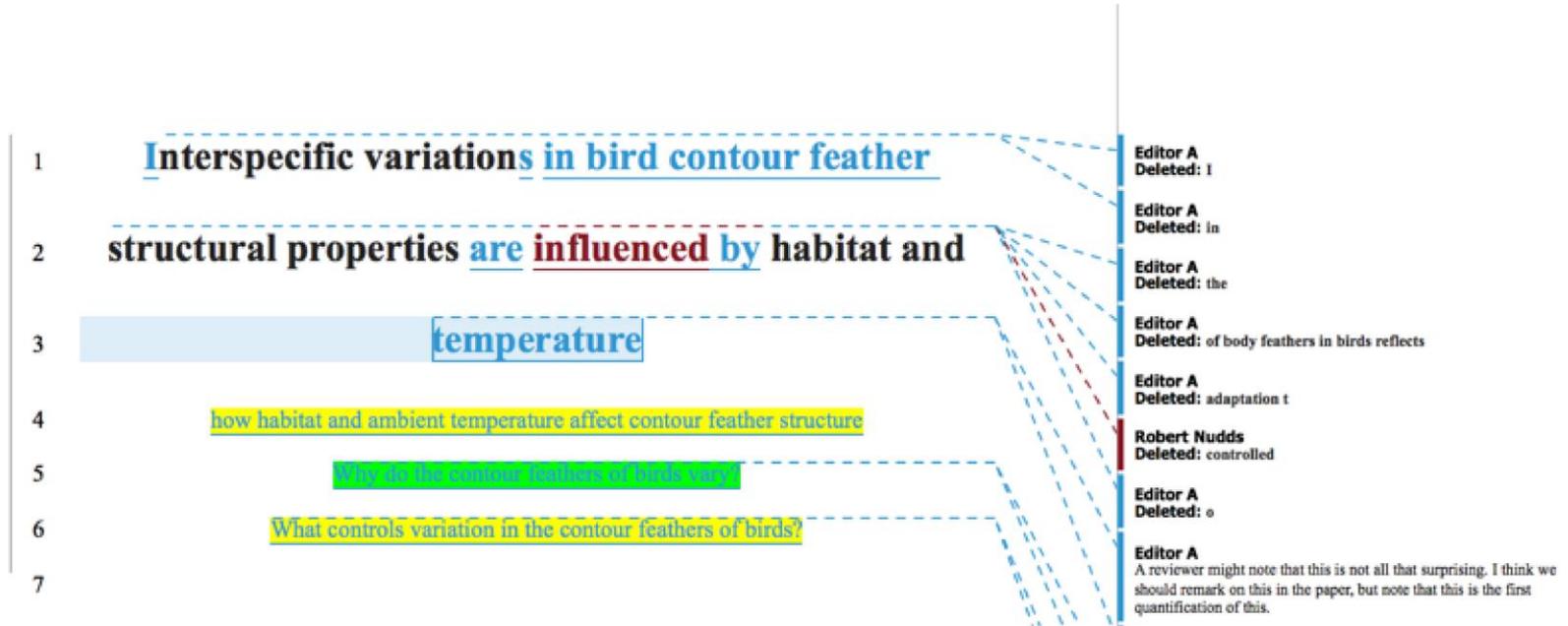


Not overly-sensationalised



Some journals now insist on including information on study design

TITLE: MY OWN WORK



TITLE: MY OWN WORK

Functional Ecology



Functional Ecology 2017, **31**, 1241–1251

doi: 10.1111/1365-2435.12820

A phylogenetic comparative analysis reveals correlations between body feather structure and habitat

Péter L. Pap^{*1,2}, Orsolya Vincze^{1,2}, Beatrix Wekerle¹, Timea Daubner¹, Csongor I. Vágási^{1,2}, Robert L. Nudds³, Gareth J. Dyke² and Gergely Osváth^{1,2,4}

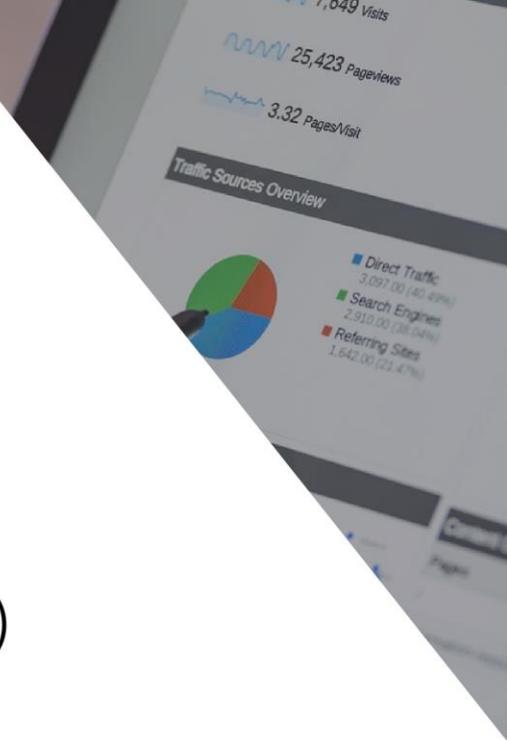
¹Evolutionary Ecology Group, Hungarian Department of Biology and Ecology, Babeş-Bolyai University, Clinicilor Street 5–7, RO-400006 Cluj Napoca, Romania; ²MTA-DE “Lendület” Behavioural Ecology Research Group, Department of Evolutionary Zoology and Human Biology, University of Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1, H-4032 Debrecen, Hungary; ³Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PT, UK; and ⁴Museum of Zoology, Babeş-Bolyai University, Clinicilor Street 5–7, RO-400006 Cluj Napoca, Romania

THE ABSTRACT (ADVERTISEMENT/MARKETING)

A good quality abstract is:

- ▷ Honest and precise
- ▷ Can stand alone
(search engines, sometimes all people read)
- ▷ No technical jargon
- ▷ Short and specific
- ▷ Cites no references

The quality of an abstract *will inform* the editor's decision



THE ABSTRACT

MANY JOURNALS NOW BASE THEIR DECISION ON THE ABSTRACT ALONE

- ▷ Sadly, many authors write the abstract in a great rush, almost as an afterthought.
- ▷ It should be a concise “standalone” piece with a very clear message.
- ▷ It must accurately reflect the full text of the paper.
- ▷ Why did you do the study? What did you do? What did you find? What did you conclude?

A STRUCTURED ABSTRACT: IT CAN HELP ORGANISE YOUR IDEAS – TRY IT!

Background Abstract	<p><i>Glossina fuscipes fuscipes</i> is the major vector of human African trypanosomiasis, commonly referred to as sleeping sickness, in Uganda. In western and eastern Africa the disease has distinct clinical manifestations and is caused by two different parasites: <i>Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense</i> and <i>T. b. gambiense</i>. Uganda is exceptional in that it harbors both parasites, which are separated by a narrow 160-km belt. This separation is puzzling considering there are no restrictions on the movement of people and animals across this region.</p>
Methodology/Principal Findings Abstract	<p>We investigated whether genetic heterogeneity of <i>G. f. fuscipes</i> vector populations can provide an explanation for this disjunct distribution of the <i>Trypanosoma</i> parasites. Therefore, we examined genetic structuring of <i>G. f. fuscipes</i> populations across Uganda using newly developed microsatellite markers, as well as mtDNA. Our data show that <i>G. f. fuscipes</i> populations are highly structured, with two clearly defined clusters that are separated by Lake Kyoga, located in central Uganda. Interestingly, we did not find a correlation between genetic heterogeneity and the type of <i>Trypanosoma</i> parasite transmitted.</p>
Conclusions/Significance Abstract	<p>This lack of a correlation between genetic structuring of <i>G. f. fuscipes</i> populations and the distribution of <i>T. b. gambiense</i> and <i>T. b. rhodesiense</i> indicates that it is unlikely that genetic heterogeneity of <i>G. f. fuscipes</i> populations explains the disjunct distribution of the parasites. These results have important epidemiological implications, suggesting that a fusion of the two disease distributions is unlikely to be prevented by an incompatibility between vector populations and parasite.</p>

ABSTRACT: EXAMPLE 2

24 Plant roots are vital for acquiring nutrients and water from soil. However, the
25 mechanisms regulating root growth in hexaploid wheat remain to be elucidated.

26 Previously, we detected a major quantitative trait locus (QTL), *qTaLRO-B1*, that
27 controls primary root length in wheat. Here, a comparative proteomic analysis
28 approach was used to study the mechanism of *qTaLRO-B1* regulated root growth. A
29 total of 80 differentially expressed proteins, comprising two steroid biosynthesis
30 related proteins and nine class III peroxidases (PODs) were identified. Real-time PCR
31 analysis showed that brassinosteroid (BR) biosynthesis pathways were significantly
32 elevated in plants harboring the positive *TaLRO-B1* allele compared with those with
33 the negative allele. However, there existed both significantly up-regulated and
34 down-regulated POD members, implying a functional differentiation of PODs.

35 Moreover, O_2^- and H_2O_2 were distributed abundantly in both the root meristematic
36 and elongation zones of plants containing the positive *TaLRO-B1* allele, but only in
37 the meristematic zone of plants with the negative allele. The differential distribution
38 of reactive oxygen species in the root tips of different genotypes may be caused by the
39 differential expression of these PODs. Taken together, our results suggest that
40 *TaLRO-B1* promotes primary root growth by elevating BR biosynthesis and
41 BR-mediated ROS pathways.

ABSTRACT: MY OWN WORK

Summary

1. Body feathers ensure both waterproofing and insulation in waterbirds, but how natural variation in the morphological properties of these appendages relates to environmental constraints remains largely unexplored. Here, we test how habitat and thermal condition affect the morphology of body feathers, using a phylogenetic comparative analysis of five structural traits [i.e., total feather length, the lengths of the pennaceous (distal) and plumulaceous (proximal) sections, barb density, and pennaceous barbule density] from a sample of 194 European bird species.

2. Body feather total length is shorter in aquatic than in terrestrial birds, and this difference between groups is due to the shorter plumulaceous feather section in aquatic birds. Indeed, a reduced plumulaceous section in feather length probably reflects the need to limit air trapped in the plumage to adjust the buoyancy of aquatic birds. In contrast, the high pennaceous barbule density of aquatic birds compared to their terrestrial counterparts reflects water resistance of the plumage in contact with water.

3. Our results show that birds living in environments with low ambient temperature have long plumulaceous feather lengths, low barb density, and low pennaceous barbule density. Data also suggest that plumage probably has limited function in reducing the heat absorption of species living in hot environments.

4. Our results have broad implications for understanding the suite of selection pressures driving the evolution of body feather functional morphology. It remains to be tested, however, how other feather traits, such as the density of plumage (feathers per unit area) and the relative number of different feather types, for example downy feathers, are distributed amongst birds with different water resistance and thermoinsulative needs.

STRUCTURE: THE MOST CRUCIAL ELEMENT

Readers need to know throughout a paper

- ← Where they have come from
- ↓ Where they are now
- Where they are going

(A plot is needed: A paper is a story)



INTRODUCTION: CONTENT



Grab the reader:

draw them immediately to the crucial issue that your paper addresses



Keep it short:

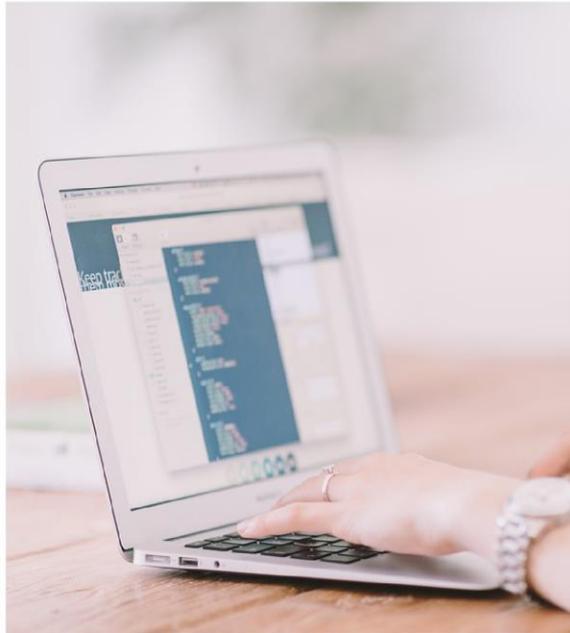
2-3 paragraphs if possible



Avoid a literature review:

set the scene and give the state of the art rather than describe everything known on the topic

INTRODUCTION: GOOD PRACTICE POINTS



- ✔ Opening sentence takes you **straight to the issue**
- ✔ Contains the **most important details** of the issue
- ✔ Contains a **brief summary** of the **controversies** and the **best evidence**
- ✔ Ends in a **crisp and clear research question** and how you set out to answer it
- ✔ Keeps with the rules of good writing and is written using **active rather than passive tense**

INTRODUCTION: A USEFUL TEMPLATE

Try just three paragraphs

1. State the question
2. The "state-of-the-art"
3. This study shows that



Good English writing: Pyramid writing

Short sentences

No unnecessary words

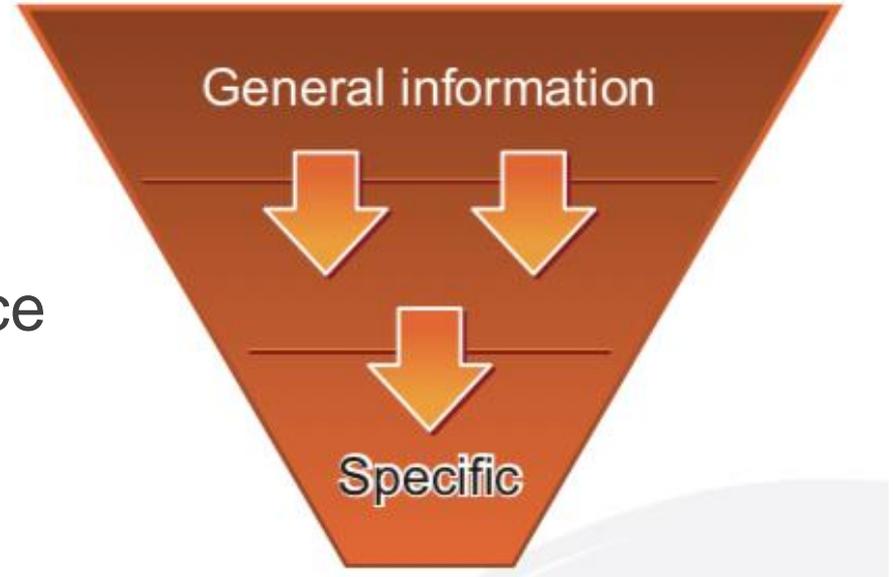
Familiar words

Active voice over passive voice

Appropriate Style

Good punctuation

Conciseness



MATERIALS AND METHODS (DATA AND METHODS)

This section provides all the **methodological details necessary for another scientist to duplicate your work.**

It should be a **narrative of the steps you took in your experiment** or study, not a list of instructions such as you might find in a cookbook.

An important part of writing a scientific paper is **deciding what bits of information needs to be given in detail.** Do not quote or cite your laboratory manual.

Sometimes, experimental details are given as a **supplement.**



MATERIALS AND METHODS (DATA AND METHODS)

- ▷ Extremely common for editors to reject a paper because authors used the wrong method to answer their question.
- ▷ Give enough detail so that a qualified reader could repeat the study
- ▷ If your methods section is “thin on details” editors worry that you are hiding something

What statistical methods did you use to analyse your data?

METHODS: SECTIONS

**Key tip: Be VERY structured
Make a list BEFOREHAND**

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Materials and methods

FIELD DATA COLLECTION AND FEATHER MEASUREMENTS

We collected feather samples from 1043 adult birds in 194 species at several locations across Romania between 2009 and 2015. Birds were captured throughout the year, using mist nets and, upon capture, five to ten body feathers were plucked from the abdomen, in the line of the shoulders. In addition, body feathers were collected from birds found dead in Romania and Norway, augmented with museum specimens from the Zoological Museum of Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca (Romania). Feather samples were stored dry in small zip-lock plastic bags at room temperature until they were measured. None of the feathers showed any sign of degradation at the time of photographing and measurements.



METHODS: SECTIONS

Key tip: Be VERY structured
Make a list BEFOREHAND

100–0.77; 0.02–0.09; permissive: 0.0001–0.001; 100–0.77; 0.85–0.97; all $F > 5.83$, $N = 16$, all $P < 0.001$].

BODY MASS, ECOLOGICAL TRAITS, AND HABITAT

We obtained approximate body masses for the species in our sample using the compilations of Dunning (2007) and del Hoyo, Elliot & Sargatal (1992–2013), distilling data to include just European populations and subspecies with European distributions in cases where data for several subspecies or populations are reported. We classified species into one of three habitat groups (Cramp & Perrins 1977–1994); terrestrial (i.e., rarely encountering water), riparian (i.e., living in wetland habitats like marshes and sedges), or aquatic (i.e., species that move around on the surface of, or in, water). Aquatic species were further categorized as either divers or non-divers. We extracted ambient temperature data from the University of East Anglia Climate Research Unit database (<http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/>; version 3.10.01) (Mitchell & Jones 2005), a

to one of two categories: either high- or low-protein content (see Pap *et al.* 2015). A high protein content is defined as exclusive feeding on invertebrates and/or vertebrates, while low is either omnivorous and/or species feeding on plants. Dietary information for each species was obtained from Cramp & Perrins (1977–1994), and all variables are reported for each species in Appendices S1 and S2 of the Supporting Information.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

We investigated the relationship between feather morphological variables and body mass, diet, habitat, breeding maximum and wintering minimum temperatures across birds. It is well-known that large within-group (i.e. within-species) variation in studied traits can cause significant bias in phylogenetic comparative analyses (Freckleton, Harvey & Pagel 2002). Thus, in order to check whether our traits for feather quality are species-specific and suitable for multispecies comparisons, we tested their repeatability by

RESULTS

This section **presents the results of the study but does not attempt to interpret their meaning.**

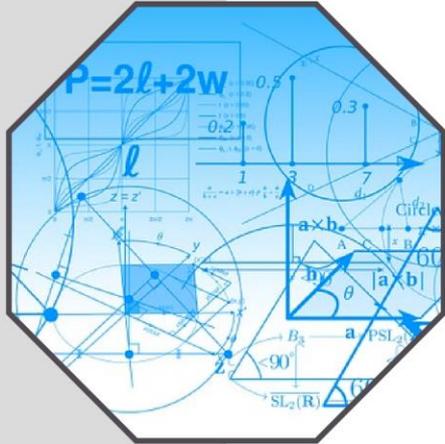
As with the Methods section, the trick to writing a good Results section is knowing what information to include or exclude. You will not present the raw data that you collected, but rather you will **summarise the data with text, tables and/or figures.** Use the text of the paper to state the results of your study, then refer the reader to a table or figure where they can see the data for themselves.

Note: Often one section “Results and discussion”.

One trick is to follow the sections of the Methods or Key Topics you feel are important.

MAKE A LIST OF THESE BEFORE YOU WRITE THE RESULTS.

RESULTS: THE FACTS AND NOTHING BUT THE FACTS



Should be ordered around primary and secondary outcomes in the same order as listed in the Methods section



State clearly and simply what you found using words and numbers



Use tables and figures for the main numbers



Don't duplicate information in text and tables

METHODS: SECTIONS

Key tip: Be VERY structured Make a list BEFOREHAND

100–0.77; $F_{2,16} = 5.83$, $P < 0.001$; $F_{2,16} = 5.83$, $P < 0.001$; $F_{2,16} = 5.83$, $P < 0.001$; $F_{2,16} = 5.83$, $P < 0.001$].

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DISCUSSION

In this section, you are free to explain what the results mean or why they differ from what other workers have found.

You should interpret your results in light of other published results, by adding additional information from sources you cited in the **Introduction** section as well as by introducing new sources. Ensure you provide accurate citations.

Relate your discussion back to the objectives and questions you raised in the **Introduction** section. However, do not simply re-state the objectives. Make statements that synthesize all the evidence (including previous work and the current work).

Limit your conclusions to those that your data can actually support. You can then proceed to speculate on why this occurred and whether you expected this to occur, based on other workers' findings.

Suggest future directions for research, new methods, explanations for deviations from previously published results, etc.

DISCUSSION



Don't write an expansive essay that **extrapolates widely** from what you found



Start the discussion with a **single sentence** that states your main findings



Discuss both **strengths** and **weaknesses**

DISCUSSION

Relate your study to what has been already found

- ▷ How do your results fit in with what is already known?
- ▷ What are the strengths and weaknesses of your study compared to previous studies?
- ▷ Why does your paper offer a different conclusion?

Discuss what your study means

- ▷ Don't overstate the importance of your findings; readers will probably come to their own conclusions on this issue

Unanswered questions

- ▷ What did your research not address? Avoid using the cliché more research is needed.

DISCUSSION:USE THE SAME LIST AS FOR THE RESULTS SECTION

**Key tip: Be VERY structured
Make a list BEFOREHAND**

- ▷ QTL mapping for MRL and PRE
- ▷ Phenotype analysis of the LR and SR groups
- ▷ Identification and quantitative results of differential proteins
- ▷ Real time PCR verification

THIS LIST OF TOPICS IS VERY IMPORTANT: WHY?

WRITING your paper



WRITING your paper

- ❖ **Yes:** Academic papers need to be **balanced**
- ❖ Select a target journal **before** you start to write
- ❖ Look at previous articles in that journal
- ❖ Average academic article length: between 5,000 and 6,000 words

What does this mean?

- ❖ 4,000 words for the Introduction? No.
- ❖ **Balance** your word count: You can use our templates for writing the different sections



Title: Aim for 7 words (or less)

Abstract: 200-250 words (check journal)

Introduction: ca. 1,500 words/3 paragraphs

Methods: Timeline headings/Short (some information in a supplement?)

Results: How many words do you need?

Discussion: ca. 2,000 words

Conclusion: Rank the outcomes of your work (finish your paper with the most important)

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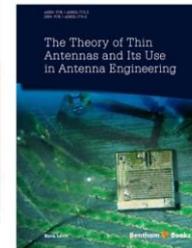
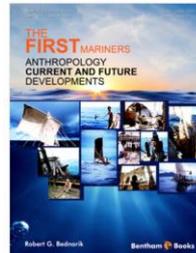
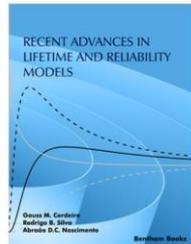
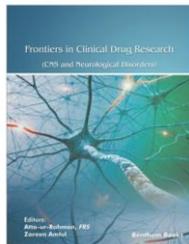
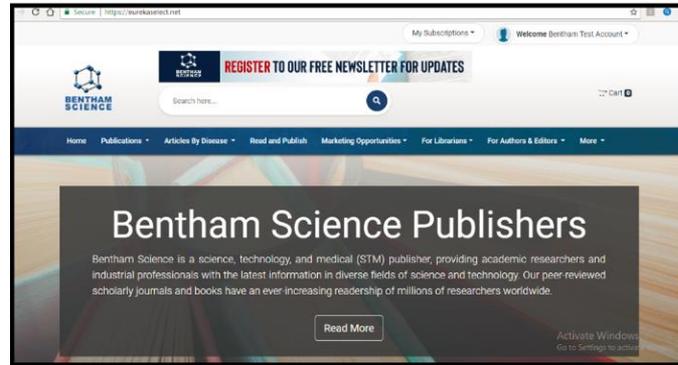
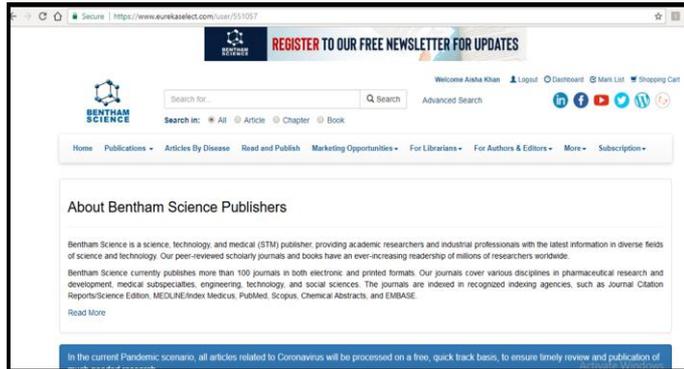
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About Bentham Science

Major international publisher: journals and books



Research Square Company overview



- Founded in 2004
- Supported +2.5 million authors in 192 countries through our preprint services platform, Research Square, and AJE's suite of manuscript preparation services



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UNIVERSITY PRESS



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



WILEY



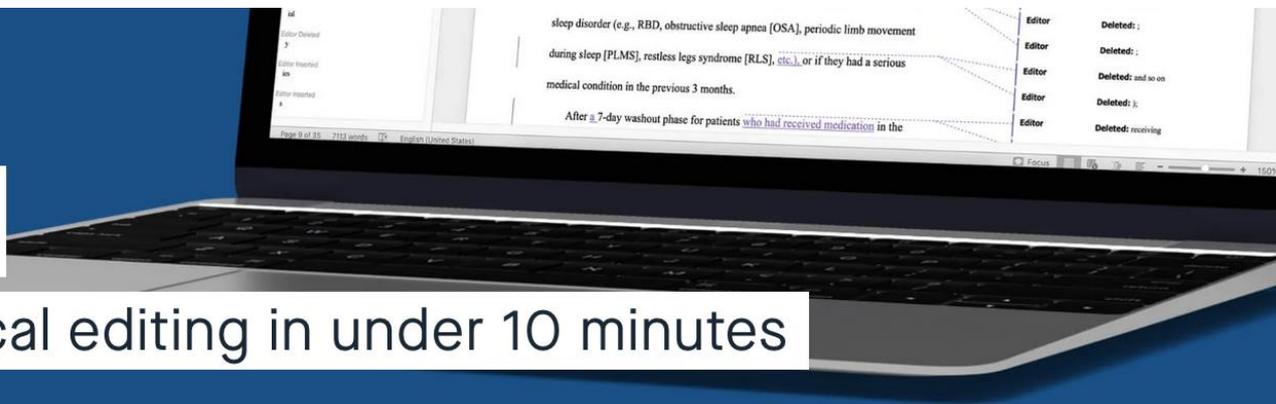
SPRINGER
NATURE



Research Square Company: AJE Digital Edit

Digital Editing

High-quality technical editing in under 10 minutes



Refine the style of your writing and improve grammar, phrasing, and article use with our automated editing service, which was developed for scientific manuscripts.

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Gareth Dyke
Director of Global Content,
Research Square Company

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