

Written communication

- Keep in mind your goal: you must convey information to the reader and keep his/her attention. Often, this information is challenging, and you need to help the reader.
- Curse of knowledge is common: your understanding of the system and questions will make it hard to communicate to others. Consider where you were one-two years prior to writing the manuscript. What parts of the manuscript would be most challenging to your former self to read? Work on those!
- You have to structure your paper, paragraphs, and sentences to lead your reader along.
- Make things easy for your reader. Don't expect them to read between the lines or provide necessary information. Randomly inserted facts aren't useful -- they take mental effort to process and distract from the narrative and point of your writing.
- Order matters -- what comes first is usually more important or necessary to understand later ideas. Define new terms as you introduce them and connect ideas to each other.
- Write directly, in first person.
- Avoid "there is" or "there are." Sentences can almost always be written more directly if you avoid this phrasing.
- Make sentences concise and direct. Avoid unnecessary words, such as "in order to" (just write "to").
- Each paragraph should have a strong topic sentence, and not stray from that central point. Try reading only the first sentences of each paragraph. Can you make sense of the manuscript?

Resources

Heard, S. B. (2016). *The Scientist's Guide to Writing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. doi: <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1515/9781400881147>