Publishing workshop – Hanoi

How to write an English paper

Presenter: Duc Le

August, 2015
Outline

- Elsevier

- How to get published
  - Before you begin
  - Select your audience

- Writing the paper
  - Using proper scientific language
  - Editors expectations
  - The review process

- What not to do

- Author rights

- How to get the right attention for your publication
Elsevier journal publishing volume

- 1,000 new editors per year
- 20 new journals per year

- Organize editorial boards
- Launch new specialist journals

- 600,000+ article submissions per year
- 40-90% rejected by >13,000 Editors (100 in UB)

- >700 million downloads by >11 million researchers in >120 countries!

- 12.6 million articles available

- 3 million Print pages

- 280,000 new articles produced per year (>3,000 from UB)

- 6.5 million author/publisher communications/year

- 557,000+ reviewers
- 1 million Reviewer reports

- 190 years of back issues scanned, processed and data-tagged
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Before you begin......

*Your personal reason* for publishing

- However, editors, reviewers, and the research community don’t consider these reasons when assessing your work.
Always keep in mind that……

…. your paper is your passport to your community!
Thought Question

- What is it that distinguishes an excellent article from a poor one?

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."
- George Orwell - Animal Farm
The preparation of a research paper begins with the planning of the project.

A well planned project will inherently address most recommendations for preparing a research paper.

However, presentation can make a difference
How do you know you are ready to publish?

Do you have information that advances understanding in a certain scientific field?

- Presenting new, original results or methods
- Rationalizing, refining, or reinterpreting published results
- Reviewing or summarizing a particular subject or field

or

Do you have information that is of use, to others?

- Adaptations to Methods / Method Development - refining, adapting or customizing existing methods
- Data
- Software

If YES - you are ready to publish!
You will now need a strong manuscript
What makes a strong manuscript?

- Has a novel, clear, useful, and exciting message
- Presented and constructed in a logical manner
- Reviewers and editors can grasp the scientific significance easily

Editors and reviewers are all busy scientists – make things easy to save their time
Novelty

- Being the first report is best
- Being definitive in an area of controversy
- Extending and confirming prior findings
- Presenting the largest study
- Presenting confirmatory data is least
  - Especially “in the current era”
Types of manuscripts

Full articles
- Substantial, complete and comprehensive pieces of research

Is my message sufficient for a full article?

Letters or short communications
- Quick and early communications

Are my results so thrilling that they should be shown as soon as possible?

Review papers
- Summaries of recent developments on a specific topic
- Often submitted by invitation
Types of manuscripts – New!

- **MethodsX** ([www.methodsx.com](http://www.methodsx.com))
  - Adaptations and customizations to methods

  - Publish, share and reuse datasets

- **SoftwareX** ([http://www.journals.elsevier.com/softwarex](http://www.journals.elsevier.com/softwarex))
  - Acknowledges the impact of software on research

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Ask your supervisor and colleagues for advice on manuscript type. Sometimes outsiders see things more clearly than you.
Selecting the right audience......

What does the impact factor mean?

Impact Factor

*the average annual number of citations per article published*

- For example, the 2014 impact factor for a journal would be calculated as follows:
  - $A =$ the number of times articles published in 2012 and 2013 were cited in indexed journals during 2014
  - $B =$ the number of "citable items" (usually articles, reviews, proceedings or notes; not editorials and letters-to-the-Editor) published in 2012 and 2013
  - $2014$ impact factor = $A/B$

  e.g. $\frac{600 \text{ citations}}{150 + 150 \text{ articles}} = 2$
Influences on Impact Factors: Subject Area

Mean Impact Factor

- Fundamental Life Sciences
- Neuroscience
- Clinical Medicine
- Pharmacology & Toxicology
- Physics
- Chemistry & Chemical Engineering
- Earth Sciences
- Environmental Sciences
- Biological Sciences
- Materials Science & Engineering
- Social Sciences
- Mathematics & Computer Sciences
Additional metrics

- SciVal Spotlight
- SCImago Journal & Country Ranking
- SNIP
- Hirsch Index / h-index
- Journal Analyzer
- Eigenfactor (http://www.eigenfactor.org/)
- Article level metrics (ELife and PLoS One)
Identify the right audience for your paper

- Identify the sector of readership/community for which a paper is meant
- Identify the interest of your audience
- Is your paper of local or international interest?
Do not just “descend the stairs”

Top journals


Field-specific top journals

Other field-specific journals

National journals

The impact factor can give you a general guidance, but it should NOT be the sole reason to choose a journal.
Choosing the right journal

- Aim to reach the intended audience for your work – does the scope fit?
- Choose only one journal, as simultaneous submissions are prohibited
- Supervisor and colleagues can provide good suggestions
- Shortlist a handful of candidate journals, and investigate them:
  - Aims
  - Scope
  - Accepted types of articles
  - Current hot topics
    - Go through the abstracts of recent publications

Articles in your reference list will usually lead you directly to the right journals.
The Journal Finder Tool on Elsevier.com

Elsevier for authors

How to publish in an Elsevier journal

Every year, we accept and publish more than 250,000 journal articles. Publishing in an Elsevier journal starts with finding the right journal for your paper. If you already know which journal, you can enter the title directly in the search box below. Alternatively, click on the 'Start matching' button to find a suitable journal based on the abstract of your article.

Publishing process  Find a journal  Prepare your paper  Submit paper  Check status

Match your abstract to a journal  Search for a journal by name

Start matching  or  Search for a Journal

The Elsevier publishing process step by step

1. Find the right journal
The first step is finding the right journal for your paper. Among the thousands of journals and books published by Elsevier are some of the world's most prominent and respected medical, scientific and technological publications. These include The Lancet, Cell, Tetrahedron Letters and a host of others. Find a journal match for your abstract by clicking on the blue 'Start matching' button above.
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General Structure of a Research Article

- Title
- Abstract
- Keywords

Main text (IMRAD)
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- And
- Discussions

- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements
- References
- Supplementary Data

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

Journal space is not unlimited.
Make your article as concise as possible.
Work in progress: What it will look like

The final article

- Introduction
- Methods & Results
- Discussion, Conclusion
Why is language important?

Proper English should be used

It can delay or block publication of work
Do publishers correct language?

No! It is the Author’s responsibility…

…but resources are available
Manuscript language: Overview

- Accurate
- Concise
- Clear
- Objective
Manuscript language: Sentences

- Write direct and short sentences
- One piece of information per sentence
- Avoid multiple statements in one sentence
Manuscript language: *Tenses*

**Present tense:**
for known facts & hypotheses

**Past tense:**
for experiments conducted & results
Manuscript language: Grammar

- Use active voice to shorten sentences
- Avoid abbreviations
- Minimize use of adverbs
- Eliminate redundant phrases
- Double-check unfamiliar words or phrases
Recap

Important so Editors and Reviewers can understand the work

Refer to the journal’s Guide for Authors for specifications

Work has short sentences, correct tenses, correct grammar and is all in English

Have a native English speaker check your manuscript or use a language editing service

Am I using proper manuscript language?
Language (usage and editing services)

Please write your text in good English (American or British usage is accepted, but not a mixture of these). Authors who feel their English language manuscript may require editing to eliminate possible grammatical or spelling errors and to conform to correct scientific English may wish to use the English Language Editing service available from Elsevier’s WebShop (http://webshop.elsevier.com/languageditoring/) or visit our customer support site (http://support.elsevier.com) for more information.
The process of writing – building the article

- Title & Abstract
- Conclusion
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Figures/tables (your data)
Author Expectations vs Editor & Reviewer Expectations

Authors sometimes experience peer review as distress they need to get through to publish their work.

However, the best editors and reviewers tend to view themselves as teachers rather than critics.

The goal is to improve the work published – for the sake of the authors, readers and science overall.
Editor Expectations

- Cover letter
- In-scope vs out-of-scope papers
- Research quality and novelty
- Guide for Authors
- Ethical conducts of research
- Reporting standards
- Plagiarism
Cover Letter

Submitted along with your manuscript

Mention what makes your manuscript special to the journal

Note special requirements (suggest reviewers, conflicts of interest)

Final approval from all authors

Suggested reviewers

January 1, 2008

Dear Professor Schmidt,

Enclosed with this letter you will find an electronic submission of a manuscript entitled "Mechano-sorptive creep under compressive loading - a micromechanical model" by John Smith and myself. This is an original paper which has neither previously nor simultaneously in whole or in part been submitted anywhere else. Both authors have read and approved the final version submitted.

Mechano-sorptive is sometimes denoted as accelerated creep. It has been experimentally observed that the creep of paper accelerates if it is subjected to a cyclic moisture content. This is of large practical importance for the paper industry. The present manuscript describes a micromechanical model on the fibre network level that is able to capture the experimentally observed behaviour. In particular, the difference between mechano-sorptive creep in tension and compression is analysed. John Smith is a PhD-student who within a year will present his doctoral thesis. The present paper will be a part of that thesis.

Three potential independent reviewers who have excellent expertise in the field of this paper are:

Dr. Fernandez, Tennessee Tech, email1@university.com
Dr. Chen, University of Maine, email2@university.com
Dr. Singh, Colorado School of Mines, email3@university.com

I would very much appreciate if you would consider the manuscript for publication in the International Journal of Science.

Yours sincerely,

A. Professor
Policies regarding authorship can vary

One example: the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors ("Vancouver Group") declared that an author must:

- substantially contribute to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- draft the article or revise it critically for important intellectual content; and
- give their approval of the final full version to be published.

ALL 3 conditions must be fulfilled to be an author!

All others would qualify as “Acknowledged Individuals”
Authorship - Order & Abuses

- General principles for who is listed first
  - **First Author**
    - Conducts and/or supervises the data generation and analysis and the proper presentation and interpretation of the results
    - Puts paper together and submits the paper to journal
  - **Corresponding author**
    - The first author or a senior author from the institution
      - Particularly when the first author is a PhD student or postdoc, and may move to another institution soon.

- Abuses to be avoided
  - **Ghost Authors**: leaving out authors who should be included
  - **Gift Authors**: including authors who did not contribute significantly
Inhibition of Ebola virus by potent anti-Ebola miRNAs *in silico*
Computer-based findings. No experimental proof. Too hypothetical for *EBioMedicine*. **Reject for out of scope.**
Research quality and novelty

In Vitro Antitumour Activity of Xanthium strumarium on Human Cervical Cancer Cells
Authors showed that extracts from a herbal plant (Xanthium strumarium) could inhibit growth and increase apoptosis of HeLa cells. No controls. Simplistic approach, no explanation of possible mechanisms of action of active substances in the plant extract. Reject for low quality.

TOTAL AND SEGMENTAL COLON TRANSIT TIME STUDY IN CONSTIPATION
50 constipation patients and 25 healthy controls. Technique used (radio opaque markers) is not new, findings on colon transit time (CTT) in Indian population is not new (see ref. 6,8,12 of the paper). Findings are all as expected (CTT was higher in constipation patients). Reject for lack of novelty.
Read the Guide for Authors .....again and again

- Find it on the journal homepage of the publisher, e.g. www.ebiomedicine.com
- Keep to the Guide for Authors in your manuscript
- It will save your time
Ethics Committee approval

- Experiments on humans or animals must follow applicable ethics standards
  - e.g. most recent version of the Helsinki Declaration and/or relevant (local, national, international) animal experimentation guidelines

- Approval of the local ethics committee is required, and should be specified in the manuscript

- Informed consents from human subjects involved in the study
  - Authors to obtain and keep confidentially

- Editors can make their own decisions as to whether the experiments were done in an ethically acceptable manner
  - Sometimes local ethics approvals are way below internationally accepted standards
Reporting standards

- Recommended minimum set of items for reporting data
- Each standard is developed and maintained by an expert group
- To achieve complete and transparent reporting, and critical appraisal and interpretation of reported data
- Endorsed/upheld by journals
# Reporting standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study type</th>
<th>Reporting standard</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical trials</td>
<td>CONSORT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONsolidated Standards Of Reporting Trials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animal preclinical studies</td>
<td>ARRIVE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal Research: Reporting of In Vivo Experiments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observational cohort and case-control studies</td>
<td>STROBE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STRengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systematic reviews and meta-analyses</td>
<td>PRISMA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genetic association studies</td>
<td>STREGA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthening The REporting of Genetic Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genetic risk prediction studies</td>
<td>GRIPS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Genetic RIsk Prediction Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnostic tests</td>
<td>STARD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>STAnards for the Reporting of Diagnostic accuracy studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Microarrays</td>
<td>MIAME</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Minimum Information About a Microarray Experiment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Make every attempt to make the first submission a success

- No one gets it right the first time!
  - Write, and re-write ….

- Suggestions
  - After writing a first version, take several days of rest. Come back with a critical, fresh view
  - Ask colleagues and supervisor to review your manuscript. Ask them to be highly critical, and be open to their suggestions.
"That's it? That's peer review?"
Peer Review

- Peer review is clearly imperfect
- Many key articles have been rejected
- Many accepted articles not read or cited
- Articles usually published somewhere

*Peer review is best system available*

Anthony DeMaria, MD
Editor-in-Chief of J. American College of Cardiology
First Decision: “Accepted” or “Rejected”

Accepted

- Very rare, but it happens
- Congratulations!
  - Cake for the department
  - Now wait for page proofs and then for your article online and in print

Rejected

- Probability 40-90% ...
- Do not despair
  - It happens to everybody
- Try to understand WHY
  - Consider reviewers’ advice
  - Be self-critical
- If you submit to another journal, begin as if it were a new manuscript
  - Take advantage of the reviewers’ comments
  - The same reviewer may again review your manuscript!
  - Read the Guide for Authors of the new journal, again and again.
First Decision: “Major” or “Minor” Revision

• Minor revision
  ▪ Basically, the manuscript is worth being published
  ▪ Some elements in the manuscript must be clarified, restructured, shortened (often) or expanded (rarely)
  ▪ Textual adaptations
  ▪ “Minor revision” does NOT guarantee acceptance after revision!

• Major revision
  ▪ The manuscript may be worth being published
  ▪ Significant deficiencies must be corrected before acceptance
  ▪ Involves (significant) textual modifications and/or additional experiments
“Thank you for your detailed and lengthy criticism of my manuscript. I will be sure to incorporate your suggestions in my next draft.”
Manuscript Revision

- Cherish the chance of discussing your work directly with other scientists in your community.

- Prepare a detailed Response Letter
  - Copy-paste each reviewer comment, and type your response below it
  - State specifically which changes you made to the manuscript
    - Include page/line numbers
    - No general statements like “Comment accepted, and Discussion changed accordingly.”
  - Provide a *scientific* response to comments to accept, ..... or a convincing, solid and polite rebuttal when you feel the reviewer was wrong.
  - Write in such a manner, that your response can be forwarded to the reviewer without prior editing

- Do not do yourself a disfavour, but cherish your work
  - You spent *weeks* and *months* in the lab or the library to do the research
  - It took you *weeks* to write the manuscript

*Why then run the risk of avoidable rejection by not taking manuscript revision seriously?*
Authors response to reviewers comments

- Welcome the comments with an open mind
- Always respond in a point-by-point manner, include the original comments and provide answers immediately underneath
- Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the critics, provide reasons and evidence for your answers
- Be professional in your answers, even when you disagree (e.g., we respectfully disagree with the reviewer in this particular point…)
- Be specific, don’t just say “we agree, changes have been made”
- Indicate *where* changes made to the manuscript (page no., line no.)
- Indicate *what* changes have been made to the manuscript (within the answer, and in the manuscript using track changes)
Authors response to reviewers comments

- Incorporate your reasons and evidence in the actual manuscript where appropriate – especially where you disagree with the reviewer comments.

- Remember that the majority of reviewers peer-review papers in their spare time voluntarily out of their goodwill – so thank them for their comments on your paper!

- Be thorough and try your best.

- If the editor has also include his/her decision along with the reviewers’ comments – and the decision is to reject your paper – first examine the comments in detail, and if you think you can address them satisfactorily, it’s always worth a try to appeal the editor’s decision and request a re-examination of your paper after revision. Most journals uphold one appeal from the authors.
Rejection: not the end of the world

- Everyone has papers rejected – do not take it personally.
- Try to understand why the paper was rejected.
- Note that you have received the benefit of the editors and reviewers’ time; take their advice seriously!
- Re-evaluate your work and decide whether it is appropriate to submit the paper elsewhere.

- If so, begin as if you are going to write a new article.
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Publish *and* Perish – if you break ethical rules

- Ethics problems with scientific articles are on the rise *globally*.

- International scientific ethics have evolved over centuries and are commonly held throughout the world.

- Scientific ethics are not considered to have national variants or characteristics – there is a *single ethical standard* for science.

M. Errami & H. Garner  
A tale of two citations  
Plagiarism detection tools

- Elsevier is participating in 2 plagiarism detection schemes:
  - Turnitin (aimed at universities)
  - IThenticate (aimed at publishers and corporations)

- Manuscripts are checked against a database of 20 million peer reviewed articles which have been donated by 50+ publishers, including Elsevier.

- All post-1994 Elsevier journal content is now included, and the pre-1995 is being steadily added week-by-week

- Editors and reviewers
- Your colleagues
- "Other“ whistleblowers
  - “The walls have ears“, it seems …
Data fabrication and falsification

*Fabrication*: Making up data or results, and recording or reporting them

“… the fabrication of research data … *hits at the heart of our responsibility to society*, the reputation of our institution, the trust between the public and the biomedical research community, and our personal credibility and that of our mentors, colleagues…”

“It can *waste the time of others*, trying to replicate false data or designing experiments based on false premises, and can lead to therapeutic errors. It can never be tolerated.”

*Professor Richard Hawkes*
Department of Cell Biology and Anatomy
University of Calgary

“The most dangerous of all falsehoods is a slightly distorted truth.”

G.C.Lichtenberg (1742-1799)
Figure manipulation

As long as they don’t obscure or eliminate info present in the original image

Brightness
Contrast
Colour Balance
Nonlinear adjustments

Must be disclosed in the figure legend

Enhanced
Obscured
Moved
Removed
Introduced
Figure Manipulation

Example - Different authors and reported experiments

Am J Pathol, 2001

Life Sci, 2004
Rotated 180°

Rotated 180°
Zoomed out ?!
The article of which the authors committed plagiarism: it won’t be removed from ScienceDirect. Everybody who downloads it will see the reason of retraction...
Publication Ethics – how it can end

“I deeply regret the inconvenience and agony caused to you by my mistake and request and beg for your pardon for the same. As such I am facing lot many difficulties in my personal life and request you not to initiate any further action against me.

I would like to request you that all the correspondence regarding my publications may please be sent to me directly so that I can reply them immediately. To avoid any further controversies, I have decided not to publish any of my work in future.”

A “pharma” author

December 2, 2008
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Authors (and in some cases their employers) have the right under national copyright laws (and international treaties) to control how their works are to be used and distributed to others.
The extent of copyright rights allows authors to permit: the copying, distribution, online access, translation & creation of other derivative works of research.

FACT
MYTH

Publishers or other distributors do not need written agreements from authors to transfer copying and distribution rights.

MYTH
Copyright Fundamentals

Journal publishing agreements can take the form of a transfer of copyright or a publishing license.

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How to get noticed

*Make sure your article gets the attention it deserves*

- The volume of research articles is growing at an accelerated pace
- For most researchers, it’s a real challenge to keep up with the literature
- Make sure your article doesn’t fall through the cracks!

9.3 hrs/week – average time spent on literature
Get noticed

Preparing your article

Promoting your article

Monitoring your article
Preparing your article

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
  - How to make your article to appear at the top of the list in search engine results
    - Use keywords in title and abstract
    - Use headings with keywords
    - Use captions for images
    - Link to your article
Preparing your article (continued)

- Choose the right journal

- Abstract: Make sure your abstract is crystal-clear about what and why. Don’t assume people will understand.

- Spend quality time on your introduction and conclusions

- Don’t forget your keywords

- Share your data and research
  - Deposit research data in a data repository, getting a DOI for it and linking it to a publication (and vice versa). 3TU – [http://datacentrum.3tu.nl/home/](http://datacentrum.3tu.nl/home/)
  - Data in Brief – new OA journal that publishes Datasets

- Use easy to understand charts and professional illustrations to support your message.

- Use clear and correct manuscript language
Appealing to both humans and search engines

Use strong key words in:

- Title
- Heading / sub-headings
- Description tags
- Description of authors
- Main body text
- Abstract
- Graphics (tables & figures)
Preparing your article (continued)

Add a video presentation to your article

- Present your paper in your own words
- Slides and audio
- Up to 5 minutes
Promote your article

- Personal contact
  - Present your work face-to-face during conferences
  - Use your e-mail signature to tell people about your article

- Share your article
  - DOI unique link to your article
  - Share link: 50 days free access

- Media Relations
  - Explain the significance of your work in lay language
  - Your institutes communications channels
  - Reach out to researchcomm@elsevier.com
Monitoring your article

- Elsevier helps you to keep track of your article performance
  - CiteAlert: citations of your article.
  - Usage Alert: downloads and views of your article
  - Altmetrics: monitors the online impact of your research
Thank you!

Questions