Paper formatting checklist

As you get to the later stages of editing your paper, use this list as a reminder of items to check.

Abstract and Conclusions

- ☐ Make the abstract self-contained without assuming detailed reader background knowledge.
- ☐ Summarize findings with specific key results rather than vague statements.
- ☐ Restate your scope and approach in the opening paragraph of the conclusions.
- ☐ Discuss broader implications rather than ending with a limitations list.
- ☐ Avoid introducing new topics in the conclusions section.

Figures and tables

- ☐ Ensure the main message of each figure is apparent to viewers.
- ☐ Include a caption with complete sentences below each figure.
- ☐ Label all axes with property name, variable name (if used), and units.
- ☐ Make text size in figures similar to body text size.
- ☐ Remove or minimize border lines in tables (use only top, header, and bottom lines).
- ☐ Right-align numerical values in tables to facilitate comparison.
- ☐ Use an appropriate number of significant digits for numerical values.
- ☐ Place table captions above tables with complete sentences.

Writing clarity

- ☐ State the main point in the first sentence or two of each section.
- ☐ Present recommendations before discussing alternatives.
- ☐ Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence stating its main idea.
- ☐ Use consistent verb tense throughout.
- ☐ Write in active voice for decisions and actions you undertook.
- ☐ Use passive voice only when the actor is irrelevant.
- ☐ Avoid emotional or judgmental words (obviously, clearly, trivial).
- ☐ Replace vague references (this, it) with specific nouns when the meaning could be ambiguous.
- ☐ Use qualifying words (might, could, may) only when you lack support for definitive statements.
- ☐ Replace imprecise descriptions (slow, several hours) with specific values.
- ☐ Use fewer and simpler words whenever possible.
- ☐ Spell out numbers less than ten unless they appear with units; use digits for other cases.
- ☐ Spell out all abbreviations and acronyms on first use.

Notation and references

- ☐ Use the same terminology or variable name consistently for each quantity or concept.
- ☐ Apply consistent notational conventions (*e.g.*, capitals for random variables, boldface for vectors).
- ☐ Define every variable in each equation.
- ☐ Use consistent capitalization style in titles and headings (Sentence case or Title Case).
- ☐ Provide precise cross-references ("Equation 2," not "the above procedure").
- ☐ Check that you have cited the correct documents.
- ☐ Verify that citation details (authors, year, title) are accurate.
- ☐ Ensure citations appear in the correct format for your target journal.
- ☐ Confirm that the references list is complete and matches the documents cited in the text.

Formatting for submission

- ☐ Add page numbers and line numbers to aid in referencing specific parts of the document.
- ☐ Use a grammar checker to identify basic spelling and wording errors.
- ☐ Ensure all figures and tables are referenced in the text.
- ☐ Verify that figure and table numbering is sequential.
- ☐ Check that all URLs and DOIs are functional and formatted correctly.