

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 much 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.