

Ten Best Practices in Manuscript Submission

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The suggestions concern best practices to consider before submitting a paper.

1) Pay attention to the structure of your paper. From the introduction to the conclusions, sections and paragraphs should follow a logical train of thought that should be clear to the reader. You may ask colleagues to help you with an internal review to check whether your science questions, proposed solutions and take home message are clear. Do not presume that a valuable contribution should not also be easily understandable; actually, the opposite is true! Remember that a good paper is not unnecessarily long. Referees prefer concise contributions, and readers are more likely pay attention to papers with a clear message.

2) Consider with much care the tone of your manuscript. There are many different attitudes that can be taken when writing a paper and they affect the opinion of the referees. Although a low profile tone is the most appropriate way to follow in many cases, we do recognize the value and fashion of provocative contributions.

3) State clearly your novel contribution, in the abstract, introduction and conclusions. The referees and the readers like to immediately recognize what is the purpose of your study and its added value. Targeting WRR means that you have a significant message to deliver to the global community of water scientist; this message should be of general interest and should clearly emerge from your paper. Overstatement and excessive modesty should be avoided in favor of objectivity. Remember that WRR strives to publish innovative concepts and theoretical developments along with their applications. If you are essentially presenting a case study, make sure that the findings are interesting at the global level and not just locally.

4) The introduction is the most difficult section of the paper to write and therefore it is not easy to provide guidelines for it. The introduction section should start with a statement of the problem you are tackling, keeping in mind that the referees expect that a novel contribution to an open and interesting issue. Then, make a brief but comprehensive review of the literature: you may feel that “brief” and “comprehensive” are incompatible. This is not true: actually, excellence also implies the capability to achieve synthesis through creativity. An excellent literature review should synthesizes the relevant literature to place the present work in an appropriate context. A literature review is not merely a summary of work that has been done. Do not forget to look at recent papers and in particular at papers in press in the relevant journals. We know that this is a time consuming and demanding endeavor, but we have no doubt that it will pay you back. As a result of the review of the literature state the research question you are interested in and then explain how you are addressing it, by emphasizing your novel contribution.

5) Explain new theoretical developments and methods clearly. State transparently any assumptions that you are introducing, discuss their validity and provide an adequate and substantiated motivation for any objective choice that you make.

6) Prepare figures and tables with care, noting that figures and tables should help not hinder understanding. Keep in mind that a figure (or table) and its caption must be self-contained, and so understandable even without reading the main text of the manuscript. Pay attention to their readability, by checking font size and usage of colors. Only necessary figures and tables should be introduced.

7) Read carefully the instructions for authors and make an effort to meet the journal's format. Even if WRR is tolerant with the format requirements for the submitted papers, there is always a reason behind a publisher's decision to adopt given standards and the referees appreciate the effort made by authors to meet these standards. Use the templates provided by the journal and pay attention to spelling errors and correct use of the English language. Details are important when writing a paper. Remember, the referees dedicate their time to your manuscript and therefore they should not feel that you did not dedicate enough attention to it.

8) Present the results clearly and objectively, by providing quantitative assessments.

9) The concluding section is very important; it should not be a mere repetition of what has been already described in the body of the paper. It should rather present original concluding remarks that address the goal of the manuscript and clearly inform the reader what has been learned.

10) Beware that the number of authors should be directly related to the essence of your contribution. Any author is expected to provide a significant contribution in the development of the research and the manuscript and all those who have significantly contributed to the paper should be on the author list. Finally, we would like to make mention to the most important, challenging and time taking phase of the writing process of a paper, namely, the first revision after review (assuming that the outcome from the first editor's decision was not negative). Indeed, we realize that in many cases the authors do not reserve enough time and attention to it, therefore getting into difficult and controversial situations. To provide useful guidance we offer the additional 5 suggestions below.

1) Carefully consider all the remarks raised the referees, including minor ones, and address them in the revised paper. If you disagree with the referees explain your reasoning in the rebuttal document.

2) Do not be concerned to make additional work. Often the referees get the feeling that the authors refuse to follow their suggestion for the very simple reason that they are concerned by additional analyses or experiments. It is important to prove that you are willing to put time into your study. If you feel that the additional work required by the

referees is not worth including in the paper it is advisable to carry it out anyway and to illustrate the related results in the rebuttal document.

3) Clearly describe any change that has been introduced in the paper in your rebuttal document by referring to line numbers in the manuscript. Do not make the rebuttal document unnecessarily long.

4) Use a proper tone in the rebuttal document: its writing style is heavily impacting the fate of a paper. For example, do not be dismissive of a reviewer comment. Sometimes reviewers miss a key point or have a different viewpoint. Remember that it is the author's responsibility to make the paper clear to the reviewer.

5) Do not forget to thank the referees in the acknowledgements of the paper. We suggest not acknowledging the editor and associate editor unless there is a very special reason. We hope that the above suggestions may help our readership to shape their scientific contributions. We are always ready to provide feedback: please do not hesitate to contact us!

References

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