

# FACILITATORS WANTED!

## *Writing Manuscripts for Publication*

**Tuesday, November 2, 2010: 9:00 AM-11:00 AM**

**Long Beach Convention Center, Room 202A, Second Floor**

### **About the Workshop:**

Publishing is an important part of the research process, but writing papers is not what attracted most of us to the field of agronomy. Learning to write papers with minimal effort and maximum impact will help you for the rest of your career. We will provide you with general advice on organizing your writing efforts and specific examples of the steps you will go through in preparing each section of your paper. To participate in this workshop, you should complete a "Getting Started Exercise," which will form the basis of discussion and feedback in small groups. The exercise is available at [www.esf.edu/for/yanai/publishing/GSE.htm](http://www.esf.edu/for/yanai/publishing/GSE.htm). Experienced authors and editors willing to guide small groups through the exercise should contact Ruth Yanai [rdyanai@syr.edu](mailto:rdyanai@syr.edu).

### **What do you need me to do?**

The core of the workshop is a small-group exercise. Facilitators are needed to guide groups through the "Getting Started Exercise" (see example below). The back of this sheet contains detailed instructions for the facilitators. Participants value the individual attention they get in the small groups. You can help promote interactions within the group and also offer your own experience, as relevant

### **When do you need me?**

The first part of the workshop is a presentation to the large group, orienting them to the exercise. You could come a little late, but if we don't know you're coming, we won't count off into the right number of groups. The small group exercise takes about an hour, and then we spend the remainder of the time in the large group. Facilitators who stay can help to answer questions at the end of the workshop.

## **Getting Started Exercise EXAMPLE**

1. Briefly explain why this research is important. To whom does it matter? Make your answer appeal to the broadest possible audience. *Global warming threatens ecological systems, coastal cities, and decisions about energy use. If C loss from terrestrial ecosystems is increased by warming, this amplifies the greenhouse effect.*
2. Objectives: What question(s) will you answer with your research?  
*What is the effect of increasing nighttime temperatures on net C flux in terrestrial ecosystems? Increased night temperatures should cause increased C losses, because of higher respiration, but also increased C sequestration, because growing season length is limited by night temperatures. Will the positive effect of increased growing season length overcome the negative effect of increased respiration?*
3. Describe the results of your work, in a small number of bulleted phrases. Include only results that are relevant to your conclusions. These results should answer the question you posed in part 2, above. If they do not, change your question so that they do.
  - *Respiration losses exceed growing season gains in most ecosystems.*
  - *Night warming causes net C loss.*
4. Write the conclusions to your paper. The conclusions should relate to the general motivation for the paper that you describe in part 1. If you accidentally write about Results, move those statements to the Results. You may want to revise your answer to part 1 to match the answer you give here. *Models that do not account for differential warming between night and day will not correctly predict the effect of global change on C balance. Estimates of terrestrial C loss with warming may have been underestimated.*

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## Instructions for Facilitators of Small Groups Doing the “Getting Started Exercise”

Start with a round of introductions. “What’s your name, where are you from, and what paper are you writing?” If you have time, you can ask, “What’s hard about it?” In a diverse group of strangers, this step can help participants identify partners for trading reviews of the exercise and even provide professional networking opportunities.

1. *Skip this, I will have made a general introduction to the whole group.*

Introduce the problem: “You are not used to having an answer and picking a question to match. This is your task now. For most of you, the problem you initially set out to answer will no longer be the best question to motivate your research. You might want to start the exercise with Part 3, Results. You can’t change those. But you can change the question that goes with that answer. So Part 1, your question, has to match with Part 3, results. Part 2, why is this important, should match with Part 4, conclusions.” Put up an example of a completed exercise.

2. *Skip this section IF your group has already filled out the GSE before the workshop.*

Give 10 minutes for filling out the Getting Started Exercise, the whole thing (don’t let them think they have 10 minutes for Part 1). Provide a warning at 5-minutes and again when 2 minutes remain. Suggest that students can raise a hand to get help. Circulate, look especially to see if the “why” is broad enough and that the conclusions address it (i.e. that they are not results). Interrupt your group (and stop the clock) to share an example when you find one. At some point, you might want to point out that this process is going to result in the first drafts of their abstracts.

3. Give 10 minutes for sharing the exercise with a partner. Objectives: Revise and improve your “abstract” before sharing it with us. If your statements aren’t clear, your partner will let you know. If your partner is from a totally different field, that’s great, because they are going to help you elevate your “why is this important” to be more general. Tell them the list of common errors so they can help each other.

At 5 minutes, suggest that they switch off, if they haven’t already. Make sure they write down the improved version, or it will take more time when they explain rather than read their “abstracts.” They need to decide which version of their objectives they like better.

This is a time when the facilitator can roam and try to help out. If you can read from a distance without disturbing the pairs, do that, and step in with suggestions.

4. Ask for a volunteer to go first to read the exercise. If the groups are small, everyone will read their “abstract” out loud. If the group is large, take volunteers until the time is up. Encourage the other members of the group to give feedback, otherwise they can tune out. Ask for volunteers who have problems they can share; we learn the most from the problematic cases.

They should realize that these parts correspond to the parts of their paper. “When you write your Introduction, you’ll include a question to go with that answer.”

Common errors:

- 1) Conclusions are often restated results, sometimes written better than in the results. Conclusions should address the ‘why is it important’ question
- 2) Often Results sections have answers for which no question was asked.
- 3) “Who cares” is commonly not general enough. The objectives can be specific to the project, but the problem statement should be broader.

These materials and the workshop PowerPoint slide show are available on my web site:

<http://www.esf.edu/for/yanai/publishing/>

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