

Introduction

Most students and even faculty in psychology receive little or no formal training in how to communicate in psychology. Nor do they necessarily learn how to write grant and contract proposals, book proposals, or talks and lectures. Many people believe that writers receive sufficient training in writing through informal channels and thus will acquire the necessary skills on their own. Do students learn the writing techniques for psychology on their own? Our experience reading psychology papers suggests that often they do not. Moreover, this experience is shared by other psychology professors and by professors in other disciplines, as well. Psychologists also need excellent speaking skills.

The purpose of this book is to provide the basic information that students and professionals alike need to speak and write well in psychology. This information is contained in 20 chapters. Although the intent is that you read the chapters in the order in which they are presented, they are for the most part self-contained and hence can be read in almost any sequence.

Chapter 1 presents and discusses eight common misconceptions that students hold about psychology papers. We have found that many of these misconceptions are reinforced rather than extinguished by conventional academic training. Most students come to believe, for example, that journal articles are and should be autobiographical – that the logical development of ideas in a psychology paper reflects their historical development in the psychologist's head. Accepting this notion as a presupposition, students often believe that authors of journal articles can plan their research and predict their findings well in advance, often down to the last detail. Readers will know better after finishing Chapter 1.

2 The Psychologist's Companion

One can write good papers only when one has good ideas that constitute the basis for the papers. Chapter 2 suggests alternative ways to generate ideas for papers. Because not all ideas are good ideas, the latter part of the chapter provides guidelines to decide which ideas are good ones that should be pursued. Finally, the chapter also gives tips on how to sell one's ideas to others.

Chapter 3 describes ways to conduct literature research in the best manner possible. We describe diverse reference materials, introduce literature research methods and useful databases, and explain how to use the Internet for scientific research and to evaluate the information found online.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the sequence of steps that psychologists follow in writing papers. Chapter 4 deals with literature reviews, and Chapter 5 with experimental research papers. The sequence of steps begins with the decision regarding a topic and ends with the publication of a finished paper. Many writers have only a fuzzy idea of the sequence of steps and of how to present this sequence to readers of psychology papers.

Consider two examples. First, would the procedure by which participants are assigned to treatment groups be described more appropriately in the "Procedure" section or in the "Design" section of a psychology paper? Second, do journal editors encourage or discourage extensive use of tables and figures in articles to clarify the presentation of experimental data? The answer to the first question is "Design"; the answer to the second question is "discourage."

Chapter 6 discusses several ethical issues and pitfalls that psychologists may face during their careers and gives advice on how to avoid them.

Chapter 7 presents guidelines for writing psychology papers. They are divided into three different subsections, dealing with content, language, and style. The guidelines are ones that many students and even professionals fail to follow. One of the reasons they fail to follow these rules is that they forget what the rules are. The chances are good that you remember learning something about avoiding dangling constructions but that either you don't look for dangling constructions in your writing or you don't even remember exactly what a dangling construction is. Chapter 7 will remind you about dangling constructions and other pitfalls in writing papers.

Chapter 8 contains a list of commonly misused words and describes the proper use of each of these words. The meanings of

3 Introduction

these words, like the rules of writing, are quickly learned but quickly forgotten early in one's career as a student. For example, probably fewer than 10 percent of the papers [that/which] are published in psychological journals consistently use the relative pronouns *that* and *which* correctly. [While/Although] these papers are certainly publishable, their readability would be enhanced by the proper use of English. Which word belongs in each place where two choices are given within parentheses? In the first sentence, the proper word is *that*; in the second sentence, the proper word is *Although*.

Chapter 9 summarizes the American Psychological Association's (2009) guidelines for writing psychology papers. Regardless of how well you write, you must learn a number of different rules that are specific to the writing of psychology papers. Different disciplines follow different guidelines for writing, and one is expected to learn to write according to the guidelines of the appropriate discipline. Common mistakes occur when writers follow Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines, which are the ones most students learn in high school. Although these guidelines are appropriate for much writing in the humanities, they typically are not appropriate for writing in psychology. Test yourself. Does one abbreviate *centimeters* as *cm* or as *cm.*? Does one abbreviate *feet* as *ft* or as *ft.*? Does one test 10 subjects or ten subjects? Does one test 8 subjects or eight subjects? The rules of the American Psychological Association lead to answers of "cm," "ft," "10," and "eight." The rules of the Modern Language Association lead to answers of "cm.," "ft.," "ten," and "eight." Learning to write a psychology paper involves learning certain rules that are unique to writing psychology papers.

Chapter 10 provides guidelines for data presentation. It gives rules for presenting data in the form of tables or graphs, as well as guidance on the advantages and drawbacks of different types of presentations. Following these guidelines will aid both your understanding of your data and your ability to communicate them effectively to others.

Chapter 11 is a primer on effective writing of articles for psychological journals. It contains tips on both what you should do and what you should not do.

Chapter 12 gives you some tips on how to make this process as successful as possible. You are not done with your article just because you have finished your first draft. If you intend to write a good article, what follows are proofreading and revisions. After submission to a

4 The Psychologist's Companion

journal and even after acceptance of your article, you may have to revise and edit your work.

Chapter 13 contains a critical checklist to use before sending an article out for publication. The checkoffs in this chapter are ones writers can use to avoid quick rejections of articles that might otherwise be accepted.

Chapter 14 contains practical suggestions for submitting a psychology article to a professional journal. What considerations enter into the choice of a journal? What happens to an article once it is submitted? What are the possible courses of action a journal editor can take? You will find out when you read Chapter 14.

Chapter 15 describes the parts of a poster presentation and also contains tips on how to make the poster presentation effective. The goal is to prevent novices from making common mistakes, such as cramming in too much information or using complicated figures or tables.

Chapter 16 contains techniques people can use to increase the chances of their getting funding through a grant or contract. Ultimately, the most important determinant of funding is the set of ideas in the proposal. But many proposals are rejected on grounds that have little or nothing to do with ideas. Competition for grants and contracts is extremely stiff. Therefore, every edge can help. This chapter helps grant writers maximize their chances of winning funding, giving them the edge that may make a difference to the outcome.

Chapter 17 describes the steps a person takes in seeking a book publisher. How do you write a book proposal, and what do you do with the proposal once you are done? Despite the importance to scholars of writing books as well as articles, people tend to know even less about how to find a publisher for a book than they do about how to get an article published. This chapter describes from beginning to end the process of finding a book publisher.

Chapter 18 discusses the writing of effective lectures. Many psychologists end up, sooner or later, teaching. For some, it may be in the form of courses for undergraduate and graduate students. For others, it may be in the form of public lectures. And for still others, it may be in the form of occasional seminars. All of us who have gone through school know how important good lectures are to learning. This chapter will help the reader write and deliver such lectures.

Chapter 19 discusses how to present oneself in a job interview. It suggests both what job applicants should do and what they should not do.

5 Introduction

Chapter 20 deals with presenting oneself effectively to the media. The goal is to ensure that a psychologist's experiences with media are positive ones rather than one the psychologist quickly comes to regret.

As you progress through this book, you will discover that communicating with an audience of psychologists requires a unique set of skills. For most students and professionals alike, merely reading and writing psychology papers is an insufficient way to acquire these skills. This book is intended for and dedicated to all of you who want to improve your writing, speaking, and other professional skills.