

Some Injunctions on Writing for Publication in Statistics

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Some Comments on Word Choice:

- Pick your words very carefully. Strive for **precision**. (For example, DON'T call an algorithm or statistical procedure a "model." A "model" is a mathematical abstraction meant to describe some situation. An algorithm or statistical procedure is a method of computation that will have theoretical properties derived from the model one is using to describe a particular context.)

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- Do NOT use the preposition "within" in place of "in." ("Within" is commonly much over-used and is both pretentious and inaccurate when used in place of the simpler "in." "Within" is a more restrictive word than "in." It means "in the inner parts of; inside; inside the limits or extent of in time or distance; inside the fixed limits of; not beyond; in the scope or sphere of; inside a specified amount or degree." "Within" is NOT simply a formal version of "in.")

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- If you use a comparative like "sooner" you are obliged to make it clear to what you are comparing. That is, you must explicitly answer the question "Sooner than what?"

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- **Be consistent** with singulars and plurals, especially with possessives. Do not write "The company contacted their customers." or "The customer first checks their order." Write "The company contacted its customers." or "The customer first checks his or her order." (Yes, I know that "his or her" is clumsy. If you don't like it, avoid the possessive construction completely, but DO NOT use the plural possessive "their" when you are speaking of an individual.)

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- **Be consistent** with tense. Pick a tense and stick with it unless you really do intend to contrast something that was done in the past with something in the present or the future. Don't jump back and forth between tenses without reason.

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- Equations are English sentences. Read them aloud. Disconnected scraps of mathematical symbols are sentence fragments and should either be incorporated into an appropriate equation or deleted.

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- EVERY figure and table that you include in a paper needs to be numbered, captioned, and referred to/discussed in the text. (If it is not included to illustrate some point you've made in the exposition, it has no reason to be in the document.) Since figures and tables in print may get separated substantially from the text that explains them and readers may want to jump around in your paper, err on the side of making captions too detailed rather than on the side of making them not detailed enough.

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- You will always do far more work than will appear in a final paper. DO NOT waste space in a final version on failed attempts, or what in retrospect are silly analyses.

Some General Advice:

- Take the craft of writing seriously. Work to get better at it. Read books about it and follow the advice you find in them. Writing is NOT just a minor detail to be overcome before you can get published. It is your chance and responsibility to explain yourself clearly to those who can benefit from your work.

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- Non-native English speakers will, of course, have a more difficult time with all this than native English speakers. But the fact that English is a second language is simply no excuse for poor communication. Teach yourself good grammar and punctuation. Build a large vocabulary. Be precise in your usage. If you don't do these things, you will both waste the time of other people and never be fully respected for your technical contributions. These things are NOT impossible if you make them a priority.

Some Resources:

- Every person who will write English ought to own, read, and reread a copy of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*. An online version of Strunk's 1918 Rules of Usage can be found at:<http://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk.html>

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