

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF WRITING FOR THE PEER REVIEWED LITERATURE

With apologies to Mel Brooks, and thanks for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby and for their insights to the following Internet contributors:

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R.S. Kirby, February 2009

The Ten Commandments of Writing for the Peer Reviewed Literature

Number 10

Know thy subject . . .

**and write as though you do, clearly,
concisely, and without boasting.**



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Number 9

Consider where to submit your article with care. Study the journal contents and scope of research to ensure that your paper is appropriate.

Then, study the journal submission requirements, and comply both implicitly and explicitly.



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Number 8

Research papers are not encyclopedias; the purpose of citing references is to ground your work firmly in the literature.

Chose references with care, for relevance, currency and as a resource to the reader.


Avoid auto-citation, except when writing obituaries and autobiographies.

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Number 7

Thou shalt make no sins of omission or commission in assigning authorship.

Include as authors all persons with a defined role in the project, but document these roles and assure that all authors agree to take full responsibility for the entire paper.



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Number 7 (continued)

For it is written:

“He that is first, shall later be last”

Matthew 20:16

Thou shalt determine authorship in relation to contribution to the work, not to the egos and desires of the individuals involved.



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Number 6

Know thy purpose . . .

Prepare a concise focused introduction, with worthwhile, important questions or hypotheses – and state these clearly in the last paragraph of the introduction.



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Number 5

Thou shalt write well, in clear, expressive prose. Thou shalt use the active voice, even the first person, wherever feasible.

Brevity is a virtue, while redundancy, repetition, convoluted sentences and irrelevant information are deadly sins.

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Number 4

Like Sisyphus, it is our lot (research) to toil the same ground again and again. But let us learn and improve from the process.

When revising and resubmitting, to the same or another journal, improve the manuscript by seriously considering all comments and suggestions, even those with which you disagree.

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Number 3

Elaborate the study design and methods in careful detail. This includes definition and measurement of key variables, use of appropriate statistical methods, consideration of a priori study power, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and related issues.

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Number 2

Thou shalt remember that while pictures are sometimes worth a thousand words, these words need not comprise most of the results section of your manuscript.

Choose figures and tables with care, avoid redundancy, and ensure that each is sufficiently self-contained that it can be read separately from your paper.

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Number 1

While thy work is concrete, the abstract is not. Word the abstract with care, as if it is the only part of your paper most readers will ever read.

Also, select key words with care, lest your paper be indexed so mysteriously that it never appears in any PubMed search even vaguely related to your topic.