IGERT Writer's Guild
UW-Madison

Top ten
horrors of horrors!!!

10/11/2013
V. C. Radeloff, et al.

Grammar and Style

Grammar and Style

1. Passive voice

Grammar and Style

1. Passive voice
   – Lacks information on who did what
   – If you can add 'by zombies' to the end of your sentence then you are writing in passive voice
   – *"Data on habitat use was collected by zombies."*

Grammar and Style

2. Unclear pronouns

Grammar and Style

2. Unclear pronouns
   - "this", "it", etc.
   - Easily causes confusion when the antecedent is not clear
   - Never start a paragraph with a pronoun

Grammar and Style

3. Terminology slippage

Grammar and Style

3. Terminology slippage
   - Do not use multiple words to refer to the same concept
   - Readers will assume that different words differ in meaning
   - Do not be imprecise for fear of being repetitive

Grammar and Style

4. Jargon and abbreviations

Grammar and Style

4. Jargon and abbreviations
   – If you have to use jargon, define it
   – Do not make up abbreviations, only use commonly known abbreviations
   – "GIS" is fine, hardly anything else is

Grammar and Style

5. Sentences that start with a reference

Grammar and Style

5. Sentences that start with a reference
   – Focus on WHAT, not WHO
   – Reference belong at the end of sentences to support your statement
   – The history of science is a poor justification for your work

Structure

Structure

6. Poor topic sentences

Structure

6. Poor topic sentences
   – What is the paragraph about?
   – That should come out pretty early in the paragraph (1st or 2nd sentence at the latest)

Structure

7. Paragraphs that try to say too much

Paragraphs

7. Paragraphs that try to say too much
   - Stick to <u>one</u> coherent point per paragraph
   - Most paragraphs that go awry have 2-3+ important points in them
   - Keep like things in the same paragraph

Structure

8. Hidden North Star

Structure

8. Hidden North Star
   - Taking too long to divulge what the paper is about
   - You should get to the point quickly
   - If your study is about X, X (usually) should be mentioned in the first paragraph

Structure

9. No goal, no plan

Structure

9. No goal, no plan
   – The last paragraph of the Intro needs to state the overall goal or question, and the specific objectives or hypotheses
   – Do not report what was done – who cares!
   – Use your list of objectives to structure Intro, Methods, Results and Discussion. 1-2 paragraphs in each for each objective

Structure

10. No closure

Structure

10. No closure
    – Results and discussion cannot leave loose ends
      • Each question needs to be answered
      • Each hypothesis needs to be tested
      • Each objective needs to be addressed

Top Ten Writing Errors

• Grammar and Style
   1. Passive voice
   2. Unclear pronouns
   3. Terminology slippage
   4. Jargon and abbreviations
   5. Sentence starting with a reference
• Structure
   6. Poor topic sentences
   7. Too many points in one paragraph
   8. Hidden North Star
   9. No goal, no plan
   10. No closure