SILVIS manuscript checklist

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|  | **Issue** | **Explanation** | **Suggestion how to check** | **Done** |
| Abstract | No abstract in early draft | The abstract is THE most important part of any manuscript. Abstracts are read orders of magnitude more often than the paper itself. Plus, writing the abstract early is a great way to hone a paper’s message. | Always include an abstract, even in your very first manuscript draft. |  |
| Missing pieces | Each abstract needs 1-2 sentences for each: Intro, Goals, Methods, Results, and Conclusion. | Please highlight these five different parts in the abstract in different text colors. |  |
| Vague results | Results statements without numbers. | Provide a few key numbers to substantiate your main results and conclusion. |  |
|  | **Issue** | **Explanation** | **Suggestion how to check** | **Done** |
| Writing errors in the main manuscript that are easily checked with MS Word’s find and replace functions | Spaces at the start of sentences | A new sentence can start with either one or two spaces. One space is more modern, two spaces more classical. It has to be consistent though. | A global search for ‘. ‘ |  |
| Sentences starting with a paper reference | Avoid making authors of papers the subject of sentences. Focus on ideas and findings, one WHAT, not WHO | A global search for ‘(‘ to identify any references that are at the beginning of sentences. |  |
| Sentences starting with a figure or table reference | “Fig. 1 shows…” is usually just a repeat of the figure caption. Put figure references at the end of sentence and talk about the main point of the figure or table. | A global search for ‘(‘ to identify any references that are at the beginning of sentences. |  |
| Pronouns | When pronouns have unclear antecedents, confusion arises | A global search for ‘this’, ‘these’, ‘it’, ‘they’ to either avoid them (best!), or ensure that they are unambiguous. |  |
| We and our | In scientific writing, ‘we’ and ‘our’ refers only to the authors, not society, or science, at large | A global search for ‘we’ and ‘our’ to check that they are only used to refer to the authors. |  |
| Data | Data are always plural | A global search for ‘data’, and ensure that data are always referred to as plural. |  |
| Affect vs. effect | Effect is a noun, affect a verb | A global search for ‘ffect’ to check. Tip: typically, you can replace ‘effect’ with ‘consequence’, and ‘affect’ with ‘transform’. |  |
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| Writing errors of sentences and paragraphs. Best checked in a printed copy. | Terminology slippage | The use of multiple words to refer to the same concept. | Read a print copy, make a glossary of key terms, and ensure that they are consistently used. |  |
| Jargon | Jargon are terms only known to a few. Contrary to popular belief, writing does not become more scientific by being incomprehensible. | Based on the glossary, search for each jargon term, and either replace it with something that is easier to understand, or – at least –make sure it is defined. |  |
| Abbreviations | Avoid all but the most common abbreviations. ‘GIS’ is fine; not much else. | Read a print copy, and make a list of abbreviations. Then get rid of them |  |
| Passive voice | All work by the authors should be referred to in active voice | Read a print copy to check. Tip: If you can add 'by zombies' to your sentence then you are writing in passive voice. |  |
| Tense | All of your work has to be referred to in past tense. Results of others in present tense. | Read a print copy of the Methods and Results section, and make sure that all verbs are in past tense. |  |
| Topic sentences | Topic sentences state what a paragraph is about. Either the 1st or 2nd sentence in a paragraph should be the topic sentence. | Highlight the topic sentence in each paragraph, and please leave it highlighted in the manuscript. |  |
| Overloaded paragraph | Two to three main points in one paragraph | The highlighting of topic sentence will show if everything in a paragraph belongs into it. |  |
|  | **Issue** | **Explanation** | **Suggestion how to check** | **Done** |
| Structural problems of the full manuscript. Best checked in a printed copy, with a list of objectives on the side. | Hidden North Star | Taking too long to divulge what the paper is about | Reread your first paragraph of the Intro to see where it leads. |  |
| No goal | The goal of the paper needs to be explicitly stated in the last paragraph of the introduction | Reread the last paragraph of the Intro to ensure that there is a clear goal statement |  |
| No plan | After the goal, the last paragraph of the Intro should have a list of 2-5 objectives, questions, or hypotheses. These are the steps necessary to reach the goal. | Reread the last paragraph of the Intro to ensure that there is a clear list of objectives, questions, or hypotheses. |  |
| Lack of balance | In a typical manuscript, Intro, Methods, Results and Discussion should each be around 1,000 words. | Add a comment box to each section and state the number of words in that section. |  |
| No follow-through | Follow you plan, i.e., structure the Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion in the same order as you 2-5 objectives. | Check the structure of each of the four major sections, and ensure that they have the same order as the objectives. Please add comment boxes to each paragraph that state which objective it addresses. |  |
| No closure | There cannot be any loose ends. | Check that the results and discussion answer every objective directly. Match them, and state which objective is addressed where. |  |
| Future research | No need to tell others what to do, or what you plan to do next. | Check the end of the Discussion to ensure that there are no future research recommendations. |  |

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| Author guidelines | Author guidelines | All too often ignored. | As soon as you have picked the journal, download the author guidelines, and follow them religiously. |  |
| Check the guidelines for length, number of references etc. | Ultimately, your manuscript cannot violate author instruction. It is fine if drafts are too long, but knowing that is helpful. | Add a comment box to state the guidelines limits, and state how close the manuscript matches those limits. |  |
| Reference formatting | All references need to follow the author guidelines. Reference software is great, but not error free. | Print out the references, and check them one-by-one. |  |