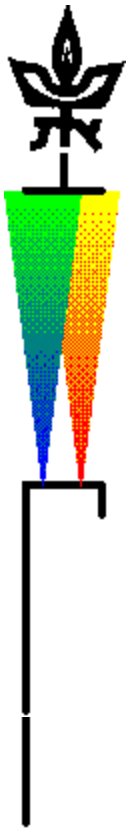
HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PAPER
(and thesis)



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The Problem:

- We spend ~20% of our time preparing “research reports” -- without training
- In contrast, we are trained to program computers, use oscilloscopes, SEM’s etc.

Lecture Objective

- Give participants “recipe” for preparing <u>good</u> research papers:
  - in terms of style and organization (content is up to you!)
  - acceptable to Thin Solid Films, Coatings and Surface Technology, IEEE transactions, AIP journals, etc.
  - easy to read
- Not a substitute for full semester writing course

Lesson Plan

- Introduction: communications channel
- Before Writing
- English Composition Tips
- Organization of the Research Paper
  - Introduction
  - Method
  - Results
  - Discussion
  - Conclusions
  - (Abstract, Title)
- Review Process
- Problems and Cures
- Summary and Conclusions

Journal Paper -- a communications channel

- Objective of scientific paper - convey information, as efficiently as possible.
- One writer - many readers -- burden on writer to communicate efficiently.
- Analog to broadcast channel -- Tx and Rx must be on same wavelength, use same protocol, expensive Tx, cheap Rx.
- Protocol for paper fixed by convention

Not a Murder Mystery!

- No virtue in keeping reader in suspense
- Reader wants info., not your personal history in arriving at results
  - Time sequence relevant, only to the extent that it affects result
- Organization, sequence of presentation optimized to convey information (not to make a good story!)

Before you begin to write – Define the "Research Question"

- Good research papers revolve around a "research question"
  - Example: "How does bias voltage affect the adhesion and interface structure of Ti-Al-N coatings applied to stainless steel substrates?
- In other fields (biology, medicine), the research question is stated formally.
- In our field, the Research Question should be:
  - Implicit in Phase 4 of Introduction (to be described)
  - Answered in the Conclusions

NO DOUBLE PUBLICATION!

- Same results may not be published twice!
  - Published = in journal, book.
  - Conference proceedings is a gray area – are they published?
  - Minor overlap to improve clarity and completeness OK
    - But should be clear, via reference, what is old and what is new
- Don’t submit same material to two different journals at same time
  - It is OK to submit paper rejected by one journal to another

No Plagiarism

- Plagiarism – passing off someone else's work as your own
- Everything (ideas, data, pictures, etc.) in report must be yours, unless a reference is cited

English Composition Suggestions

- Hierarchal Structure ("top-down organization"):
  - Chapter, Section
    - Sub-section, etc.
      - Paragraph
        - » Sentence
- Before writing text, write a detailed outline – down to the level of defining the topic of each paragraph
  - Major problem – misplaced statements (method in results, results in discussion, etc.)

English Composition, cont'd

- "Bottom-up" organization:
- The sentence:
  - Expresses a complete thought
  - Most sentences should use the 'natural' English word order: subject, verb, predicate

"This relation is valid when x>r"

"The chamber was evacuated with a diffusion pump"

English Composition – The sentence, cont'd

– Simplify sentences by using strong natural verbs, rather than derived noun plus weak generalized verb:

Not: *Measurements were made of the coating hardness using a nano-indenter.*

Instead write: The coating hardness was measured using a nano-indenter.

English Composition – The sentence, cont'd

– Avoid beginning the sentence with long prepositional phrases

Using a CSEM model 3400 nano-indenter equipped with a flashlight and a microcomputer, the hardness of the coating was measured.

Instead:

The hardness of the coating was measured using a CSEM model 3400 nano-indenter equipped with a flashlight and a microcomputer

English Composition, cont'd

- The Paragraph
  - Develops a topic
  - At least 2 sentences, more preferred
  - 1st sentence defines the topic of the paragraph
  - Subsequent sentences develop idea in logical order
  - Final sentence presents conclusion, or main point

English Composition- The Paragraph, cont'd

- In the final stage, the net deposition rate on the anode is zero. Cathodic material is either deflected by the high pressure A-plasma before it reaches the anode, or is re-evaporated after a very short dwell time. MP's reaching the anode will likewise be evaporated. A given location on the substrate may be exposed primarily to C-plasma or A-plasma, according to the geometry of the electrodes and shields and the plasma flow dynamics, as illustrated schematically in Fig. 3

- Par. Subject
- Development of subject
- Final Sent. – Main point

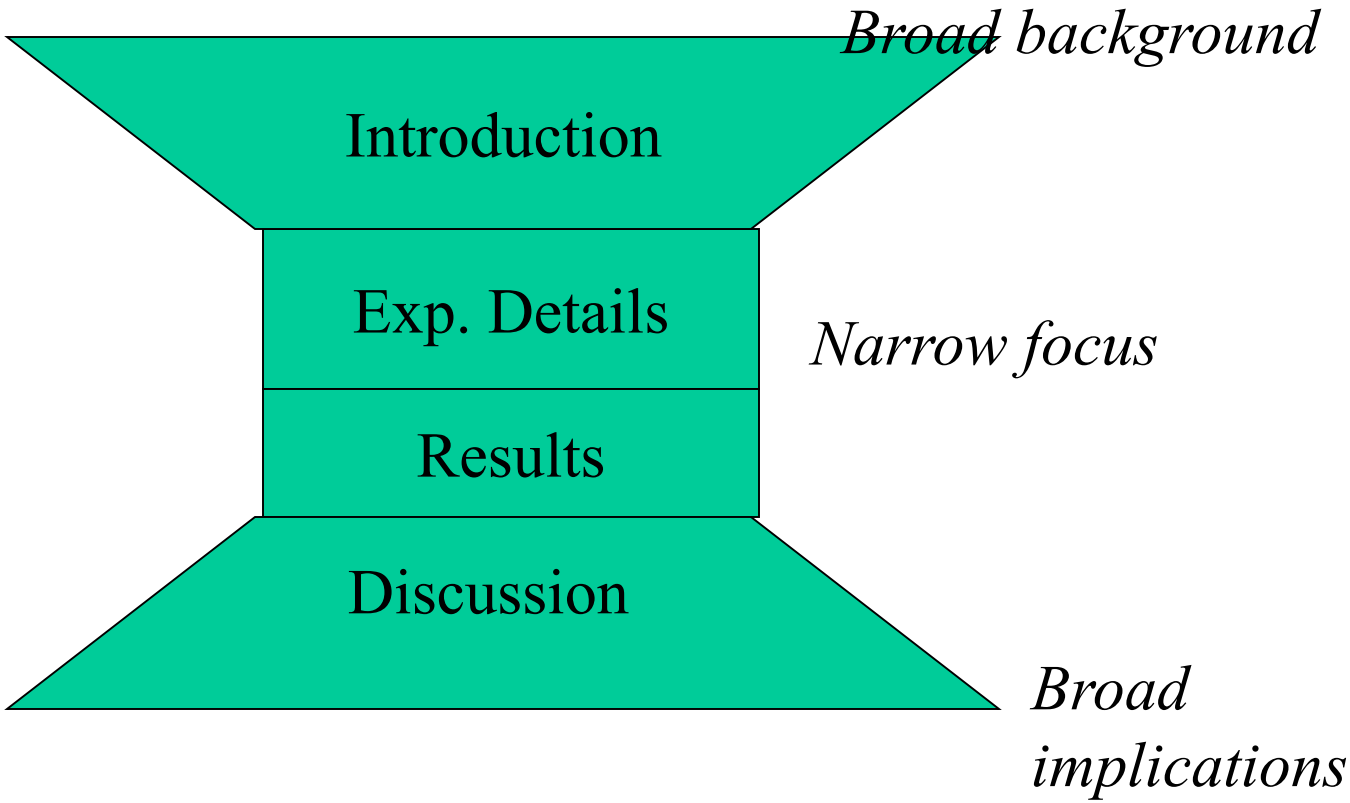
Word Processor Instructions

- Frequent back-ups
- Use defined “styles” for headings, etc.
- Indent, extra space before new paragraph
  - Build into style
- Use automatic endnote numbering
- Do NOT insert extra blank spaces or blank lines
  - It defeats automatic features of word processors
  - Use TAB to control horizontal spacing
  - Use “insert line” and “page break” if needed

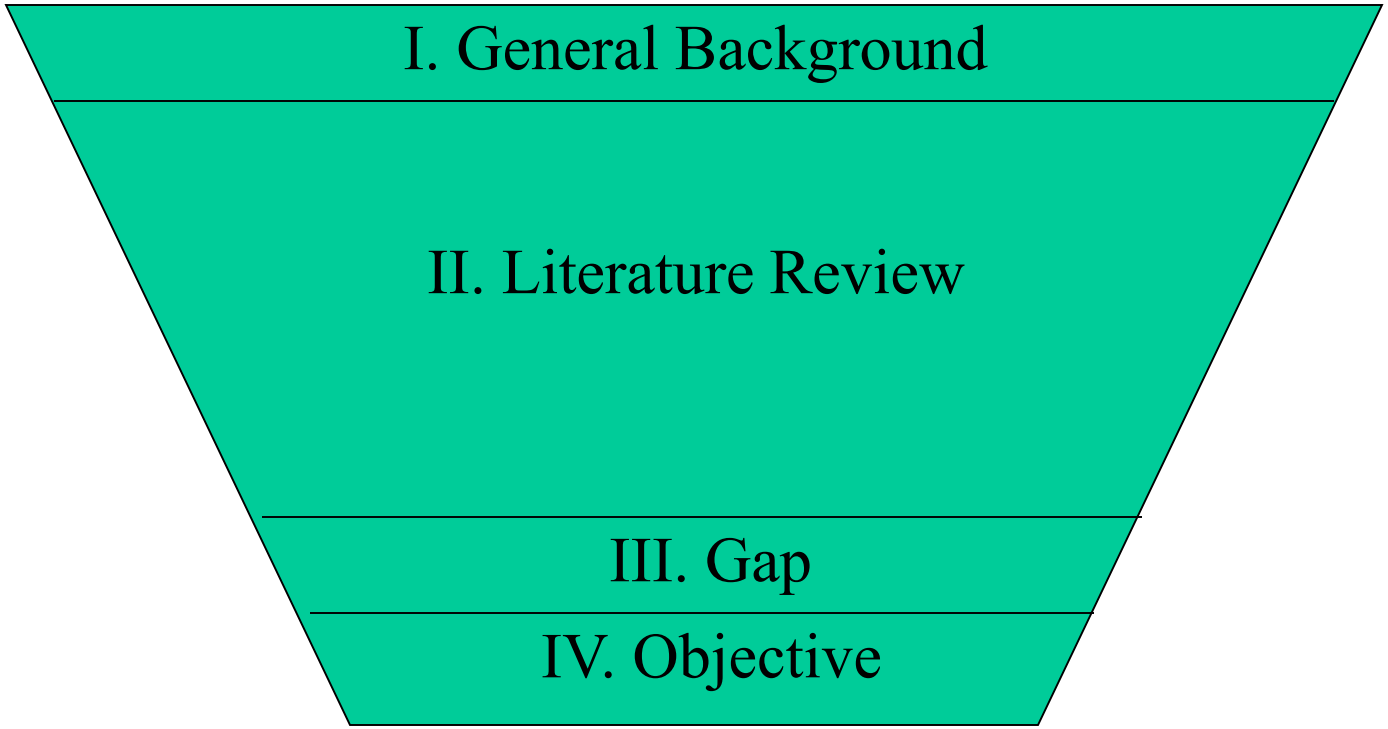
Organization of the Paper

Abstract	Summarizes work
Introduction	What are we talking about?
Experimental Details	What did we do?
Results	What did we get?
Discussion	So What?
Conclusions	~3 key points you want reader to remember

Trapezoidal Organization



Introduction



Introduction

- Introduction and Discussion hardest for the novice to write well !
  - (Exp. Details, Results much more straight forward)
- Objective of the Introduction: give reader sufficient background information so that he can understand and appreciate your work!

Introduction

- 4 Required parts:
  - I. General background
  - II. Literature Review
  - III. Gap
  - IV. Statement of Purpose
- 2 optional parts
  - V. Value statements
  - VI. Preview

Intro: I. General Background

- Purpose:
  - Place paper in broad context
  - Bring reader up to speed
- Style
  - Should be understandable by every reader
  - Defines topic
  - Short (1 par., ~3-5 sentences)
  - Usually very general, non-controversial sentences

Intro: II. Literature Review

- Purpose
  - Places paper in specific context.
  - Sets the stage for stating what was not done previously (in III) by showing what was done,
- Organization – order citations by:
  - Approach (end with that closest to yours).
  - Relevance (end with most relevant
  - Chronologically (end with latest)

Lit. Review, cont'd

- Citation focus:
  - "Information Prominent" -- often used at the beginning of stage 2, and refer to research in the general area of your study.
  - Example: "Because of the complexity of the non-equilibrium behavior, the swarm parameters have been analyzed in non-uniform fields in He [1], [2], and N_2 [3], [4] by Monte Carlo simulation and in air and Ar [5] by solving the diffusion flux equations".

Lit. Review, cont'd

- Citation focus (cont'd):
  - "Author Prominent" – often used to describe studies closely related to present work.

  Example: "Boeuf *et al.* [6] took into account the additional ionization caused by a beamlike group of fast electrons and developed an extended memory factor model in helium".

Lit. Review, cont'd

- Citation focus (cont'd):
- "Weak Author Prominent" – often used for general statements characterizing the state of the art, or typical work performed in the past.

Example: "Several authors [1-4] have studied linear and nonlinear wave processes in various kinds of plasma, but not much work has been done for waves in a rotating plasma".

Lit. Review, cont'd

- Citation focus (cont'd):

"General Statements about the State of the Research"

Example: "Theoretical investigations of these phenomena in plasmas have been vigorously pursued for the last two decades. However, the time evolution of the waves and instabilities leading to shocks, double layers, frequency shift, precessional rotation, etc., has not been understood fully".

Lit. Review, cont'd

- **DO NOT USE REFERENCE NUMBERS AS WORDS!!!!**
  - NO: Examples of crack propagation in composite materials are given in [1-4]
  - Instead: **Crack propagation has been previously investigated [1-4].**
  - If you have to 'say' the number for the sentence to make sense, rewrite!
  - Better to cite work by authors name (followed by ref. number). Reader can relate to names – numbers (only) force him to stop reading and search for references at end of paper.

Lit. Review, cont'd

- Your own previous work?
  - Treat your own previous work fairly
  - Referees and readers very suspicious if work of author or author's group cited out of proportion, or work of others ignored.

Intro. – III. Gap Sentence

- Summarizes state of knowledge by indicating:
  - What was not done, or
  - Errors in previous work (be careful and tactful!), or
  - Disagreements, controversy between various sources.

Gap Sentence

- Most important sentence for getting paper accepted!
  - (most?) common cause for paper rejection – nothing new
  - Gap sentence, by indicating what wasn't done previously, shows that your work is new!
  - **A good gap sentence forces reviewer to work hard to reject paper for lack of novelty**

Intro. – III. Gap Sentence (cont'd)

- Usually 1 sentence long
- Always negative
- Must relate to previous papers by you and your group in same manner as other papers
- Sentence should be explicit, precise, and focused:
- Example: *"The dependence of the interface structure between Ti substrates and Al films on the substrate bias voltage has not yet been determined."*

Intro. – III. Gap Sentence (cont'd)

- Don't be wishy-washy
  - "Few research have investigated….."
    - Begs the question – "what about the few?"
    - The "few" should be the focus of the lit. rev., and the gap should be relative to them
  - "To the best of our knowledge, no one has…."
    - It's the authors' job to know the literature!

Intro. IV-Statement of Purpose

- Immediately follows gap sentence
- States objective of the research/paper, which is, basically, to fill the previously stated gap
- Should be concise, precise, explicit and focused
  - The “research question” should be implicitly clear!
- Example: *“The objective of this research was to determine the dependence of Al/Ti interfaces as a function of substrate voltage during vacuum arc deposition”*

Intro. IV-Statement of Purpose

- Style notes:
  - The objective of research is not to do research (or study, investigate, etc.) Instead, use more decisive terms – measure, determine, construct, calculate, etc.
  - "research" centered SOP – use past tense
    - The objective of the (research, project, investigation, etc.) was ….
  - "paper" centered SOP – use present tense
    - The objective of this (paper, report, article, etc) is….

Intro. – Optional Parts

- V. Statements of Value
  - Indicate importance or significance of work
  - Short (1-2 sentences)
  - Modest tone
- VI. Preview
  - Useful for long papers
  - Give principle result
  - Indicate organization

Experimental Details

- Sometimes called:
  - Experimental Apparatus and Procedure
  - Methods and Materials (bio, med)
- Do not call it ‘Experimental’ (an adjective -- a title must include a noun)
- Answers the question “what did I do?”

Experimental Details

- Amount of detail: absolutely must include sufficient detail so that every result presented can be duplicated elsewhere
  - If you have secrets necessary to get the reported results, don't publish!
- Nice to report details which would help your readers
- Eliminate extraneous detail

Experimental Details

- Start with Apparatus
- Standard or well-known apparatus – mention, define, give ref., as appropriate
- Non-standard, not well-known, - describe

1. Define purpose
2. Give brief overall description (use a diagram)
3. Describe parts

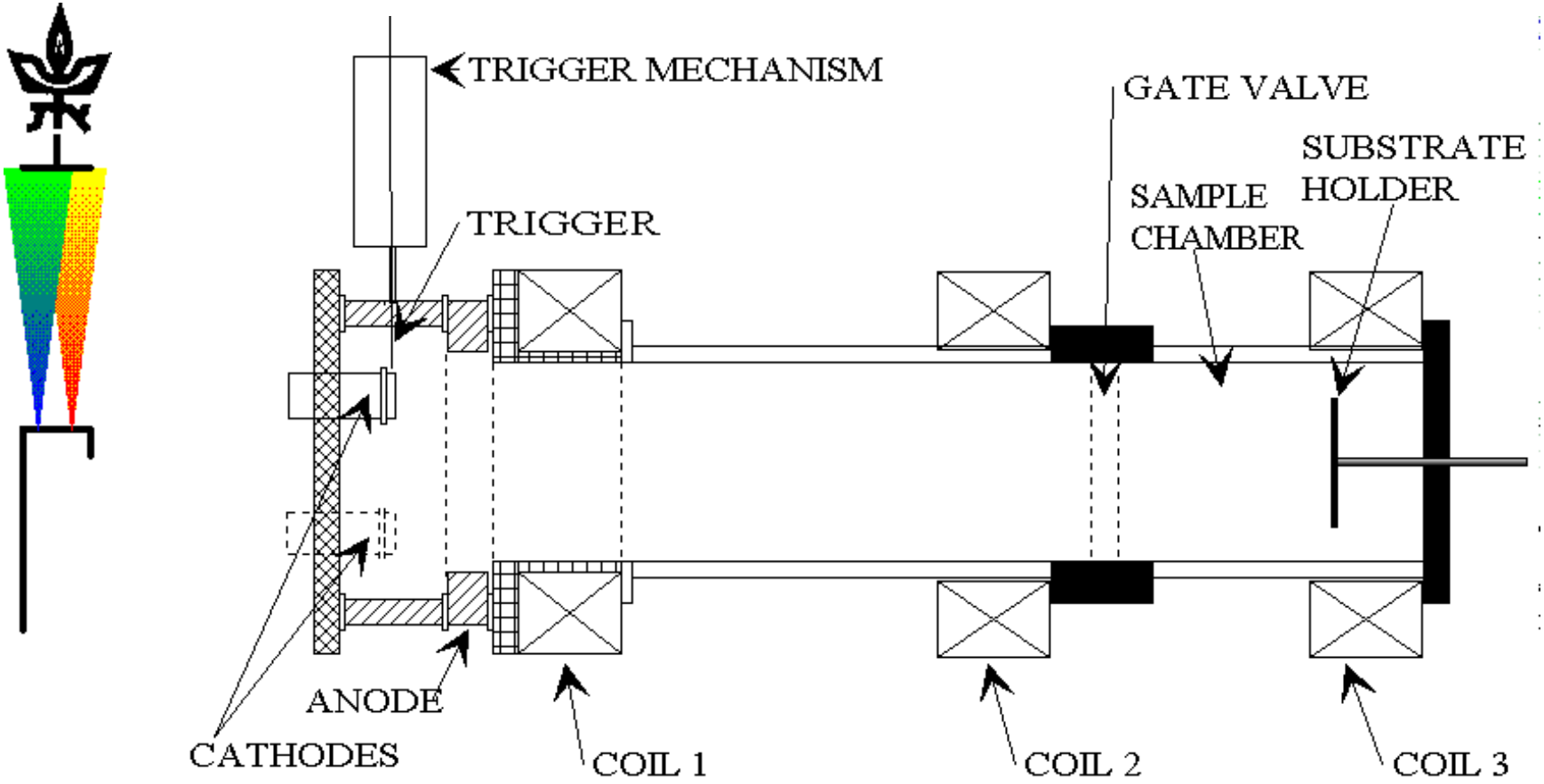
   Some logical order (signal or material flow, left-right, top-bottom, etc.)

4. Describe inter-relation of parts, operation.

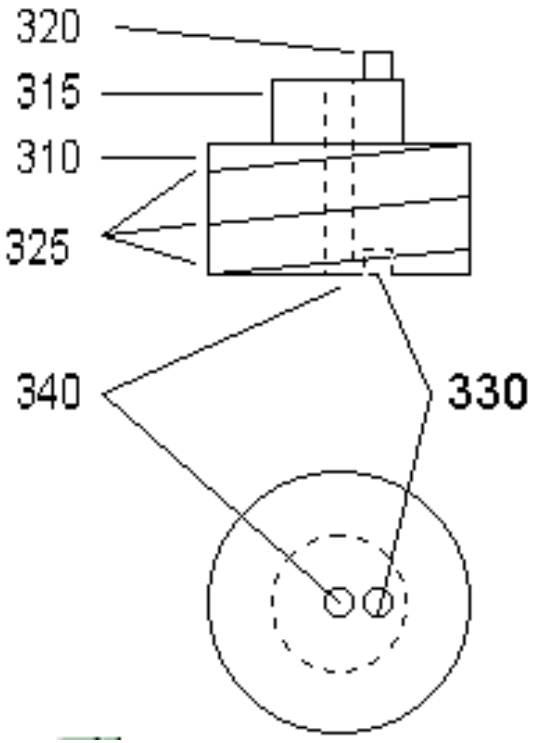
Apparatus Diagrams

- Schematic – show only parts necessary to understand operation
  - All parts mentioned in text should be labeled in diagram
  - All unusual parts in diagram should be described in text
- No workshop drawings
  - too detailed
  - lines too thin
- No photographs
  - Easier to understand schematic drawing

“Heads-up Display”



Eye-tiring figure: Eye needs to jump back and forth from fig. to caption or text



Exp. Details – Style and Grammar

- Usually past tense
  - present tense for general truths, generic description of standard equipment
- Voice
  - Human agent – passive (avoid I, we, etc.)
    - The voltage was adjusted *(by the experimenter)* to 15.4 V.
  - Instrumental agent – active or passive
    - The generator produced a series of 50 V, 50 ns pulses.
    - A series of 50 V, 50 ns pulses was produced by the generator

Exp. Details – Style and Grammar

- Articles
  - First mention of a part – use “a/an”
  - Subsequent mention – use “the”
- Word order
  - Start with old information (i.e. part already described), then give new information

Example: Ions were produced with a Kaufman source. The source was positioned 25 cm from the substrate surface.

Exp. Details – Exp. Procedure

- Sequence of events followed to conduct experiment
  - Give sufficient detail to duplicate results
  - Don’t give unnecessary detail
- Specify all experimental conditions/parameters required to duplicate results (e.g. pressure, temperature, voltages, fields, flows, etc.)
  - Give specific common, fixed values
  - Indicate range of variable parameters
  - Often a table summarizing exp. parameters is useful

Theoretical Papers – Model Assumptions, Derivation of Equations

- Also answers “what did I do?”
- State all assumptions first, then develop equations
- Give sufficient detail for duplication elsewhere
  - Shouldn’t need to work weeks to progress from one equation to the next!

Table summarizing parameters and experimental variables

Fixed Parameters		**Value**
Cathode diameter		50 mm
Anode i.d.		160 mm
Axial Magnetic Field		100 mT
Variables	**Symbol**	**Value**
Cathode Materials		Zr, Hf, Ti
Cathode Current	I	50-150 A
Deposition Time	T_d	60-180 s

Theoretical Papers - Nomenclature

- Define each symbol
  - Either 1st time used, or
  - In Nomenclature Table
- Recommendation – Prepare Nomenclature Table for internal use. 4 Columns:
  - Symbol
  - Definition
  - Pages upon which it appears
  - Page containing definition

Results

- Answers the basic question, “What did I get” or “What did I observe”
- Typically, most results given in tables and figures. Text revolves around them.

Results, cont'd

- **Three Information Elements – types of sentences**

Location (L) sentences indicates which figures or tables contain a particular result.

Presentation (P) sentences present the most important findings.

Comments (C) are sentences which comment on the results.

- Sometimes L&P are combined in a single sentence.
- Never combine C with anything else.

Results, cont'd

type	example
L	The correlation parameters as a function of distance from the jet outlet is shown in Fig. 3.
P	It may be seen that the correlation decreases steeply with distance, and becomes negligible after 5 cm.
C	This results differs significantly from those observed with conventional jets.
L&P	The wavelet intensity has a Gausian temporal profile, whose width decreases with the distance between the sources, as may be seen in Fig. 4.
C	This is similar to the results from ring sources.
L&P	The wavelet intensity has a Gausian temporal profile, whose width decreases with the distance between the sources (Fig. 4).
L	Table 5 summarizes the composition and wear properties of coatings deposited under various conditions.

Results - Style and Grammar

- Location sentences
  - In present tense
  - Both active & passive OK
- Presentation sentences
  - Report results not in figures or tables
  - Summarize most important results of tables and figures – “Blind man’s rule”
  - Usually use past tense
  - Be precise, and as quantitative as necessary/possible

Increasing Information in Presentation Sentences

1. It may be seen that Y depended on X.
2. It may be seen that Y increased with X.
3. It may be seen that Y increased linearly with X.
4. It may be seen that $Y \approx 22.3\ X + 32$.

Results - Style and Grammar

- Comment sentences:
  - Only comments intimately related to specific finding.
    - Put more general comments in Discussion!
  - Don’t mix ‘facts’ (i.e. results) with interpretations, speculations, etc.
    - Put these in the Discussion

Results – all the conditions!

- Be sure that all the conditions, parameters, etc., required to obtain a particular result (e.g. in a specific figure) are given!
- If the conditions are not completely specified in "Experimental Details" (e.g. if there were variable parameters), then they must be given either in Location sentence, caption or figure
- Always give conditions first, then the result.
  - 1st - what you did,
  - 2nd - what you got

Results – figures and tables

- Choose most appropriate format to make your point
  - Tables where absolute value is most important
  - Graph where trend is most important
  - Choose x axis so it (and not a parameter) represents the most important variable

Results – figures and tables

- Heads-up display – all required info on the graph (if possible), rather than in caption or text
- But - don't crowd
- Illiterate man's rule
  - Figures should be understandable to an illiterate!
- Don't be lazy – author should work, not reader
- Always specify units .
  - **Do not use** V, ×1000

Discussion

- Answers the question “So what?”
- **Typical Elements in the Discussion**
  - **Specific reference to the present study:**
    - 1. Reference to the main purpose or hypothesis
    - 2. Review of the most important findings
    - 3. Limitations and justifications:
      * demonstration of self-consistency (e.g., with model assumptions)
      * demonstration of statistical validity
      * technique limitations, and their implications (e.g., bandwidth of instrument→high frequency components, if existent, cannot be observed)

Discussion, cont'd

- 4. Comparisons
  * between different elements of the present studies
  * with previous works (between various theories, between various experiments, between experiment and theory, or theory and experiment)

Discussion, cont'd

- **General statements**
  - 5. Implications and generalizations
  - 6. Recommendations
    * for future research
    * practical applications

- In general, discussion starts with specific statements re. present study, and diverges towards more general statements.

Discussion, cont'd

- Major problem – correctly conveying degree of certainty (of explanation, implication, etc.)
  - Faulty or absent analysis by author
  - Wrong choice of words
  - Its o.k. to offer speculative explanation, if
    - clear to the reader that it's a speculation
    - short

Certainty Scale

category	use	key words
speculation	idea or ideas that come to mind	may, possible, conceivably
likely	some evidence supports this idea	suggests, indicates
very likely	substantial evidence supports this idea	is consistent, strongly suggest
most likely	There is more evidence and/or theoretical support for this idea than any other existing idea	most likely
proven	All possible explanations are on the table, and a decisive test indicates that this idea and only this idea explains the observation	proven, proves, proof, shown, demonstrated

Discussion

- **Don’t introduce “new” results in the Discussion !!!**
  - Don’t present “new” facts in the discussion!!!
  - The discussion should discuss results presented earlier in the paper, or in the literature (with a specific reference).

Conclusions

- May be the concluding paragraph of the discussion
- or separate section, entitled “Conclusions”, or “Conclusions and Recommendations”
- Should be very short (1-2 paragraphs)
- Don’t repeat objectives or methodology
- Don’t use indicative sentences (e.g. *The microhardness and critical load was measured as a function of the substrate temperature.*)

Conclusions

- No “new” information – this section should summarize results and ideas which are presented and developed in detail in previous sections (i.e. results and discussion).
- Summarize the most important results, and their implications. (again this is a summary, the implications should have been developed and discussed in Discussion).
- Think in terms of 3 things you want the reader to remember

Conclusions

- The conclusions must contain the answer to the "research question", (or an "admission of failure", in which case perhaps the paper should be rewritten around a more modest research question).
- Should be self-contained – avoid references (either internal *(e.g. see Fig. 3)* or external)
- Recommendations may be offered for further work. They should be firmly based on the present work.

Abstract

- Write draft before writing body of paper
- Re-write when done
- Summarizes in 1-2 sentences each:
  1) background,
  2) objective
  3) methodology
  4) most important results
  5) conclusions

Abstract, cont'd

- Many read only abstract (abstract journals), ∴ make it informative, not merely indicative

- ⇒ Indicative example: The voltage as a function of temperature was measured.

- ⇒Informative example: *It was found that the voltage decreased as a function of the temperature, reaching a saturation value of 30 mV*.

Abstract, cont'd

- Abstract should stand alone – no references.
- Abbreviations:
  - use only if a term is used repeatedly *within the abstract*,
  - and its use will save considerable space.
  - Define each abbreviation the first time it is used.

Title

- Compose title and detailed outline at the beginning of the writing process
- Re-evaluate and correct title after the paper is written
- Short (<2 lines, 1 is better)
- Accurately express the subject of the new results presented
- No abbreviations!!!

The Review Process

- Author submits paper to editor
- Editor sends paper to reviewer(s)
  - ‘peer’ review
  - Tries to choose senior researchers, whose opinion he trusts
- Reviewer writes
  - Overall opinion – publication recommendation
  - Specific comments
  - Fills in form

The Review Process – cont'd

- Editor generally adopts consensus opinion of reviewers
  - If there is no consensus, either reviews himself or sends to an additional reviewer
  - Informs author of results
  - Most reviews are "grey", require author response

The Review Process – cont'd

- Author response
  - Addressed to the editor – not the reviewer
  - Where possible, do what the reviewer suggests!!!!!
    - If he didn't understand you, many other readers won't either!!
  - Write cover letter to editor, indicating location of revisions.
  - Don't detail the changes or give additional explanations in the letter!
    - The ordinary reader won't have this letter to help him!
  - If the reviewer's comments were especially helpful, say so in your cover letter.

The Review Process – cont'd

- If you can't agree with the reviewer (on specific points)
  - Write a clear rebuttal in your cover letter to the editor
  - Or submit elsewhere
    - Incorporate changes that you do agree with
- Editor's response
  - If he is convinced all reviewer's suggestions met, start publication
  - Otherwise, sends revised paper back to reviewer, or to additional reviewer

The Most Common Problems in Technical Papers

PROBLEM	CURE
1. Indicative rather than informative abstract.	The abstract should inform the reader of the key results, not merely indicate the scope of the paper.
2. Introduction not sufficiently broad so that all readers of the target journal can understand the problem studied.	Start paper with general statements defining the field and the problem so that anyone normally reading the target journal knows at least what you are talking about.
3. Introduction does not contain a 'gap' sentence, or the gap sentence is fuzzy.	State explicitly in a separate sentence what wasn't done, or done improperly, in the previous literature, that justifies doing and publishing the current research.
4. Insufficient detail in the method and apparatus sections, or in the derivation of equations.	Give sufficient detail so that another skilled investigator can exactly duplicate your results.

5. Mixture of ‘fact’ and interpretation	Always organize your presentation with (1) what you did, (2) what you got (i.e. results), and (3) interpretation, in that order. Separate interpretation from facts, by placing interpretation in a separate sentence, or better a separate section (i.e. discussion). Use appropriate words to indicate lack of certainty and modesty in presenting interpretation.
6. Bad organization	Separate into separate sections (1) what you did (i.e. method), (2) what you got (i.e. results), and (3) why (i.e. discussion). Ask yourself after each sentence “Did I give the reader ALL the information he needs to understand this sentence someplace previously in the paper?”
7. Undefined symbols, changing nomenclature	Make a nomenclature table for your own use. List and define each symbol. List each page where a symbol appears. List the page you defined the symbol. During proof-reading, check each symbol against the table.
8. Rabbits pulled from the hat.	Introduce all results in the results section. No new ‘results’ in the discussion or conclusion. Make sure all conclusions firmly supported by results, and interpreted in discussion.

9. Poor paragraph organization	No 1-sentence paragraphs. Lead sentence of par. introduces topic, last sent. presents major point or conclusion. Each sentence follows logically from preceding sentences
10. Awkward sentences	Use natural form of verb (not "measurements were made of the voltage" – instead "the voltage was measured"). Mostly use natural English word order: subject, verb, predicate.
11. Bad graphics	Label all axes with name and units. 'Heads-up' presentation[1]. Blind man's rule[2]. Illiterate man's rule[3]. Use large enough letters, symbols, and line width.

[1] *'Heads-up' presentation*. Where possible, give the information needed to understand a figure directly on the figure (rather than in the caption or text).
[2] *Blind man's rule.* Key results appearing in figures and tables should be described verbally in the text so that a blind man, who only hears the text, understands the paper.
[3] *Illiterate man's rule.* Figures should be self-explanatory, so that an illiterate (in the language of the paper) can understand the figure without reading any text.

Most Common English Mistake by Native Hebrew Speakers

- In compound nouns, use only the singular noun form in all nouns except the final noun:
  - **velocity distribution**,
  - not velocities distribution
    - (it doesn't matter how many velocities might be involved)
  - **electron energies**, not electrons energies
    - even if there are 10^{23} electrons

Summary – 10 Commandments for writing a good paper

1. Have a well defined ‘research question’
   - Implicit in ‘statement of purpose’ in intro.
   - Answered in conclusions
2. Organize paper in standard manner (Introduction, Experimental Apparatus and Method, Results, Discussion, Conclusions)
   - Prepare an outline before writing text
   - Put each statement into the right place

Summary – 10 Commandments

3. Explicit gap sentence in introduction
4. Give all the details required for duplicating results
5. Results: Location, Presentation, Comment
6. Good graphics – easy to read and understand
7. Be modest in explanations, implications
8. Polish each sentence
9. Informative abstract
10. Work hard to make readers' job easy

Thanks for your attention!

- Want more? **Read the book**!
  - R. Boxman and E. Boxman, *Communicating Science: A Practical Guide for Engineers and Physical Scientists*, Word Scientific 2017
  - http://www.worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/10145
  - Or “google” boxman communicating science
  - Use discount code WSPHY25 until 30 April 2017