

From Draft to Acceptance

The Complete Academic Writing Checklist

A step-by-step guide for researchers,
PhD students, and academics navigating
the journey from first draft to journal acceptance.



MANUSCRIPT INTELLIGENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Why Most Good Research Gets Rejected

Every year, millions of research papers are submitted to peer-reviewed journals. The majority are rejected - not because the science is flawed, but because the manuscript fails to meet the standards journals expect. Poor structure, unclear language, missing information, and formatting errors are responsible for more rejections than scientific weakness.

This checklist was created by researchers, for researchers. It distills the collective wisdom of successful authors who have navigated the submission process at Nature, Science, IEEE, Elsevier, and hundreds of other top-tier journals. Use it at every stage of your writing process - from the first outline to the final submission.

How to Use This Checklist

Work through each phase in order. Tick each item only when you are completely satisfied - not when you think it is "good enough." The difference between a good paper and a great paper is in the details.

~50%

Papers rejected at desk review
before reaching peer review

~30%

Rejections caused by language
and presentation issues

~70%

Authors who revise and resubmit
are eventually accepted

PHASE 1 PRE-WRITING AND RESEARCH PREPARATION

Research Integrity and Ethics

- + All experiments have been conducted ethically with appropriate institutional approval (IRB, IACUC, or equivalent).
- + Data fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism have been strictly avoided.
- + All co-authors have agreed to be listed and have approved the final submission.
- + Conflicts of interest have been identified and will be disclosed in the manuscript.
- + The research has not been submitted to another journal simultaneously.
- + All funding sources have been documented and will be acknowledged.

Journal Selection (Pre-Writing)

Choosing the right journal before you write - not after - saves weeks of reformatting and significantly increases your acceptance rate.

- + The target journal Aims and Scope have been read thoroughly.
- + Recent issues have been reviewed to confirm the paper fits the current publication direction.
- + The journal Impact Factor and quartile ranking have been verified at Clarivate JCR or Scimago.
- + The Author Guidelines have been downloaded and read in full.
- + Article Processing Charges (APC) have been checked if open access is required.
- + The average review time and acceptance rate have been researched.

Pro Tip: Use the Dr. MinSat Labo Journal Recommender

Paste your abstract into the Journal Recommender tool and receive instant recommendations for the top 5 to 15 journals that match your research scope, powered by real OpenAlex data. Always verify the final Impact Factor at Clarivate JCR before submitting.

PHASE 2 MANUSCRIPT STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Title

- + The title accurately reflects the core finding - not the methodology alone.
- + The title is concise (ideally under 15 words) and avoids unnecessary jargon.
- + Key search terms that researchers would use to find this paper are present in the title.
- + Abbreviations are avoided in the title unless universally recognized in the field.

Abstract

- + The abstract follows the journal required structure (structured or unstructured).
- + Background, Objective, Methods, Results, and Conclusion are all clearly represented.
- + The most important quantitative finding is explicitly stated.
- + The abstract word count is within the journal limit (typically 150 to 250 words).
- + The abstract can stand alone without reading the full paper.
- + No citations are included unless the journal explicitly allows this.

Pro Tip: Auto-Generate Your Abstract

Paste your rough notes and key findings into the Dr. MinSat Labo Abstract Generator. It produces a perfectly structured 4-part abstract within your word limit in seconds.

Introduction

- + The research problem is established clearly within the first paragraph.
- + The gap in existing knowledge that this paper addresses is explicitly stated.
- + The most relevant prior literature is cited - not every paper ever published on the topic.
- + The research objective or hypothesis is clearly stated.
- + The structure of the paper is briefly outlined at the end of the introduction.

Methods

- + The methodology is described in sufficient detail for another researcher to replicate the study.
- + All materials, equipment, and software are identified with version numbers and suppliers.
- + Statistical methods are described including software, version, and significance thresholds.
- + Ethical approvals and participant consent procedures are documented.
- + Sample sizes and how they were determined are explained.
- + Limitations of the methodology are acknowledged.

Results

- + Results are presented objectively without interpretation.
- + All primary outcomes stated in the Methods are reported - including negative results.
- + Statistical results include effect sizes, confidence intervals, and exact p-values.
- + Figures and tables are referenced in the order they appear in the text.
- + Raw data or data availability statements are included where required.

Discussion

- + The key findings are interpreted in the context of the research objective.
- + Results are compared with prior literature - both supporting and contradicting studies.
- + Alternative explanations for the findings have been considered and addressed.
- + Limitations of the study are honestly and thoroughly discussed.
- + Future research directions arising from this work are suggested.
- + The Discussion does not simply repeat the Results section.

Conclusion

- + The conclusion directly answers the research question stated in the Introduction.
- + No new information or findings are introduced in the Conclusion.
- + The broader significance and implications of the work are clearly articulated.
- + The conclusion is concise - typically no more than 2 to 3 paragraphs.

PHASE 3 LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND CLARITY

Language quality is one of the most common reasons for desk rejection. Editors at top journals read hundreds of manuscripts per month. Unclear, inconsistent, or non-native English writing signals to editors that the paper may not be ready for publication.

Grammar and Clarity

- + The entire manuscript has been proofread for grammatical errors.
- + Sentences are clear and concise - the average sentence length is under 25 words.
- + Technical jargon is defined on first use.
- + Abbreviations are introduced in full on first use and used consistently thereafter.
- + Passive and active voice are used appropriately.
- + Hedging language (may, might, suggests) is used appropriately for unconfirmed findings.
- + Absolute claims (proves, demonstrates conclusively) are reserved for well-supported findings only.

Common Language Mistakes to Avoid

Wordiness	"It is important to note that..." - Simply state the point directly.
Nominalization	"The analysis of data was performed..." - Write "We analysed the data..."
Inconsistent tense	Use past tense for methods and results. Use present tense for established facts.
Vague quantifiers	"Many studies have shown..." - Cite specific studies with numbers.
Comma splices	Two independent clauses joined only by a comma - use a semicolon or split sentences.

Pro Tip: Humanize and Proofread with Dr. MinSat Labo

Use the Manuscript Humanizer to transform stiff or AI-assisted prose into natural, publication-ready English. Then run Manuscript Proofreader to catch grammar errors and style issues specific to academic writing conventions.

PHASE 4 FIGURES, TABLES, AND DATA PRESENTATION

Figure Quality and Formatting

- + All figures meet the minimum resolution of the target journal (typically 300 DPI for color, 600 DPI for line art).
- + Figures are submitted in the format required by the journal (TIFF, EPS, PDF, or PNG).
- + All text within figures (axis labels, legends) is legible at the published size.
- + Color figures use a colorblind-friendly palette where possible.
- + Figure panels are labeled clearly (A, B, C) and described in the figure caption.
- + Scale bars are included in all microscopy and imaging figures.
- + Statistical significance is indicated on graphs with appropriate notation (*, **, ns).

Pro Tip: Prepare Figures Instantly

Use the Dr. MinSat Labo Figure Preparation tool to upscale your figures to 600 DPI, convert between formats (TIFF, PNG, JPG), and check compliance with major journal requirements.

Figure Captions

- + Every figure has a concise title followed by a detailed description.
- + Captions are self-contained - the figure can be understood without reading the main text.
- + All abbreviations used within figures are defined in the caption.
- + Statistical methods and sample sizes (n values) are stated in captions.

Tables

- + Tables are used for data that cannot be conveyed efficiently in the text.
- + The same data is not presented in both a figure and a table.
- + All column and row headers are clearly labeled with units.
- + Footnotes explain all abbreviations and symbols used within the table.
- + Tables are numbered sequentially and referenced in order in the text.

PHASE 5 REFERENCES AND CITATIONS

- + All in-text citations have a corresponding entry in the reference list.
- + All reference list entries are cited at least once in the text.
- + References are formatted exactly according to the journal required citation style.
- + DOIs are included for all references that have them.
- + All author names, journal titles, volume numbers, and page numbers are verified for accuracy.
- + Preprints that have since been published are cited with the final published version.
- + Self-citations are included only where genuinely relevant.
- + Key papers in the field that reviewers would expect to see cited are included.
- + Reference management software (Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote) has been used consistently.

Pro Tip: Format References Automatically

Paste your reference list into the Dr. MinSat Labo Reference Formatter. Select your target journal style and receive perfectly formatted references with CrossRef DOI verification for 100 percent accuracy.

Style	Used In	Format Example
APA 7th	Social sciences, psychology	Author, A. (Year). Title. Journal, Vol(Issue), pages.
Vancouver	Medicine, Lancet, NEJM	1. Author A. Title. Journal. Year;Vol(Issue):pages.
IEEE	Engineering, technology	[1] A. Author, "Title," Journal, vol. X, pp. Y-Z, Year.
Nature	Nature family journals	Author, A. et al. Title. Journal Vol, pages (Year).
ACS	Chemistry journals	Author, A.; Author, B. Journal Year, Vol, pages.

PHASE 6 JOURNAL SELECTION AND SUBMISSION

Before Submission

- + The manuscript has been formatted per the journal Author Guidelines (font, spacing, word count, file format).
- + All supplementary materials are prepared and formatted correctly.
- + The cover letter is written and addressed to the correct Editor-in-Chief.
- + Suggested reviewers have been identified with no conflicts of interest.
- + The submission system account has been created and all files are ready to upload.
- + All co-authors have reviewed and approved the final version for submission.
- + The corresponding author contact details are current and correct.

The Cover Letter

The cover letter is your first direct communication with the editor. It should be professional, concise, and persuasive. A poor cover letter can result in desk rejection even for strong manuscripts.

- + The cover letter is addressed to the specific Editor-in-Chief by name where possible.
- + The manuscript title and intended journal are stated clearly in the opening line.
- + The core contribution is summarized in 2 to 3 sentences.
- + The novelty and significance of the work relative to existing literature is explained.
- + Confirmation that the work is original, not under consideration elsewhere, and approved by all authors is included.
- + Any conflicts of interest are disclosed.
- + The cover letter is no longer than one page.

Pro Tip: Generate Your Cover Letter

Enter your journal name, paper title, and main contribution into the Dr. MinSat Labo Cover Letter Writer. Receive a flawlessly formatted, persuasive cover letter in seconds.

PHASE 7 PEER REVIEW AND REVISION

Receiving reviewer comments - especially after a Major Revision decision - can be stressful. The key is to respond systematically, respectfully, and thoroughly. Treating reviewer comments as an opportunity to strengthen your paper almost always leads to acceptance.

Responding to Reviewers

- + Every single reviewer comment has been addressed - none ignored.
- + Each response begins with a respectful acknowledgment of the reviewer insight.
- + Where you agree with a comment, the specific change made is described and revised text is quoted.
- + Where you disagree, a polite, evidence-based justification is provided.
- + Line numbers referencing the revised manuscript are included for every change.
- + The response document clearly distinguishes reviewer comments from author responses.
- + A track-changes version of the revised manuscript is prepared if required.
- + The response letter opens with a brief summary paragraph thanking the reviewers.

Pro Tip: Polish Your Reviewer Responses

Paste the reviewer critique and your rough technical answer into the Dr. MinSat Labo Reviewer Response Polish tool. Receive a perfectly toned, respectful, and rigorous response in the exact register that peer reviewers expect.

After Acceptance

- + Proof corrections have been completed carefully and returned within the deadline.
- + All author names, affiliations, and funding acknowledgements have been verified in the proof.
- + Open access and licensing options have been selected if applicable.
- + The final published DOI has been saved and shared with co-authors.
- + The paper has been shared on ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and LinkedIn.

BONUS

Quick Reference Master Checklist

Print this page and use it before every submission. Tick each box only when you are genuinely satisfied.

Research and Ethics

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ IRB approval obtained | ☐ No data fabrication or plagiarism |
| ☐ All co-authors approved | ☐ Conflicts of interest disclosed |

Structure

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Title is clear and keyword-rich | ☐ Abstract within word limit |
| ☐ IMRaD structure followed | ☐ Conclusion answers research question |

Language

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Grammar checked throughout | ☐ Active voice used where appropriate |
| ☐ Jargon defined on first use | ☐ Manuscript humanized and proofread |

Figures and Tables

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Minimum 600 DPI resolution | ☐ Correct file format (TIFF/EPS/PDF) |
| ☐ Self-contained captions | ☐ No duplicate data in figures and tables |

References

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ All citations verified for accuracy | ☐ DOIs included |
| ☐ Correct citation style applied | ☐ No missing or orphan references |

Submission

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Formatted per journal guidelines | ☐ Cover letter written |
| ☐ All files uploaded correctly | ☐ Co-author approval confirmed |

TOOLS

Recommended Tools for Researchers

RECOMMENDED**Dr. MinSat Labo**drminsat.com

All-in-one academic writing platform: Humanizer, Abstract Generator, Cover Letter Writer, Reviewer Response Polish, Korean-to-English Translator, Journal Recommender, Reference Formatter, Proposal Generator, and Figure Preparation.

Zoterozotero.org

Free reference management software. Automatically formats citations in any style.

Grammarlygrammarly.com

Grammar and style checker. Good for general English but not specialized for academic writing.

Overleafoverleaf.com

Online LaTeX editor. Essential for journals that require LaTeX submission.

Clarivate JCRjcr.clarivate.com

Official source for journal Impact Factors and quartile rankings. Always verify here before submission.

Scimagoscimagojr.com

Free alternative to JCR for checking journal rankings and quartiles.

BioRenderbiorender.com

Professional scientific figure creation tool. Free tier available.

Start writing better papers today.

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No credit card required.