

Discussion on writing

Based on *Writing Science, how to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded*

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Making a story sticky

- Getting published is not the ultimate goal, getting cited is
- A sticky idea is
 - **S**imple
 - **U**nexpected
 - **C**oncrete
 - **C**redible
 - **E**mootional
 - **S**tores

Simple idea

- Address the core of a problem in a clear and compact way
- Simple doesn't mean simplistic. Don't trivialize the issue, identify its essence
- It takes no talent to see the complex in the complex, the challenge is to cut through the clutter to see the simple

Unexpected

- Most papers are forgettable because they are incremental
- There is an enormous mass of knowledge on your topic, your work should identify the unknown within that mass
- The knowledge gaps may be small, but that doesn't mean they are unimportant
- Highlighting the unknown is difficult - we know a lot and we like to show off what we know

Concrete

- Science lives with a tension between concrete data and abstract idea
- The danger zone is in the middle – small scale abstractions that are neither concrete details nor high-level schemas

Credible

- Establish credibility of idea by grounding them in previous work
- Establish credibility of data by describing methods clearly
- Establish credibility of conclusions by showing that they grow from credible data
- Build a chain that extends from past work into future directions

Emotional

- To engage us in your work, you need to engage our curiosity. Do that by asking a novel question
- If you don't ask an engaging question, you only appeal to our inner nerd and our love for accumulating trivia

Stories

- To write a good paper, you need to think about internal structure and how to integrate story modules

Analyze existing papers.
Do they implement SUCCEES?

OCAR story structure

- **O**pening
- **C**hallenge
- **A**ction
- **R**esolution

Opening

- Who are the characters, where does it take place?
- What do you need to understand about the situation to follow the story?
- What is the larger problem you are addressing?

Challenge

- What do your characters need to accomplish?
- What specific question do you propose to answer?

Action

- What happens to address the challenge?
- In a paper: describe the work you did
- In a proposal: describe the work you hope to do

Resolution

- How have the characters and their world changed as the result of the action?
- What did you learn from your work?

OCAR story structure

- You should be able to get the key points of a paper from the **O**pening, **C**hallenge and **R**esolution
- You'll know whether you need to go back and read it fully

ABCDE story structure

- **Action:** immediately engage the reader
- **Background:** fill the reader in on the characters and setting so they can understand the story
- **Development:** follow the action as the story develops
- **Climax:** bring all the threads together and address them
- **Ending:** same as resolution

OCAR vs. ABCDE

- **O**pening and **C**hallenge =
Action and **B**ackground
- ABCDE gets the reader into the story faster
- But less efficient than OCAR in moving the story forward – after the initial action, you have to back up and fill in the background

LD story structure

- **Lead:** core of the story, collapses opening, challenge and resolution
- **Development:** fills out and develop the story

Analyze existing papers.

Do they implement OCAR, ABCDE or LD?

Where are the OCAR elements?

The Opening

- Three goals:
 - Identify the problem that drives the research
 - Introduce the characters
 - Target the audience
- Whom do you want to read your work and how do you want them to think about it?

The first sentence

- Get readers moving and set the direction
- Establish expectations and generate momentum
- If you start in one direction and then switch, readers get mental whiplash
- Worse: if opening is unclear and doesn't go in any direction, readers will wait to figure out where to go

The first sentence

- Avoid explaining a schema that scholars in the field don't need explained
- There is nothing wrong with explaining things for yourself in a first draft. When you revise, figure out where the real story starts and delete everything before that.

Targeting your audience

- Experts: open quickly, building off the discipline's core schemas
- Broad audience: two-step opening to introduce and then redefine the focus
 - Open with an issue that engages the audience, then modulate it to one you want to work with
 - Frame the issues broadly, then narrow in on the specific research you propose

How wide should the opening be?

- Set the opening to draw in as broad a readership as you can manage
- Establish expectations that you can deliver on
- If your opening is wider than the resolution, readers will feel cheated
- If the resolution is wider than the opening, readers won't ever see that the story would interest them

How wide should the opening be?

- If you oversell in the immediate opening, you can still filter down quickly
- If you frame too narrowly, you lose readers immediately, and once lost, you can't get them back

Analyze existing papers.

Did they identify the larger issue? the characters?
Did they target a narrow audience or a wider one?