



## Ten Take-Home Messages from the AVETH talk Making Academic Writing as Straightforward as Possible

1. **Most of your readers are not native speakers of English or of your own language.** Generally, the simplest vocabulary that still expresses your idea precisely is likely to be the most widely understood.
2. **Your readers are going to decode your text with their prior knowledge, and you're likely to overestimate the extent and detail of that knowledge.** You may have heard this called the curse of knowledge.
3. **All readers have finite attention.** It's important that you spare the reader needless work processing your text so that they have as many mental resources as possible left for dealing with your message, the science.
4. **Scientific writing is not "creative writing".** This doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't be creative about your scientific writing, but the purpose of scientific writing is quite different to that of creative writing. This difference in purpose means that lots of general advice about writing is not relevant to your situation, and you may have to unlearn some assumptions about writing and the writing process.
5. **Academic writing is about planning, not inspiration.** In particular, separating decisions about your message from the activity of drafting can make the writing process much more efficient: use outlines between brainstorming and drafting, if possible with your co-authors.
6. **Keep sentence structures as simple as your message allows.** Ensure the reader can identify subject and verb quickly, pick something familiar to the reader as the subject, and keep lists and complex material to the end of the sentence.

7. **Remove redundant material from your text.** Remember that what is redundant to one reader might be vital information to another, and that not all repetition is redundancy.
8. **Readers process sentences and longer parts of texts within frames of reference.** Because these are often largely implicit, ensure that you give readers clear signals about changes to frames of reference.
9. **Meet discipline-specific expectations by adhering to the conventions of your field.** Your science should be innovative, of course, but your scientific writing style is likely to perform best when it offers the readers no alarms and no surprises.
10. **Take time to improve your writing.** Like playing a musical instrument or learning a sport, writing becomes easier the more often you practice it. You can also learn a great deal from what you read; when you find a paper that's particularly clear and easy to read yet still delivers a complete scientific message, read it one more time to see what makes it so. Get feedback on your writing from colleagues as well as co-authors. Take a writing course.

Find courses here:

<https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/en/angebot.html>

These courses are likely to be most useful for you:

- 3902-MA 2.76 **Writing research papers for publication:**  
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- 3900-MA 2.71 and 3901-MA 2.72 **Writing at doctoral level:**  
Natural science and engineering C1
- 0582-MA 2.64 **Basic academic writing:**  
Natural science and engineering B2

We also offer

- 3905-MA 2.68 **Writing your master's thesis:**  
Natural science and engineering C1-C2