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Editorial

How Language, Education, Culture and AI Influence How We Write

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ABSTRACT

How does someone become an author? Some definitions require that they have published something, an article, book or play, while others would say just beginning the creative process of writing or producing an electronic document is enough. Those of us who contribute to journals like this one are certainly authors, and how we communicate through what we write has a strong connection to our language, education, culture, life experience and profession. Today, artificial intelligence (AI) is able to independently create works we normally attribute to authors, alter an actual author's work so that its content, style and meaning are significantly changed, or simply aid an author by correcting errors in spelling, punctuation or grammar. As the influence of AI increases we need to follow current guidelines related to its use, but it is also vital that we remain true authors by asking intelligent and meaningful questions, retaining the ability to recognize answers that are untrue or not believable, and working to share our ideas, beliefs and experience through writing that is clear, accurate and informative.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Language and Culture; Academic writing; Authorship; Plagiarism.*
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1. Introduction

It is a challenging fact for many that the dominant language for scientific writing is English. While it is true that a number of countries do have journals that are published in their native language, for example, France and Germany, most often authors are faced with the need to write their papers and respond to reviewers using English. Consequently, this places at a disadvantage the many people who want to publish their work for whom English is not their first language, and especially those whose education has given them limited opportunities to read, write and speak English. However, if you are one of these authors, the advice the best journal editors will give you is to seek out an English-speaking writer to review your manuscript before you make your submission. In this way you can benefit from corrections and suggestions that will improve your manuscript, and make it more likely that a journal editor will decide that what you have written is suitable to be sent out for review, rather than rejecting your submission.

2. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Today, of course, with the upsurge of artificial intelligence (AI) impacting both research and publishing there are many programs available to authors based on large language models that have dramatically altered the process of language generation. Consequently AI programs do now offer authors an alternative to seeking the help of an editor, or an additional step they can take to check and improve what they have written, and it has been shown that these tools can increase the writing proficiency of non-native speakers (Li et al, 2024). However, as is now apparent from the major concerns voiced in the media about security related to the advance of AI, all these programs have potential disadvantages or associated risks in spite of their promise, and so need to be approached with caution even when we are only turning to them as authors. Awareness is particularly important regarding the security, privacy and ethical implications of using programs such as ChatGPT (Wu et al. 2024).

Among the indications of the growing concern has been the appearance of guidelines related to AI and the fact that most journals now have policies regarding appropriate and responsible use (Flanagin et al, 2026), including the requirement of a declaration from the author if an AI program has been used. In this context, the use by journal editors of software designed to detect AI generated text has also become widespread (Xiang et al, 2026).

It is especially important that authors who are less familiar with the English language, particularly the complexities of its grammar, confusing vocabulary and quirky idioms, understand that the version of their manuscript generated by many AI programs will be readily recognized as being the product of AI by most editors. This is particularly true with free or limited AI programs, and is because the structure, choice of words and use of idioms in the version of your MS they produce tend not to be ideal, so the 'voice' of the end product is somehow artificial, overly formal or unconvincing, and also often either too long (verbose) or too short (stilted).

So authors must think carefully about their use of AI programs, and the advice to rely on an English-speaking editor remains the gold standard. However, there is of course value to be had from the basic assistance provided through AI in the programs available to help with the correction of basic grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and incorrect syntax (after all everyone relies on these elements in word processing software). Moreover, remembering to spellcheck a manuscript before submission should be seen an essential step in the preparation of every paper.

3. Culture

It is important to remember that in addition to language, our culture and traditions can add impact, quality and relevance to many forms of scientific and academic writing. And conforming to the strict requirements for English language, should not mean that the richness of these elements has to be lost where they are appropriate in a scientific report.

4. Figures and Tables

A good report with correct English will often benefit from the inclusion of figures or tables, as when appropriate and well-constructed, these provide clarity through their presentation of data in particular. Remember that including tables and figures also enables the text to be shorter than where long lists or written descriptions of complex numeric data are used instead, and this makes your paper shorter, and most importantly, more readable.

5. Illustrations

A well-chosen image also allows economies to be made in the written text, in addition to adding information in its own right. The fact that 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is well known; this is because the 'right' image can usually convey more information and prompt more thought more effectively than a lengthy written description. However, an integral part of an image's impact is the inclusion of an informative caption; this should provide a brief description of what the image shows so that it is clear to the reader how it is contributing.

6. Photo Essay

There are valuable lessons to be learned from how journalism employs images. Here, it is the image which is principally relied on to present the information the author wants to convey and the text accompanying it is often brief. Journalists know their readers have limited time to take in the information they are providing, and that an impactful image will attract attention to an article that may otherwise not get read. In this context, remember the value of a scientific article or paper written as a photo essay. A good photo essay uses images to provide the background, tell the story and show the relevance or outcome of an intervention. The captions for each image guide the readers' understanding by providing the context and additional detail. The text accompanying the images should be brief and be written to link the images rather than to tell the story (Macnab et al, 2018). The GHMJ (Global Health Management Journal) has this format among its article categories, and it is one that is also valuable in report writing where the potential reader is unlikely to have, or be able to make, time to read a long written report, for example, an academic supervisor, administrator, a ministry official or when reporting to a granting agency (Nanvuma et al 2025).

7. Artwork

The use of images does not have to be limited to photographs of course. There are many examples in the literature where paintings by artists have been used instead. One of the most compelling to my mind is a small painting by Gabriel Metsu that illustrates the impact of illness. In this picture the artist shows a sick child sitting on a mother's lap, and the subject was likely one of the many children affected by plague during the outbreak which occurred in Metsu's native Amsterdam at the time he painted it in 1766. Metsu's original painting is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, (https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-3059) and this image is one of several included in an article illustrating artists' portrayals of sick children through art (Duke, 2025). Just looking at the image you can see the listless nature of the child, her pallor and vacant gaze, and the limpness with which she sits on her mother's lap which communicate so clearly the fact that she is ill. Additional aspects where the picture tells us more, are the concern on the mother's face and the items the artist included in the painting that indicate the child has likely been refusing to eat or drink as a consequence of her illness - the vessel containing a spoon put to one side.

8. Plagiarism

Mentioning the artist Metsu provides a reminder that authors must be mindful of the issue of plagiarism. In days gone by, it was perfectly acceptable for artists and composers to reuse elements and themes from their previous work. But these days the convention which must be followed is not to repeat more than 6 consecutive words from any of your previous publications. Hence, reworking sentences and even definitions is often necessary if you want to include material from past work in a new article, and when you do, it is obligatory to acknowledge the original work by citing it in a reference as well.

For first time authors or those early in their career the principal challenge related to plagiarism is usually where work by other authors is relied on in the introduction to provide background, or where the author's results and conclusions are compared in the discussion to other published research. Once again, making sure to reference the works used with a correct citation is essential. But it is also necessary to paraphrase what you want to include, rather than cutting and pasting material directly from the original paper. Although it is allowed to directly quote a sentence or two or a key statement where necessary, this must always be placed within quotation marks and be linked with a citation to the original source.

For more seasoned authors, the plagiarism challenge encountered is most often the limitation that now exists on reusing material from your own previously published work. Today's convention that no more than 6 words may be reproduced verbatim makes the repetition of a previously conceived idea, technological definition or research method a challenge, as these must be rephrased as well as the source being clearly referenced. Once again, this is an area where an experienced editor can help you avoid the potential pitfalls that now exist for all authors in relation to this aspect of plagiarism.

In this context, it's amazing to think that not so long ago composers in particular could repeat and reuse sections from their prior work with impunity; indeed, they often even 'borrowed' from contemporaries without criticism. A wonderful example of the benefits of this practice of reuse is the inclusion by the composer Handel of his Hallelujah chorus from his oratorio 'The Messiah' in its entirety as the finale for a new anthem he wrote for a fundraising concert to support the Foundling Hospital in London; this work was then transformed from being relatively unknown to become the poplar and well-loved work that it is today (Howell, 2014).

9. Conclusion

I want to end by leaving you with an important reminder. Nowadays we need to follow guidelines on how we use AI (Flanagin et al, 2026), and be mindful of concerns about its potential to impact our use of language, ways we express our thoughts and even how images are generated. But as Michael Thompson wrote recently in the UK Times newspaper, "If AI is destined to do much of the calculating, coding and analysing presently undertaken by humans, then the ability to ask an intelligent question, recognise a foolish answer, understand another human being and occasionally write a decent sentence may become more valuable, not less." (Thompson, 2026). I am sure Thompson is correct in this regard. And so we should all aim to ask valid questions, endeavour to question answers and try harder to understand each other, while continuing to look for opportunities to write and take advantage of every chance we are given to get input on how to improve as authors.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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