1. Structure of a Paper

Typical Structure of a Paper

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Literature Review and/or Theoretical Framework
4. Econometric/Empirical Framework
5. Data and Descriptive Statistics
6. Empirical Results
7. Summary and Conclusions
8. References
9. Appendix
Abstract

- Communicate the one major and novel contribution.
- Not more than 150 words.
- Write very concrete. Don’t waste space with meaningless and vague statements.
- State the major research question, model (if not standard), data (if innovative) and major results.
- Give at least three representative keywords (possibly not contained in the title) after the abstract.
Getting the Introduction Started

Before you start writing: Identify and distill the central contribution of your paper.

First paragraph: Introduce to the overall topic. What are we talking about?

Second paragraph: State in compact form what your paper is about (without going into more details). State the central and novel contribution. Put the punchline right up front!
The next introductory paragraphs...

- Give more background information on your specific contribution. If necessary, give the most important underlying references.
- Motivate your research objective and state your research questions.
- Explain how your paper contributes to the existing literature.
- Explain (in compact form!) your approach and state the used data (if interesting).
- State the major findings (not all specific details).
- Give the structure of the remainder of the paper.
Literature Review

- Only needed as an extra section if you provide it in more detailed way. Otherwise imbedded in introduction or next section.
- Don’t overload the reader and don’t write a survey!
- Carefully select the relevant(!) literature and not just all what you could find.
- Categorize and systematize the literature in a meaningful and transparent way.
- Quote properly in the form, e.g., “Engle and Granger (1987)“
Notation

- Use a proper, transparent and consistent (!) notation. Make it simple but still unequivocal.
- Try to use common notation (e.g., $r_t$ for log returns and not, e.g., $h_t$.)
- Introduce your notation carefully. If it is complicate, remind the reader to some definitions from time to time (... risk aversion $\theta$ is ...)
- Check your formulas carefully. Avoid obvious errors.
- Show main derivations and relationships. Lengthy derivations should go into the appendix.
Tables and Figures

- Don’t overload the reader with empirical results.
- Most important tables/figures should be put directly in the text. Less important ones might be put in the appendix. Irrelevant ones should be skipped.
- Tables and figures must be readable (font size, colors!)
- Tables and figures should be designed in a way such that they are maximally informative.
- Tables and figures should be self-explaining (proper legends, explanations)!
Empirical Results

- Don’t just replicate what the reader anyway sees from the tables and figures (e.g., ... the t-statistic is 2.35 ...)
- Directly interpret results and draw conclusions.
- The result sections are often boring and written in a mechanical way. Avoid that and make it interesting!
- Work out and systematize the major findings. You might even number them in the text.
- Start with the main result!
- Don’t waste space with preliminary results.
Conclusions

▶ Short and sweet!
▶ Very briefly and compactly explain again what you have done in the paper.
▶ Do not repeat all of your results. Give the main message!
▶ Give some general conclusions but don’t start speculating.
▶ Do not put all your plans for future research at the end!
References

- Quote papers properly and completely (!)
- All papers quoted in the text must appear in the references and vice versa.
- Quote in the “Econometrica style“.
- If you quote working papers, check for updated versions or forthcomings.
Appendix

- Mathematical appendix for lengthy derivations and proofs.
- Extra category for tables and figures.
- Use also a consistent and transparent structure.
- Note: The appendix should provide useful extra information!
- The appendix is not a “waste dump“ for everything you have produced.
- Assess whether you (as a reader!) would find your appendix useful.
General Remarks on Organization

- Readers are impatient and don’t have much time. Readers skim!
- Most readers just want to know the main story and your basic result!
- Organize your paper such the readers can easily skim and can get to the point.
- Don’t organize your paper in a “novel style“. Get to the central result as fast as possible - not at the very end!
General Remarks

- Keep it short! Every word counts!
- Every sentence should say something.
- Don’t replicate phrases. Saying it once (but understandable) is enough!
- Discipline yourself. “Do I really have to say this? Can I formulate more compactly (but still understandable)?“
- Be precise regarding your wording. Avoid meaningless sentences.
- Avoid obvious sloppiness! Use spell-checkers.
Specific Remarks on Writing

- Normal sentence structure: subject, verb object.
- Use active tense. Not: “... it is assumed that ...” or “... it should be noted that ...”
- Use present tense.
- Write concrete and not abstract. Don’t use fancy words.
- Don’t use double adjectives (... very important results ...)
- Avoid technical jargon
It is usually the case that most good writers find that everything before the “that” should be deleted. Right?

Don’t use too much “this“. E.g., “this shows ...“, “this means ...“

Don’t abbreviate authors’ names.

Don’t overuse italics.

Use footnotes only for things a typical reader genuinely can skip. If it is important put it in the text, otherwise skip it.

Don’t use bullet point lists.
Conclusions

► Good scientific writing is very difficult!
► Put the punchline right up front.
► Be as clear as possible.
► Get rid of any nebula and noise.
► Don’t try to impress people with (typically dispensable) technicalities or details.
► Make it maximally easy (and not complicate!) for your readers to read your paper and to understand the main contribution.
► Assess your paper from the viewpoint of a referee. Referees don’t have much time and want to quickly understand what your main contribution is.