REFERENCES: LESSONS IN WRITING

*Suvrit Sra*

“*Display of superior knowledge is as great a vulgarity as display of superior wealth – greater indeed, inasmuch as knowledge should tend more definitely than wealth towards discretion and good manners.*”

— Fowler on ‘French Words’

1. **SUMMARY**

I list below a few essential references for writing: dictionaries, thesauri, and usage guides. I also mention a (biased) selection of well-written books and papers.

2. **DICTIONARIES**

1. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com): The ultimate, authoritative source. Can be intimidating; the historical ordering of definitions and examples can hinder rapid lookup. Nevertheless, for remote meanings and fine points it is indisputable.


3. *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*: good for daily use.

4. *Concise Oxford English*: A basic dictionary, good for quick lookup, can be inadequate.


Other dictionaries are mentioned in Appendix A.

**BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES**


3. **THESAURI**

Most major dictionary publishers also publish thesauruses. For ordinary day-to-day usage, I find *www.thesaurus.com* to be sufficient.

4. **WRITING GUIDES**

4.1. **STYLE AND USAGE GUIDES**


If you do not have immediate access to this book, you could begin by reading (accessible via the Internet) *The Science of Scientific Writing* by G. D. Gopen and J. A. Swan. The fundamental thesis of the paper is: Writing to meet the reader’s expectation.

4.2. PUNCTUATION, TYPESETTING, TEDDUM

1. *The Chicago Manual of Style*: This tome has long been the definitive source of the nitty-gritty of book writing and publishing. It contains daunting coverage of punctuation—not for the feeble hearted.

2. *Mind the Stop*: A witty guide to all things punctuation.

4.3. SCIENTIFIC WRITING GUIDES

1. *Handbook of Writing for the Mathematical Sciences* by N. J. Higham. This handbook is a detailed guide to writing itself; highly recommended.

2. *A Primer of Mathematical Writing* by S. G. Kranz contains some general useful advice.

COMMENT: The reader might also benefit from advice on mathematical typesetting offered by Knuth in *The \TeX{}book*. The book might seem daunting to those addicted to \LaTeX{}, and many of the difficulties of mathematical typesetting are already handled either by \LaTeX{} or by the amsmath package. Nevertheless, the reader will definitely benefit from Knuth’s insights into the \TeX{} system as well as mathematical typesetting.

5. BOOKS AND PAPERS

I have listed below some well-written scientific books and papers.

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A. ADDITIONAL SOURCES

In this appendix I have smashed together a list of more guides, manuals, and their ilk; I excluded these references from the main list to avoid overwhelming (and thereby losing) the reader. Higham provides a much more detailed guide, and I recommend that you have a look!

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