Checklist for Evaluating your Paper or Thesis

This checklist is intended to help you with a draft version of a paper or thesis. It can also be modified to evaluate simpler writing projects such as homework assignments or lab reports.

This checklist can be used for self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, or for evaluation from a faculty advisor.

Include specific comments, suggestions, or advice in the second column and consider those when revising your draft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section of Paper</th>
<th>Notes, Ideas, Advice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
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<td><em>Is the title informative without being too long?</em></td>
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<td>o 15 words or less is usually a good title length.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
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<td><em>A mini-version of the paper!</em></td>
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<td><strong>Table of Content</strong></td>
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<td><em>The road map to the paper!</em></td>
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<td>o Is it complete?</td>
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<td>o Includes appendices.</td>
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Additional Comments
**Introduction**
*Use the ‘inverted’ triangle’ to organize: start with big picture and context.*

- Introduce your topic and concisely provide context.
- Explains the importance of your work: rationale and major objectives.
- Include the most important studies (expand in the literature review).
- If applicable: include your formal hypotheses and predictions.

**Writing Advice:**

- Use precise, accurate language.
- Begin paragraphs with key ideas (topic sentences).
- Break sentences into readable “chunks” and put lists or long complicated ideas at the ends of sentences.
- Limit direct quotations in favor of paraphrases with sources.

**Additional Comments**
**Background / Literature Review**

*Show that you know what you are doing!*

- Describe background on factors that may influence your results.
- Synthesizes previously published work and data that is relevant to your research.
- Document all work properly with parenthetical citations that correspond to your References section.

**Writing Advice:**

- Use precise and accurate language.
- Organize information logically and use subheadings and/or numbered/bulleted lists as necessary.
- Begin paragraphs with key ideas (topic sentences).
- Break sentences into readable “chunks” and put lists and long complicated ideas at the ends of sentences.

**Additional Comments**
### Methods and Study Area

*Science is documented and reproducible!*

- Provide the complete information about what you studied.
- Describe the study location, context, and relevant background.
- Describe tools, sampling devices, etc.
- Describe your procedures and data manipulation in enough detail to allow evaluation and replication.
- Describe your statistical tests and analysis.

### Writing Advice:

- Organize information logically and use subheadings and/or numbered/bulleted lists as necessary.
- Use active writing and past tense.

### Additional Comments
**Results**
*Present what you did, not what you think it means!*

- Summarize your data, emphasizing important patterns and changes.
- Support your generalizations with explanations, statistics, etc.
- Provide figures and tables as necessary to document experiments and results.
- Avoids interpretation, drawing conclusions and inferences - that comes later!
- Focus on your own work!

**Writing Advice:**

- Use words and numbers correctly and precisely.
- Organize information logically and use subheadings and/or numbered/bulleted lists as necessary.
- Begin paragraphs with key ideas (topic sentences).
- Include all figures and tables at the end of the paper.

**Additional Comments**
## Discussion

*What does it all mean and imply?*

- Provide a brief restatement of your main results.
- Interpret results, support conclusions with evidence, and explain why experiments/tests succeeded or failed.
- Draw relationships to others’ work.
- Compare your results to the prior literature.
- Examine significance and explain how your work contributes to a broader understanding of the topic.

## Writing Advice:

- Use words and numbers correctly and precisely.
- Organize information logically and use subheadings and/or numbered/bulleted lists as necessary.
- Convey confidence!

## Additional Comments
### Conclusions

*What should we do now?*

- Briefly summarize what you have done, what was discovered, and why your findings are important.
- Suggest possible directions for future work.
- What’s the important take-home message to remember?
- Focus on the important conclusions and omit unimportant conclusions.

### Writing Advice:

- Begin paragraphs with key ideas (topic sentences).
- Convey confidence!

### Acknowledgements

- Who provided substantial help but is not a co-author?
- Who provided the funding and other important resources?

### References

- Include all cited references.
- Include the names of all authors and full titles of their papers or studies.
- Use correct and consistent format (APA or style used by a major journal in your discipline).

### Additional Comments
Figures and Tables

- Place each figure or table on a separate page after the references.
- All parts of the figure and table are large enough to be readable.
- The axes have proper spacing, ranges, clear labels, and include the unit of measurement.
- Avoid unnecessary fluff such as gridlines, titles, 3D charts, etc.
- Number each figure and table sequentially and use in that sequence in the text.

Figure or Table Captions

- Include enough information to understand the figure or table without reading the rest of the paper.
- The figure caption is more than just a repeat of the axis labels!
- The figure caption goes below the figure; the table caption goes above the table.

Figure 2. Comparison between the plant biomass measured in 0.25 square meter plots (mean and SD) in abandoned fields after Year 1 and after Year 5.

This checklist is modified from:
- http://sib.illinois.edu/SkillGuidelines/9%20GUIDELINES-A%20SAMPLE%20MANUSCRIPT.doc