

1.2.1.2 Tasks of scientific texts

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The tasks of scientific texts include

- Documentation and conveying information
- Making the research topic a part of the written scientific tradition.
- Publishing research results. The research is considered finished when the results have been published.
- Educating other professionals in the field.
- Societal function (gaining funding and other support).
- Making the information available to potential practical applicators (e.g. health care professionals, schools, legislators).
- General education and the promotion of information.

A scientific text is always an argument in some discourse. The researcher must be able to argue how his/her research relates to previous studies and discourse.

On publishing motives

People working in the field of science have both communal and personal reasons for publishing. The researcher uses his/her publications to participate in scientific discourse, thus ensuring his/her position in academic communication. A mature scientist also wants to inspire younger colleagues to do research. The motives for making one's work public can include not only gaining recognition or showing one's scientific competence, but also education and passing on information. A mature scientist can also write textbooks or reviews. Another motive for publication can be to popularize science for the general public. Those who write about their own research desire recognition. By presenting their research results to the scientific community for evaluation they strive to display their scientific competence. Departments and faculties are under pressure to publish their research, and it is the teaching and research staff who feel this pressure. They are expected to produce quality research that can be published, and the reputation of the university depends on those publications.

What is required of scientific communication?

Scientific text must contain the information necessary to make the reader understand the presentation. The aim is to make it simple: to present issues clearly and to use words in such a way that their meaning comes easily to the readers. The researcher must make his/her claims so that everyone with the appropriate training will understand them. The researcher makes his/her research and the results thereof public. S/he must use concepts understood at least by other experts, and presents the results in an easily comprehensible manner. S/he avoids complicated sentences and unnecessary expressions, and strives for general clarity and simplicity. The target audience dictates how the text is written.

Ethical issues must also be considered during both the writing and publication processes. Scientific writing is not just stating facts, it is constructing meanings as well; the choice of words, as well as presentation, structuring and referencing methods always construct different meanings. Doing science and writing about it are a balancing act between old and new, certain and uncertain, promotion and modesty, a communal voice and one's own 'researcher's voice', tradition and innovation, as well as criticism and tact.

Writer's ethics

Scientific norms require that the results are available for anyone to use, as long as credit is given where credit is due. This is done by e.g. referring to the original source so that the reader can see where the thought has originated. In other words, plagiarism is not allowed even when you are borrowing from your own work. Striving for truthfulness requires that research results are not falsified. Uncritical generalizations or meaningless glorification of the results is not permitted.

The researcher should also mention the shortcomings of his/her work. Documentation must not be misleading or incomplete. The researcher should be his or her own primary critic. Data collection and analysis methods must be related in the manner generally expected in the scientific community.

Sources

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