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Academic Writing as if Readers Matter: Book Review

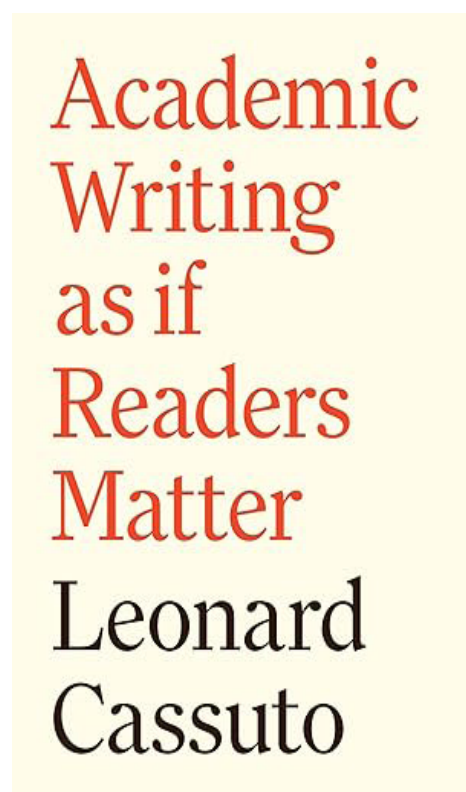
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Academic writing as if readers matter, Written by L. Cassuto, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2024, 224 pp., ISBN: 9780691263601 (hardback); 9780691195797 (paperback); 9780691256610 (ebook)

Writing a scientific paper is as substantial as doing science itself. As many scientists state [Booth et al., 2016; Gastel, Day, 2022; Peoples 2021], good scientific (or academic) writing is imperative for scientists' career advancement and science in general. The aspects commonly integrated into works on academic writing relate to design, language, clarity, and citation (see, for example, [Booth et al., 2016; Gastel, Day, 2022; Peat et al., 2002]) that may differ from writing in other contexts. The handbook under discussion is a strong companion to them. The book "Academic Writing as if Readers Matter" by L. Cassuto provides basic principles on preparing a manuscript for publication at different stages starting from analyzing the title, finding the sources, note-making and referencing, through to editing and peer review of the work. It offers an in-depth perspective of multiple aspects revealing how to present a paper effectively and efficiently. The clear structure, accessible content, and well-thought-through practical activities aids in overcoming obstacles and acquiring solid academic writing skills.

If we compare the contribution of the book to the domain of scientific writing with that of other works, we see that the handbook tradition mostly delves into IMRaD conventions, formal style rules, technical clarity, etc. [Gastel, Day, 2022; Peoples, 2021], while Cassuto, repackaging known advice, prioritizes framing scholarly prose as an ethical relationship with the reader. This proves the conceptual originality of the book. *Academic Writing as if Readers Matter* is relevant for different readerships since it may be beneficial for both novice and



senior scientists, for teachers of higher education establishments, and for students as well.

ACADEMIC WRITING AS IF READERS MATTER

The arrangement of the book is conventional: it includes the Introduction, four chapters divided into subsections, the Appendix, and Notes.

The Introduction section Leonard Cassuto starts with acknowledging the challenges both writers and readers are generally faced with. He emphasizes the need for academic writing to be renovated and converted into a relationship with the reader. This calls for a shift in

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the focus in scientific writing from the writer to the reader. The section effectively argues creativity as a prerequisite for good scientific writing. It sets the stage for a broader argument on creative rule-breaking. This is precisely the kind of point that raises a genuine issue in academic writing: the difference between rhetorical flexibility and norm compliance. However, Cassuto does not offer specific criteria for when rule-breaking improves communicative efficiency and the conditions under which it is appropriate. In fact, some contradiction arises which the book does not resolve.

What earns the reader's attention in this part is specific tips and advice which makes the introduction less theorised and more practically oriented. The author addresses both famous figures' and his own experience providing more lively nature to the book.

Chapter 1 The Care and Feeding of the Academic Reader covers the special needs of the academic reader and pillars of academic writing. The section illustrates the basic principles of structuring the paper, providing arguments in a right and concise way, and proper quoting. Through a few examples, the author shows how to integrate the principles into practice.

Cassuto fosters a deeper insight into the relation between the academic writer and the academic reader through a series of metaphors and cartoons. The explanation in this way makes it easier for a novice writer (e.g. a student or L2 scholar) to comprehend the essence of the writer-reader collaboration. However, for postgraduate students and more seasoned scientists this stylistic choice is less acceptable since it lessens the seriousness and conventional nature of scientific writing rules and gives few practical recommendations on research paper writing. While this section offers a rich description of building a sympathetic bond between the writer and the reader leaning heavily on extended metaphors, it does not explicitly explore the certain writing strategies and leaves open questions about their exemplification. The chapter's power could have been strengthened by a more sustained reflection on the actionable techniques on how to meet the needs of an academic reader and their practical implications. It would have enhanced the chapter's practicality and make it more relevant for scientists.

In chapter 2 Everything Is a Story the author presents some particular advice on the construction of arguments, paragraphs, and sentences in academic prose. This chapter is rather valuable as it provides a systematic approach to making arguments with clean lines, clear structure, and strong foundations organizing the problem into a story. Cassuto promotes the idea that writing is thinking, which corresponds with works of other scientists (see, for example, [Booth et al., 2016]). But what offers some strengths to the book is that the author redefines writing converting it from the mere expression of thought to telling a story. It

gives a compelling argument for the use a narrative logic in a paper.

Theoretical reasoning in the chapter is supplied with a large number of diagrams and visuals which serve as solid arguments. Cassuto proposes a lot of tips, exercises, and practice fostering skills which can be effectively applied not only in writing a scientific paper but in other spheres, e.g. in delivering a speech or preparing a presentation. This enhances the pedagogical usability and disciplinary transferability of the book.

The chapter reviews some information presented before. Although it can be regarded as refreshing and systematization of the material, the section would benefit if divested of repetition of some ideas from chapter 1.

Chapter 3 Jargon and Judgment addresses one of the principal ingredients of scientific writing – appropriate language. The author's exploration into clear wording, the correct use of jargon, and accurate conveying of the message offers a broad view of logical organization of ideas and effective structuring of a paper in accordance with the standard format for scientific writing. The author champions avoiding ambiguity in academic writing. In this, the book is interwoven with works of other scientists (see, for example, [Gastel, Day, 2022]).

To show the ideas from the chapter in action, Cassuto presents excerpts from actual papers with their in-depth analysis aiming to equip academic writers with the promising techniques to avoid producing dense and difficult writing and losing of clarity. His practical advice not only illuminates the creating a paper that conveys information accurately and is easily interpreted by the reader but also provides useful insights into fostering the special, suggestive style of the text. This section is particularly valuable as it proposes a set of guiding questions related to testing the writing on common mistakes connected to language usage. What stands out in this chapter is a good balance between theory and practice. Illustrating a clear practical implementation of linguistic or grammar rules, Cassuto succeeds in making the chapter effective for those who learn to use the English language with precision.

In terms of some improvements, the chapter would have been strengthened if at the beginning the author had integrated less reasoning on some notions which reveal little importance for academic writing (e.g. the insight into the concept text as an example of jargon; it may lead to implications with transferability of the guidance across fields and limits in regarding audience) and had not explained some ideas (like writing is teaching, writing is a story, etc.) and concepts (e.g. in-group, out-group) for several times.

The final chapter Why We Must stands as a call to transforming academic writing into the space of community and

collaboration which helps writers invite response and conversation and find their full audience of interested readers. Through poor role models, Cassuto demonstrates common mistakes which erect barriers to readers' understanding and gives advice on how to prevent them. The presented examples are compelling but the section would benefit from a discussion of shrewd excerpts for aspiring writers. While the part explains in-detailed on cultivating critical self-awareness of the writer's tendencies, it could further explore the insights for implementing the tips in practice which would strengthen the book's applicability. Moreover, as the chapter advocates writing deprived from the verbose style, it would have been beneficial to apply shorter examples and give less information on politics and ethics.

The book concludes with the appendix How to Use Artificial Intelligence. In this part, the author covers strengths and weaknesses AI has. Cassuto champions applying AI in the early stages of research and writing as a valuable tool for generating the basic information on well-known subjects and its summarizing. However, the author emphasizes generic, mediocre prose in which generative AI presents its findings and warns the academic writers about substitution machine-authored prose for their own work. The ideas specified in this part are consistent with Cassuto's core conceptual thread – the academic writer's responsibility to the reader – precisely because generic AI prose risks severing that relationship.

In response to the current tendencies of Artificial Intelligence usage both in the educational and scientific fields, the appendix is distinctly timely. Its overall contribution to the book is a brief depiction of a rapidly shifting landscape and a coherent extension of the reader-centered ethic. However, there raises questions on how AI can be applied in practical writing. By addressing purpose-built AI tools, the part would have offered a distinct contribution to prior research on academic writing and would have increased the book's relevance and applicability.

The section Notes presents the sources the author refers to in the book. This encourages readers wishing to explore topics further to consult the works noted.

CONCLUSION

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Academic Writing as if Readers Matter stands out for a comprehensive view of scientific writing pillars in a simple way and its motivational effect. The integration of valuable practical representative samples into sound theoretical academic writing principles strengthens the book. In relation to existing academic writing guides that analyze certain writing strategies in a more formal style, the book makes the content more alive and present to the reader.

Aimed primarily at students, the guidebook is useful for those who are inexperienced in writing for academic purposes as it helps them to start on a path to publishing their research. The book can most benefit early-career researchers needing motivation and writing-awareness; instructors seeking metaphoric teaching devices; scholars who prefer a rhetorically framed, ethos-oriented guide. Less useful the book may be for readers mastering discipline-specific writing, learning advanced technical genres, or seeking systematic style guidance rather than narrative persuasion.

In regard to some improvement, a more effective balance of theoretical insights with practical guidance would have given the book depth making it a valuable resource for those interested in accommodating the specific needs of the academic reader. Despite some lacks, the guidebook is rich in sound advice, astute analysis, and clear examples of dos and don'ts in scientific writing. It provides concrete strategies to help a student or scholar write in a way that engages readers and reaches broader audiences.

While the book presents some challenges in practical implementation, it provides a solid foundation to transform academic writing into communication with the reader in line with 21st-century scientific goals. Cassuto has achieved his main goal – he has bridged science and writing and foregrounded the reader.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.