Style Guide

Please contact your editor and/or Namita Sarraf if you have any questions

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1 Introduction

This document provides a guide to writing clearly and succinctly. This is not an exhaustive list of principles, but rather a reference of some common tendencies and how to address them.

The principles:

- Define or describe specialized terms and jargon.
- Whenever possible, break up long sentences into shorter ones.
- Use definite, specific, and concrete language.
- Make sure that it is clear what pronouns like "this" and "it" are referring to, or replace them with more specific words.
- Use a transition word or a dependent clause to transition between paragraphs and ideas within paragraphs. This helps with flow and clarity.
- Never use two words where one will do.
- When constructing sentences, place similar ideas or subjects next to each other.
- Use the Oxford comma.
- Keep tenses consistent. To reference experiments and moments of discovery, use past tense; to reference conclusions, use present tense; ongoing work, present tense; concepts and principles, present tense.
- Avoid using idioms and figures of speech in your writing. An extensive list of phrases to avoid can be found **here**.

We will introduce a short passage and work through the first eight principles to improve it. The final version will be presented in section 4. The last two principles are further explained in section 5.

2 Passage

DNA origami is created by annealing a scaffold with many short staple strands that each bind to the scaffold in two places, which results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape. It was invented in the early 2000s.

DNA origami has been studied extensively to probe the possibilities of nanoscale self-assembly. There are often times when it is used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications. It is an attractive technology because of its programmability, experimental robustness and cost-effectiveness.

3 Principles in action

Each principle will be followed by an example - first the original text, then a rewritten version. The original text will be updated in each subsequent example based on the rewrites from the previous example. The fully rewritten passage will be presented in the next section.

- Define or describe specialized terms and jargon.
  - *Original*: DNA origami is created by annealing a scaffold with many short staple strands that each bind to the scaffold in two places, which results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape.
  - *Rewrite*: DNA origami is created by annealing a **long, single-stranded** scaffold **strand** with many short staple strands that each bind to the scaffold in two places, which results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape.
- Whenever possible, break up long sentences into shorter ones.
  - *Original*: DNA origami is created by annealing a long, single-stranded scaffold strand with many short staple strands that each bind to the scaffold in two places, which results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape.
  - *Rewrite*: DNA origami is created by annealing a long, single-stranded scaffold strand with many short staple strands**.** Each staple strand binds to the scaffold in two places**.** This results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape**.**
- Use definite, specific, and concrete language.
  - *Original*: DNA origami is created by annealing a long, single-stranded scaffold strand with many short staple strands.
  - *Rewrite*: DNA origami is created by annealing a single-stranded scaffold strand, **which is on the order of thousands of nucleotides**, with **hundreds of** staple strands, **which are on the order of 30 nucleotides each**.
- Make sure that it is clear what pronouns like "this" and "it" are referring to, or replace them with more specific words.
  - *Original*: DNA origami is created by annealing a single-stranded scaffold strand, which is on the order of thousands of nucleotides, with hundreds of staple strands, which are on the order of 30 nucleotides each. Each staple strand binds to the scaffold in two places. This results in the scaffold being pulled into a designed shape. It was invented in the early 2000s.
  - *Rewrite*: DNA origami is created by annealing a single-stranded scaffold strand, which is on the order of thousands of nucleotides, with hundreds of staple strands, which are on the order of 30 nucleotides each. Each staple strand binds to the scaffold in two places. This results in the scaffold being pulled into a designed shape. **This technology** was invented in the early 2000s.
- Use a transition word or a dependent clause to transition between paragraphs and ideas within paragraphs. This helps with flow and clarity.
  - *Original*: DNA origami has been studied extensively to probe the possibilities of nanoscale self-assembly. There are often times when it is used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications.
  - *Rewrite*: **In the past couple of decades,** DNA origami has been studied extensively to probe the possibilities of nanoscale self-assembly. **As a result,** there are often times when it is used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications.
- Never use two words where one will do.

- *Original*: In the past couple of decades, DNA origami has been studied extensively to probe the possibilities of nanoscale self-assembly. As a result, there are often times when it is used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications.
- *Rewrite*: In the past couple of decades, DNA origami has been studied extensively **as a nanoscale self-assembly technique**. As a result, **it is often used** as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications.

- When constructing sentences, place similar ideas or subjects next to each other.
  - *Original*: In the past couple of decades, DNA origami has been studied extensively as a nanoscale self-assembly technique. As a result, it is often used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications. These studies have established its programmability, experimental robustness and cost-effectiveness.
  - *Rewrite*: In the past couple of decades, DNA origami has been studied extensively as a nanoscale self-assembly technique. These studies have established its programmability, experimental robustness and cost-effectiveness. As a result, it is often used as a platform to facilitate other experiments and applications.

- Use the Oxford comma.
  - *Original*: These studies have established its programmability, experimental robustness and cost-effectiveness.
  - *Rewrite*: These studies have established its programmability, experimental robustness**,** and cost-effectiveness.

4 Rewritten Passage

DNA origami is created by annealing a single-stranded scaffold strand, which is on the order of thousands of nucleotides, with hundreds of staple strands, which are on the order of 30 nucleotides each. Each staple strand binds to the scaffold in two places. This results in the scaffold being pulled into the designed shape. This technology was invented in the early 2000s.

In the past couple of decades, DNA origami has been studied extensively as a nanoscale self-assembly technique. These studies have established its programmability, experimental robustness, and cost-effectiveness. As a result, it is often used as a platform to faciliate other experiments and applications.

5 Further Considerations

- **Tenses**: to reference experiments and moments of discovery, use past tense; to reference conclusions, use present tense; ongoing work, present tense; concepts and principles, present tense.

  Examples:
  - Experiments and moments of discovery: The concept **was invented** in the early 2000s.
  - Concepts and principles: DNA origami **is created** by annealing...

- **Idioms**: Avoid using idioms and figures of speech in your writing. An extensive list of phrases to avoid can be found **here**.

  Examples:
  - "Wrap your head around" something
  - To "make matters worse"
  - To "go back to the drawing board"
  - "Better late than never"