Writing and Publishing First Quality Scientific Manuscripts

Academic Writer’s Workshops
In Manila and Cebu
August, 2013

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Outline

• Writing a quality manuscript
  • Preparations
  • Article construction
  • Language
  • Technical details
• Revisions and response to reviewers
• Ethical issues
• Conclusions: getting accepted
When did people begin to ‘publish’ their ideas and stories?
How did they ‘publish’ them?
Why did they ‘publish’ them?
Approximately 32,000 years ago, some of our ancestors painted on cave walls, for example in the Chauvet Cave in France.

Why did they do that?
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Why did they do that?

To inform us about their lives, experiences and recommendations.
Approximately 32,000 years ago, some of our ancestors painted on cave walls, for example in the Chauvet Cave in France.

Why did they do that?

To inform us about their lives, experiences and recommendations for good living.
Today we also ‘publish’ for similar reasons but in addition we have some new dimensions, including:
Why publish?

• Scientists publish to share, with the research community, findings that advance knowledge and understanding
  • To present new, original results or methods
  • To systematize results
  • To present an integrated, holistic review of a field or to summarize a particular sub-topic within a field
The publish or perish driver

- Funding Bodies
- Scientists / Clinicians
- Journal Publication
- Grant Writing
What do publishers want?

WANTED

• Originality
• Significant advances in field
• Appropriate methods and conclusions
• Readability
• Studies that meet ethical standards

NOT WANTED
What do publishers want?

**WANTED**
- Originality
- Significant advances in the field
- Appropriate methods and conclusions
- Readability
- Studies that meet ethical standards

**NOT WANTED**
- Duplications
- Reports of no scientific interest
- Work that is out of date
- Inappropriate methods or conclusions
- Studies with insufficient data
Preparatory Questions

What steps do I need to take before I begin to write my paper?
How do I properly develop my article?
How can I ensure I am using proper manuscript language?
Determine if you are ready to publish

You should consider publishing if you have information that advances understanding in a specific research field. This could be in the form of:

- Presenting new, original results or methods
- Summarizing, refining, or reinterpreting published results
- Reviewing or summarizing a particular subject or field

If you are ready to publish something you need to prepare a strong manuscript.
What is a strong manuscript?

• It has a clear, useful, and exciting message

• It is presented and constructed in a logical manner

• It is designed so that reviewers and editors can grasp the significance easily

Editors and reviewers are all busy people – develop your manuscript so that they can do their jobs effectively and efficiently
Who is your audience?

- Do you wish to reach specialists, multidisciplinary researchers, or a general audience? You will need to adjust information and writing style accordingly.
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- Each journal has a style; read some of their articles to get an idea of their style and approaches for effective communication.
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• **Is the readership worldwide or local?**
Which Journal?

• Consider:
  – Aims and scope (check journal websites and read recently published articles in the potential target journal(s))
  – What types of articles does it publish?
  – What type(s) of readership does it have?
  – What are current hot topics in the journal(s)? (Review recent abstracts)
  – Ask colleagues for advice
Reduce your risks

DO NOT gamble by scattering your manuscript to many journals

Only submit your manuscript to one journal at a time!!!

International ethics standards prohibit multiple simultaneous submissions, and editors DO find out!
Decide upon the most appropriate type of manuscript

- Conference Papers
- Full articles/Original articles
- Short communications/letters
- Review papers/perspectives
  - Self-evaluate your work: Is it sufficient for a full article? Or are your results so thrilling that they need to be shown as soon as possible?
  - Ask your supervisor or colleagues for advice on manuscript type. Sometimes outsiders see things more clearly than you.
Conference Papers

- Excellent for disseminating early or in-progress research findings;
- Typically 5-10 pages, 3-4 figures/tables, 15-20 references;
- Draft and submit the paper to the conference organisers;
- Good way to start a scientific research career.
Full articles/Original article

- Standard for disseminating completed research findings;
- Typically 7500 to 8500 words, 5-8 figures/table, 25 -35 references
- Draft and submit the paper to the appropriate journal;
- Good way to build a scientific research career.
Short Communications

• Quick and early communications of significant, original advances;
• Much shorter than full articles;
• Approximately 3000 - 3500 words, 2 – 4 figures/tables, 5 - 10 references;
• Good way to publish early findings and to solicit feedback and partnerships.
Review papers

• Critical synthesis of a specific research topic
• Typically 9000 – 13000 words, 5-10 figures, 80 – 300 references
• Typically solicited by journal editors
• Good way to consolidate a scientific research career

Sample full article title:
Summary – What steps do I need to take before I write my paper?

- Determine if you are ready to publish
- Decide on the type of manuscript
- Choose the target journal
- Check the Guide for Authors
Consulting the Guide for Authors will save your time and the editor’s

It is a sign unprofessionalism on the part of the author to submit a poorly developed manuscript that is not formatted according to the journal’s requirements!

All editors hate wasting time on poorly prepared manuscripts
In Class Exercise

What are key characteristics of the best and worst manuscript you have seen?
In comparing good and bad articles, please note:

- What are characteristics of ‘good’ articles?
- What are characteristics of ‘not-good’ articles?
- What are key lessons you learned from this comparison?
Stimulating Creativity and overcoming fear of failure!!!

“Imagination is more important than knowledge!”

Albert Einstein
Making New Connections

“Discovery consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else and thinking something different.”

-Albert Szent-Gyorgyi
Winner, Nobel Prize in Medicine (1937)
Creativity Exercises

• New Games
• Nine-Dot Exercise
• Overcoming Fears of Writing
• New Idea Killers
• Creativity ppt.
• Imagine Video
Outline

• Writing a quality manuscript
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Writing a quality manuscript

• Article construction
Article Structure

- Title
- Authors
- Abstract
- Keywords

Main text
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion (Conclusion)

- Acknowledgements
- References
- Supplementary material

Need to be accurate and informative for effective indexing and searching.

Each has a distinct function.
Title

A good title should contain the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the paper.

**DO**
- Convey the main findings of the research
- Be specific
- Be concise
- Be complete
- Attract readers

**DON’T**
Title

A good title should contain the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the paper.

**DO**
- Convey the main findings of the research
- Be specific
- Be concise
- Be complete
- Attract readers

**DON'T**
- Use unnecessary jargon
- Use uncommon abbreviations
- Use ambiguous terms
- Use unnecessary details
- Focus on part of the content only
Slower processing is correlated with higher levels of depressed mood, fatigue, lower verbal fluency, fewer words and digits recalled and poorer recall of visual-spatial information in MS patients.

Relationships between information processing, depression, fatigue and cognition in multiple sclerosis.
Authorship

General principles for who is listed first

• **First Author**
  • Conducts and/or supervises the data generation and analysis and the presentation and interpretation of the results
  • Puts paper together and submits the paper to the journal
• **Corresponding author**
  • The first author or a senior author from the institution
Authorship

Avoid

• **Ghost Authorship**
  – leaving out authors who should be included

• **Gift Authorship**
  – including authors who did not contribute significantly

• **Spelling names:** Be consistent!
Authors and affiliations

Be consistent with spelling, full versus short names, full versus short addresses, including current, correct e-mail addresses

Surnames: Pérez-García / Pérez / García

Middle Initial: Use consistently or not at all

First Names: Dave / David

Affiliation: Faculty of Medicine / Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Abstract

What are key elements of a good abstract?

1. It sets the stage with the introduction
2. It states the problem you addressed
3. It clarifies why you selected this problem
4. It states how you did your research to ‘solve’ the problem?
5. It states your key findings?

Use the abstract to “sell” your article!!
Abstract

The quality of an abstract will strongly influence the editor’s and potential reader’s decision

A good abstract:
• Is precise and honest
• Can stand alone
• Uses no technical jargon or acronyms
• Is brief and specific
• Cites no references

Use the abstract to “sell” your article
Keywords

Keywords are important for indexing: they enable your manuscript to be more easily identified and cited.

Check the Guide for Authors for the journal’s requirements for key word limits.

- Keywords should be specific
- Avoid uncommon abbreviations and general terms
Introduction

Provide the necessary background information to put your work into context

It should be clear from the introduction:

• Why the current work was performed
  – aims
  – significance
• What has been done before
• What was done (in brief terms)
• What was achieved (in brief terms)
Introduction

DO

• Consult the Guide for Authors for word limit
• “Set the scene”
• Outline “the problem” and your hypothesis(es) or research questions
• Ensure that the literature cited is balanced, up to date and relevant
• Define any non-standard abbreviations and jargon
Introduction

DON’T

• Write an extensive review of the field

• Disproportionately cite your own work, work of colleagues or work that supports your findings while ignoring contradictory studies or work by competitors

• Describe methods, results or conclusions other than to outline what was done and achieved

• Overuse terms like “novel” and “for the first time”
The methods section must provide sufficient information so that a knowledgeable reader can reproduce the research that you did and obtain similar results!

Unless the Guide for Authors states otherwise, use the past tense; the present tense is usually only used in methodology-type papers.
## Results

The main findings of the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use figures and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tables to summarize data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show the results of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statistical analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compare “like with like”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

The main findings of the research

**DO**
- Use figures and tables to summarize data
- Show the results of statistical analysis
- Compare “like with like”

**DON’T**
- Duplicate data among tables, figures and text
- Use graphics to illustrate data that can easily be summarized with text
“Readers… often look at the graphics first and many times go no further. Therefore, the author and the reviewer should be particularly sensitive to inclusion of clear and informative graphics.”

– Henry Rappaport, Associate Editor, *Journal of Organic Chemistry*
Figures and tables can be the most effective way to present results

BUT:

• Captions should be able to stand alone, so that the figures and tables are understandable without the need to read the entire manuscript;

• The data represented should be easy to interpret;

• Colour should only be used when necessary.
Illustrations should only be used to present essential data.

The information in the table can be presented in one sentence:

‘The surface soils were dark grayish brown, grading to light olive brown (woodland), light olive brown (wetland), and pale olive (grassland) at 100 cm.’

Summarize results in the text where possible.
The figure and table show the same information, but the table is more direct and clear.
Graphics

- Legend is poorly defined
- Graph contains too much data
- No trend lines
Legend is well defined but there is still too much data and no trend lines.
• Legend is clear
• Data are organized better
• Trend lines are present
Statistics

• Indicate the statistical tests used with all relevant parameters
  mean ± SD

• Give numerator and denominators with percentages
  40% (100/250)

• Use means and standard deviations to report normally distributed data
Statistics

• Use medians and inter-percentile ranges to report skewed data

• Report $P$ values
  \[ p=0.0035 \] rather than $p<0.05$

• The word “significant” should only be used to describe “statistically significant differences”
Discussion

Describe

- How the results relate to the study’s aims and hypotheses
- How the findings relate to those of other studies
- All possible interpretations of your findings
- Limitations of the study
Discussion

Avoid

• Making “grand statements” that are not supported by the data

  Example: “This novel treatment will massively reduce the prevalence of malaria in the third world”

• Introducing new results or terms
Conclusions

Put your study into CONTEXT

Describe how it represents an advance in the field

Suggest future experiments

Avoid repetition with other sections

Avoid being overly speculative

Don’t over-emphasize the impact of your study
Acknowledge anyone who helped you with the study, including:

- Researchers who supplied materials or reagents
- Anyone who helped with the writing or English, or offered critical comments about the content
- Anyone who provided technical help
Acknowledgements

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• Anyone who provided technical help

State why people have been acknowledged and ask their permission

Acknowledge sources of funding, including any grant or reference numbers
Check the Guide for Authors for the correct format

Check

• Spelling of author names
• Punctuation
• Number of authors to include before using “et al.”
• Reference style

Avoid
Check the Guide for Authors for the correct format

Check

• Spelling of author’s names
• Proper Punctuation
• Number of authors to include before using “et al.”
• Reference style

Avoid

• Personal communications, unpublished observations and submitted manuscripts not yet accepted
• Citing articles published only in the local language
• Excessive self-citation and journal self-citation
References

Use the format for the journal to which you intend to submit your manuscript. *It is not the editor’s job to do that for you!!*

Harvard System (alphabetical by author/date):


APA (American Psychological Association) System (alphabetical)


Vancouver System (numbered in order or citation)

Supplementary material

Information related to and supportive of the main text, but of secondary importance

Includes:

• Microarray data
• Method validation
• Additional controls
• Video data

Will be available online when the manuscript is published.
Summary points about writing a quality manuscript

• Language
Do publishers correct language?

- No. It is the author’s responsibility to make sure her/his paper is in its best possible form when submitted for publication.

- However:
  - Publishers often provide resources for authors who are less familiar with the conventions of international journals. Please check your publishers’ author website for more information and for assistance.
  - Some publishers perform technical screening prior to peer review.
  - Visit http://webshop.elsevier.com for translation and language editing services.
“Journal editors, overloaded with quality manuscripts, may make decisions on manuscripts based on formal criteria, like grammar or spelling. Don't get rejected for avoidable mistakes; make sure your manuscript looks perfect”

Arnout Jacobs, Elsevier Publishing

Thus, both the science and the language need to be sound.
Write with clarity, objectivity, accuracy, and brevity

- Key to successful manuscript writing is to be alert to common errors:
  - Sentence construction
  - Incorrect tenses
  - Inaccurate grammar
  - Mixing languages

Check the Guide for Authors of the target journal for any language specifications
Manuscript Language – Tenses

• Present tense for known facts and hypotheses:
  “The average life of a honey bee is 6 weeks”

• Past tense for experiments you have conducted:
  “All the honey bees were maintained in an environment with a consistent temperature of 23 degrees centigrade…”

• Past tense when you describe the results of an experiment:
  “The average life span of bees in our experiments was 8 weeks…”
Manuscript Language – Grammar

• Use active voice to shorten sentences
  – Passive voice: “It has been found that there had been…”
  – Active voice: “The authors found that…”
  – Passive voice: “carbon dioxide was consumed by the plant…”
  – Active voice: “…the plant consumed carbon dioxide..”

• Avoid abbreviations: “it’s”, “weren’t”, “hasn’t”
  – Never use them in scientific writing
  – Only use abbreviations for units of measure or established scientific abbreviations, e.g. DNA
Manuscript Language – Grammar

• Minimize use of adverbs: “However”, “In addition”, “Moreover”

• Eliminate redundant phrases

• Double-check unfamiliar words or phrases
Language

Use English throughout the manuscript, including in the figures.
Summary – How can I ensure I am using proper manuscript language?

• Proper manuscript language is important so that editors and reviewers can easily understand your messages

• Refer to the journal’s Guide for Authors for specifications

• Check that your paper has short sentences, correct tenses, correct grammar, and is all in English

• Have a native English science editor review to correct the English of your manuscript
The three “C”s

Good writing possesses the following three “C”s:

• Clarity
• Conciseness
• Correctness (accuracy)

The key is to be as brief and specific as possible without omitting essential details
Know the enemy

Good writing avoids the following traps:

• Repetition
• Redundancy
• Ambiguity
• Exaggeration
Repetition and redundancy

Vary the sentences used when writing the abstract or describing findings at the end of the introduction

Don’t copy from other sections verbatim!

Avoid words with the same meaning

In addition, sections were also stained with …

After centrifugation, pellets were then…
"There was a massive decrease in the number of tumors following p.o. administration of green tea"

Beware of exaggeration but do indicate significance
Writing a quality manuscript

• Technical details
Layout

• Keep line spacing, font and font size consistent throughout – double-spaced 12-point Times New Roman is preferred

• Use consistent heading styles throughout and no more than three levels of heading

• Number the pages

• Number lines if the journal requires – check the Guide for Authors

• Order and title sections as instructed in the Guide for Authors – Figure and Table sections are normally together following References
“...25-30 pages is the ideal length for a submitted manuscript, including ESSENTIAL data only”

Consult the Guide for Authors for word and graphic limits.
Final checks

Revision before submission can prevent early rejection

What can I do to ensure my paper is in the best possible state prior to submission?

• Ask colleagues to take a look and be critical
• Check that everything meets the requirements set out in the Guide for Authors – again!
• Check that the scope of the paper is appropriate for the selected journal – change journal rather than submit inappropriately
Cover letter

• This is your chance to speak to the editor directly
• Keep it brief, but convey the particular importance of your manuscript to the journal
• Suggest potential reviewers

This is your opportunity to convince the journal editor that s/he should publish your study, so it is worth investing time in the cover letter.
Cover letter

Include:

• Editor name – Address to journal editor, not generic
• First sentence – provide title, author list and journal name
• Briefly describe:
  • your research area and track record
  • the main findings of your research
  • the significance of your research
• Confirm the originality of the submission
• Confirm that there are no competing financial interests
Final checks

Re-Review before submission can prevent early rejection!!!

What can I do to ensure my paper is in the best possible state prior to submission?

• If necessary, get a colleague or approved editing service to improve the language and ensure that the manuscript possesses the three “C”s
• Ensure that the literature cited is balanced and that the aims and purpose of the study, and the significance of the results, are clear
• Use a spellchecker
Language Editing Services

Recommended companies include:

- Edanz Editing
- Liwen Bianji
- International Science Editing
- Asia Science Editing
- SPI Publisher Services
- Diacritech Language Editing Service

Use of an English-language editing service listed here is not mandatory, and will not guarantee acceptance for publication in Elsevier journals but it will help to improve your chances that your manuscript will be accepted.
Revisions and Response to Reviewers
Post-referee revision

Carefully study the reviewers’ comments and prepare a detailed letter of response!!

- Respond to all points; even if you disagree with a reviewer, provide a polite, scientifically solid rebuttal rather than ignore their comment
- Provide page and line numbers when referring to revisions made in the manuscript
- Perform additional calculations, computations, or experiments if required; these usually serve to make the final paper stronger
The reviewer is clearly ignorant of the work of Bonifaci et al. (2008) showing that the electric field strength in the ionization zone of the burned corona is less than the space charge free field before the corona onset....

Thank you for your comment. However, we feel that the assumption in our model is supported by recent work by Bonifaci et al. (2008), who showed that the electric field strength in the ionization zone of the burned corona is less than the space charge free field before the corona onset.
Post-referee revision

• State specifically what changes you have made to address the reviewers’ comments, mentioning the page and line numbers where changes have been made.

• Avoid repeating the same response over and over; if a similar comment is made by multiple people, explain your position once and refer back to your earlier response in responses to other reviewers or the editor.
What gets you accepted?

A ttention to details
C heck and double check your work
C onsider the reviews
E nglish must be as good as possible
P resentation is important
T ake your time with revision
A cknowledge those who have helped you
N ew, original and previously unpublished
C ritically evaluate your own manuscript
E thical rules must be obeyed
Accepting rejection

Don’t take it personally!

• Try to understand why the paper has been rejected
• Evaluate honestly – will your paper meet the journal’s requirements with the addition of more data or is another journal more appropriate?
• Don’t resubmit elsewhere without significant revisions addressing the reasons for rejection and checking the new Guide for Authors
Accepting rejection

• Suggested strategy for subsequently submitting your revised-previously rejected paper to a second journal:
  • In your cover letter, declare that the paper was rejected and name the journal
  • Include the referees’ reports and show how each comment has been addressed
  • Explain why you are submitting the paper to this journal, for example this journal is more appropriate for your paper
Ethical Issues
Unethical behavior “can earn rejection and even a ban from publishing in the journal”

Terry M. Phillips, Editor, Journal of Chromatography B

Unethical behavior includes:

• Multiple submissions
• Redundant publications
• Plagiarism
• Data fabrication and falsification
• Improper use of human subjects and animals in research
• Improper author contribution
Multiple submissions save your time but waste editors’

The editorial process of your manuscripts will be completely stopped if the duplicated submissions are discovered

“It is considered to be unethical…We have thrown out a paper when an author was caught doing this. I believe that the other journal did the same thing”

James C. Hower, Editor, *International Journal of Coal Geology*
Multiple submissions

Competing journals constantly exchange information on suspicious papers

You should not send your manuscripts to a second journal UNTIL you receive the final decision from the first journal

DON’T DO IT!!
Redundant publication

An author should not submit for consideration in another journal a previously published paper.

- Published studies do not need to be repeated unless further confirmation is required.
- Previous publication of an abstract during the proceedings of conferences does not preclude subsequent submission for publication, but full disclosure should be made at the time of submission.
Redundant publication

• Re-publication of a paper in another language is acceptable, provided that there is full and prominent disclosure of its original source at the time of submission.

• At the time of submission, authors should disclose details of related papers, even if in a different language, and similar papers in press.
Plagiarism

“Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit, including those obtained through confidential review of others’ research proposals and manuscripts”

Federal Office of Science and Technology Policy, 1999
Plagiarism

“Presenting the data or interpretations of others without crediting them, and thereby gaining for yourself the rewards earned by others, is theft, and it eliminates the motivation of working scientists to generate new data and interpretations”

Bruce Railsback, Professor, Department of Geology, University of Georgia

For more information on plagiarism and self-plagiarism, please see: http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~roigm/plagiarism/
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offence that could lead to paper rejection, academic charges and termination of employment. It will seriously affect your scientific reputation.

DON’T DO IT!

Unacceptable paraphrasing, even with correct citation, is considered plagiarism.
Data fabrication and falsification

- Fabrication is making up data or results, and recording or reporting them.
- Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, processes; or changing / omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.

“The most dangerous of all falsehoods is a slightly distorted truth”

G.C. Lichtenberg (1742–1799)
Improper author contribution

Authorship credit should be based on

1. Substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data

2. Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content

3. Final approval of the version to be published

Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3. Those who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project should be acknowledged or listed as contributors. Check the Guide for Authors and ICMJE guidelines: http://www.icmje.org/
Peer Reviewer’s Roles
Purpose of peer review

Peer review is a very important part of scholarly publication, it is the cornerstone of the whole system. It has two key functions:

• Acts as a filter, to ensure only good research findings are published.
• Improves the quality of the papers submitted for publication.
Reviewer’s evaluation

Originality

- Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to warrant publication?
- Does it add to the canon of knowledge?
- Does the article adhere to the journal's standards?
- Is the research question an important one?
- Is it in the top 25% of papers in this field?
Reviewer’s evaluation

Structure

➢ Is the article clearly laid out?
➢ Are all the key elements present: abstract, introduction, methodology, results, conclusion?

➢ Consider each element on appropriateness and conciseness
Language

If the article is poorly written with a number of misspelled words and grammatical errors. Advise the editor of the poor quality, and allow them to take appropriate action.

Correcting English in a paper is not the role of the reviewer.
Previous Research

- If the article builds upon previous research does it reference that work appropriately?
- Are there any important works that have been omitted?
- Are the references accurate?
Ethical issues

- **Plagiarism & Fraud:**
  If any suspicion, let the editor know

- **Other ethical concerns:**
  Has confidentiality been maintained? If there has been violation of accepted norms of ethical treatment of human subjects these should also be identified
Report to the Editor

- Scientific journals use standard report structures.
- Options regarding publication of an article include:
  a) Reject due to poor quality, or out of scope
  b) Accept after revision
  c) Minor revision or major revision needed
  d) Reject with encouragement to re-submit a new article after the following major changes have been made
Enjoy Your Journey

- There are many challenges and barriers you will encounter in seeking to prepare and to publish your document.
- However, that journey will be easier and more satisfying if you use the contents of this presentation as a guide.
Celebrating your first published article in the JCLP!
That is why you publish, mmmm........!!
Thank you

For further information please visit:
http://ees.elsevier.com/jclepro/default.asp