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Book Review

David H. Foster: A concise guide to communication in science and engineering. Oxford University Press, Oxford, Paperback ISBN 978-0-19-87024-9 – (19.90 £)

It may be a triviality, but it is worth mentioning again and again that the findings of scientific research need to be communicated effectively. Researchers should receive credit for their research and scientific communication undoubtedly facilitates career progress, whilst using various forms and media of communication helps to inform society and the wider scientific community about the research. As the saying goes “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” (modified after Mann & Twiss 1910), Perhaps a new adage might be that if the results of research are not published, do they actually exist?

There are many textbooks about scientific communication (see for example a former book review by Török 2016), so what would make a researcher want to add this to their collection of reference material? The answer is quite easy and simple: because it is good. The merit of this book lies in that it tries to give real and technical help to improve the communication skills of the reader, especially in the field of technical paper drafting. The book contains thirteen chapters dealing with various aspects of scientific communication. After a short intro (Ch 1) the author introduces the general principles (Ch. 2) which should be kept in mind during scientific communication. Chapter 3 is one of the most important and longest chapters of the book; and it focuses on writing research papers. The book has a strong focus on writing and formal communication, and thus, informal communication i.e. posters (Ch 10) or lectures and talks (Ch 11) receive much less attention. Also, the preparation of literature reviews, technical reports, dissertations and theses are jointly presented in a single chapter (Ch 4). In contrast, the use of mathematics (Ch 6), data description and statistical inference (Ch 7) or graphing data (Ch 8) all receive a separate chapter. I feel that some parts of the last mentioned three chapters are either too specific (i.e. preparation of equations for the publications) or too trivial (e.g. averages or the measures of variation). However, I found chapter 5, labelled “Use of English” very useful and important, particularly for scientists and engineers for whom English is not their main language. The book introduces many important aspects which help readers to improve their scientific language and the conciseness of their manuscripts. I also found it useful that the book contains a chapter focusing on publishing of papers (e.g. journal selection and review process, Ch 9) and another dealing with ethical issues of research and publication (Ch 12).

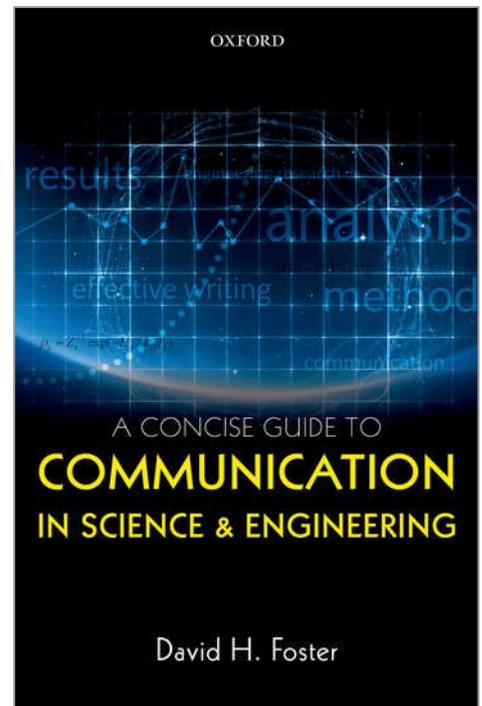
There are two very important qualities of the book. First, at the end of each chapter there is a checklist which helps the reader summarise the key points; for example, in the chapter on Research Articles, the practical checklist focuses on the most important aspects to be considered during the drafting of specific sections of research pa-

per. Secondly, there are more than 350 examples of good and bad practices in research paper writing and in the use of graphs and scientific language – these are showcased in grey boxes throughout the whole book for easy reference by the user.

Based on my experience – and in agreement with the author - I can recommend this book for all levels of researchers who wishing to undertake more effective scientific research and communication. It is a very practical book which is divided into chapters which are relevant to different stages of communication, e.g. preparation of illustrations or preparing posters, making it a useful and handy reference in todays world where communication is key.

References

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