



From the Editor

Call for supervisorship

Laurén A. (2025). Call for supervisorship. Silva Fennica vol. 59 no. 2 article id 25054. 3 p. <https://doi.org/10.14214/sf.25054>

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From a seedling. An important share of all scientific publishing is related to PhD or post-doc projects. This is true for articles published in Silva Fennica as well. Learning any complex skill takes time, patience and intelligent work, as the French master-flautist Marcel Moyse put it. Research is certainly such a skill, and therefore young scientists need support and tutoring from senior scientists. In other words, the young scientists need their supervisors.

Supervisorship needed. Building research skills requires serious commitment from supervisors. The research process includes a wide range of tacit knowledge that is not taught in books or social media channels. How should I, in this particular article, build the introduction and hypotheses, what to include and what to exclude, in which details should I clarify the material and methods, what equations to show and how, what figures are needed, how to build up the terms and nomenclature, what is the theory applied here, what can I say about the results, how do they discuss with previous literature, what can we conclude? The writing process is full of practical choices that eventually affect the quality of the outcome. Guiding a young scientist in this maze requires persistent supervision work. This means writing together.

Writing is thinking. The transfer of tacit knowledge between the supervisor and the young scientist is needed especially in writing. The statement “I understand it well but I cannot explain it” is practically always false. It just means that I do not understand. Furthermore, blurry text is very seldom a language issue. Writing cruelly exposes how we think, and if we are not contented with the writing, we must rethink, rephrase and rewrite. The research process is reiteration of thinking, writing and evaluation. As a PhD student I was often frustrated with my own professor, who spent hours speculating how a reader could misinterpret my writing. Decades later his message is clear.

Purpose of publishing

On the ladders. Performance of each scientist, project, research programme, department, faculty, university or other research organization is measured by scientific publications. This keeps us active. An expanding list of publications is required when we ascend the ladders of academic life. We always get what we measure, and in this context, it is easy to forget the ultimate purpose of scientific publication.

To show, not to show off. The purpose of a publication is to convey information, not to enlarge one's list of publications. This means that the reader should be in a focal point of a scientific article. Same way as in a cookery book, the reader should be given a clear, understandable and repeatable recipe for new thinking.

No excuses. All research articles are wrestling in the same category. There are no categories or special issues for research done when the author had a flu, co-author was unmotivated, the supervisor was in a hurry, someone needed a new entry for the list of publications, or the PhD project ran out of budget. While these excuses may seem reasonable from the writer's perspective, they are totally irrelevant for the reader. The reader wants information and expects reliable, transparent and good science.

Responsibilities

Reviewer is not a supervisor. "It is not finalized but let us submit; the reviewers will anyway require changes" is a reckless statement. All reviewers and most editors do their service for science on a voluntary basis. It is already difficult to persuade reviewers to their valuable work, and becomes increasingly difficult if the manuscripts are not properly built, written or finalized. The reviewer's work is to evaluate the scientific contents and this evaluation becomes possible only when the manuscript is clearly written. The supervisor's task is to guarantee the article quality. This requires solving important tasks and easy tasks.

Important tasks. The supervisor shows, in the writing process, the young researcher how a scientific question and hypotheses are constructed. In the same process, the young scientist learns how to do proper reference to literature and what is the essence of critical reading. The young scientist learns, perhaps in reiteration of rethinking and rewriting, how to describe materials and methods so that they can answer the proposed questions and test the hypotheses, and express it so that the reader can easily understand them. The supervisor takes care that all equations are clear, parameters defined and described, units of variables are shown and that the reader can follow the storyline from the question formulation, via results to conclusion. The supervisor also teaches the style of scientific writing. Gradually, the young scientist understands what belongs to Materials and methods, what to Results and what to Discussion. After writing together with the supervisor, the young scientist knows how to avoid exaggeration and over-interpretation of results, and starts to avoid fluffy language and normative statements.

Easy tasks. Every now and then learning the Important tasks becomes overwhelming. Then the supervisor may teach the beauty of the Easy tasks. Start by carefully reading Instructions for Authors at the journal web pages. Follow all the guidelines. It is surprising how few authors appreciate the importance of this part of the research. In the same way as building a house becomes more pleasant and efficient when the construction site is tidy and arranged, building a research article becomes easier when applying journal guidelines from the beginning. Again, thinking the valued reader, define terms and use them systematically throughout, locate all references in the list, and formulate figures and tables and their captions according to the guidelines. Use universal mathematical equations instead of programming language codes, define all variables and their units, parameters, parameter estimates, indices, types of variables and the uncertainty metrics. When all terms and variables are clear and defined, they can be elegantly referred to in the article. Suddenly the reasoning in the article is illuminated for the reader as well.

Motivation for supervision. The bond between the supervisor and the young scientist is influential in good and in bad. Efficiency of the research work is not particularly good at the beginning of the work: if the supervisor invests 100 units of work, the return is likely to be much less than this. It is

clear that the supervisor could implement the work on his/her own in much less time. Therefore, motivation for becoming a supervisor cannot be a pursuit to easy publications. The supervisor's work comes with a significant responsibility. The supervisor must have the following requirements: skills, time and commitment for the work.

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Editor-in-chief