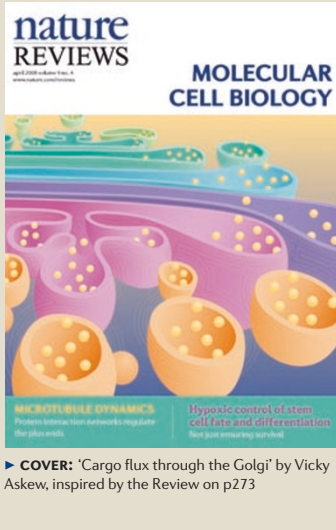




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In the haste to describe their research achievements, scientists rarely bother with definite articles, most adjectives or any other words that can reasonably be omitted. Although there are many good things about 'writing like a scientist' (the writing is generally succinct, structured, chronological and precise), scientific language can be perceived as dull and awkward.

A study published in a recent issue of *EMBO reports* validates what many readers may already instinctively know: although scientific literature is rich in vocabulary, it lacks words that are designed to produce an emotional response. Various sensory terms — such as those related to perception of colour, smell, taste, touch, sound and time — are completely absent from the scientific literature. But are such words really required? And how would they improve a manuscript to describe an experiment, interpret the data or draw conclusions? The authors propose that “the sensory-deprived writing style that dominates the biomedical literature impedes text comprehension and numbs the reader’s senses and mind”. In other words, scientific literature could be more engaging — and better understood — if it activated our senses as well as our minds.

So, who is to blame? Is it the standardized, often tight, article format imposed by scientific journals or the rush in which articles may be written? It is probably a bit of both. And would 'sensory-rich' writing be more appealing to reviewers and/or readers? The best way to find out is to rip from scientific writing the best lessons it contains within its succinct language, sparse descriptions, tight chronology, direct message and clear structure — and maybe add a bit of spice! Needless to say, we aim for all our articles to stimulate the reader’s senses and mind.

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