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Researcher Academy

How to write a good *Data in Brief* article

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How to write a good *Data in Brief* article

HAO-RAN WANG, PhD

Scientists across all disciplines create a wealth of data in many formats, of which only a small percentage is disseminated via the publication of peer-reviewed research articles. Many disciplines and funding bodies are beginning to mandate data sharing as a standard component of scientific dissemination. Launched in 2014, the multidisciplinary journal *Data in Brief* addresses this need by providing a venue to describe any data from any field that may be useful to another researcher.

Its data articles are different from research articles or even short communications. The data is not judged on its significance but on its utility and potential reuse. Null/negative and intermediate results (or in this case the data underlying those) are acceptable *Data in Brief* material as long as they are truthful.

Data articles are reviewed for clarity and completeness. If the data is solid and useful, some minor revisions may be needed, but authors are not requested to re-run their experiments or generate a new dataset and then resubmit. The peer-review process is transparent, and generally much faster than for a research paper.

The articles ensure your data, which may otherwise remain unpublished or be buried in supplementary material, is citable, actively reviewed, curated, formatted, indexed, and publicly available to all upon publication.

Overleaf we cover some useful tips to bear in mind when writing a data article for *Data in Brief*.



	Do:	Don't:
In general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The journal <i>Data in Brief</i> publishes a very specific article type that allows you to describe and share data. ■ Follow the <i>Data in Brief</i> template to prepare your article. ■ Remove all submission instructions. ■ Use the word 'data' throughout your data article wherever possible. ■ Spell out acronyms and abbreviations. ■ Include enough information so that your data article can be read on its own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Data articles published by <i>Data in Brief</i> are not mini-research papers or short communications. ■ Don't include a Conclusion, Discussion or Summary section. ■ Don't use words such as 'study', 'results', 'conclusions', etc. ■ Don't provide excessive background information but refer to published articles whenever possible. ■ <i>Data in Brief</i> is primarily a venue to describe original data rather than new methods.
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The title should be unique and focus on the data you are sharing. ■ If possible use the words 'data', 'dataset', etc. in the title. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't use the same title as an existing research paper. ■ Don't use words such as 'effects', 'evidence', 'response', 'implications', 'influence' etc. in the title.
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The abstract should be purely descriptive and describe the contents of the data article. ■ If the data article is related to a research article, include the abbreviated reference in the abstract. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't copy the abstract from a research paper ■ Don't describe any related research article, results, or provide too much background.
Specifications table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fill in the fields in the Specifications table. ■ Remove all instructions from the table. If a field is not applicable, leave it blank (e.g. data source location). ■ Keep the fields in the table brief. ■ If your dataset is deposited in a public repository, include the link in 'Data accessibility'. It is not necessary to reproduce the data in the <i>Data in Brief</i> article. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't leave the examples provided in the table or they may end up in your final article. ■ Don't include too much information in for example the "Experimental Factors" and "Experimental Features" fields. ■ Instead move the details to the Materials and Methods in the text. ■ Don't include links to data in repositories that are behind a firewall.
Value of the Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Value of the Data should include 3-5 broad, general, short bullet points. ■ Put into perspective the utility of the data beyond what you used it for in your own research. ■ Explain how/why the data you are sharing in this <i>Data in Brief</i> article could be generically valuable to the scientific community, with an eye towards possibly opening up doors for new collaborations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't offer interpretative statements or conclusions about the data nor state the value of this data relative to any related research study. ■ Don't make conclusions about any data not presented in your data article.

	Do:	Don't:
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide a brief description of the data and its context. ■ If possible, include the raw data beside statistical analysis. ■ For data to be more effective, we encourage better presentation, visualization as well as quantification of the data, images etc. ■ Add captions to figures and tables. ■ Your data can be either included with the article, or deposited in a repository. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The data should not be published previously in a research paper or in its supplementary material. ■ Don't copy and paste figures, data or tables from a research paper. Instead add a reference to published data in other articles. ■ Datasets reported in the <i>Data in Brief</i> article should result from experiment or observation rather than e.g. computer simulations.
Experimental Design, Materials and Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give the essential information to understand the data/how the data was created. ■ Include only information directly relevant to the data being shared. Add additional detail as necessary. ■ Add equations or enough information to explain how derived data or statistics were generated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't copy and paste the entire Materials & Methods section from a research paper. These may not all be relevant to the data article.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cite related work in the literature where appropriate. ■ If your article was transferred to <i>Data in Brief</i> via another Elsevier journal, ensure that you have cited your main research article. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't cite articles that aren't directly relevant to the <i>Data in Brief</i> article.

Data in Brief datasets can vary from very small to very large; for example, a data article can deal with one single dataset, image or table or it may simply describe a very large dataset deposited in a public repository.

All data described in an article submitted to *Data in Brief* must be made publicly available. This can be via:

1. The article. You can upload datasets as individual zip files during the submission process in our electronic submission system, but the system may not be able to process very large datasets.
2. Public repositories. There are many public repositories to which you can upload your datasets, some of which are field specific. See our [list of supported data repositories](#).
3. Mendeley Data. If you aren't sure where exactly you should put your data, or you have data that falls outside of the data accepted by the established repository in your field, you can upload your files to [Mendeley Data](#) which has a limit of 10GB per dataset (uploading and labelling each individual .zip file would be best here).

Mendeley Data, with which *Data in Brief* is collaborating, is free for the journal's authors. If you choose this route, you upload all your data files into Mendeley Data without hitting 'publish'. This means the editor and reviewers can look at your data during the review process (and you can still make changes to the data and metadata), but the data is not yet publicly available. Then, when you submit your final, revised version, you can formally publish your dataset on Mendeley Data, which makes it fully open access to everyone, and provides the final dataset DOI in your *Data in Brief* article. The two will be both linked and archived after that.

Many roads to publishing data articles

A growing number of participating Elsevier journals give authors the option to convert supplementary data into a data article that they co-submit to the journal *Data in Brief* alongside their research article. If the research article is accepted for publication, it is sent directly to *Data in Brief* for a final editorial review. The research article and the data article are then linked on the ScienceDirect platform.

And of course, a data article can be always submitted directly to *Data in Brief*:

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