

# Author guidelines final report – format scientific article Journal of Master Forensic Science

It is expected that the final Research Project Report is written in the form of a manuscript which could be submitted to a journal. These author guidelines are adjusted from the author guidelines for the Elsevier journals Forensic Science International, Forensic Science International: Genetics, and Digital Investigation. Information not relevant for the main article (such as sub questions, methods, techniques or results not described in the article) should be added to the appendix or supplementary materials. In addition, do not explain text book knowledge in your manuscript. You can assume your reading audience consists of fellow scientists who are experts in their field.

A very good report displays a high level of understanding of the forensic context, in other words it displays a "forensic awareness" and answers questions such as "What does the forensic community need?" and "How could this innovation be used in forensic practice?". Apart from the forensic topic and a forensic relevant research question, the challenge is to write a Research Project Report that is valuable for the forensic community and might even get published.

## Article type

Research article: Original contributions in the many different scientific disciplines pertaining to the forensic sciences. Report practical or theoretical forensic research in min. 7.000 to max. 10.000 words (equivalent to about 10 to 15 pages). This is excluding the title page, tables and figures, references and supplementary materials.

## Language

Please write your text in good English (American or British usage is accepted, but not a mixture of these). To avoid unnecessary errors you are strongly advised to use the 'spell-check' and 'grammar-check' functions of your word processor. The use of GenAI to improve readability and correct textual errors is also allowed but not mandatory (see part on GenAI Use below).

## Lay-out

**Very important:** It is not allowed to copy the exact lay-out of a journal. For example, you should not include a main heading which is on the first page at the top of an article and it is not necessary to use two columns of written text. This could cause the impression that it is published work and that could cause copy right issues, it is also not the form in which original manuscripts are submitted to scientific journals.

## Figures and tables embedded in text

Please ensure the figures and the tables are placed next to the relevant text in the manuscript. Figures, including photographs, should be referred to in the article text as Fig. 1, Figs 2–4. References to tables should not be abbreviated, i.e. Table 1.

**Figure captions:** Ensure that each illustration has a caption and that the corresponding caption is placed directly below the figure. A caption should comprise a brief title (not on the figure itself) and a description of the illustration. Keep text in the illustrations themselves to a minimum but explain all symbols and abbreviations used. Number figures consecutively in accordance with their appearance in the text.

**Tables:** Ensure that each table has a caption and that the corresponding caption is placed directly above the table and place any table notes below the table body. Please submit tables as editable text and not as images. Number tables consecutively in accordance with their appearance in the text. Be sparing in the use of tables and ensure that the data presented in them do not duplicate results described elsewhere in the article. Please avoid using vertical rules and shading in table cells.

## Title page

The following information should be stated on the front page of your report:

- title of the research project, should be concise and informative. Titles are often used in information-retrieval systems. Avoid abbreviations and formulae where possible.
- name of student and student ID,
- the number of EC,
- period during which research project was carried out,
- Master Forensic science, University of Amsterdam
- name of supervisor(s) including affiliation(s),
- name of examiner including affiliation(s),
- name of (research) institute where the project was performed,
- date of submission.

## Headings

The manuscript should be constructed with these main headings: Abstract, Keywords, Introduction, Material & Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion (optional), Acknowledgement (optional), References, and Supplementary Materials.

**Please note:** if particular sections are not applicable to a specific forensic field the guideline format can be adapted after discussion with the supervisor.

## Abstract

A concise and factual abstract is required of max. 350 words. The abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, the principal results and major conclusions. An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone. For this reason, references should be avoided, but if essential, then cite the author(s) and year(s). Also, non-standard or uncommon abbreviations should be avoided, but if essential they must be defined at their first mention in the abstract itself.

## Keywords

Immediately after the abstract, provide a minimum of three and maximum of 6 keywords, avoiding general and plural terms and multiple concepts (avoid, for example, 'and', 'of'). Be sparing with abbreviations: only abbreviations firmly established in the field may be eligible. These keywords will be used for indexing purposes.

## Introduction

State the objectives of the work and provide an adequate background of published work of relevance to your study. However, a detailed literature survey or a summary of the results should be avoided. It is not common to use subheadings in the introduction section.

## Material and Methods

Provide sufficient details to allow the work to be reproduced by an independent researcher. Methods that are already published should be summarized, and indicated by a reference. If quoting directly from a previously published method, use quotation marks and also cite the source. Any modifications to existing methods should also be described. You can use subheadings to structure this section.

## Results

Results should be clear and concise. State the results and draw attention in the text to important details shown in tables and figures. You can use subheadings to structure this section. Subheadings can be used to arrive at a logical order in the presentation of the results.

## Discussion

This should explore the significance of the results of the work, not repeat them. Avoid extensive citations and discussion of published literature. The discussion should point out the significance of the results in relation to the reasons for doing the work, and place them in the context of other work. You can use subheadings to structure this section. The forensic context and relevance of the work is typically part of the discussion and the same holds for recommendations for future work.

### Conclusion (optional)

The main conclusions of the study could be presented in a short Conclusions section of one paragraph, which may stand alone or form a subsection of a Discussion section.

### Acknowledgements (optional)

A brief statement acknowledging collaborators and research assistants who do not meet the criteria for authorship described above, or acknowledging funding sources, providing relevant permit numbers (including institutional animal use permits), or giving recognition to organizations that made the work possible.

### References

Please ensure that every reference cited in the text is also present in the reference list (and vice versa). Any references cited in the abstract must be given in full. Unpublished results and personal communications are not recommended in the reference list, but may be mentioned in the text. If these references are included in the reference list they should follow the standard reference style of the journal and should include a substitution of the publication date with either 'Unpublished results' or 'Personal communication'. Citation of a reference as 'in press' implies that the item has been accepted for publication.

Most journals have their reference template available in many of the most popular reference management software products. These include all products that support Citation Style Language styles, such as Mendeley and Zotero, as well as EndNote. Using the word processor plug-ins from these products, authors only need to select the appropriate journal template when preparing their article, after which citations and bibliographies will be automatically formatted in the journal's style.

There are no strict requirements on reference formatting at submission. References can be in any style or format as long as the style is consistent. Use of DOI is highly encouraged. If you do wish to format the references yourself they should be arranged according to the following examples:

#### Reference style

Text: Indicate references by number(s) in square brackets in line with the text. The actual authors can be referred to, but the reference number(s) must always be given.

Example: '..... as demonstrated [3,6]. Barnaby and Jones [8] obtained a different result ....'

List: Number the references (numbers in square brackets) in the list in the order in which they appear in the text.

Examples:

Reference to a journal publication:

[1] J. van der Geer, J.A.J. Hanraads, R.A. Lupton, The art of writing a scientific article, *J. Sci. Commun.* 163 (2010) 51–59.

Reference to a book:

[2] W. Strunk Jr., E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, fourth ed., Longman, New York, 2000.

Reference to a chapter in an edited book:

[3] G.R. Mettam, L.B. Adams, How to prepare an electronic version of your article, in: B.S. Jones, R.Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the Electronic Age*, E-Publishing Inc., New York, 2009, pp. 281–304.

Reference to a website:

[4] Cancer Research UK, Cancer statistics reports for the UK. <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/aboutcancer/statistics/cancerstatsreport/>, 2003 (accessed 13 March 2003).

Reference to a dataset:

[dataset] [5] M. Oguro, S. Imahiro, S. Saito, T. Nakashizuka, Mortality data for Japanese oak wilt disease and surrounding forest compositions, Mendeley Data, v1, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.17632/xwj98nb39r.1>.

### Supplementary materials

Besides the main results described in the article an appendix/supplementary materials should be added covering everything which could not be included in the main article, such as:

- research (sub)questions arising from the project which are not covered in the article (including those of which the results failed, or of which the results are irrelevant for the final conclusion in the supplementary materials);
- all used methods and techniques not described in the article;
- discussion of discovered results, which are not relevant to the final conclusion;

- tables and figures covering data details that are too extensive to be included in the article. Please submit your material together with the article and supply a numbered (e.g. Appendix 1, or A1, A2 etc.), concise, descriptive caption for each supplementary file.

### Research data

Journals often encourage and enable you to share data that supports your research publication where appropriate. Research data refers to the results of observations or experimentation that validate research findings. To facilitate reproducibility and data reuse, journals often also encourage you to share your software, code, models, algorithms, protocols, methods and other useful materials related to the project. Discuss with your supervisor and examiner how to make sure that the research data remains available after finishing your project and is in a form that fits with the RDM (Research Data Management) guidelines of the host institute.

### GenAI Use

Within the Master Forensic Science, you are allowed to use Generative AI (GenAI) to support your learning process but according to the [policy framework and guidelines](#) as defined by the University of Amsterdam. For example, you can use large language models (LLMs) to help your self-study by generating flashcards or generating explanations of concepts. GenAI should be a support tool to help you reach the course's learning objectives, not a system to which you delegate activities that are meant to promote your learning. The course examiner has final say on which use cases are permissible or not within their course.

**You may not use GenAI to create any content you submit for assessment**, regardless of whether it's graded numerically or on a pass/fail basis. The **only exception** is if an assignment description explicitly allows GenAI use. In such cases, permissible use is delineated by the course instructor.

**Never share personal information, research data, or course materials with a GenAI system, except for UvA AI Chat.** This UvA-hosted system was built with GDPR compliance and data security in mind. If in doubt about sharing information, don't share. You can always check with your course coordinator whether any intended use case is responsible.

**Teachers are never allowed to use GenAI to grade your work.** They may, however, use it to formulate their feedback. Only tools allowed by UvA should be used in research and education. If there is no UvA license for software, use cannot be mandatory in education. This implies that learning objectives must be achievable without the use of non-licensed tools. UvA AI Chat can be used, if used with due consideration and care.

**Within the Research Project course, GenAI use is permitted for the following purposes:**

- as a learning assistant, structuring your learning plan including timelines, milestones and reflection on your learning process;
- to find, scan, analyse, and select relevant academic literature (although students must study all relevant papers in detail themselves and must always conduct literature searches independently to ensure the search is complete and correct);
- refining a research question through iterative feedback;
- as an academic writing coach, providing feedback on thesis structure, style, and grammar to improve readability and language of the work;
- as preparation for the discussion section of the defence, anticipating and practising for questions that could be asked;
- when in doubt if a specific use is acceptable in terms of scientific integrity the student should always ask the supervisor and/or the examiner.

**Note 1:** Whenever you use GenAI it is essential to provide complete transparency and explain in detail what you have used and how you have used it! In a thesis or report include this information in an appendix. Discuss GenAI use with your supervisor and examiner during project meetings and evaluation moments. Make sure to document and archive GenAI sessions to allow for more detailed review and discussion if needed. It also demonstrates and is part of responsible use.

**Note 2:** In all of this, it is essential that the student does not outsource essential academic tasks within the project exclusively to GenAI. GenAI can never be a (co-)author of the work and the student must remain fully responsible for and in control of the research and the dissemination of the results. This means that GenAI

output must always be carefully checked by the student and that AI generated content cannot simply be copy-pasted.

**Note 3:** The use of GenAI is not mandatory and cannot be enforced by the supervisor or examiner (unless GenAI is part of the research assignment itself). This means that the student should be able to complete the project in a satisfactory manner without the use of GenAI if he/she so wishes.

**As further information an example from scientific practice: this is what Elsevier, publisher of a multitude of scientific journals, instructs authors on the use of GenAI when preparing manuscripts for submission<sup>1</sup>:**

***“The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in scientific writing***

***Please note this policy only refers to the writing process, and not to the use of AI tools to analyze and draw insights from data as part of the research process.***

*Where authors use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process, these technologies should only be used to improve readability and language of the work. Applying the technology should be done with human oversight and control and authors should carefully review and edit the result, because AI can generate authoritative-sounding output that can be incorrect, incomplete or biased. The authors are ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of the work.*

*Authors should disclose in their manuscript the use of AI and AI-assisted technologies and a statement will appear in the published work. Declaring the use of these technologies supports transparency and trust between authors, readers, reviewers, editors and contributors and facilitates compliance with the terms of use of the relevant tool or technology.*

*Authors should not list AI and AI-assisted technologies as an author or co-author, nor cite AI as an author. Authorship implies responsibilities and tasks that can only be attributed to and performed by humans. Each (co-) author is accountable for ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved and authorship requires the ability to approve the final version of the work and agree to its submission. Authors are also responsible for ensuring that the work is original, that the stated authors qualify for authorship, and the work does not infringe third party rights, and should familiarize themselves with our Ethics in Publishing policy before they submit.*

***The use of generative AI and AI-assisted tools in figures, images and artwork***

*We do not permit the use of Generative AI or AI-assisted tools to create or alter images in submitted manuscripts. This may include enhancing, obscuring, moving, removing, or introducing a specific feature within an image or figure. Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or color balance are acceptable if and as long as they do not obscure or eliminate any information present in the original. Image forensics tools or specialized software might be applied to submitted manuscripts to identify suspected image irregularities.*

*The only exception is if the use of AI or AI-assisted tools is part of the research design or research methods (such as in AI-assisted imaging approaches to generate or interpret the underlying research data, for example in the field of biomedical imaging). If this is done, such use must be described in a reproducible manner in the methods section. This should include an explanation of how the AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the image creation or alteration process, and the name of the model or tool, version and extension numbers, and manufacturer. Authors should adhere to the AI software’s specific usage policies and ensure correct content attribution. Where applicable, authors could be asked to provide pre-AI-adjusted versions of images and/or the composite raw images used to create the final submitted versions, for editorial assessment.*

*The use of generative AI or AI-assisted tools in the production of artwork such as for graphical abstracts is not permitted. The use of generative AI in the production of cover art may in some cases be allowed, if the author obtains prior permission from the journal editor and publisher, can demonstrate that all necessary rights have been cleared for the use of the relevant material, and ensures that there is correct content attribution.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/generative-ai-policies-for-journals>, accessed August 2025.