

Consider the requirements of formal publication, including standards for writing, editing and style, for a range of archaeological project outputs (47%, 3500 words or equivalent)

Introduction

Almost forty years ago, Ian Hodder (1989) argued that the style and structure (amongst other criteria) of archaeological reports were boring to an almost incomprehensible extent. To counteract this, he proposed the construction of a descriptive and holistic site narrative instead of simply quantifying the types of objects found on a site. He argued that his preferred writing choices allowed for the construction of a relativist and hermeneutic means of archaeological publication while acknowledging that archaeologists could not be as objective as their scientific counterparts. Perhaps it was time to re-examine what had drawn the preceding antiquarians to archaeology? Since Hodder wrote these words, a level of change within archaeology has been enacted. While a level of consistency and standardisation in presenting and transforming data (with a level of objectivity) is necessary in formally published archaeological project outputs, some such outputs lend themselves more naturally to illustrating and synthesising data generated by a given project. Historic England (2015, 19) deemed the archaeological monograph to be the “highest-level” of formal publication, likely as they are the most in-depth and lengthy means of formal publication within archaeology. However, other types of formal publication and project outputs should not be excluded from this discussion.

Formal publication as a project output

Instances of formal publication can vary across archaeology, and it should also be noted that not all archaeological project outputs result in formal publication. Although there are a number of

different types of formal publication in archaeology, it is but one type of project output in the discipline. Commercial archaeology typically produces grey literature reports that are not formally published, though often contribute to ongoing research published in journals and conference proceedings. There are many different types of formal publication in archaeology, with a wide variety of individuals consuming and producing them. Historic England (2015, 22) defined the three types of audiences of archaeological project outputs as: public, professional, and academic. In only examining formal publication, it should be noted that we are excluding a public audience (apart from the small number of members of the public who may be involved with local archaeological societies, working groups, etcetera). By their nature, formal publications are typically written by archaeologists and for archaeologists: whether professional, academic, or a mixture of the two. A public audience relies upon the effective dissemination of archaeological publication in order to learn from them. There is a degree to which one may understand the benefit of a publication to professional and academic audiences by examining how these works vary in different ways. As these two audiences are not entirely separate from one another, there is much crossover. Furthermore, the various specialisms within archaeology lend themselves to the different aspects of formal publication through different means.

It is possible to create a rough grouping of formal archaeological publications in a way that provides more insight than merely examining the most likely audience. Examining the purpose of a work can be quite insightful into the choices made in its construction. Doing so allows us to understand the extent of a piece of research, and particularly how such research may benefit different types of archaeologists. It should be noted that archaeological research can be

undertaken by many different archaeologists working in both commercial and academic archaeology and can also be of benefit to many different types. The site monograph is arguably the published work with the most input from those working in the professional sphere and are often published by (or in conjunction with) commercial units themselves. Though the thematic focus of monographs varies dependent upon site findings, they are written to examine one site in great detail. This high level of detail allows their findings to be integrated into further research on many different topics, allowing the reader to select whichever part they may desire. This specificity and use of intricate technical drawings means that the site monograph is often used as a source of comparison for materials from similar sites by commercial archaeologists. Other formally published works in archaeology often relate to research of varying degrees of completion, with their publication being undertaken by the most relevant society or publishing body. Commercial works can be of use to such publication if it is of regional significance. Ongoing research can vary depending upon how it is significant, whether it is regional or typological. Archaeological journals, universities, and archaeological societies exist to oversee such publication, allowing ongoing research to be presented correctly in ways that we will examine here.

Standards for writing

Writing standards across such publications and the authors writing them can vary. The type of publication typically dictates the level or type of detail being given. Thematic works such as the site monograph and some published volumes use a standard that is more descriptive, contributing to the narrative construction of a site that Hodder (1989) championed. Such a

narrative exists as an appropriate counterpart for glossy photographs and detailed reconstructions often involved in such pieces, assisting in constructing a holistic picture of the site from its many different presented parts. In recent decades, published volumes of archaeological essays and even archaeological textbooks occasionally use such narrative techniques, including unconventional additions such as the experiences of the author (Hayden 2001, 23) or predicted student criticisms of the text (Johnson 2010). Doing so undoubtedly assists in making the piece more readable and appealing, particularly to those who may be new to the discipline. The site monograph similarly may use non-academic or non-archaeological resources to contribute to this descriptive narrative, using quotes or images (such as historic paintings) that elicit certain emotions or feelings and provide a modern-day proxy for ancient or historic sensations (Speake 1989; Bowden *et al.* 2009).

Pieces of formal publication involved in ongoing research and typically limited by their word count (such as journal articles or conference proceedings) would not benefit from such narrative building, instead choosing to present the most exciting elements of their findings and discuss relevant prior research. Given that, by nature of being published in a society journal or resulting from conference presentation, these outlets are intended for specialist groups, it is appropriate to use a writing standard intended for them. The theme of a conference also dictates the entire piece of work, though the standards for writing in the overarching publication should be consistent throughout. As the different parts of a specialist theme are examined in such works, the use of specialist terminology is unavoidable. As a result of this, specialist terminologies persist in such publications but are rarely defined. As publications often benefit from the input of those working in the commercial sphere, an understanding of

excavation is also assumed. While such assumptions may appear dangerous, they allow for a writing standard that is informative yet concise in such works. Given the diversity of archaeology as a discipline, it is difficult to impose standardisation in many such instances.

Despite this, there have been some attempts to bring a level of explicit writing standardisation to a variety of archaeological publications. A notable attempt to do so was by that of the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH 2018), which created several thesauri detailing the advised spelling and usage of terms and phrases used in many different archaeological instances. These efforts have been sanctioned by organisations such as the Council for British Archaeology, Historic England, and the British Museum (amongst others) yet are used to varying extents by different organisations. While some may roll their eyes at the need to agree upon the spelling of “post hole,” such explicit guidance is highly valuable and should be adhered to where possible. Such efforts do not simply serve to increase the findability of data, but to increase the accessibility of it across the industry. Doing so aims to create a level of uniformity across multiple publications from a variety of authors. Furthermore, doing so is a means to standardise and replicate qualitative data, such as the fabric of a piece of pottery as described by two different specialists with different lived experiences. This standardisation aids the presentation of the data from formal publication to be included in projects that result from recent technological advances, such as their use in Big Data projects. In order to actualise such change, these efforts should be encouraged from the outset of a project, even in commercial excavation. In recent years, many of the larger commercial units have implemented on-site digital recording systems, which inadvertently encourage the use of a pre-determined set of

descriptive terms. This retains interpretative value whilst encouraging a basic level of standardisation, though a formal effort should be made to ensure that the pre-determined set of terms is in keeping with standards sanctioned by the overarching organisation. This will make the path to formal publication as smooth as possible.

Editing

Purposeful and efficient editing is similarly vital in a variety of archaeological publications. Like many disciplines, the importance of editing can manifest itself in different ways, most prominently as a means of quality checking a piece of work. The editing process, like archaeology itself, is inherently collaborative yet, as aforementioned, requires a level of standardisation. As a result, the peer review system is widely in use in editing pieces of formal publication in archaeology. The system aims to ensure that a piece of work is as ethical as possible, written to a good standard, and uses an appropriate style for its audience. It also benefits archaeology, allowing the discipline to remain self-critical and transparent. While many would argue that the system plays a vital role in ensuring the quality of a piece of work, there are those who would argue that it can also affect whether an individual may see their article published or receive funding for a project. Some have argued that single-blind peer review in archaeology may even affect the career of an individual, allowing a minority of authors and institutions to “dominate the academic market” (Beck *et al.* 2021, 571). Salazar *et al.* (2019, 230) warned against this profit-focussed means of publishing in archaeology yet deemed that the system may be merely the “best possible” method of editing for quality. It is evident that the double-blind form is most appropriate in diminishing any potential subconscious prejudices that exist in archaeological peer review (Heath-Stout 2020a), though archaeological publishers

rarely specify the type of peer review that they use.

Other than editing text for quality, there are further choices that can be made when editing a piece intended for formal publication. Editing choices can also be made to increase the usability of a publication to as many individuals within an audience as possible. The inclusion of appendices is a means by which to provide detailed information to the reader, and it is often presented through visual means. Taking the different levels of experience across members of an audience into account is a wise choice here and doing so best serves inclusion and accessibility. Some types of formal publication are more appropriate for achieving this than others depending upon the editing choices that are typically made. Site monographs hold something of a publishing luxury in their writing depth and focus on one site. Because of this, they can opt to include detailed appendices of relevant data. Such works can include appendices detailing and quantifying the relevant materials (both finds and environmental data) present on site (Speake 1989, 127-129; Hope-Taylor 2010, 325-335), explain relevant areas of study and their background (Fulford *et al.* 1987, 235-240), or glossaries explaining technical terms or words in languages different to that the article is written in yet relevant to the work (Semple *et al.* 2021, 299-303). In some publications, it may be important to make such editing choices in order to improve the accessibility of such works to indigenous peoples, most notably in countries with modern indigenous populations still in existence. Such glossaries can provide translations of key terms, thus furthering an understanding of a population that is rightfully encouraged by protective rules and regulations.

Shorter publications, such as individual articles within journals and conference proceedings, do

not have the luxury of lengthy appendices, yet may not benefit from them. Due to their brevity, it is often more beneficial to do so within the body of the text. Some societies may even encourage the author to consider whether the use of such figures is necessary (Society for Historical Archaeology 2024). Shorter publications may opt to do so through means of the most relevant images, tables, and diagrams. Works relating to ongoing research may choose to present concepts (including those influenced by prior research) in the form of flow diagrams, particularly when such a process may be difficult to explain or to present in a linear way (see figure one). Such publications may also depict prior research and relevant feedback loops closely related to sociological discourse (Power 2020; Heath-Strout 2020b; Bonacchi 2014). There are subtle editing choices that such outlets can choose to increase the usability of their work. The inclusion of an index at the end of a collected volume is a small yet effective editing choice, though it should be noted that it is often used in publications that discuss or use digital archaeology and open-access publication, it is not typical of formal publication (Hageneuer 2018). A wider variety of publications, formal and otherwise, should opt for such editing choices for the sake of accessibility.

Style

Such writing standards and editing choices dictate the choices made when structuring and formatting a publication. It is typical for such stylistic requirements to vary depending upon the publisher and their preferences, such as differences in font and text spacing. As many societies, the conferences they hold and their associated journals are all regional, they will typically specify preferences in the language used, such as a preference for American English over British English (Society for Historical Archaeology 2024) or their preferred terminology (Australian

Archaeological Association 2021). Publications associated with academic institutions will be more likely to use the house style of the institution in both structure and format. It is typical that publications with multiple authors have an overseeing editor that ensures consistency in writing standards, editing, and style. In ensuring a consistent style, the editor may reformat a piece of work before it is accepted into the publication. Prior to submission, authors should familiarise themselves with a style guide of a particular publisher. Despite these variations in formatting, there is some uniformity in stylistic choices in formal archaeological publications. Title pages are one of the most consistent uses of formatting across different works, serving to denote different authors or topics. Also consistent across archaeology is the use of the Harvard referencing system, even in works that do not undergo formal publication, such as grey literature reports. This type of referencing allows for the inclusion of the year of publication of the reference cited in the body of the text, allowing the reader to easily discern an initial understanding of its relevance.

As there is a multitude of specialisms and a variety of methodologies that such groups use, there is a multitude of ways that archaeological publications may be structured. Again, this structure is dictated by the writing style and the position one must strike in the balance between archaeological narrative and data exposition. For the latter, archaeological publications benefit from the use of a scientific report style in their formatting. This is the use of commonly used (not just in archaeology) subheadings typical of a scientific report, such as an abstract summarising the reason for the research and its basic findings, a detailed section on methodologies (and materials if relevant) used to undertake the research, and a detailed

section on the results that came from this. The consistent use of such a structure makes the research as replicable as possible, allowing others to compare it with other similarly structured works where needed. Housekeeping sections may also be included to ensure that copyright and any conflicts of interest are accurately detailed in the body of the text.

As discussed in the editing section, there are certain instances where presenting data through visual means in archaeological publications may not only be a wise editing choice, but a stylistic choice. As a result of this, there is a consistency in the way that such data is presented.

Technical drawings are an important visual medium that are included in many archaeological publications, and it is important that they use consistent conventions when used. The likes of site maps, plans, and section drawings should always use an appropriate scale and north arrow, regardless of publication type. The digitisation of such drawings can be difficult, and it should be ensured that they are as clear as possible upon finalisation. If numeric data would benefit from being presented via a table to be included either in the body of the text or as an appendix, the relevant parts of the data to include should be considered. In instances where research may be presented to a physical audience, such as at a conference, it is likely that such data will be presented in the forms of graphs and pie charts, which allow trends to be discerned more easily. While these should be included in resulting publications, more complex data and trends may also be demonstrated in tabular form in these texts.

As they are similarly appealing to an audience, more unconventional means of visual data presentation are becoming more commonplace within archaeological publication. Some types of archaeological publication are known for their use of visual media, most notably the site

monograph. These publications typically have glossy covers depicting some of the visually appealing finds of the project (Hatherley and Murray 2021; Hope-Taylor 2010; Speake 1989), aerial site photographs (Rodwell 2001; Luke and Barker 2022), or detailed illustrated reconstructions of the site at the peak of its use (Hamerow 1993; Cramp 2005). In my experience, the preference for the style cover page of such monographs varies dependent upon the organisation creating them, though the use of high-resolution photographs over reconstructions and technical drawings appears to be becoming an increasing trend in recent years. Illustrated reconstructions have been popular for as long as archaeology has been a discipline, with their accurate creation dependent upon the illustrator closely collaborating with multiple specialists. The types of site reconstructions are diversifying in recent years, particularly with the onset of technological advancements which have allowed for a greater level of interaction with such resources.

Such technological advances have allowed for a diversification in the ways that visual media may be used in and alongside formal archaeological publications. Many such efforts have transcended the professional and academic audiences and may even appeal to members of the public, particularly with larger projects that are not yet published. Such an example is that of the *A14 Road Trip to the Past* (MOLA Headland Infrastructure 2024), an online interactive resource that allows the user to explore different themes from the site. There are familiar elements of visual media contained within these themes, such as navigable and technical site photographs. The resource presents these alongside relevant facts written in simple yet informative language so that it may be as accessible as possible. The project also generated a coffee table book, displaying high resolution photographs of fifty of the most interesting finds

from the project (Hawker-Yates 2024). As one of the largest archaeological projects of its kind in the United Kingdom, the A14 project is proving to be highly innovative in the ways it has chosen to present visual media. More generally, advances in technology also lend themselves to more in-depth site reconstructions, particularly those which can be presented digitally and in three dimensions. It should be noted that the scope of the A14 project is large and not typical of the majority of commercial projects.

Conclusion

Of course, in an ideal world, all sites worthy of publication would warrant a variety of intriguing and accessible project outputs. As aforementioned, not only is formal publication but one of many archaeological project outputs, it excludes many members of the public audience. The increasing use of digital resources alongside formal publication helps to diminish this bias, though its use is still worryingly scarce. Like all aspects of archaeology, a discipline with thin margins, its publishing scope is dependent upon its allocated resources. It is also limited by the implications of copyright, particularly in areas where multiple contributing organisations and authors may complicate matters. At first glance, it appears simple; open-access publication should replace that of formal publication. However, the more one analyses aspects such as those detailed above, this is not as simple as it may first appear. As there is a gulf between a public audience and the findings detailed in formal archaeological publications, there is a gulf between archaeologists and standardisation. There is a rarely acknowledged or addressed need for more standardisation in archaeology, particularly in the commercial world. Some attempts by the larger commercial units are being undertaken in the likes of digital recording systems, and it is hoped that such change will trickle down into other forms of professional

standardisation. If such considerations are not undertaken for the sake of professional integrity, then why not for accessibility? Much work is needed to close such gaps.

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Figures

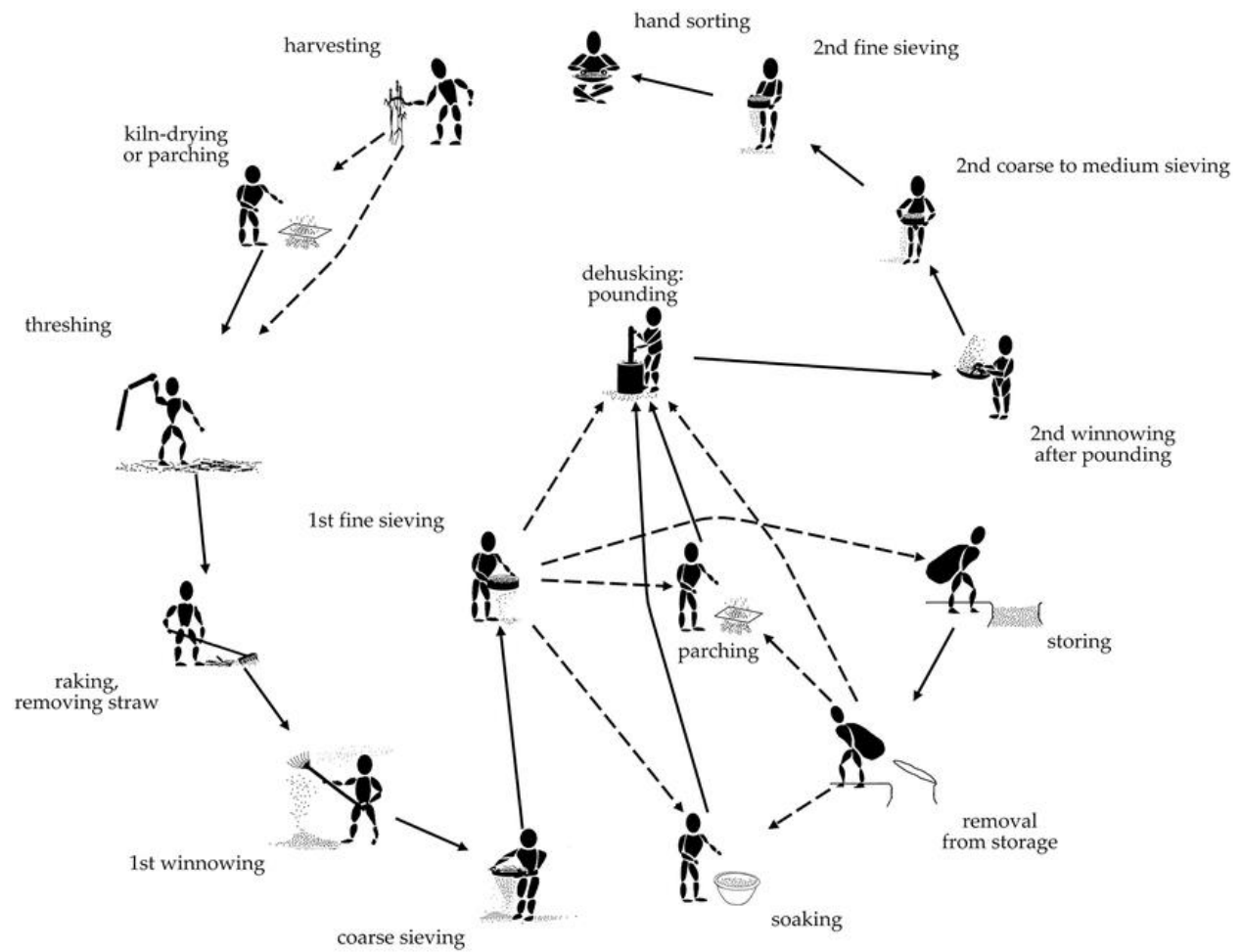


Figure one. A diagram showing the relationship between different stages in the *chaîne opératoire* (operating chain) of crop processing. From Heiss *et al.* (2021).