Writing a Readable, Interesting Article

Elements and Structure
Papers, letters, books, reports, proposals, etc., should contain at least the following elements:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

Articles also can contain references, figures and/or tables, and appendices.

Parts of the Paper, Report, Article, Etc.

Introduction
Here you provide the context for your paper. Your introduction is your chance to truly catch the reader’s attention. You should describe clearly the topic of your paper. The description should be specific and focused. The introduction should lead into the detailed discussion that will comprise the body of your article.

Body
The body is a logical sequence of ideas that leads the reader to comprehension of your topic. The body could contain historical background, details about experimental apparatus and measurements, physical concepts, necessary mathematics and derivation, figures, tables, and anything else needed to convey your point. The body should be organized logically, not chronologically. The paper is not a diary but an explanation of a topic or findings.

Conclusion
The conclusion is a final statement. It is the place where you lead the reader’s focus from the detailed discussion in the body. This is the place for closure. You should never end an article without a conclusion. The conclusion is what sticks with the reader. Don’t leave your reader hanging. If you don’t offer a conclusion, your readers will remember nothing.

Steps to Follow
1. Brainstorm your ideas.
2. Organize your ideas into a logical sequence.
3. Write about your ideas in general terms. Then look at what you have written to see if your ideas follow one another logically. If they don’t, rearrange them and try again.
4. Decide what figures, tables, equations, etc. you must include to explain your ideas.
5. Write a draft.
6. Revise it a couple of times. And again. And again.
7. If possible have your article peer reviewed.
8. Revise again.
9. Complete your final draft.
Some Tips

- **Devise meaningful titles for all sections and subsections of your piece.** Your titles should enable your reader to see at a glance the topic of each section and subsection. They should be short and succinct.

- **Never write tacky sentences** that begin with phrases like “My topic is” or “This paper is about.”

- **Use bold and italic only when necessary.** An article riddled with bold and italic will only distract your reader. Bold and italic should only be used to highlight the most important parts of your article.

- **Give each idea at least one paragraph.** Each paragraph should make and discuss one point.

- **Develop your article from the inside out.** Write the body first. You can’t write the conclusion before you write the body. And it’s easier to write the introduction once you know what you are introducing.

- **Sidebars.** Don’t be afraid to create sidebars with relevant information from your article. Sidebars can contain lists, definitions, and any other information that might highlight points pertaining to the topic you are writing about.

- **Outlines.** Outlines should be given careful consideration. Often outlines are not appropriate for the body of an article. They can be jolting and distract your reader from the topic or point that you are trying to convey.

- **Appendices.** Appendices contain information that doesn’t belong in the body of the article. For example, appendices are good places for mathematical derivations or tabulated data.

- **Figures.** When possible, use figures to illustrate, clarify, and emphasize the points you want to make. But use figures selectively. Don’t show absolutely every result you generated. Some results can be summarized in the body. When preparing figures for your paper, follow these four rules:
  - First, each figure caption must identify each element (points, lines, etc.) in the figure. The caption must also explain briefly the content of the figure.
  - Second, each figure must be cited and discussed in the body of your article. Never include a figure without explicitly discussing it.
  - Third, axes on each figure must be labeled, including units wherever required.
  - Fourth, be consistent. Use the same line types and symbols for figures that show data of the same type.
• **Tables.** Tables in a scientific paper serve two purposes. The primary purpose of a table is archival. The secondary purpose of tables in a scientific paper is to make a point you can’t make in a figure.

• **Don’t “write”—rewrite.** Plan from the first word to revise your article numerous times. Keep revising and editing until you can’t stand it anymore.

• **Write in your own voice.** Don’t use fancy words. Use as little technical jargon as possible. Don’t use colloquial expressions or slang. Use a balance of conversational and formal writing. Use active voice.

• **Define all symbols, specialized terms, and abbreviations.** Never use any symbol, acronym, or jargon that you have not clearly defined.

• **Spell out an acronym on first reference.** All times after, use only the letters.

• **Don’t pad your article.** Make your point. Cut the fluff.

• **Tell a story.** The best articles tell a story and make readers want to read. Construct the body in such a way that every step follows logically from the one before it.

• **Edit.** Your article should be as free of typographical, mathematical, and grammatical errors as possible. Eliminating errors from an article requires time, effort, patience, and determination. You must do it. Run each draft through a spell checker. Read your article numerous times. Have your peers read your article.

• **Check your figures, tables, etc.** Never submit a sloppy article full of errors. You have invested time into your work. Don’t you want it to have the best presentation you can possibly give it?

• **Format.** Be sure the paper adheres to the formatting requirements of the publishers/editors that you are submitting your article to. If you aren’t sure of the requirements, ask.