

EDITORIAL

In academia, we write a lot. As students, we are normally told how long our writing pieces should be. But academic adulthood often comes with more nebulous guidelines in terms of length of various writing pieces. So my question is, does the size matter? In spirit, it should not (or should it?); in reality, we have some, often untold, expectations about the “reasonable” minimum and maximum.

An abstract for a talk is expected to be no more than 200 words, an abstract for a paper normally spans no more than a third of a page, a conventional Ph.D. thesis spreads 100 or more pages. But what about articles? Do norms change depending on the area or the journal? A thesis is supposed to be somewhat comprehensive and include the necessary background for the reader not to be bothered looking up all the sources. An article, on the other hand, assumes a more specialized audience and hence does not require an in-depth background or literature review. But who really decides on the necessary length as a measure of an article’s worth? And is there such a thing as not long enough? Maybe not. John H. Conway and Alexander Soifer win the prize for the shortest math article ever published: their “Can $n^2 + 1$ unit equilateral triangles cover an equilateral triangle of side $> n$, say $n + \epsilon$?” published in the January 2005 edition of *The American Mathematical Monthly* consists of just two words. (For the full story behind this article and its publication, read the piece by Alexander Soifer in *Mathematics Competitions*, 23 (1), available here: <http://www.openculture.com/2015/04/shortest-known-paper-in-a-serious-math-journal.html>).

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