

Tips for Good Writing in Health Sciences

The scope of medical writing ranges from reports (internal and regulatory), conference presentations (abstract, oral, posters) and journal articles (original research, review, case report, letter to the editor). Certain qualities are required for effective medical writing:

1. Start with Good Science. When it comes to writing, there are aspects that should be remembered and which should be adhered to:

- **Communalism:** scientists give up their intellectual property rights in exchange for recognition and esteem for their research
- **Universalism:** There is a universal evaluation system for claims to truth
- **Disinterestedness:** Scientists are rewarded for acting in ways that appear to be selfless
- **Organised scepticism:** Ideas are subject to being tested followed by rigorous, structured scrutiny by peers

2. Plan Effectively

Planning your research study effectively can aid in the smooth transition of writing up. For original research have a clear research question, seek statistical advice, use the right study design, act ethically, keep an open mind and minimize bias, agree who will be the principal investigator, agree who will be authors and contributors and agree to publish even if there are negative results.

3. Behave ethically

The ethics of the study whether using human or animal participants must adhere to the declaration of Helsinki in addition to your institution.

For publication ethics, simply stating that the study was approved for ethics is not enough. Avoid misconduct, protect patients' identities, and report clearly: informed consent, any deviation from usual practice, full burden imposed on patients, total risks posed to participants and others and the benefits to participants, patients and society. Beware if identifiers such as age, sex, location, clinical details, test results, photographs.

4. Clear writing

Keep it simple: use short, familiar words. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Be specific and be concrete, say what you mean and not what you say.

5. Authorship

Avoid guest and ghost writers. Authorship credit is based only on substantial contribution to: conception and design, or data analysis and interpretation, drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published. All these conditions must be met. Researchers must decide among themselves the precise nature of each contribution.

6. Competing interests

A person has a competing interest when he or she has an attribute that is invisible to the reader or editor but which may affect his or her judgement. Always declare a competing interest!

7. Misconduct

Avoid making up data or results and recording or reporting them. Do not falsify any information such as research materials, nor plagiarize. Use plagiarism checkers such as Turnitin, Cross Check, iThenticate and Cross Ref.

Compiled by: Taahira Moola, February 2015