

# Opportunities in veterinary writing

Nicola M. A. Parry<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Parry Medical Writing, Inc., Northborough, MA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Massachusetts Institute of Technology,  
Cambridge, MA, USA

## Correspondence to:

Nicola Parry  
Parry Medical Writing, Inc.  
Northborough, MA, USA  
nicola@parrymedicalwriting.com

## Abstract

Unlike medical writing, ‘veterinary writing’ does not exist as a defined career path. However, writers are inevitably also required in this field and play important roles in different areas of the veterinary profession for creation of scientific and non-scientific documents. Scientific writing may involve production of regulatory and research-related documents, disease- or drug-related educational and promotional literature, and materials such as abstracts, journal articles, and posters for publication. Non-scientific writing may involve production of print-based and online materials for consumers about medicines and pet health. Numerous opportunities therefore exist for medical writers and veterinarians to embed themselves in various areas where writers are essential to the veterinary profession.

**Keywords:** Veterinary, Veterinary writing, Scientific writing, Non-scientific writing, Translation

## Introduction

Although the field of writing for the veterinary profession is less formalised than its medical counterpart, written communications are as important here as in the medical profession.

Veterinary writing encompasses a similarly wide array of activities that also fall into two major categories: scientific and non-scientific. Scientific writers concentrate on written communications for professional veterinary clinical and scientific audiences, while non-scientific writers typically produce non-technical materials.

As in the medical communications profession, writers who work on veterinary-related materials may produce original materials or edit other writers’ work or may have combined roles of writing and editing.

In this article, I hope to introduce you to some of the opportunities available for writers who would

like to break into writing for the veterinary profession (Figure 1). While these terms are not formally recognised, I will use the term ‘veterinary writing’ to refer to writing for this profession and ‘veterinary writers’ to refer to writers who produce these materials.

## Scientific veterinary writing

### Regulatory writing

In the US, for example, medical writers in pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries produce numerous regulatory documents involved in helping a new product, such as a drug or medical device, progress from clinical trials through US FDA approval. These may include study protocols, clinical trial reports, summaries of efficacy and safety data, literature reviews, investigator brochures, Investigational New Drug documents, and New Drug Application submissions.<sup>1</sup>

Animal drugs proceed through a similar, regulated process. A company must submit a New Animal Drug Application (NADA) to the Office of New Animal Drug Evaluation (ONADE) in the Center for Veterinary Medicine within the FDA. NADA documents include supporting data that establish a drug’s effectiveness and safety as well as information on its chemical components and pharmacology.<sup>2–5</sup>

Investigational New Animal Drug documents are also required if an unapproved new animal drug will be used for research. These comprise the discovery phases of the drug, explanation on its components and intended use, data from laboratory animal studies on safety and efficacy, and the results of any pilot studies. The company submits these data to the ONADE for FDA review for safety and efficacy.<sup>3–5</sup>

Although companies that produce animal drugs may already have regulatory medical writers on staff, the need to prepare documents for regulatory

submissions for these drugs nevertheless presents a unique opportunity for writers with a veterinary background because of their expertise in this field.

### Clinical research

Opportunities for veterinary writers are also abundant in research settings, such as in academia or in government institutions. Writers can help veterinary clinicians and researchers prepare high-quality, scientific copy to communicate their science in a wide range of publication types, such as clinical or scientific research papers, literature reviews, abstracts, and conference posters. They may also help veterinary clinicians and scientists develop and write grant proposals to obtain funding for important research studies.

Additional opportunities exist within contract research organisations. During drug development, before a new drug can be tested in the target species, it must undergo rigorous pre-clinical testing or non-clinical trials. This phase involves testing both *in vitro* and *in vivo* in suitable animal models and collecting important pharmacological data (drug dosing, safety, and efficacy).<sup>6</sup> Writers develop documents from these data to facilitate risk assessment by the regulatory authorities as they evaluate whether the drug is suitable for testing in its target species.

### Journals

Positions are also available at peer-reviewed veterinary and scientific journals for veterinary writers and may include those of editor-in-chief, managing editor, and manuscript editor.

Publication planning in veterinary journals is increasingly following guidelines on editorial independence produced by the World Association of Medical Editors and the code on good publication practice of the Committee on Publication Ethics.<sup>7</sup> Veterinary writers therefore have an important role to play in promoting the development and editing of clinical publications in close conjunction with authors.

As is the case for most professions, there are numerous trade publications (print and online) in circulation in the veterinary profession. These also offer many opportunities for writers and can be a lucrative niche for freelance writers with a veterinary background.

### Marketing materials for veterinarians

Writers are also needed by pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to help develop the communication strategy and publication plan that runs alongside the clinical development process and supports the commercialisation of the company's

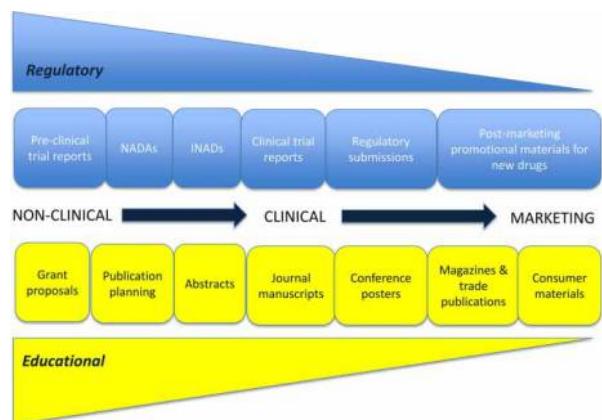


Figure 1: Opportunities for writing in the veterinary field (see text for abbreviations).

products. This plan helps to introduce the drug to veterinarians and to ensure that it remains on their radar during its lifecycle. Writers can be particularly effective in this part of the campaign if they have a veterinary background. In addition to producing written scientific marketing documents to communicate the company's information to veterinarians, they may also play a role in tracking the developments of competing companies that produce drugs in the same therapeutic area and in monitoring their competitors' communication strategies and publication activities.

Veterinary writers may also assist in disseminating clinical and scientific data on a veterinary product to veterinarians at conferences and in veterinary journals.

### Veterinary translation

Translation is a field that often goes hand-in-hand with writing and although some professionals work solely as translators, some writers may also provide translation services.

As with medical documents, translation of documents is required in the veterinary field. Ideally, this should take place during the writing process to enhance the quality of the translated material.

The work of writers may be translated into any language. For example, documents written in English may be translated into any of the EU languages to meet local requirements in some European countries. Veterinary writers who provide translation services have a key role to play in this process and may work on documents such as packaging leaflets for drugs, protocols for clinical trials, clinical and scientific materials for publishing, and textbooks. Inaccuracies may be introduced during the translation of any document and could potentially have serious consequences. Veterinary experts who provide translation services can therefore significantly

reduce the potential for errors compared with linguists without a veterinary background.<sup>8</sup>

## Non-scientific veterinary writing

### *Promotional materials*

Promotional writing is often commonly known as marketing writing and may cover a range of content from journal advertisements to direct-to-consumer materials and marketing brochures for veterinarians.

Veterinary writers may be involved in development of numerous types of direct-to-consumer marketing materials. Pharmaceutical companies and pet insurance companies, for example, rely on writers for content to help communicate about their products to farmers and owners of pets or competition animals. Direct-to-consumer marketing materials are also used by other businesses such as pet food companies, veterinary clinics, and boarding kennels and catteries. Writers may produce content on veterinary products for print and web-based media platforms.

### *Magazines and trade publications*

There are also many mainstream magazines and trade publications available (in print and online) for the pet/animal industry. As publications are written on a consumer level, this offers many opportunities even for writers without a veterinary background, can lead to regular and long-term freelance writing assignments, and may serve as a stepping stone into other areas of writing in the veterinary field.

### *Veterinary translation*

Written materials may need to be translated into different languages for consumers, as well as for veterinarians. For example, these may include marketing documents about medicines, pet foods, or pet insurance; packaging leaflets to accompany medicines; or animal health brochures provided by veterinary clinics. And as previously mentioned, given the risk of serious consequences as a result of inaccurate translation, involving veterinary experts at this stage can significantly reduce the potential for errors.

## Qualifications needed for veterinary writing

Inevitably, the basic attributes required to succeed in veterinary writing are similar to those for medical writing (Figure 2). However, additional qualifications required to break into veterinary writing will vary depending on the category of writing involved.

For those interested in scientific veterinary writing, a degree in veterinary medicine will inevitably be advantageous when applying for positions or



Figure 2: Attributes required to succeed in veterinary writing.

freelance projects, although not necessarily essential. Veterinarians with a graduate degree or specialty qualification may also find it easier to break into certain areas of veterinary writing.

Other qualifications, such as veterinary nursing certification or a degree in animal science, will also be useful. And just as in the medical writing field, individuals with any science degree can also succeed in veterinary writing.

For those interested in the less technical non-scientific veterinary writing, a veterinary or science qualification is typically unnecessary, although certainly will be advantageous. Writers who pursue this track often have a degree in a discipline such as communications, English, or journalism.

And if you are already established as a medical writer in either the scientific or non-scientific track, you already have a head start for getting into veterinary writing. Indeed, many medical writers already work in this arena. However, it is important to note that despite many commonalities with the medical field, writing for the veterinary profession can introduce challenges for even a medical writer with experience in a variety of medical writing categories and therapeutic areas. Among other things, veterinary medicine has many of its own specialised terminologies, as well as a unique framework with respect to regulatory submissions. Although not insurmountable hurdles, these pose very different challenges to a medical writer.<sup>9</sup>

## Summary

The veterinary profession is a niche with a similar scope of writing needs as the medical field. However, there is no defined 'veterinary writing' speciality or structured educational pathways to take in order to gain recognition as an expert in

this field, as is the case with medical writing. Additionally, job openings for ‘veterinary writers’ are not advertised, *per se*. Consequently, persistence, networking, and marketing are key to finding employment as a writer in this area, just as in the medical writing field. Hopefully this article has provided an outline of some of the many opportunities available for writers who wish to break into writing for the veterinary profession, whether or not they have a veterinary background.

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## Author information

Nicola Parry is a freelance medical writer living in the United States, in the Greater Boston region. She is also a veterinarian and is board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Pathologists.