

Getting Your Foot in the Door

SECTION EDITOR



Ivana Turek
ivana.turek@gmail.com

Editorial

What does it mean to be a medical writer? How can you start off on the right track? Good advice is very valuable and learning from others is important for our development.

Therefore, Bruna Landeira asked three experienced medical writers to share some insights on their start in medical writing. This article can help you avoid some pitfalls at the outset and advance your career. Enjoy the read!

Ivana

What piece of advice do aspiring medical writers tend to ignore?

Bruna Landeira

Lille, France

Correspondence to:

brunalandeira@gmail.com

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Medical writing is a field that includes a widely diverse range of jobs and work styles. Consequently, aspiring medical writers can lose their focus and time struggling in their first steps. With this in mind, I interviewed three medical writers with different professional backgrounds to provide advice that may be helpful to beginners in this field.



Photo by KOBU agency

experience to answer two questions:

1. What is a piece of obvious advice that beginners tend to ignore?
2. What is a piece of advice for beginners that may not be so obvious?

Alejandra Viviecas

What is a piece of obvious advice that beginners tend to ignore?

Focus on the lifestyle you want and the kind of deliverables you want to work on. Medical writing is a big field that offers a lot of opportunities in terms of lifestyle. This is one of the things I love the most about this career, but it requires you to think about what you want

before you start applying for jobs or projects. Sometimes, beginners are so eager to hit the road running that they forget to answer these basic questions. Do you want to do freelancing? Would you rather write or edit? Do you lean more towards medical communications or regulatory? Asking these questions beforehand will help you target the right roles, leading to higher job and personal satisfaction, and ultimately making job progression easier.

What's your piece of not-so-obvious advice for beginners?

Once you start working in medical writing, **use a time tracking tool so you know how you are**

Use a time tracking tool so you know how you are allocating your time.

Photo by Lukas Brzdek

Alejandra Viviecas, Clare Chang, and Barbara Bartolini are experienced medical writers with distinctive career trajectories. Alejandra Viviecas and Barbara Bartolini started as freelancers, even though Barbara decided to take a different career path in the end and works as a scientific editor. Clare Chang built her career in regulatory medical writing.

The three of them reflected upon their own

allocating your time. This will help you be more efficient and plan realistically. It will also show you how you are getting faster as you gain more experience, which will give you a lot of satisfaction.

Clare Chang

What is a piece of obvious advice that beginners tend to ignore?

This piece of advice might be difficult to swallow for aspiring writers. For many beginners, there is a lot of focus on writing (e.g. grammar, creating a portfolio to showcase writing skills). My own take from this is, if you are only *starting* to refine or polish your writing skills to fit the medical writing role, then the role may not necessarily be for you. Writing well is one of the foundational skills a medical writer should have in their inventory before they start their career. It should come naturally, as drawing is natural for an artist. Of course, one can always further refine these skills. However, **throughout their medical writing career, there will be a lot of other skills they have to learn.**

What's your piece of not-so-obvious advice for beginners?

To find a job, the best way is through **networking**. Networking is not just about sharing your details and having someone in your LinkedIn network. It is also not just about connecting and asking for a job. As an aspiring writer, it's important to learn about the craft by starting a conversation. Ask about the role. Be curious about what the role entails. **Make human connections.** Give updates on what you are doing and how you're working towards getting a medical writing role. Ask questions about things that you don't understand. Most importantly, follow up!

Barbara Bartolini

What is a piece of obvious advice that beginners tend to ignore?

Take some time for yourself. To be a medical writer means that you have to like writing and thinking on your own. Indeed, many medical writing projects are based on teamwork, but the medical writer is the player who spends the most "alone" time. It may be different from the usual office life and even from an academic job, where discussion and meetings are common. As a medical writer, you have meetings and discussion with clients, authors, and stakeholders, but the



Photo by Diego PH

most precious time, in my opinion, is that spent reading and thinking, developing ideas, and metabolising the context and information to be reported in the text. The creative part happens when I am alone. Working independently in three-hour blocks, without interruptions (emails, WhatsApp, calls, coffee breaks) is extremely important in my view, and can be underrated by beginners.

What's your piece of not-so-obvious advice for beginners?

I hesitated a lot before starting. I

never had real training as a medical writer after finishing my PhD, nor during my postdoc years. I never got a certification, and I felt I was unprepared for the job. Then I just started to post short pieces on social media, more to test my writing abilities than to demonstrate that I could write. It was worth it. **Experience gained in the**

field helped me to understand what I liked to do and what I was good at, and at the same time, it gave me visibility in the market. After the first few projects I was more aware of my abilities and of my limits, so I was able to search for material focused on what I needed to know to grow as a professional. In addition, networking and talking to other medical writers has been extremely important for my growth. I believe that getting training is good, but one can learn a lot while on the job. Another thing I would like to point out is **the importance of having other skills besides writing,** i.e. data analysis, social media management, graphics,

and artwork. Different backgrounds and interests are a plus for a medical writer because there are so many different types of editorial output: manuscripts for peer review, digital output, infographics, videos, and interviews. Medical writing is a wide umbrella and in every project, there's a need for more than just writing. Being able to contribute more than one skill is a plus, while continuing to develop your qualifications as a medical writer.

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Conflicts of interest

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The creative part happens when I am alone.



Author information

Bruna Landeira, PhD, is a biologist with experience in neuroscience. She is a member of the Medical Writing Organisation and the European Medical Writers Association. Currently she teaches scientific writing for PhDs.