

The 3 C's of medical writing: Communication, conflict management, and critical thinking

Asha Liju,¹ Diana Daniel,²
Grishma Kanchan²

¹ Medical Writing Services, Parexel
International Ltd., Uxbridge, UK

² Medical Writing Services, Parexel
International Ltd., Bangalore, India

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Correspondence to:

Diana Daniel

diana.daniel@parexel.com

Abstract

Human-centred “soft” skills are becoming increasingly essential, especially in the current digital workspace. As medical writers navigate the intricate landscape of compliance and precision, they must fortify their soft skills with a foundation of emotional intelligence. In this article, we discuss the interplay of communication, conflict management, and critical thinking (the “3 C’s”) as the cornerstone to achieving success in medical writing.

For over a century, we have recognised that having well-developed soft and people skills account for most job success, whereas technical abilities and knowledge (hard skills) account for a minority.¹ More recent studies in 2015 and 2016 confirmed the importance of soft skills, with 93% of employees rating them as “very important” or “essential” and 97% considering them the key to business growth or success.^{2,3}

The rise of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) has further accelerated the demand for soft skills. According to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers of 260 employers, communication is among the top three most sought-after skills.⁴ In another study by CPP Global, the publisher of the Myers-



Briggs Assessment, 85% of individual contributors and leaders reported experiencing inevitable conflict at work.⁵ Further, based on

McKinsey & Company briefing notes on AI, automation, and the future of work, critical thinking and complex information processing skills will grow in demand.⁶

In this article, we delve into the significance of the “3 C’s” of communication, conflict management, and critical thinking, and how these intertwine and mutually contribute to helping medical writers succeed (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The 3 C's

The 3 C's – communication, conflict management, and critical thinking

The significance of effective communication in medical writing

We medical writers often take on dual roles of project manager and writer; therefore, communication is a vital component of our responsibilities. This entails collaborating with cross-functional team members, participating in meetings and scientific discussions, providing

feedback and guidance to other team members, responding to queries and clarifications, analysing data, presenting key findings, and more. A LinkedIn article reported that 97% of employees feel that effective communication affects their task efficiency.⁷

Mastering effective communication empowers medical writers to efficiently collaborate and coordinate, successfully manage projects and stakeholders, objectively resolve conflicts, and adapt to dynamic requirements with ease. Effective communication is thoughtful, well-constructed, error-free, logical, complete, and consistent so that the audience receives the intended message. In challenging situations and during difficult conversations, it is essential to maintain a delicate and critical balance of being assertive without resorting to passive aggression or succumbing to pressure. In achieving this balance, effective communication must be coupled with critical thinking and conflict management.

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The importance of conflict management in medical writing

Medical writers often encounter conflicts in the workplace. The CPP global study reported that 85% of employees dealt with conflict at work to some degree and 29% dealt with it frequently or always.⁵ This conflict may be related to, for example, differing opinions, timelines, document strategy and messaging, or understanding of guidelines. When conflicts are not resolved, they can negatively affect morale and cause resentment, frustration, stress, and reduced productivity. Therefore, conflict management is an essential soft skill to develop.

The key to resolving conflicts lies in the power of effective communication and the application of unbiased critical thinking. While resolving conflicts, we need to put our personal differences and preferences aside to make decisions that are

ultimately in the best interest of the readers.

When managed effectively, constructive conflicts provide opportunities for growth and learning, facilitate collaboration among co-workers, help maintain morale, prevent disruptions in productivity, and provide an environment to stay focused and engaged at work.

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The nuances of critical thinking in medical writing

In today’s fast-paced, competitive world, critical thinking has become essential for success in any career, including medical writing. A survey conducted by Reboot reported that 95% of respondents believe that critical thinking skills are vital in today’s world and 85% think that these skills are lacking in people.⁸

Medical writers with strong critical thinking skills are equipped to question assumptions, challenge existing ideas, explore alternative possibilities, and see the big picture. By utilising critical



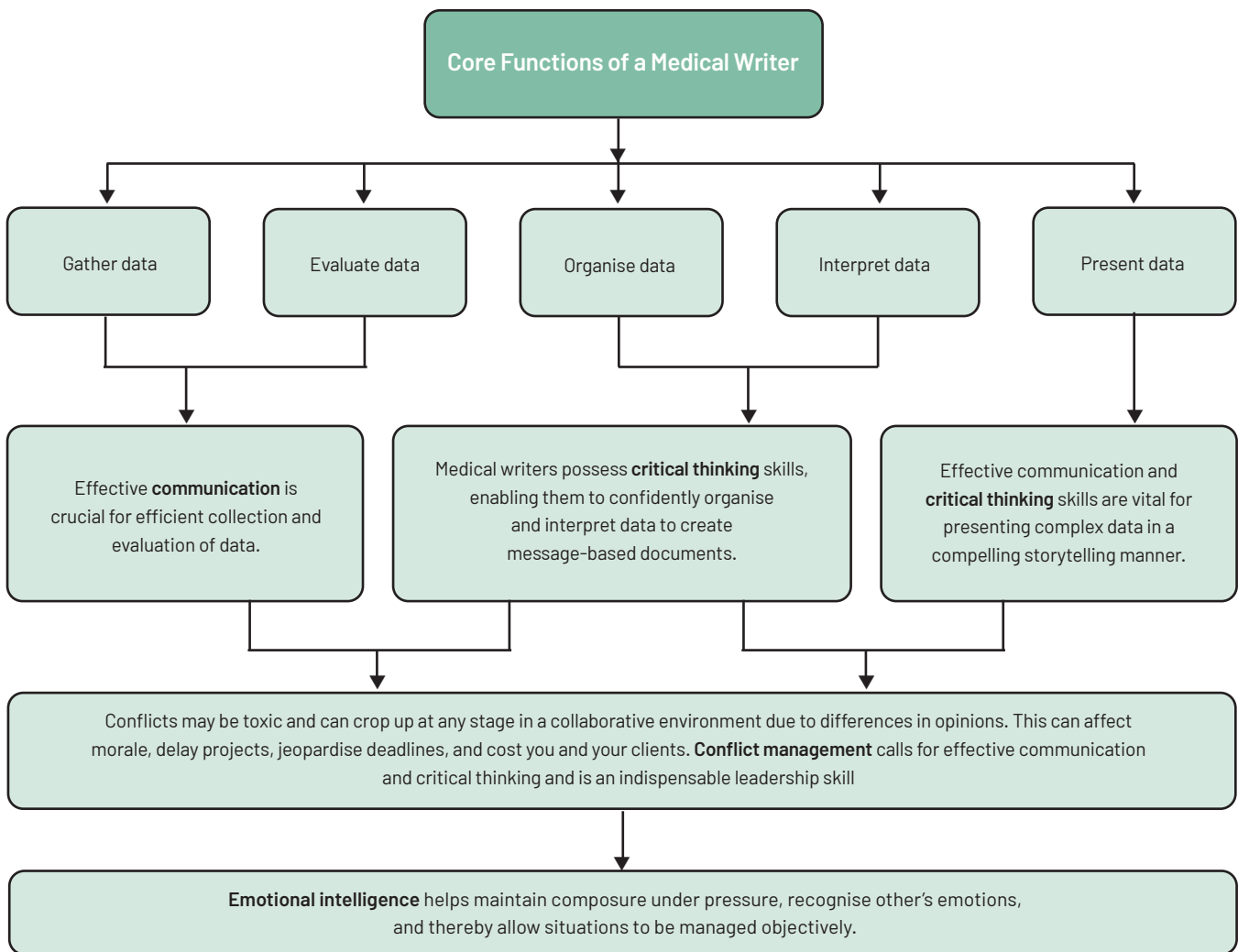


Figure 2. An example of applying the 3 C's

thinking, medical writers become empowered to arrive at innovative solutions and make well-grounded decisions. This is particularly crucial in the ever-evolving landscape and with the increasing complexity of scientific information, where medical writers must navigate challenges, maintain accuracy, and deliver high-quality documents.

Critical thinking is not innate, but it can be cultivated. Medical writers can nurture unbiased critical thinking skills through consistent practice, reflection, and exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives. Committing to continuous intellectual growth is essential for sharpening critical thinking abilities.⁹ By actively seeking out new knowledge, challenging assumptions, and engaging in critical analysis, medical writers can continuously refine and strengthen their critical thinking skills, leading to improved problem-

solving, more effective communication, and better decision-making.

The interplay of the 3 C's – a synergistic blend

The 3 C's are not standalone skills but rather are interdependent and complementary. Critical thinking enables clear communication, and effective communication is key to resolving conflicts. With strong critical thinking, medical writers can communicate their ideas effectively, provide constructive feedback, and take a systematic and analytical approach to conflict resolution. Communicating well in tough situations (even to say “no”) requires critically

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weighing implications and using sound logic to respond fairly and constructively.

While the interplay of the 3 C's is essential for successful outcomes, these should be fortified by a foundation of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence helps individuals understand and manage their own emotions and empathise and respond to the emotions of others. This awareness of emotions promotes open and honest discussion, forms the base for building professional trust, and augments the overall effectiveness of communication. Emotional intelligence also plays an important role in conflict management

by enhancing empathy, active listening, and the ability to see things from different perspectives. Further, it allows individuals to handle differences with sensitivity and to enable mutually favourable solutions. Emotional intelligence supplements critical thinking by providing awareness of how emotions influence decision-making. It is therefore the key to effective communication, conflict management, and critical thinking.

Medical writers apply the principles of the 3 C's consciously or unconsciously in their daily work (Figure 2). Therefore, honing these skills will not only help medical writers develop high-quality documents, but will also foster collaboration, engagement, and teamwork.

Concluding remarks

Regardless of whether you are a seasoned medical writer with years of experience or just embarking on this journey, honing the 3 C's of communication, critical thinking, and conflict management and fortifying these skills with emotional intelligence is not just an investment in your profession but also your personal growth and development. These skills can help us all become more insightful, empathetic, impactful, and simply better human beings.

Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own and not necessarily shared by their employer or the EMWA.

Disclosures and conflicts of interest

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Author information

Asha Liju, BVSc and AH, is a Senior Manager at Parexel. Her responsibilities include recruiting, onboarding, coaching/mentoring, professional development, driving process improvement initiatives, and client liaison.



Diana Daniel, PhD, is a Senior Medical Writer at Parexel. She has delivered a wide range of high-quality documents for local and global markets in various therapeutic areas. She is the subject-matter expert for soft skills for the Parexel India Medical Writing Services team.



Grishma Kanchan, MSc, is an Associate Manager at Parexel. Her responsibilities include coaching/mentoring, professional development, cross-functional collaboration, and client liaison. She has successfully led and conducted soft skills training programmes for the Parexel Medical Writing Services team.