

Unlocking the power of emotional intelligence in medical writers

Ananya Bhowmick,
Seema Abhijeet Kaveeshwar,
Susmita Sahu

Regulatory and Medical Writing, MMS Holdings,
Bangalore, India

doi: 10.56012/wcvn6255

Correspondence to:

Ananya Bhowmick
ananya.benazir@gmail.com

Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to recognise and understand emotions (one's own and those of other people), is a valuable attribute for medical writers (MWs). MWs play a pivotal role in communicating medical and scientific information to regulators, patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals. EI helps MWs to understand the needs of the audience, develop effective communication skills, author impactful content, and collaborate efficiently with multiple stakeholders. It is thus essential for MWs to develop strong EI skills, i.e., be self-aware and self-motivated, be able to self-regulate, take ownership and responsibility for actions, be problem solvers, show empathy, foster healthy relationships, evaluate feedback positively, and implement balanced solutions. To enhance their EI, MWs can adopt EI-focussed training and development sessions at workplace, practice mindfulness daily, assess EI using multi-rater feedback scales, seek EI coaching, and set realistic goals.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capability to identify and comprehend emotions (one's own and those of other people). The level of one's EI depends on how one treats oneself and others.¹ According to psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, EI is a part of social intelligence. The term "EI" consists of two parts: emotions and intelligence.² Emotions relate to a person's feelings in relationships and intelligence refers to the ability to build inferences about something or about someone. EI also comprises four branches (see Table 1). EI empowers the mind, making us happy and content. Knowing the language of emotions helps us sustain strong personal and professional relationships.³

"Emotions drive people; people drive performance." This frequently quoted statement succinctly captures the effect that EI has on work. Daniel Goleman commented that 80% of our personal success can be attributed to our EI, and the remaining 20% to our intelligence quotient (IQ).⁴ Thus EI is a valuable attribute for medical writers (MW). (i.e., please just eliminate the part I have crossed out. It can significantly enhance their ability to communicate effectively, understand the needs of the audience, and

develop powerful leadership skills by working collaboratively.²

Characteristics of MWs with EI

Medical writing requires a fusion of scientific expertise and precise writing abilities, including creativity, adaptability, and meticulous attention to detail. MWs often work under tight deadlines, handle complex data analyses, adhere to diverse regulatory standards, and manage stakeholders' inputs. Having high EI can help MWs thrive in these challenging and dynamic situations. MWs with high EI are resilient, motivated, empathetic, social, emotionally aware, and have a strong ability to self-regulate with a clear and composed mindset. They are prepared to embrace failures or setbacks in pursuit of long-term success. These skills prove invaluable when dealing with demanding clients and stressful projects, allowing writers to effectively address challenges, leading to fewer conflicts, improved efficiency, and lower risk of burnout.⁵ The key components of EI skills in MWs are:

- **Self-motivation:** MWs with high EI are self-motivated and resilient. Self-motivation plays a key role in overcoming burnout, leading to enhanced efficiency and productivity.

Table 1. Four branches of emotional intelligence

Branch of emotional intelligence	Definition
Perceive emotions	The ability to recognise one's own emotions and the emotions of others based on verbal and non-verbal expressions
Express emotions	The ability to accurately convey or express an emotional state
Understand and analyse emotions	The ability to understand and process sequences of emotions, and the ability to transfer one emotion to another
Conscious regulation of emotions	The ability to regulate emotions (upregulating positive emotions and controlling negative ones) in self and others

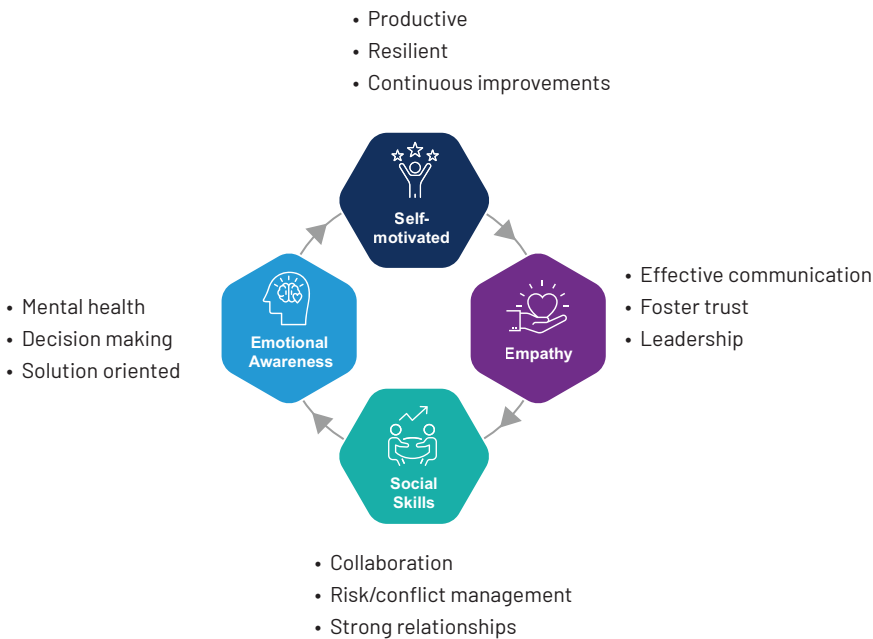
Abbreviations: EI: emotional intelligence



- Empathy:** Being empathetic is crucial for MWs, both personally and professionally. The ability to perceive the sensory states of others enables MWs to establish emotionally favourable and adequate relationships with all stakeholders. Writers with EI understand what makes other people tick and hold profound respect for them. They are exquisitely

sensitive to the needs and perspectives of their readers. Rather than focusing on what they want to write, they figure out the best way to communicate what their audience wants to read. When MWs put themselves in the patient’s shoes, they can relate to the patient’s experiences and can adopt a more patient-centric approach to writing.

- Social skills:** Medical writing requires a blend of interpersonal and social skills. It involves active listening and comprehending the clients’ expectations, managing fast-paced deliverables, navigating through project complexities and multiple revision cycles, collaborating with diverse teams, gracefully managing criticism at work, and ensuring that deadlines are met. Hence MWs, with their emotional understanding, can build meaningful relationships and affect positive outcomes.
- Emotional awareness:** It indicates the extent to which MWs can understand themselves, recognise negative and positive feelings and emotions, and understand not only the cause of their occurrence but also the relationship between their own feelings and actions. MWs with high EI can keep themselves collected under stressful situations and wait for the right time and place to express their feelings appropriately.



Overall, MWs with high EI empathise with colleagues, clients, patients, friends, and family; identify the negative thoughts and emotions; express what they feel and, why they feel so; foster happy emotions; are open to creative thinking; focus on resolving conflicts through communication; and evaluate actions, behaviour, and relationships (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Leveraging emotional intelligence for success

Benefits of strong EI skills

EI can significantly impact the overall performance and productivity of MWs in the workplace. Strong EI skills contribute to improvements in numerous aspects, such as:

- **Technical skills:** MWs need to analyse extensive scientific information on different therapeutic areas and diseases. They are required to author correct scientific messages for diverse audiences, including patients. Increased awareness of the “emotional” needs of the audience helps MWs to develop varied content customised to the audience.
- **Teamwork:** Strong EI skills enhance communication, leading to effective collaboration with co-writers and different stakeholders in the projects. This boosts the morale of co-writers and helps in tapping the team’s professional capabilities.
- **Time management:** In the multifaceted domain of research, authoring documents is often the last task and writers are expected to deliver documents under compressed timelines. Collating inputs on content and getting the “buy-in” from all stakeholders can also be time-consuming. Thus, it is imperative to plan and define timelines. Managing one’s own time in a way that is considerate of others, avoiding procrastination, and embracing a daily routine also helps maintain a work-life balance.

- **Resilience:** Medical writing can be stressful, especially when dealing with multiple or varied clients, tight deadlines, and regulatory guidelines. High EI helps writers manage stress, respond well under pressure, and maintain focus. MWs with high EI take ownership and thrive in dynamic environments and circumstances.
- **Effective client relationships:** High EI helps MWs understand clients’ expectations and priorities, thus foster mutual trust and strong relationships.
- **Conflict management:** Difference in opinions and authoring styles are common during document development. Active listening, empathy, and negotiation skills help MWs drive open, constructive, and result-oriented discussions.
- **Handling feedback and improvement:** Writers with high EI confidently accept 360° feedback and maintain focus on solutions and improvements.
- **Continuous learning and growth:** MWs with high EI understand the ongoing self-improvement process, seek feedback, and continuously improve the skills needed to achieve personal and professional success.

Mindfulness is an inward-orienting, self-empowering practice that can improve writing engagement of MWs by reducing stress, enhancing creativity, and increasing focus.

Focussed approaches to enhance EI skills

A few strategies that MWs can incorporate in their daily routine to enhance EI skills are presented in Figure 2.

“Practicing mindfulness” as a path to EI

Mindfulness is an inward-orienting, self-empowering practice that can improve how MWs engage with the writing process by reducing stress, enhancing

creativity, and increasing focus. It is the practice of paying attention to the present moment with curiosity and openness. Proficient writing entails considering the point of view of the audience, not just that of the writer, and this requires mindfulness.⁶ An important starting point for MWs to develop EI through mindfulness is to simply learn to pause and evaluate what they have written, face their work in an honest and non-judgemental fashion by letting go of their attachments or biases, thus fostering a more productive writing process. Practicing mindful breathing techniques to reduce stress and enhance clarity promotes a more productive writing experience.

Using self or multi-rater feedback to build EI

Multi-rater feedback is a valuable tool for assessing EI in the workplace. Currently, several scales and tools to measure EI exist but many of these have not been empirically evaluated. O’Connor et al. (2019) provide an overview of the most credible measures, discussing their validity, reliability, and conceptual foundations. These assessments are instrumental in identifying areas for EI enhancement.⁷ These strategies, among others detailed in Table 2, are essential for MWs looking to improve their EI and, by extension, their professional capabilities and leadership skills.^{8,9}

Coaching for EI

In the quest for more efficient ways to ensure client success, EI is emerging as the new elixir for high performance while maintaining work-life balance. One-on-one coaching is a widely accepted approach to improve various aspects of EI. Progressive organisations emphasise the importance of EI training and use both external and internal coaching to boost employee performance.¹⁰ Coaching enables writers to



Figure 2. Implement a focussed approach to enhance your EI skills

Abbreviations: EI, emotional intelligence; SMART, specific, measurable, agreed or achievable, realistic or relevant, and time bound.

recognise EI's foundational elements, understand its role in personal development, identify effective tools for EI assessment, and employ proven techniques for EI improvement. This includes creating action plans to recognise stressors/triggers, establish positive behavioural patterns, and offer opportunities for practice. Moreover, coaching plays a crucial role in breaking cycles of unhealthy behaviour by fostering new perspectives for positive change, providing actionable strategies for immediate challenges, and encouraging accountability.

EI coaching empowers MWs to achieve their life goals by maintaining control over their emotions and promoting sustainable behavioural changes. Coaches guide MWs in making small, yet significant, adjustments that cultivate productive and positive relationships, enhancing overall performance. They encourage MWs to evaluate their EI levels and pursue individual coaching to advance their EI skills. The popular coaching models are the following:

- **"Goal Reality Options Will" (GROW) model:**¹⁰ Developed by coaching pioneer Sir John Whitmore, this model is akin to planning a journey. It employs a step-by-step approach to help individuals answer a pivotal question: "Where do you want to reach in life?"



- **Specific Measurable Agreed/Achievable Realistic/Relevant Time-bound (SMART) model:**¹² This model is traditionally used in business to emphasise tangible and measurable outcomes. It provides a structured method for setting and achieving goals.

Setting realistic goals

Today's environment of information overload and high work expectations makes it challenging for MWs to set clear professional goals. To assess their EI levels and identify areas of improvement, MWs can leverage the support of EI coaches.

Using models like GROW or SMART, MWs can define and achieve their professional aspirations within realistic timelines.

Conclusion

MWs possessing high EI are distinguished by their efficiency in communication, leadership, influence, and the ability to enact meaningful change. These individuals often become role models, inspiring colleagues, and contributing significantly to the enhancement of organisational culture. EI is clearly an important aspect of thriving in the workplace – it opens new

Table 2. Emotional intelligence measurement scales

EI measurement scale	Characteristics
EQ-i 2.0 ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-rating assessment tool ● Reliable, valid, and widely used ● Administered by certified practitioner ● Tests 15 competencies grouped into five composites: self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal, decision making, and stress management
EQ 360 ⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multi-rater or 360° assessment ● Combines individual's perception of EI with the perceptions of managers, peers, and others for a complete evaluation ● Offers comprehensive assessment of feedback from multiple sources that provide valuable insight into one's personality and identify blind spots or areas for professional and personal growth
MSCEIT ⁹	<p>Consists of 12 separate sub-tests that measure the following four branches of EI as per the Mayer-Salovey theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceiving emotions ● Facilitating thought ● Understanding emotions ● Managing emotions <p>It offers strategies for individuals to improve the way they communicate and connect to others.</p>

Abbreviations: EI: emotional intelligence; EQ, emotional quotient; EQ-i, emotional quotient inventory; MSCEIT, Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional intelligence Tests.

opportunities and lets MWs connect with others, fostering greater positivity and fulfilment. Leveraging EI, MWs can translate positive emotions into a more memorable experience for their clients and get loyalty as a result. Lastly, building EI skills is an ongoing journey. Thus, MWs are encouraged to consistently apply themselves in harnessing their inherent EI capabilities to achieve their professional objectives.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Clare Chang for providing her guidance throughout the drafting process. The authors would like to thank Prasad Babu, Director, Marketing Operations, MMS Holdings, for his assistance in drafting. The authors would also like to thank Ragesh Raju (Associate Director, Creative Design, MMS Holdings) and Sharath Srinivas (Senior Graphic Design and Content Marketing Specialist, MMS Holdings) for their assistance in graphics generation.

Disclaimers

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

Disclosures and conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Reshetnikov VA, Tvorogova ND, Hersonskiy II, et al. Leadership and emotional intelligence: Current trends in public health professionals training. *Front Public Health*. 2020;7:413. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2019.00413
2. Mayer JD, Salovey P, Caruso D. Models of emotional intelligence. In: Sternberg RJ, ed. *Handbook of Intelligence*. Cambridge University Press. 2000:396–420. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511807947.019
3. Chowdhury MR. How to improve emotional intelligence through training. *Positive Psychology*. 2020 [cited 2024 Feb 19]. Available from: <https://positivepsychology.com/emotional-intelligence-training/>
4. Goleman D. *Emotional intelligence*. 10th ed. New York: Bantam Dell; 1995.
5. Gray-Grant D. Why the best writers have the most emotional intelligence. 2017 [cited 2024 Feb 29]. Available from: <https://www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/2017/07/>
6. Parrish E. Why mindfulness is important for writers. 2024 [cited 2024 Feb 29]. Available from: <https://berriesandbarnacles.com/the-importance-of-mindfulness-in-writing/>
7. O'Connor PJ, Hill A, Kaya M, et al. The measurement of emotional intelligence: A critical review of the literature and recommendations for researchers and practitioners. *Front Psychol*. 2019;10:1116. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01116
8. The Emotional Intelligence Training Company Inc. 2024 [cited 2024 Feb 29]. Available from: <https://www.eitrainingcompany.com/eq-i/>
9. Mayer JD, Salovey P, Caruso DR. *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) user's manual*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems; 2002.
10. Evercoach. The ultimate guide to emotional intelligence coaching. 2024 [cited 2024 Feb 29]. Available from: <https://www.evercoach.com/coaching-guides/emotional-intelligence-coaching/>
11. Leonard K, Watts R. The ultimate guide to S.M.A.R.T. Goals. 2022 [cited 2024 March 28]. Available from: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/smart-goals/>



Author information

Ananya Bhowmick has over 10 years of experience in academia, clinical research, and regulatory medical writing. She holds a PhD in biotechnology and has multiple publications in the field of endocrinology and cell biology. She has also worked closely with patients as a research scientist at Apollo Hospitals, India. Find her on LinkedIn at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-ananya-bhowmick-phd-9074a51a>



Seema Kaveeshwar has an extensive scientific background and advocates innovative approaches for efficiency. She has authored a broad range of regulatory and clinical documents. She also has valuable hands-on experience in clinical research at the site level in Narayana Hrudayalaya and in academia at Manipal College of Pharmacy, India. Find her on LinkedIn at: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/seema-kaveeshwar/26/1a4/831>



Susmita Sahu has over 16 years of expertise in authoring clinical and regulatory documents. She has supported multiple new drug approval submissions for critical diseases. She manages a diverse team, enjoys mentoring, and establishes strong relationships. She is also an instructor for medical writing courses (MMS Academy™) and develops document-specific trainings. Find her on LinkedIn at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/susmitasahu>