

# Writing matters

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## Editorial

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Writing matters to medical writers ... or at least it should. But sometimes we are more consumed with the content of a document than the writing itself. And some might even argue that detailed medical or scientific information cannot be written as simple, clear, and engaging prose. I disagree; the writing in medical and scientific documents should be not only well organised but also simple to read and comprehend.

Many books, articles, and guidelines have been written on the appropriate content of different documents, but few specifically teach medical writers to write well. *Medical Writing* is here to help. In this issue, we provide you with a series of articles that help generate simple, clear, and engaging text.

Michele Arduengo gets us started with four central principles of clear writing in her article 'Writing to make your message clear'. In the article, which is based on her scientific writing blog, she states that the main principle is to write for the reader. I can't repeat this enough to my colleagues (and even to myself)! Writing should be clear, accurate, and engaging and make life easy for the reader. Michele's article illustrates her four principles of clear writing with multiple examples, making her article an excellent basic reference for all medical writers.

Of course, writing clearly has to start somewhere. Two articles in this issue will help you get started in the right direction. In 'What's your problem?' Marina Hurley explains that the origin of a clear document is a clearly articulated problem statement. Her article includes an exercise to help a writer articulate the problem statement and then use it to guide the structure, design, and logic of the document.

In 'The joys of outlining', Robert Taylor explains that once you have the main idea, writing an outline is enormously helpful for preparing a well-written document. I have to admit that I never used outlines when I was a graduate student or even when I first started as a medical writer, but as pointed out in Dr Taylor's article, this can lead to 'wandering into wastelands of irrelevance'. I have to agree, and like Dr Taylor, I am now a

staunch supporter of outlining, even for the simplest documents. As pointed out in his article, an outline gives discipline and focus to the writing process and is a great help in organising team projects. His article also details exactly how to put together a good outline.

These principles should help you build a well-written text, but how can you be sure that the document's content, style, and format are of high quality? In 'Quality control: getting the best out of your review', Nicola Haycock explains the benefits of detailed quality control. She also explains how the process should run and how to create a detailed quality control checklist.

Finally, in this issue's installment of Webscout, Karin Eichele summarizes and provides links to additional websites and PDFs on writing clear and proper English as well as on how to write for websites and the influence of technology on writing.

## Readability matters too

All of these ideas can help a medical writer write clearly and produce high-quality text. But even if your content is excellent and your text well written, it won't be used if it is not easy on the eyes. How many times have you been turned off and frustrated by a document or website that was painful to look at or was badly organised?

As explained in part I of II of 'Pleasing the reader by pleasing the eye' by Gabriele Berghammer and Anders Holmqvist, this issue is called 'readability'. Their article explains how the elements in a text work together to determine whether it will be successful with a target audience. In particular, they explain how the format and design of a document must make information easy to find and extract.

In 'Writing visually for medical writers', which I co-authored with Charlotte Leventhal (that's right, my mom), we give some specific instructions on how to make a text approachable and how to make information easy to find and understand. Our instructions include details about not only how the document looks on the screen or page but

also how specific kinds of visuals can be used to speed comprehension of complex information.

So, both writing and readability are important in creating a successful text or document. Of course,

there's a lot more to these subjects than can be covered in this issue of *Medical Writing*, but I think that these articles should be a great start in the right direction.

### **An important note on copyright for articles published in *Medical Writing***

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