

Clinician/teacher: Writing for Publication

Center for Faculty Development and Diversity

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Why write?

- Communicate new, important material or approach
 - Clinical research, educational material, clinical or administrative experience, review, etc
- Academic advancement
- Request from journal, colleague, book editor
- Visibility, status as expert



Considerations for writing

Is it worth doing?

- Will it advance personal or professional goals?
 - Promotion, becoming credible in a field, etc
- Is it new? Important? Educational?
- Who will read it? Define the target audience?
- How much time and effort will be required?
- Literature search to ascertain originality, scope and need



What can I write?

- **Writing or scholarly productivity is an academic imperative; new HMS promotion guidelines “count” many types of writing**
- For the clinician/teacher a broader range of options exists
 - Original papers
 - Books – single author and edited
 - Essays; editorials
 - Reviews
 - Chapters
 - Curricula and education material
 - Case studies; clinical reports



Once you decide to write: consider

- Scope and dimension of the topic – too much?
- Target audience, e.g., primarily for MDs, PhDs, the public, allied professionals
 - You can't be everything to everybody
- Single author, coauthors?
 - Work with a colleague or joining a writing group may facilitate the process



Which publisher/journal?

- Think about it early in the process
- Consult with mentor, colleagues
 - on editorial boards
 - with experience refereeing for journals
 - who have written or edited books



Choosing a publisher/journal

Types of publishers

- General – discipline, e.g., medicine, molecular biology
- Specialty – psychiatry, internal medicine
- Subspecialty – neuroradiology, endocrinology
- Journals published by pharmaceuticals or advertising companies (“throwaways”) may not “count”
- Trade – for the general public; mass marketed or academic trade (McGraw Hill, Delacorte)
- University (Harvard, Oxford)
- Self publishing
- Internet publishing



Choosing a publisher/journal

- ❏ CHECK websites, library
- ❏ What types of books/journals articles do they usually publish? (clinical, research, cases, etc.)
- ❏ Is your topic one that they publish?
 - ❏ Does it appear in their catalogs or tables of contents (rarely? frequently?)
 - ❏ Has the topic/format recently been published by them (esp., for a book)
- ❏ What instructions are provided in author information (style, referencing, authorship)



Choosing a publisher/journal

- Does the publisher offer the best match of audience and topic?
- International, national, local interest
- Circulation
- Marketing
- Are other authors satisfied?



Choosing a publisher/journal


- Review process - refereed (single or double blind), opened or editor decision
- Turn-around time: Effect on tenure decision/grant
 - Rejection rate of journal – be realistic
 - Select one by reality testing and chances, your need)
- Prestige of journal/publisher
- Advance: Don't expect 6-figures if you aren't a known author
 - Few books are best sellers unless they are textbooks
- Honorarium, royalties, credits, copyrights , etc., are negotiable; find out what is reasonable by consulting with colleagues (agents? lawyers?)
- Set a realistic date for submission (book contract)



Beginning the writing process

- Authorship – if multi-authored, decide order at the beginning (relationships have ended because of unresolved disagreements)
 - Include all who have had significant input in the work
 - First paper/book
 - Authority and name recognition of colleague may help get it published



 GB Shaw – “You don’t expect me to know what to say about a play when I don’t know who the author is, do you? If it’s a good author, it’s a good play, naturally”





The Writing Process

- Write a preliminary outline – get feedback and suggestions from those who know the field and/or those who write
- Detailed outline
 - Insert references even if incomplete
 - Encourage, obtain and follow critiques, suggestions
- Production system
 - Label and date multiple drafts
 - Have collaborators edit drafts
- Develop a working title: it is not final



The Writing Process






Special issues

-  Confidentiality and informed consent – esp., for clinical cases
-  Acknowledge others who contributed significantly even if not co-authors






The Writing Process

References

-  Relevant articles – titles often misleading – detailed search necessary; consider older literature (often not on Internet)
-  Databases – not all relevant journals are on the Internet
-  Ascertain accuracy (some journals require copies of original paper or chapter for quotes)
-  Primary vs. secondary sources – what is journal, publisher policy?
-  Meticulous recording and transcribing








Pitfalls

-  Forgetting where an item came from
-  Quoting inexactly
-  Forgetting to cite



The Writing Process

Pitfalls and humbling experiences

-  Attempt to cover too much
-  Inability to stop revising
-  Inability to focus – seeing too much complexity
-  Lack of organization
-  Idea not so original
-  Difficulty editing or taking suggestions
-  Poor writing style



Writing the book/article

- Abstract – succinct description

- Introduction – sets the stage

- Purpose: Context - Where does the idea/data fit?
- What will it add? How does it differ from other work?
- Why is it a next step? What issues/questions are being addressed?
- Review of relevant literature

- First chapter of a book and introduction of a paper engage the reader

- It won't be read beyond this if it is boring



Writing the book/article

- Methodology and results, if applicable
 - Setting
 - Sample
 - Time frame of study
 - Measures used and why
 - Data analysis
 - IRB approval
- For clinical – details of cases, observations







Writing the book/article

Results

-  Use of tables, etc

Discussion

-  Summarize findings
 -  What do they mean?
-  Critique method and findings; acknowledge weaknesses and limitations
-  Suggest practical applications (here or in conclusion)


Writing the book/article

Conclusion and/or summary

-  Point out gaps

-  Summarize major points, findings

-  Be consistent with purpose stated in introduction

 Don't necessarily write in this order. It is often better to begin with results and/or methodology. Many authors write the abstract, introduction and/or discussion last

Title

- Final suggested title – clear, concise, informative
 - Title is important to attract readers
 - Some publishers choose the final title
- Catchy and “cute” titles are amusing and easily remembered, but:
 - They are generally not informative
 - They are difficult to code for search, present retrieval problems



Submission

- ❏ Proof carefully
 - ❏ ZERO typos, missing words, bad grammar
- ❏ Cover letter – clear, succinct, describe purpose, date for completion (book)
- ❏ Length – don't send a 25 page paper if 10 is the limit
- ❏ Don't send
 - ❏ a descriptive paper to a journal that only publishes “hard data”
 - ❏ a paper that is not in the style of the journal (giveaway that the journal was your 2nd choice)



Review process

Receipt of manuscript by publisher/editor

- Requirements met, suitability determined
- Peer reviewers selected: conflict of interest ascertained

Reviewer selection

- Expertise in the field
- Interest, willingness to meet deadline
- Reviewer (referee) given guidelines, questions, ratings



Review process

- Reviewers submit reviews to editor
- Reviews vary enormously in detail and depth
- Editors/editorial boards make the final decision



Rejections

- Rejections from an excellent journal/publisher may give helpful suggestions and feedback
 - May delay publication



Revision request

- Acceptance without a request for revision is rare – an opportunity to learn and improve
 - The journal/publisher will not promise but is interested
 - Do revisions promptly
 - Revision suggestions can be contradictory or unrealistic
 - Describe what you have or haven't done and explain
 - You can appeal and ask for re-review if you suspect bias



Why God never received tenure at any university

- ❖ He had only one major publication
 - ❖ Had no references
 - ❖ Not published in a refereed journal
 - ❖ Authorship is questionable
- ❖ He never obtained permission to use human subjects
- ❖ Experts cannot replicate his results
- ❖ When one experiment went awry, he tried to destroy the evidence by drowning the subjects
- ❖ He may have created the world, but what has he done since?



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