



## Preface

All of us in biomedicine understand the urgency of getting experimental results into print as quickly as possible. Yet this critical step in the cascade from research conception to publication receives almost no attention in our formal training. It is as if we have been put to sea without a compass. Our collective failure to achieve widespread literacy in our own language – Biomedical Language – seriously impedes the important process of disseminating new biomedical knowledge and thereby improving the human condition. It is also a significant personal concern for researchers and clinicians in the highly competitive, publish-or-perish environment of contemporary academia. Of course, if we are clever or lucky enough to come up with that Nobel Prize-winning discovery, great science will carry the day and we are likely to get published even if our writing is fairly horrid. But most of us who publish are “bread-and-butter” scientists. We compete for space in journals which may only accept 10% or 20% of the submissions that they receive each year. For us, convincing, engaging writing will make the difference between being published or rejected, or at least it will make the difference between being published on first submission or having to go through a number of revisions (or journals).

None of this is to propose that good writing can make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. Scientific content is the *sine qua non* of biomedical writing. But content by itself is not enough. Style makes the difference with editors, reviewers, and readers who in their professional lives (like we in ours) have to run as fast as they can just to avoid falling behind. It makes sense that editors and reviewers are more likely to accept manuscripts which fire their interest, and readers, of course, have no use for manuscripts which they can’t decipher.

First and foremost, this book is intended as a practical guide to writing good, publishable biomedical manuscripts. We will, however, also learn how to recognize and even evaluate quality in writing, and thereby become more informed consumers of the literature. Over the years, biomedical journals have published numerous articles on writing. By and large, they contain unhelpful advice which amounts to “write better” or “write like me”. This guide to writing is different. Although the author is a neuroscientist, the text is based largely on the literature of comparative linguistics: studies of scientific discourse and quantitative analyses of large collections of published papers.

This book is not about biomedical writing as the author wishes it were, but rather it is about the writing patterns of successful authors, those who have published and whom we can emulate. This simple guide was written for my colleagues and friends: native English speakers (whatever variety of English they speak), as well as for the many friends for whom – as with the majority of biomedical writers – English is a second language.

Writing a Biomedical Research Paper

A Guide to Structure and Style

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