

Writing for publication

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About Me

- General Practitioner
- Co-editor, *Asia Pacific Family Medicine* journal
- Consultant medical editor, *Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care*
- Former medical editor, *Australian Family Physician*
- P/T Senior lecturer - department of general practice, Monash University
- Member of COPE and member of WAME

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Useful websites

- <http://www.wame.org>
- <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk>
- <http://www.icmje.org/>
- <http://mulford.nco.edu/instr/>
- <http://apimj.com>

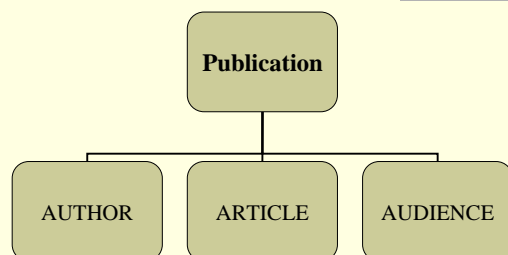
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Key Objectives

- To expand writing skills
- To build on critical reading skills
- To improve understanding of the publication process
- To overcome barriers and build enthusiasm for writing

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Achieving our objectives



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Workshop Format

- Each component will be considered in turn, starting with the Author, moving to the Audience and finishing with the Article
- Process is interactive with some didactic teaching
- Includes practicing writing techniques, editing exercises and reviewing
- Session will finish with the development of a 'letter to the editor'

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The author

Personal motivation

Enjoyment

Personal growth

The need to share

Fame and fortune

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The author

Professional Motivation

Academic advancement

Contribute to the knowledge of the discipline

Build and develop the professional skill base

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Common Barriers to writing

- I don't have time
- I have nothing important to say
- I can't write
- I am not interested
- It is too hard

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Tips for reducing barriers

- The 'nibble technique'
- Keep an ideas book handy
- Keep pieces of writing in a scrap book

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"If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will each still have an one apple.

But, if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas"

George Bernard Shaw

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Exercise 1

Visualize an object, a place or an experience that has meaning for you. Describe this entity in such a way that your feelings about it are conveyed to the reader. Try not to explicitly state how you feel. Consider the value of the senses in your description: sight, taste, smell, touch.

Remember –where, what, when, why and how

word limit : 50 words

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Exercise 1

The salty breeze barely disturbs the calmness of the cove. It is a popular bathing spot but people only add to the lightness and beauty of it. Its rugged physical presence provides a balm for a tired soul

Word count - 38

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What makes good writing?

- The topic is important to you
- You feel strongly about the topic
- You have a clearly defined premise
- There is only one message per article
- The message matches the format

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Good writing - preparation

- The 'so what' test (Edward Huth)
- Preparing for difficulties - how committed are you to getting it finished?
- Is this a solo or a group piece
- What do you know about the topic?
- What do you need to know?
- What resources do you have?
- What resources do you need?

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Who is an author?

An author is a person who makes a substantial contribution to:

- Conception and design or analysis and interpretation of data **and**
- Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content **and**
- Final approval of the version to be published

Criteria of the *International Committee of Medical Journal Editors*

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The audience

The 'who cares' test (Edward Huth)

If general

What is their comprehension level?
What do they know about the subject?

If medical

Are you writing for your peers?
Is your audience general or specialist?

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Targeting the right journal

- Every journal has a target readership - does it match **your** target readership
- Match the message to the medium
- Make sure your article has the right format

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Examples from the BMJ

- 7000 papers submitted per year
- 7% overall are accepted eventually
- "the killer question"
- if this study is "true" would it be a POEM ie will it make a difference for patients or policy making
- 'Editors make initial decision on 20-50% of articles based on the abstract alone'
- One of the signs that paper is unsuitable
- incomprehensible first two paragraphs

Dr Graham Easton, Assistant editor, BMJ, Japan 2005

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More tips from the BMJ

1. "the question is more important than the result"
- read the users guide to the medical literature and make sure your study design follows it
2. Questionnaire surveys
- "we probably don't want", especially if the response rate is below 55%"
3. Prevalence studies and cost of illness studies -
"we definitely don't want"

Dr Graham Easton, Assistant editor BMJ Wonca Kyoto, Japan

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What do editors want?

- "excitement/wow"
- "Importance"
- "originality"
- "relevance to the audience"

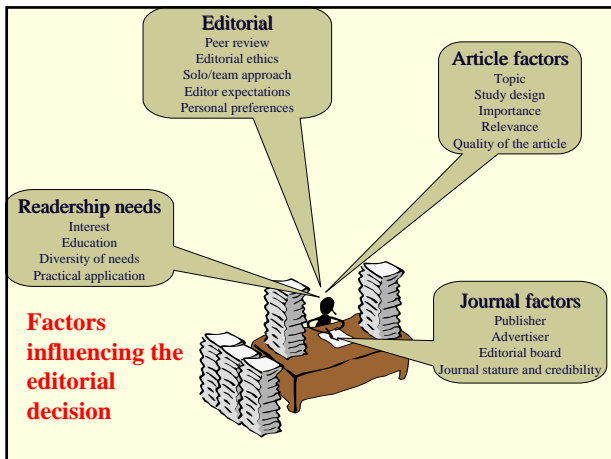
Dr Graham Easton, Assistant editor, BMJ presentation Kyoto, Japan, May 2005

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Dealing with editors

- The editor is the reader's advocate
- The editor wants to build the reputation of the journal
- An editor has multiple responsibilities
- An editor's life is governed by deadlines

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Submitting your article

- Submit to one journal at a time
- Have a checklist
- Provide full contact details
 - have all authors signed the coversheet?
 - is a corresponding author nominated?
- Look for an acknowledgement card within 2 weeks of submission

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Article attributes

- Clarity
- Brevity
- Simplicity

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“Then you should say what you mean”, the March hare went on.

“I do,” Alice hastily replied. “At least - at least I mean what I say - that’s the same thing you know.”

“Not the same thing a bit!” said the Hatter. “Why you might as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same as ‘I eat what I see!’”

“You might just as well say,” added the March hare “that ‘I like what I get’ is the same as ‘I get what I like!’”

“you might just as well say” added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, “that ‘I breathe when I sleep’ is the same thing as ‘I sleep when I breathe!’”

‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’ Louis Carroll

Exercise 2

“To put it bluntly, the medical profession and its suzerain health system can no longer plan and operate as an amorphous farrago of services in splendid isolation from society’s imprimatur”

(AMA Gazette 1978)

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Exercise 2

- Suzerain = feudal overlord
- Amorphous = vague, ill organized
- Farrago = medley or hotch potch
- Imprimatur = official approval

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Exercise 2

“ to put it bluntly, the medical profession and its *feudal* health system can no longer plan and operate as an *ill organized hotch potch* of services in splendid isolation from society’s *approval*”

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Exercise 3

- What is the message?
- Is it ‘true’ on the information provided?
- Is it interesting?
- Who would be interested in it?
- Is this important to publish
 - if so, why
 - if not, why not?

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The CBE* approach to peer review

- Adopt a positive, impartial attitude
- Assume the role of the author’s ally
- Your aim should be to promote effective and accurate scientific communication
- Protect the manuscript from exploitation
- Action it as quickly as possible
- Communicate any likely delays to the editor

*CBE- Council of Biology Editors

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Finding your voice

- Grammar is not everything - but without it you risk obscurity
- Find the right word to convey your meaning
- Focus on correctness and consistency of language
- *Don’t* be afraid of flair and individuality - but *do* read the guidelines to authors

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Tips for better writing

- Try to create visual images with words
- “structure is everything” (Easton)
- Organize your ideas to lead the reader through your argument
- In a sentence move from the ‘known’ to the ‘unknown’
- Mix up sentence length
- Keep one idea per paragraph

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Examples of visual images

“a person afflicted with a chronic disorder is often engaged in a prolonged struggle to adapt to his or her environment.”

(Ian McWhirney)

What techniques make this interesting?

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Tips for delivering the message

- Use strong verbs rather than adding adverbs
- Avoid using intensifiers
- Strong words are robbed of their impact by intensifying them
- Look for redundancy of expression and delete

Eg : instead of 'look into deeply' try 'delve' or 'probe'

Eg : for 'extremely thirsty' use 'parched'; 'awfully hot' could become 'scorched'

Eg : really exhausted; truly exceptional

Eg : more equal; most unique

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Exercise 4

- Avoid the possibility of
- Another way this can be expressed is by saying that
- All results presented in this study
- Provides a detailed account of
- Due to the fact that
- Avoid
- In other words
- All our results
- Describes
- Because

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More Tips

- Avoid cliches
- Active versus passive voice
- Use similes, metaphors and analogies to add interest and aid clarity
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations wherever possible

■ "like the plague"

■ "the patient passed a specimen"

■ Similes use 'like' or 'as'; metaphors state that item A is item B

■ "the patient with SOBOE had an ECHO which showed she had PPH , not an AMI"

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Exercise 5 – Editing your Work

This observer believes that, the most common criticism made presently by older practioners are that young graduates have been taught a great deal of information about the mechanism of disease but little relative to the practice of medicine - or to put it in a more blunt fashion, they are too "scientific" and not know how to take appropriate care of patients'.

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Exercise 5 – Editing your Work

This observer believes that, *wordiness, inappropriate punctuation* the most common criticism made presently *misuse* by older practioners *misspelling* are *misuse* that young graduates have been taught a great deal of information *wordiness* about the mechanism of disease but little relative to the practice of medicine - or to put it in a more blunt fashion *wordiness* , they are too "scientific" and not *misuse* know how to take appropriate *wordiness* care of patients' *misuse, inappropriate punctuation*

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Exercise 5 – Editing your Work

The most common criticism made at present by older practitioners is that young graduates have been taught a great deal about the mechanism of disease but little about the practice of medicine – or, to put it more bluntly, they are too 'scientific' and do not know how to take care of patients.

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Figures and Tables

- If you show, don't tell
- Figures and tables are to aid reader understanding of your data
- Be selective

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Tables – common mistakes

- Always label
- Use footnotes to explain symbols, units of measure etc
- Place each table on a separate sheet
- Label sequentially
- Quote table number in text

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Maximizing impact from tables

- Edit tables as meticulously as you do text
- Make sure all the columns add up
- In simple frequency tables provide 'n'
- Check author guidelines for table format

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Common mistakes with figures

- Are the x and y axes labeled correctly?
- Is the scale correct?
- Have you provided a key (or legend) to explain the main features?
- Have you chosen the right graphic? (algorithms, photographs, diagrams etc)

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Putting it together

- **Introduction**
Tell them what you are going to say
- **The Body**
Tell them
- **The conclusion**
Tell them what you said

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The Introduction

- “ a bad beginning makes a bad ending”
(Euripides)
- The reason for the article should be expressed clearly and briefly in the introduction
- Remember the ‘when,what,where, why and how’
- Consider a ‘hook’ to gain readers attention
- Make the reader want to read on

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The body

- Avoid the squid technique (Doug Savile)
“ *the author is doubtful about his facts or reasoning and retreats behind a protective cloud of ink.*”
- The argument should progress in logical sequence
- One argument/idea per paragraph

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The conclusion

- Comes at the end!!!
- Summarize the arguments presented in *this* article - no new material
- Must be consistent with the introduction
- Keep it brief and make sure it delivers your message

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Thoughts to finish on

- If you want to write well, read good writing
- Revise and proof read your work
- Read it out loud for sense
- Remember: Clarity, Brevity, Simplicity
- Get the basics right!

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Thoughts to finish on

Mrs Beeton's recipe for jugged hare:

“first catch one hare”

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