

## How We Develop Writing Skills

Professional writing requires a range of skills, most of which can be learned with practice. Basic writing is the fundamental ability needed to convey content through print. Other monographs in this series share added skills you will need to write for publication. Hopefully, you have learned much or some of this in your academic program. Even then, it can be daunting to move from academic writing directed to faculty graders to publication writing directed to a broader readership. But here are some ways to learn and become more comfortable in writing. Starting with reading and writing!

**Reading:** As a clinician, you have probably read endless journal articles, opinion pieces, book chapters, etc. To hone writing skills, you should now read objectively for the writer's content and style. I suggest reading aloud to force yourself to take a piece word-for-word, as well as to consider the overall flow and connections. You are looking for good authors cobble together sentences, paragraphs, etc. How they stress the important pieces of their work. How they provide necessary evidence. How they identify remaining questions or unknowns. What styles are most common in various sources—which do you find compelling and clear. . .and what weaknesses and/or omissions do you recognize? What types of articles do you enjoy reading and learning from? Make notes along the way or highlight the good and the not-so-good.

**Writing:** Beyond ongoing reading, the essential task is to practice writing! A LOT. All types of writing help. For instance, you can contribute to newsletters, policies, patient instructions –these are all writing opportunities we can identify and volunteer for. Ultimately, you'll need to practice with manuscript type content, publication-style effort. That is where you may find the effort increasingly daunting. Not only are you held to conveying information in a logical manner, but now you will encounter specific word-count and reference limitations, heading styles, etc. These requirements make it important to consider our goal and content range to meet a given journal's style. Writing is no different than anything else you want to do well; iterative practice and effort is needed to move towards identified goals as you develop excellent writing skills.

**Reviewing:** Another way in which I believe prospective authors develop skills is through serving as a volunteer manuscript, chapter, or book reviewer. This is related to the earlier section on reading. Most professional journals have a critical need for reviewers in a range of topical areas. Your expertise is an asset you can offer as you continue to consider styles and methods authors use. Consult the home page for the journals you generally read for information for reviewers. At the time of this writing,

Lippincott offers a free basic tutorial for peer reviewers (<https://editingservices.lww.com/peer-reviewer-training-course/>). Another resource I will frequently mention in this series is Wiley's online Nurse Author & Editor Journal website (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17504910>), where you will find several relevant articles simply by searching for "reviewer". You can also contact the publisher of textbooks relevant to your practice and to offer your expertise and ask to be considered as a reviewer. Finally, do not minimize the learning opportunity of offering to review a peer's manuscript to provide feedback.

**Team Writing:** Once you are ready to begin writing, consider teaming up with more experienced author(s) in the area in which you are interested. A team consists of two or more writers with shared or complementary expertise and knowledge. Each member has access to the others' skills and the added external accountability associated with teamwork. Team structures vary. A later post will address important considerations when working with one or more co-authors.

**Accountability Groups:** Finally, another opportunity could be organizing or joining a writing accountability group. Unlike writing teams, members in these groups do not co-write a manuscript. Instead, they provide external accountability and peer support. A writing accountability group includes a few individuals who are working individually on their own manuscripts. They meet weekly or bi-weekly to share challenges and progress, provide and receive feedback and support, and encourage each other to stay on track. To learn more, simply enter "writing accountability group" in a search engine. If you do not know more than one other person working on planning and writing a manuscript, for a "writing accountability partnership" instead.

These broad ideas are intended to help you think about dipping your toe into the professional writing pool, even if you are not prepared to start a publishable manuscript. How to develop early skills on which to build. If you access monographs in order, the next one discusses the author and publisher partnership and how to identify a journal specific to your intended content. In a "live program", I touch on this before going deeper into the writing part, which is ultimately influenced by the publishing journal. But I hope you will go in any order you wish.

I hope this topic will continue to interest you. If you have questions about what was covered here, feel free to email me.