Foreword

Like most skills, scientific writing is something that is learned and continuously improved over the course of a career. To the academician, it is an essential skill without which success can never be attained. To the clinical practitioner, it can be an inherent gift to be called upon when an opportunity to contribute new knowledge presents itself. However, as the quality and complexity of basic and clinical research continue to evolve, the requirements for scientific writing have become more demanding. Journals have adopted standards for measuring quality and levels of evidence and now have a more consistent way of knowing when an article is worthy of communication to its readers. Authors, on the other hand, are challenged by increasingly rigid criteria for organizing their data and drawing meaningful conclusions.

The title of this book states its purpose. It is meant to be a guide. More importantly, it is meant to be a practical guide, one that can be used as a tutorial as well as a reference. It begins with a chapter that is almost rhetorical in its title, “Why Should We Publish Papers?” The writer needs to think about the importance and purpose of what he or she is doing. Will the published article advance knowledge? Will it raise new questions that require further exploration? Will it change clinical practice? If it will do none of these, perhaps it shouldn’t be written. This opening chapter addresses the responsibility of authorship.

A good part of this book addresses the basic principles of scientific writing, presenting them in a structured and organized way. It provides lots of tips, “do’s and don’ts,” and identifies the essential elements of scientific writing in a “what you need to know” manner. It provides direction on the use of statistics and when a statistician is needed. It distinguishes the role of the statistician from one who just “crunches numbers” to one who is part of the intellectual process of study design. Importantly, it provides clear direction on the role of the author and the qualifications for authorship. It addresses the question of ethics in scientific writing, not only in terms of communicating the truth but also in maintaining credibility over the course of a career.

The maturation process for a successful scientific writer can be long and arduous. Along the way, there are problems, pitfalls, missteps, and failures. Picking oneself up, dusting oneself off, and moving forward after a paper or grant application has been rejected is something we must all learn to do. This book should make that experience a little easier. One of the really nice features of this book is that, in addition to the practical guide for writing a paper for publication, there is a section about the presentation of research findings, learning how to write an abstract, learning how to prepare a PowerPoint or poster presentation, and learning how to be consistent when presenting and publishing results. The importance of this latter skill can be greatly underestimated.

As a researcher, the greatest way to share knowledge with the scientific community and to establish oneself as a scientist is through publication in academic journals. Those who are fortunate enough are able to learn the process of academic writing through valuable mentorship and experience. However, there is no formal process for those who have not had the opportunity for such mentorship. Writing a research paper for publication is what we consider to be one of the most essential steps in the practice of clinical research. Consequently, this second book was developed to provide an easy-to-follow guide for surgeons wishing to contribute to the scientific community, but lacking adequate guidance and familiarity to successfully do so.

Although the process of publication is often daunting and time consuming, the benefits of publishing your work often far outweigh the costs. This unique book has been written by surgical experts and is designed to provide a roadmap for the challenging, yet rewarding process of academic publication and presentation in surgery. It includes excellent tips on the principles of writing and provides a detailed description of the requirements for preparing an academic manuscript to a peer review journal. A thorough overview of the review process as well as guidelines for interacting with journal editors will provide you with the required skills and confidence to see your manuscript through the review process. This book concludes with advice on the proper presentation of research findings, including both podium presentations and poster presentations at academic meetings. We are confident that this text will smoothly guide you to successful publication and presentation of your academic research.

Nothing is more gratifying than seeing your work published. It is the closure of a loop that involves substantial effort, commitment, and dogged attentiveness to detail. In the final analysis, communicating what you know with enough evidence to justify a treatment, intervention or the making of a diagnosis is a contribution of enormous impact. This book provides the vision to help achieve that goal.

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Evidence-based medicine requires the application of best evidence to optimize patient care. Critical to the advancement of the core principles of evidence-based medicine is the timely publication of important studies to guide patient care. Without wide dissemination of research findings, important advances in patient care may not be realized and potentially beneficial therapies under-utilized.

As a clinical researcher, publication of research is critical for several reasons including knowledge transfer, academic advancement, development of new collaborations, and impact on patient care. Publishing research increases the awareness of an investigator’s findings, prevents publication bias, increases the quality and credibility of the paper, and prevents the use of preliminary data from abstracts. The critical last step to the translation of a well-constructed and executed clinical study is the writing of the final manuscript for publication. Unfortunately, the majority of research fails to get published—often for one of two reasons: 1) authors not submitting their manuscripts for publication and 2) rejection of manuscripts from peer-reviewed journals.

To optimize the translation of evidence into practice, the results of clinical research studies needs to be efficiently and effectively disseminated to health care practitioners. Realizing the challenges to writing a paper for publication, we have carefully presented a practical guide to Getting Your Research Published. We focus on surgeons given the historical challenges of publishing research in the surgical subspecialty. This textbook is the culmination of years of experience among experienced authors in both conducting research and disseminating research results. The first section of the book stresses the importance of disseminating research results and discusses many of the challenges faced when reporting the results of surgical trials. The second section of the book provides practical steps for writing a manuscript, determining authorship, and submitting a manuscript to an academic journal for publication. We also describe journal requirements and the peer review process. The final section of the book focuses on presenting research findings at specialty meetings. All aspects of the book center around the core theme of Getting Your Research Published and provide critical context to publishing, responding to journals, and presenting findings of your research to a broader audience at meetings.

Throughout the text we have maintained a standardized approach that includes a number of innovate strategies to make the book easy to read and interpret. Jargon Simplified sections provide simple definitions of terminology that may not be familiar to the reader and Key Concepts sections highlight the most important issues described in each chapter. The Reality Check boxes highlight real life examples of the concept being discussed, which provides a practical context to the chapters. Our text provides the key principles for disseminating research results, preparing manuscripts for publication, and presenting research findings, and is unique in its approach of “practical advice for working clinical researchers.”

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Preface
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