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Have nothing to disclose with regard to commercial interests.
Scholarly Writing Seminar Series: Case Reports

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Scientific Writing: Outline

• Review the importance of writing
• Describe the nature and scope of a writing seminar
• Discuss the outcomes derived from writing seminars
• Propose strategies for the future
The Importance of Writing

• Disseminates valuable information
• Allows for mastery of a subject
• Provides a wealth of opportunities
  – referrals, research grants, lectures, and travel
• Facilitates further mentoring
Writing Seminars at MGH: Our Goals

• To encourage participants to write
  – and to submit articles to peer-reviewed journals

• To enhance skills
  – reviewing, editing, and writing

• To gain an understanding of the process
  – collaboration, peer-review, and well planned efforts
    • e.g., the agricultural model
Writing Seminar: Topics Covered

- Resistance
- Preparation and organization
- Finding the right audience
- Writing style, language, and grammar
- Peer-review
- Determination of authorship
- Editorial support
History of Writing Seminars

• Departmental seminar started (1978) by Tom & Ellie Hackett
  – Ted Stern & Ellie Hackett (1988) continued the mission
  – > 200 residents, fellows, and junior staff joined
  – hundreds of works published; graduates have published thousands

• Hospital-wide seminar (started 1997)
  – Three to four sessions; overview provided; brief report written together
Writing Seminar: Types of Work Reviewed

- Case reports
- Clinical studies
- Literature reviews
- Grant applications
- Book reviews
Writing Seminar: Our Method

• Each participant submits works in progress
• Works are critiqued by all
  – re: audience, style, content, and the science
• General and specific writing strategies and pointers provided
• “Information for authors” pages discussed
Information for Authors Pages

- Manuscript criteria
  - original articles, special articles, regular articles, case reports, and letters to the editors
- Cover letter
  - copyright, authorship and responsibility, disclosure of commercial interests, patient anonymity, and informed consent
- Manuscript preparation
  - titles, style of writing, informed consent, abstract, tables, figures, and references
General Strategies for Writing

• Find a subject that interests you and read about it
• Critically review the literature
  – authors, year, sample size, population, methodological problems, and implications
• Establish your audience
  – consider collaboration
• Create an outline
Organization of an Article

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Bibliography
Abstract

• Make it substantive, structured, and brief
  – background
    • tell what was known and why you did the study
  – objective
    • tell what you hoped to learn or find
  – methods
    • tell how the study was done
  – results
    • tell what you found
  – conclusions
    • describe the implications for practice
Introduction

• Tell what you set out to do and why
• Provide the prevalence and severity of the problem
• Briefly discuss prior research
  – highlight conflicting viewpoints
• State the purpose and hypothesis
Methods

• Tell how you did the study
• Describe the design
• Tell how subjects were recruited
• Provide characteristics of the sample
• Provide inclusion and exclusion criteria
• Describe the study setting
Results

• Design
• Sample (subjects)
• Procedure (treatment)
• Variables and instruments
• Data collection
• Treatment of data
• Data analysis (statistical analysis)
Discussion

- Place the findings in the context of previous work
- Tell if you agree/disagree with previously published research & theories
- Discuss the limitations of the study
- Provide clinical implications of the study
Conclusion

- Summarize your results
- Clarify the significance of your results
Bibliography

• Provide relevant (and current) references
• Use the appropriate reference format for your submission
Literature Review: Outline

- Introduce the topic
- Provide relevant history
- Critically review the literature
- Discuss the differential diagnosis
- Review the pathophysiology
- Discuss the significance of the findings
- Review the treatment alternatives
- Summarize the key points
- Provide a conclusion
- Provide references
Case Reports

• Determine if more than one case is required
• Be cognizant of word restrictions (600-1800)
• Attempt to have an on-off-on trial
• Employ a workable structure
  – Introduction: 1/2 page
  – Case: 1-2 pages
  – Discussion: 2-3 pages
  – References: 10-15
Book Reviews

- Who is it for?
- What are its limitations?
- Did you like it?
- What are its strong points?
- What does it cover?
- What does it omit?
- Is it multi-authored?

- Do you recommend it?
- What does each chapter cover?
- What is the writing style like?
- Is it comprehensive?
- Is it current?

Are you sure you want to write a negative review?
Peer-Review

- A process to determine:
  - originality, validity, and significance
- Usually involves 2-4 “experts”
  - members of an editorial board
  - authors of articles on the subject in the journal to which you are submitting an article
  - co-workers of experts
Questions for Peer-Reviewers

• Is the hypothesis clearly stated?
• Is the methodology sound?
• Are the results clearly presented?
• Are the conclusions valid?
• Are the findings new?
• Is the bibliography relevant and current?
• Is the article appropriate for the journal?
• Is a statistical consultant necessary?
• Do you recommend revision and/or publication?
Response to Request for Revision

• Respond to comments of reviewers in detail
• Make necessary changes
• Write detailed cover letter
  – tell what changes were made
  – tell where changes were made
  – tell why some changes were not made
  – send copy with “tracking changes” highlighted
• Don’t be petty
Order of Authorship

• Decide who is, and who is nor, an author
  – requirements include:
    • participation in the work and the writing
    • assumption of public responsibility for the conclusions
    • willingness to submit the data on which the study is based

• Honorary authorship is intellectually dishonest
  – being a laboratory or departmental sponsor and (last) author are not mutually exclusive
Order of Authorship

• The first author is that person who contributed most to the work
  – an author is a person who writes
  – the sequence of author listing is determined by the relative contributions to the work
    • e.g., involving creation of the idea, performance of the study, analysis of the data, and writing of the first draft

• Decisions about authorship should be made as early as possible
  – disagreements should be resolved by the principals
General Writing Suggestions

- Construct an outline
- Omit needless words
- Whenever possible, use the active voice
- Try to use interesting language
- Write in a natural way
- Listen to the rhythm of your sentences
- Avoid qualifiers
- Remember grammatical rules
- Pay attention to the way your paper looks
- Revise and rewrite
Specific Writing Suggestions

• Spell out #s < 10
  – e.g., nine
• Use #s for items > 10
  – 12 not twelve, unless it starts a sentence
• Use % symbol with #s, and percents with numbers
  – e.g., nine percent; 12%

• Punctuation goes inside quotation marks
• Don’t justify right margin
• Double space throughout
• Use proper citation style for journal
  – e.g., Stern\(^2\); Hackett (3)
• Use appropriate units of measurement
  – e.g., mm Hg, mEq/L
Additional Writing Suggestions

• Edit carefully
• Avoid repetition
• Use a spell checker
• Use tables sparingly
  – don’t use tables for simple lists
  – don’t repeat content from the text in tables
• Spell out words the first time, then abbreviate
Samples of Substituted Phrases


- a considerable amount of
  - many, much
- a great number of times
  - often
- a majority of
  - most
- a small number of
  - a few
- along the likes of
  - like
- are of the same opinion
  - agree
- at this point in time
  - now
- based on the fact that
  - because
- in the event that
  - if
- in the not too distant future
  - soon
Conclusions… to be verified

• Editing provides mentorship
• Writing skills can be learned
  – writing gets easier
• Writing facilitates other opportunities