Scientific Writing. Easy when you know how


This book is a handy summary of how to go about writing an article for a scientific journal. Most seasoned scientific writers would be familiar with the issues that are discussed but the book is aimed at novice writers and it is nice to have all the advice and suggestions condensed in one volume.

The book starts with a chapter that encourages researchers to write by discussing the rewards for being a good writer. Good time management skills are discussed to ensure writers devote sufficient time to the writing and polishing of their papers - a novel approach for would-be writers.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the nitty gritty of writing by advocating the IMRAD structure (introduction, method, results, and discussion.) But they contain much more than how the paper should be planned. They deal with tricky issues such as the politics surrounding authorship of research teams and how they could be listed. A credit point system for deciding authorship is suggested in one of the highlighted/boxed examples. Data analysis, interpretation of results, the golden rules for reporting numbers, tables and graphics and ethical approval are among some of the other aspects discussed which are central to writing a paper. Chapter 4 deals with finishing the paper dealing with such aspects as the title page, references, citations and peer reviews - all illustrated with highlighted examples, and boxed key messages. Each chapter ends with extensive references to websites, journals and books. I doubt though that novice writers would delve into many, if any, of the copious references. They would rather, I think, distill the information from the book and start writing.

After reading those three chapters carefully, the writer should then turn to the back of the book to pick up tips about writing style, grammar, word choice and punctuation. Although nearly 100 pages dealing with these aspects of writing might be a bit too much to read in one go.

There are three chapters in the middle of the book that cover review and editorial processes, publishing and other types of documents. Not as essential to know about if you are just starting to write your first draft, but useful to guide you once you have completed your research paper.

The book ends as it began with some encouraging suggestions to keep the writer writing. The authors suggest a mentor or forming a writer’s group, and they give some practical suggestions on how to avoid writer’s block. All in all, the book is a handy reference source for novice scientific writers.

A D Marais

Walter Fleming Scott

Walter Fleming Scott died aged 83 some days after a tragic car accident returning from a Game Reserve in Gauteng. His injuries were devastating and survival would have left him severely crippled. The medical profession - and his patients - will be the poorer for his loss.

Wally exuded life. He was a delightful companion who first became my close friend in the 1940s when we were medical students in Johannesburg. He and I, with Gerry McNeill and Peter Moore made a foursome in the wards, wandering after hours in search of problem cases. Our arguments together helped us all to clear the examination hurdles and made us better doctors.

In clinical training, as in his sixty years of practice, Wally was at his best facing an unsolved problem. Because of his tenacity, knowledge and wisdom, he served his patients, and his friends, with warmth and distinction. He continued practising as a physician and as an assistant at the Cardiac Clinic until his death.

In 1947, my second year at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, I had become familiar with the joys of punting on the Cherwell, the banks of which are lined with trees and shrubs. My wife and I took Wally punting when he stayed with us after he had passed the Membership examinations of the Royal College of Physicians. The river was running strongly, making punting hazardous. At one stage when we had stopped under overhanging foliage, Wally wanted to try his hand, despite his
John Werendly van der Riet is op 17 November 2002 in die ouderdom van 87 jaar in Bloemfontein oorlede, waar hy sy hele leven aan die mediese fakulteit aan Bloemfontein toegeken is.

John was a genuine leader—one who led by example and who headed judgements, but also by his fairness and honesty, his kind conviction and his unselfish friendship. He was a true aristocrat and Christian gentleman of astonishing depth. W van der Riet. Dr J W van der Riet.

In conclusion dear members of the family and friends, we humbly thank the good Lord for such a caring family man, a loving father and grandfather, and last but not least, for such an exemplary guide and inspiring friend.‘

Namens die Takraad Tak Vrystaat
S V Potgieter, Ere-sekretaris