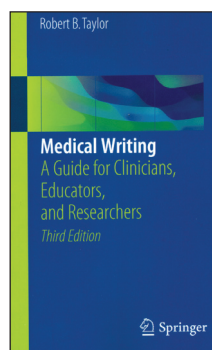


Medical Writing: A Guide for Clinicians, Educators and Researchers. Robert B. Taylor. Springer, Singapore, 2018. Third edition. 420 pp, price not mentioned. ISBN: 978-3-319-70125-7.



Writing up a paper after completion of a research study can be a daunting task. There is, of course, only one way to learn it, and that is by actually writing and making errors and learning from them. However, how does one begin? Robert B. Taylor offers his distilled wisdom of 40 years in this book, now into its third edition.

Taylor enumerates the reasons we write and correctly puts pursuit of intellectual stimulation at the top and monetary profit

at the bottom (as many of us do know). He also comments on why we don't write and offers some solutions for this problem.

The advice is most practical and deals with the entire gamut of issues, right from how to begin the writing process to how to submit the article and what to do subsequently. For instance, Taylor warns us (on page 329) to 'never attempt to compose online' while uploading a paper to a journal site. You could get timed out and lose whatever you have composed (which I can confirm, from first-hand experience!). We are informed, on page 119, about the existence of the website <https://99designs.com/blog/resources/public-domain-image-resources>, which offers high-quality illustrations that can be used without any fee, as they are in the public domain. He even points out common errors such as 'the data shows...' and tells us that the phrase is incorrect because data is a plural word; 'The data show...' is the correct phrase (page 67).

Humour exudes through most pages of the book and he states, for instance, that all journals refer to themselves as 'the Journal' (with a capital J). Further, no paper is ever rejected—they do 'not meet the journal's needs' (page 334). While on the subject of humour, on page 203, Dr Taylor points out something that had not occurred to me—a potential danger of humorous and satirical papers, such as those in the Christmas issue of the *BMJ*, is that some people may miss the point and accept them as Gospel!

The references used range from those published over a hundred years ago, as well some from 2017. I note that journals such as *J Clin Diagn Res*, published from New Delhi are also included, besides the *N Engl J Med* and other acclaimed journals. The epigrams and quotations are most appropriate. Gems like 'a sour correspondent' instead of 'as our correspondent' (page 347, a reference to an article in *The Lancet* from a century ago, quoted in *JAMA* in 2001) is evidence of his in-depth research and documentation of such statements from various articles. In fact, Dr Taylor's wide reading of subjects beyond medicine is obvious.

The chapter dealing with ethical issues includes adequate information on predatory or pseudo journals, as well as on journal metrics and on journal hijacking.

I must include a comment on conflict of interest; I have authored the chapter on 'Letters, editorials and book reviews' in Sahni and Agrawal's book (published by this *Journal* and now co-published by Springer) and while, with my obvious bias, I think Taylor's book is well written and useful, the chapter on this topic in his book is superlative.

No book is perfect. There are often errors of omission and of commission, and reviewers love to point them out. I must admit, however, that I could find absolutely nothing wrong with this book. In fact, the only error was on the last cover page and is the penultimate word on the page. For some reason, Springer classifies this book as belonging to the subject of 'Family medicine and Geriatrics', rather than to Writing. I was also unable to find any blurb about the author or any information on how to contact him if a reader had any suggestions or comments. (Google, however, resolved this issue.)

'Doctor Taylor's rules for medical writers', with which he concludes the book, sum up the messages well.

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