Writing for Biomedical Publication

The goal of Writing for Biomedical Publication by David C. Morrison, Christopher J. Papasian, and Stephen W. Russell is to assist both novices and experts in improving the quality of manuscripts they submit for publication. This publication is divided into three sections: “Understanding the Biomedical Publishing Enterprise,” “Preparation of a Biomedical Manuscript for Publication,” and “Submission, Review, Revision and Publication,” and each section, in turn, is divided into several chapters. Unfortunately, the first section of the book provides little of substance to the reader. The information presented in the second and third sections may be helpful to students writing their first manuscript, but would be less useful for more experienced authors.

One must work through 53 pages of text to the start of the second section (Chapters 9 – 17) before getting to the meat of the book, that is, advice on how to write a manuscript. Here, the authors deliver generally useful pointers for writing a manuscript, including an overview chapter entitled “Conceptual Framework” followed by a chapter-by-chapter breakdown describing the key features of each section of a manuscript. The authors write this section from their particular point of view, presenting step-by-step instructions for writing a manuscript. For example, their advice is to write the abstract first—perhaps this is a useful exercise, but it is typically the last part of the manuscript I write. There also appears to be little recognition that writing a manuscript is an iterative process—I would argue that it does not matter where you start (I like writing Methods first) because one will edit, re-edit, and edit again as the manuscript develops.

Importantly, it is not until Chapter 14 that the authors highlight a key conceptual point of manuscript preparation. That is, when writing a manuscript, it is the responsibility of the individual presenting the work to make it accessible and understandable to those steeped in the knowledge of the field as well as to scientists new to the discipline (whether researchers-in-training or experts from another field). Understanding this concept is fundamental to what we do as scientists. Unfortunately, when this point is addressed, it is presented in the context of the manuscript writer’s need to “minimize the amount of intellectual effort required of readers.” The authors of this work state in the text that, “Since the level of interest of many readers will be, at best, modest, substantial effort should be made to ensure that the reader’s (relatively limited) attention span be maintained by clearly communicating the rationale for the initial experiment...” This sentence illustrates what I found to be an off-putting tone of some sections of this work.

The third section, encompassing chapters 18 – 23, deals specifically with the “Submission, Review, Revision and Publication” of manuscripts. I found these chapters to be the most concisely written and informative sections of this publication. The authors provide an accurate and well-rounded overview of the process required to take a manuscript from submission to publication, and I think most young students would find this section enlightening.

As noted earlier, weakest part of this publication is the first section, entitled “Understanding the Biomedical Publishing Enterprise.” Scattered throughout this section are a series of opinion statements from the authors, which quite frankly, appear to indicate that the authors hold the broad scientific establishment in low regard. I found the pontificating wearying at best, and unprofessional at worst. What I found most frustrating was the authors’ need to actually include the overly worn mental approaches to specifically study Candida albicans. These may be innovative and timely techniques, but they will almost certainly be replaced with other innovative and timely techniques in the near future nor are they applicable to non-albicans Candida. While the chapters in the first five sections have the gravitas and impact of a PBS Nova special, the chapters in Section VI are more like a reality TV show. I note that the original edition did not have a similar section, and this may represent the editors trying something new for this edition. However, the section does not work for me and seemed out of place. Second, the textbook begins with a short introductory chapter entitled “Candida: What Should Clinicians and Scientists Be Talking About?” Like Section VI, I found this introductory chapter out of place. Unlike Section VI, this is an important chapter that should be included, such as in Section V. The chapter outlines important questions that need to be addressed in the clinic, such as improved diagnostics and new prophylactic strategies. However, the textbook does not address these important questions in any dedicated way. As the first chapter, separate from any actual section, it raises critical translational research-oriented questions that are not addressed by a textbook focused on advances in basic biological research.

Overall Candida and Candidiasis is an excellent textbook and can be considered the gospel of yeast pathogenesis (with apologies to the dimorphic fungal and cryptococcal communities). The book hits on virtually every major issue associated with Candida biology and the diseases caused by Candida species. With the many advances made over the last decade, this textbook is a particularly timely update and a must have to any researcher studying Candida species or is generally interested in fungal pathogenesis.

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phrase “Publish or Perish” in its full pejorative sense, as if one must just slog ahead, sell out, and publish. We publish as scientists because it is our responsibility to do so—to paraphrase, if data are generated in a lab and no one hears, is it still data? In my opinion, sharing our findings with colleagues is a critical part of what we do as scientists, and I would have assumed these authors would agree on this point given the subject matter of this publication.

In summary, there are helpful nuggets scattered throughout the text, but the reader must work to find the useful material. And although I received a copy of the book to review, I will not share it with the folks in my lab.

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