

Guidance for Contributing

Guidance for Contributing to the Medical Writing Substack Blog

Last Updated: Oct 23, 2025

Goals of document: This document provides guidance for contributors to the volunteer-based medical writing Substack blog. It outlines the expected workflow and details guidelines for content and format. It also offers templates and examples for the two types of articles that will be written.

How Can This Contribution Help You?

Writing for the Med Writer's Notebook Substack is a great way to support the medical writing community. I encourage you to browse the [directory of published articles](#).

It's also an opportunity to build your professional portfolio and demonstrate key skills:

- **Organization:** Show your ability to structure content logically and clearly.
- **Research & Synthesis:** Summarize and interpret evidence or resources accurately for a target audience.
- **Audience Awareness:** Address real challenges and needs of early-career or transitioning medical writers.
- **Personal Insight:** Contribute authentic perspectives and strategies that go beyond AI-generated summaries.
- **Professional Presentation:** Use formatting, takeaways, and optional visuals to create polished, portfolio-ready submissions.

Guidelines

1. The only requirement is to follow the templates and include the provided headers for your article type. Do not skip or rename them.

2. If you select one of the topics I created, check [the topic list](#) to see whether it is under **Research/Evidence-Based Articles** or **How-To Articles**. Use the correct template for that category.
3. You are welcome to add images (a header image with sourcing attributions is appreciated) as you see fit, as long as you either embed them into the Google doc or provide direct links.
4. There is no suggested word count or limit. Write as much as needed to convey your points clearly. For the 4 articles I've written to date the word count has ranged from approximately 350 to 600 words.
5. You may use bullet points, numbered lists, or tables as appropriate.
6. Write for an audience of early-career or transitioning medical writers. Avoid jargon unless explained.
7. You have full freedom and responsibility for the quality of your content within this framework, including length and style.
8. You can copy and redistribute the content that you write wherever you want such as a LinkedIn article, or a document in your portfolio (link to the substack is not necessary).

A Few Notes

- The Substack blog will always remain free. Your contributions are for shared learning, not monetization.
- Publishing frequency depends on the volume of drafts received. We aim to post weekly when enough drafts are available, but timing may vary.

Directions and Workflow

1. **Sign Up for a Submission Date:** Pick an available weekly slot from the [Google sheet](#); deadlines are firm to help keep the workflow moving.
2. **Writers Select a Topic:** Choose from the provided topic list or propose your own idea using the same format.
 - a. If you choose one of my topics, check first that it is available in column E or in the topic doc. I am allowing up to 4 articles on each topic.

- b. If you make your own topic, which I highly encourage, you to use the same format I have used in column F. This should keep you guided to deliver a high-quality draft. You can add it to the column or email it to me.
3. **Editors Select an Article:** Once a writer has selected a date and topic, add your name in the Google sheet into the appropriate column.
4. **Writers Draft Their Article:** Use Google docs to write your article.
5. **Writer Submit for Editing:** Submit your article on the submission date you selected and share your Google Doc link with me and the editor who signed up for your article.
 - a. I will send the writer and editor two reminder emails: one 2 weeks before the article is due and one the day before it is due. Share your Google doc link in the response to the last reminder email.
6. **Editor Provide Revision Suggestions:** Editors have **1 week** to review the submission and provide suggested edits via Google Docs' commenting or suggesting mode and submit to me and the writer.
7. **Writers Revise if Needed:** Writers have **1 week** to review and incorporate whichever revisions from the editor they want and send the draft back to me only.
8. **Finalize:** I will notify the editor and writer when the article is published. If any intermediate deadlines are missed after I receive the first draft, the article goes straight to the publication queue; no further revision is allowed.

Advice: Research/Evidence Articles

- Each research/evidence article should include at least one peer-reviewed journal article. I have provided one or a few to get you started, but you are not required to use them.
- You can use additional sources or reference types to strengthen your points. The goal is to give weight to your recommendations and discussion.
- Do not worry if the references are not specifically about medical writing. The personal perspective section is where you explain how the evidence applies to medical writers and reflect on your own experience.

Template: Research/Evidence Article

The only requirement is to use the provided headers for your article type. Do not skip or rename them.

Title

[Do not use any punctuation in your title. I will be adding a label to make it easier for readers to distinguish posts when topics are repeated.]

Subtitle

Written By: Author

Edited By: Editor

Add a lede here. A lede is a brief opening (a few sentences) that explains the purpose and goal of the article. It should set the stage for the reader and highlight why the content matters.

Research/Evidence

summarize key findings from peer-reviewed sources and the implications for transitioning and early-career medical writers.

Personal Perspective

Offer your personal opinion on the summarized data and how it might affect you.

Key Takeaways

Three to five bullet points highlighting actionable insights and guidance.

Reference

You may use any professional format you wish (e.g., AMA, APA, Chicago). Add a hyperlink to direct to the article.

AI Disclaimer

Disclose If any AI was used specify the specific systems and describe how they were used.

Contributions of Blog Creator

[Whether or not I created the topic this would be noted here]

Nicole Bowens, PhD created this blog to bring together perspectives from medical writers at all experience levels, with the goal of supporting those who are aspiring or early in their careers.

She also maintains a Medical Writing Collaboration Directory. If you are offering projects, [apply via the link](#). Unfortunately, project seekers are not eligible at this time.

About the Contributing Author [this is optional]

You may add a short blurb introduction yourself if you would like.

Contributor Contact Info [This is optional]

Writer: name

 **Email:** email address

 **LinkedIn:** profile link URL

Editor: name

 **Email:** email address

 **LinkedIn:** profile link URL

Example: Research/Evidence Article

The Value of Medical Writing Workshops for Early-Career Professionals

Practical Insights and Evidence on How Workshops Can Shape Early-Career Medical Writers

Written By: Nicole Bowens, PhD

Edited By: Nicole Bowens, PhD

Medical writing workshops are widely used to help early-career researchers develop essential skills, but how effective are they really? This article examines the evidence from global studies, highlights the practical benefits and limitations of workshops, and shares personal insights for aspiring and transitioning medical writers.

Research/Evidence

Breaking into medical writing can be challenging, and early-career writers often struggle to gain practical experience quickly. Understanding how workshops contribute to skill development can help aspiring and early-career medical writers make informed choices about where to invest their time and energy.

Global Overview of Workshops

A recent systematic review examined the global impact of medical writing and publishing workshops. These workshops are conducted worldwide and vary widely in format, including lectures, group discussions, mentorship, hands-on exercises, and online sessions.

Assessment Methods

They are assessed through multiple methods, such as manuscript grading by instructors and faculty, structured rubrics, checklists, multiple-choice or free-form quizzes, weekly progress assessments, and participant self-evaluations. This variety highlights both the experimental nature of workshop teaching and the many ways participants can gain practical experience.

Evidence on Impact

Although participants generally report satisfaction with workshop content, feedback, and structure, the measured impact on knowledge and skills is limited and inconsistent. Meta-analyses of available data found only nonsignificant increases in knowledge, whether measured as mean changes or percent changes, although some individual participants did experience improvements.

Reported gains include writing and publishing knowledge, critical thinking, manuscript drafting, and adherence to academic writing standards. Workshops that incorporated hands-on exercises occasionally enabled participants to produce publishable manuscripts, demonstrating that targeted, applied experience can have meaningful outcomes.

Limitations and Considerations

The evidence is limited by inconsistent reporting, diverse assessment methods, small sample sizes, and very low certainty of evidence. No standardized tools exist to reliably measure the impact of these workshops, making it difficult to draw robust conclusions.

Despite these limitations, workshops remain a common and valued method for gaining experience, receiving mentorship, and building professional networks.

For early-career writers, they offer structured opportunities to develop practical skills and understand the publication process, even if measurable improvements in writing proficiency are not consistently observed.

In short, workshops are a practical stepping-stone for writers looking to accelerate their career development.

Personal Perspective

Although the research highlights general trends, the key takeaway for me is that workshops can be a useful tool, but their impact depends on how they are used.

I have personally found workshops to be an effective way to target specific skills that need improvement. When selecting a workshop, I balance how much I expect to learn with the cost, aiming to maximize the value I get from it. I also focus only on skills that truly need development.

This approach requires self-reflection and the discipline to avoid signing up for courses out of curiosity, especially if they are likely to cover material I already know. By being intentional in this way, I have been able to strengthen my grammar, writing, and editing skills.

I highly encourage fellow aspiring and early-career medical writers to take a similar approach.

Key Takeaways

- Workshops may develop medical writing skills, though measurable improvement is limited.
- Guided exercises, mentorship, and structured feedback provide practical exposure to publication norms and processes.
- Workshops can build confidence in drafting scientific manuscript hits and applying hands-on skills.
- They offer opportunities to connect with peers and mentors, expanding professional networks.
- Even without strong measurable outcomes, workshops provide valuable experience, feedback, and guidance, helping early-career writers make informed professional development choices.

Reference

[Astaneh B, Abdullah R, Astaneh V, et al. Impact of Performing Medical Writing/Publishing Workshops: A Systematic Survey and Meta-Analysis. *J Med Educ Curric Dev*. 2024;11:23821205241269378.](#)

Disclaimer

ChatGPT and Perplexity AI were used to research, draft, and edit this article.

Contributions of Blog Creator

Nicole Bowens, PhD developed the topic and selected the references for this article. She created this blog to bring together perspectives from medical writers at all experience levels, with the goal of supporting those who are aspiring or early in their careers.

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About the Contributing Author

This article was written by Nicole Bowens, PhD, a medical education writer with expertise in oncology, neuroscience, and psychiatry. She has authored over a dozen CME digital activities within the past year. She also supports aspiring and early-career medical writers with resources hosted on her website as well as coaching services.

Contributor Contact Info

Writer: Nicole Bowens, PhD

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Advice: How To Articles

- There's no single right way to write these. Your perspective is what makes it valuable.
- Even small tips or reflections can be helpful to others; it doesn't need to be comprehensive.
- Sharing what didn't work can be just as useful as sharing what did.

Template: How To Article

The only requirement is to use the provided headers for your article type. Do not skip or rename them.

Title

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Subtitle

Written By: Author

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Add a lede here. A lede is a brief opening (a few sentences) that explains the purpose and goal of the article. It should set the stage for the reader and highlight why the content matters.

The Challenge

Explain a challenge or common scenario faced by transitioning and early-career medical writers.

Common Solutions

Summarize common strategies

My Approach

Share your own tips or lessons learned.

AI Disclaimer

Disclose If any AI was used specify the specific systems and describe how they were used.

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Editor: name

 **Email:** email address

 **LinkedIn:** profile link URL

Example: How To Article Example

How to Create an Effective Workflow to Stay on Time with Deadlines

Practical Strategies for Building a Workflow That Keeps Early-Career Medical Writers on Track

Written By: Nicole Bowens, PhD

Edited By: Nicole Bowens, PhD

Juggling multiple projects, tight deadlines, and high expectations is the reality for early-career medical writers. Creating an effective workflow can be the difference between stress and success. This article outlines practical strategies and approaches to help writers work efficiently, maintain quality, and build confidence across projects.

The Challenge

Medical writers often struggle with managing multiple assignments, meeting client expectations, and balancing research, drafting, and editing tasks. Without a clear workflow, these issues can cascade, affecting not just deadlines, but confidence, learning, and long-term career growth. Effective workflows are essential to prevent:

- **Underestimating project time:** This can lead to last-minute stress.
- **Getting sidetracked by background reading:** Tangential research slows progress on the main task.
- **Feeling overwhelmed by competing priorities:** This makes focus and momentum difficult to maintain.

Missing deadlines can increase stress, reduce credibility, and make it harder to take on future projects. Inconsistent workflows can also make it difficult to track progress, plan revisions, and maintain quality across sections of a document, creating a cycle of last-minute work and anxiety.

Common Solutions

To address these common obstacles, writers often rely on practical strategies and tools to organize their work and maintain quality. Common approaches include:

- **Use project management tools:** Tools like Trello, Asana, or Notion help track tasks, set milestones, and visualize timelines.
- **Break projects into sections:** Treat each as a mini-deadline to maintain momentum and steady progress.
- **Block dedicated periods:** Allocate focused time for research, drafting, and editing to minimize distractions and maintain focus.

- **Create templates and checklists:** Standardize recurring tasks such as formatting, citations, or section outlines to save time and reduce decision fatigue.
- **Set reminders and alarms:** Keep deadlines visible and maintain accountability.

While these strategies are widely recommended, they often fail if not consistently applied or integrated into a personalized workflow that matches the writer's style and project scope.

My Approach

While the common solutions are useful, the key is adapting them to your own strengths and skills. What works for one writer may not work for another. Knowing the strategies is just the first step; applying them consistently and adjusting as needed is what makes a workflow truly effective.

Here are a few methods I personally use that complement these common strategies:

- **Plan around cognitive flow:** Separate reading, outlining, drafting, revising, and fact-checking to stay mentally organized and avoid burnout.
- **Use sections as mini-deadlines:** Treat each section or subsection as a milestone to maintain momentum and measure progress.
- **Integrate evidence per section:** Collect, highlight, and cross-reference sources while drafting to reduce last-minute fact-checking.
- **Reflect on tentative decisions:** Keep notes on areas requiring judgment or future adjustments to support continuous improvement.
- **Leverage selective AI support:** Use AI to summarize or organize content only when it accelerates insight without replacing manual understanding.
- **Prioritize psychological awareness:** Recognize when perfectionism or self-doubt is slowing progress, and adjust workflow to keep moving.

By experimenting and adapting these strategies, you can build a workflow that works for your unique style and career goals.

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