Breaking Into Medical Writing: Professional Advice for New Medical Writers

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Conclusions

Based on a survey of experienced medical communications professionals, the success of new medical writers can be promoted by implementation of a well-orchestrated and comprehensive training curriculum covering a range of topics from soft skills (e.g., communicating in a cross-functional team) to technical skills (e.g., data management and scientific writing)

Poster #70

Overture (Background)

- As new medical writers enter the profession with diverse backgrounds from academic and/or industry settings, they may not be immediately familiar with best practices in medical communications
- A survey was conducted with the goal of collecting advice for new medical writers from experienced medical communications professionals (the "virtuosos")

Composition & Arrangement (Methods)

- A 15-question survey was developed by a multidisciplinary medical communications group including medical directors, account directors, and a managing editor
- Survey topics included team communication, content development, writing tools, and in-person activities
- Data on respondents' experiences in medical communications were collected
- Respondents were also asked to list common industry acronyms and to share resources and advice for new medical writers
- The survey was shared with medical communications professionals via email, InCight's LinkedIn page, and ISMPP Connect in accordance with the ISMPP survey policy

Members of the Orchestra (Survey Demographics)

Characteristics	Respondents (N=47)
Medical communications experience, n (%)	
≥10 years	25 (53.2)
5-9 years	12 (25.5)
3-4 years	8 (17.0)
1-2 years	0
<1 year	2 (4.3)
Current role, n (%)	
Medical/scientific writer	20 (42.6)
Medical/scientific director	15 (31.9)
Account/client services	7 (14.9)
Other[a]	5 (10.6)
Current employer, n (%)	
Medical communications agency	35 (74.5)
Pharmaceutical company	3 (6.4)
Freelance medical communications	3 (6.4)
Other[b]	6 (12.8)
Highest academic degree, n (%)	
PhD	27 (57.4)
Master's	9 (19.1)
Bachelor's	11 (23.4)
Location, n (%)	
US	29 (61.7)
UK	11 (23.4)
India	3 (6.4)
Other[c]	4 (8.5)

[a]Editorial, business development operations, meetings & events, visual communications, executive management (n=1 each).

[b]Contract research organization, n=3; biotechnology, n=2; integrated biopharmaceutical solutions organization, n=1.

[c]Australia, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand (n=1 each).

Results

The Medical Writer's Song

Important Skills and Tools for New Medical Writers

Harmonization (Team Communication); N=47



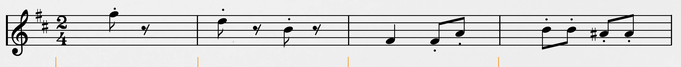
- Keeping tempo with deadlines and priorities (34%)
- Actively participating in internal and external status calls (30%)
- Taking notes during calls (23%)
- Using email distribution lists (13%)

Composing With Skill and Precision (Content Development); N=47*



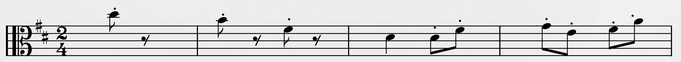
- Fine-tuned attention to detail (64%)
- Distilling a message from large datasets (62%)
- Annotating accurately to source data (40%)
- Project management/ meeting deadlines (38%)

Setting the Stage (Content Development); N=46



- Developing an outline (37%)
- Developing a first draft (30%)
- Transforming data into tables or figures (24%)
- Taking in author feedback (9%)

The Writer's Instruments; N=35†



- SharePoint – file sharing (40%)
- EndNote – reference management (26%)
- GraphPad Prism – data visualization (11%)
- Consistent file naming and version control (29%)

Playing to the Crowd (Advice for In-person Activities); N=23



- Prepare in advance (35%)
- Take meticulous notes (26%)
- "Ad board meetings are probably the most helpful activities for a new writer … real insight into how client strategy develops"

Composition Notes (Survey Questions)

Team Communication – "Please rank in order of importance (1 being the most important) these aspects of team communication for a new medical writer"

Content Development Skills – "What skills would you consider to be the top 3 for a new medical writer to successfully develop materials? (select 3)"

Content Development Stages – "Please rank in order of importance (1 being the most important) these aspects of content development (manuscripts, abstracts, posters, etc)"

The Writer's Instruments – "What tools and resources do you consider most useful for data management (e.g., data visualization, graphs, tables, figures, fact checking, maintaining data accuracy, reference management, navigating client documents such as clinical study reports, file-sharing software, document version control)?"

Advice for In-person Activities – "What strategies and resources do you consider most useful for in-person activities (e.g., congresses, advisory boards, pitch meetings)?"

*Sum of values >100% due to respondents selecting 3 choices
†Sum of values >100% due to multiple overlapping responses

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The Medical Writer's Playlist (Resources)

- Pharma industry news and resources: FirstWord Pharma, Fierce Pharma, NetworkPharma.tv
- Professional development organizations: ISMPP, AMWA
- Research databases: ClinicalTrials.gov; PubMed
- Publishing & writing resources: GPP 2022, ICMJE, EQUATOR Network
- AI tools: freely available or proprietary (be aware of client-specific and industry regulations)

Backstage Pass (Common Acronyms)

- ARS = audience response system
- CME = continuing medical education
- CMPP = Certified Medical Publication Professional
- CMS = Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- CSR = clinical study report
- DL = distribution list
- EOD = end of day
- EOW = end of week
- EOY = end of year
- FC = fact check
- GPP = Good Publication Practice
- HCP = healthcare professional/provider
- IND = investigational new drug
- KOL = key opinion leader
- KPI = key performance indicator
- MLR = medical, legal, regulatory (review)
- MSL = medical science liaison
- NB = new business
- NDA = new drug application
- P2P = peer-to-peer
- PLS = plain language summary
- PLSP = plain language summary of publication
- PRC = promotional review committee
- RFP = request for proposal
- RFQ = request for quotation
- SAP = statistical analysis plan
- SmPC = Summary of Product Characteristics (European Medicines Agency)
- SOW = scope of work
- SWOT = strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- TLF = tables, listings, figures
- USPI = US Prescribing Information
- VEO = value, evidence, and outcomes

Refer to the "ISMPP Commonly Used Acronyms" list for additional acronyms

Encore ("Key" Notes of Advice)

"To be a good writer, you have to be a good storyteller and understand what you are writing about … think through the intent of what you are writing and how you can best develop that story before you begin writing it"

"Consider feedback as a way to improve your draft and not as criticism of your work"

"Self-organization and soft skills are important. Ask questions, clarify confusions, overcommunicate, send regular drafts for feedback, be proactive"

"Get exposed to/support as many different project types as possible, even the challenging projects that you might not like; it's important to develop experience across as many deliverables as possible"

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