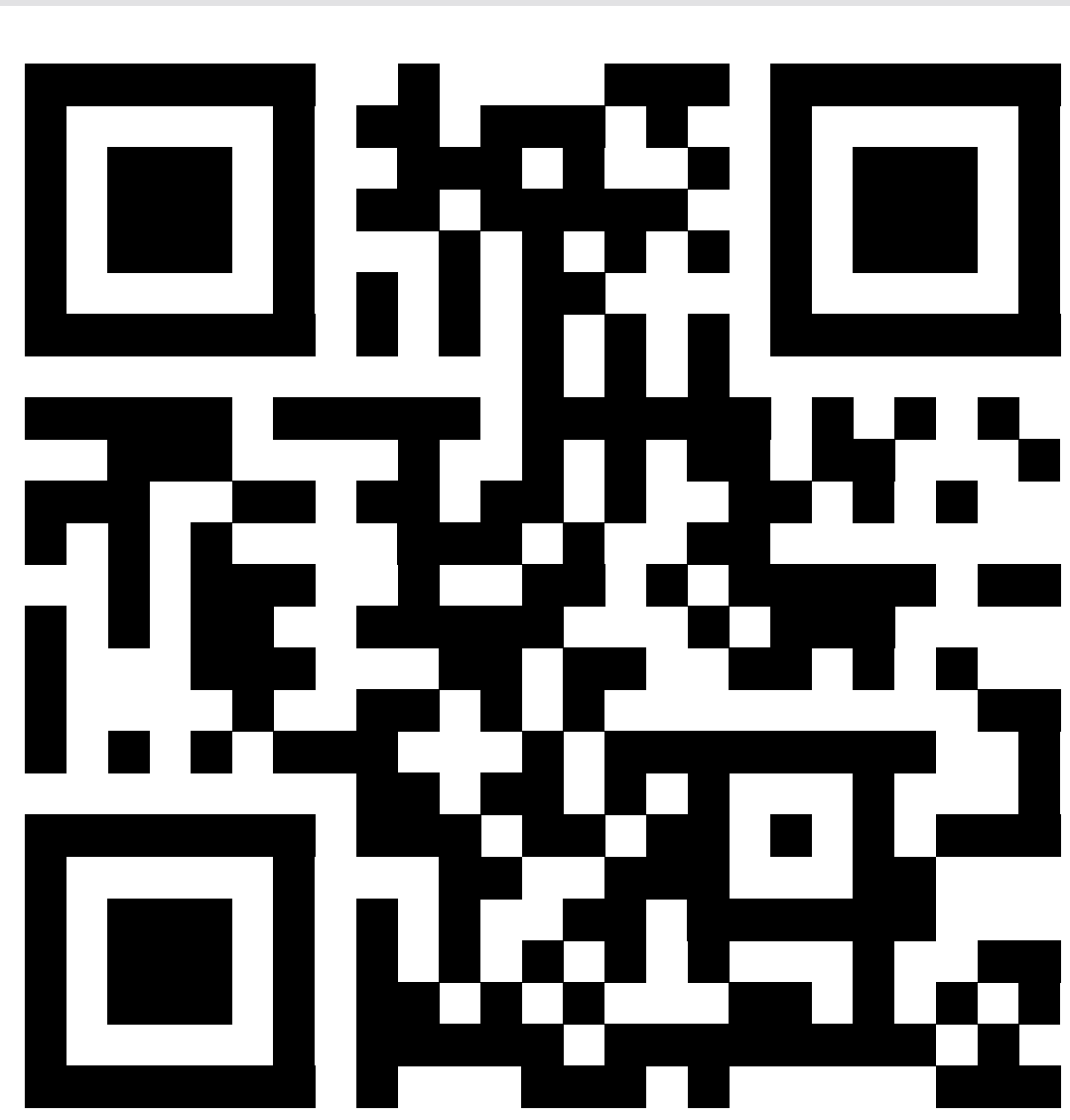


What Medical Writing Teams Really Think and Do!

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Access additional information and a plain language summary here



What we found matters to medical writing teams



Perceptions of the Writing Process

Definition:
How writers understand the work of manuscript preparation

- >> **“Taking ‘horrible’, complicated data and giving it a beginning, middle, end, and takeaways for clinicians”**
- >> **“Telling the story of the data”**
- >> **“Flow”** makes a **“compelling story”**



Conceptual Clarity

Definition:
Stakeholders’ levels of certainty throughout manuscript development

- >> Writing feels like **“aiming at a moving target”** when authors do not have a strong sense of purpose or implications for a manuscript
- >> **“Working with authors over multiple publications”** helps **“them and me communicate their interpretations and conclusions”**
- >> Authors aligning on a clear sense of purpose and audience expedites the writing process



Dexterity of the Writing Teams

Definition:
How medical writing teams (MWTs) adapt to challenges and new situations

- >> **“I’ve been primed [by my team] with the idea that the project is complex. That reduces anxiety when I’m writing”**
- >> Completing **“small tasks [like inputting references] as I wait for a meeting to start adds up in the long run”**
- >> Team cohesion creates a **“safe space”** and permits writers to **“ask silly questions”** throughout the preparation process



Source Material Uncertainties

Definition:
How writers perceive and work with primary and secondary materials

- >> Incomplete/inaccurate CSRs, complicated figures, and missing references create confusion and delay
- >> **“When I find an error I get concerned that the manuscript may mislead clinicians”**
- >> **“It takes longer to make the manuscript flow”** when working with multiple CSRs, data sources, and figures



Author Engagement Strategies

Definition:
How and when writers involve authors in the manuscript preparation process

- >> **“When [authors] see the draft, that’s usually when the authors actually come up with better ideas to make the manuscript flow, what kind of things to include or exclude”**
- >> **“I query authors in each section. It reminds them to read through the entire draft”**
- >> **“When authors read draft 1 carefully, there tend to be fewer major changes in draft 2”**



Tool Use

Definition:
How MWTs relate to their tools and adapt them to their tasks

- >> **“If a journal doesn’t provide a template, I’ll make one”**
- >> Multiple computer monitors dedicated to different content saves time switching between documents
- >> Editors use different document views to complete different editorial tasks, eg, during a final edit

What our research means

- >> **Medical writing is not just writing**
Customized training on topics like dealing with source materials, achieving conceptual clarity, and engaging authors effectively can address diverse challenges faced by MWTs
- >> **Editorial is not just editing either**
Recognize varied editorial practices, including adopting different personas during the editing process, and host roundtables to share approaches
- >> **Focusing on conceptual clarity**
Develop clear guidelines and strategies for engaging authors early and effectively in discussions around conceptual clarity and how it can help minimize delays and revisions
- >> **Anticipation mindset**
Encouraging MWTs to adopt proactive strategies for anticipating challenges, such as "writing ahead" or completing small tasks in anticipation of future steps, could reduce timelines
- >> **The importance of safe spaces**
Highlights the need for team-building activities and open communication channels within MWTs
- >> **Tool customization**
Investing in customized tools, templates, and training can streamline processes, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing errors
- >> **Technology as an enabler**
Stay informed and curious about new technological solutions to streamline manuscript preparation processes further
- >> **Balancing workload**
Effective workload management, considering the complexity of manuscripts and the expertise required, is crucial. Resources need to be allocated strategically
- >> **Investing in professional development**
Encouraging and funding continuous professional development for MWT members will help them to stay up-to-date with the latest industry trends and improve their skill sets

What we did

An observational field study:

**1 agency – Caudex**

**7 manuscripts**

**38 MWT members**

**12 months**

At each manuscript stage, including writing, editing, comment resolution, submissions, and team meeting tasks:

**Pre-work interview (~15 mins)**

**Work observation via screen sharing (~60 mins)**

**Post-work interview (~15 mins)**

Data gathered included observations, industry documents and company SOPs, which were thematically coded and triangulated across three organizational levels:

- >> **Agency.** Agency’s mission, and how it prepares the MWT to achieve it. How MWTs are tasked. Meeting and communication practices. Quality assurance practices.
- >> **Team.** MWT goals. Technologies used. Habits, challenges, and recoveries. SOP implementation.
- >> **Individual.** Daily tasks and communication. Drafting practices and technologies. Project comfort and enjoyment. Self-efficacy.

The study was company- and Syracuse University IRB-approved (#23-243). Participants provided full consent.

Qualitative data included:

**42 interview observations (72 hours total)**

**45 meeting observations (15 hours total)**

Observations showed MWT activities, perspectives, resources, habits, and practices important to maintaining standards and role satisfaction despite challenges such as expedited timelines.

These data yielded sets of concepts and overarching themes, as captured above.

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