

Foreword

Effective communication is essential in science, yet many scientists have little or no formal training in scientific writing. Unfortunately, the rigorous demands of the curricula for scientific studies leave little time or energy for specific training in communication skills.

Scientists from countries where English is usually confined to the language classroom face the additional challenge of writing in a language in which they rarely feel confident. Courses in English as a foreign language focus on the essentials for everyday communication. Advanced courses on English for academic purposes tend to focus on the arts, including only a few token texts about “Science” in its most general conception. So, scientists are left to struggle with the specifics of English in their own fields, gleaning what they can from the articles and books they need to read for their daily work.

However, the scientific literature abounds with poor writing, and it is sometimes difficult to find articles that could serve as models for clear

communication. Too many authors try to impress readers with flowery language using big words in long, convoluted sentences, obscuring their message and placing an unnecessary burden on the reader.

Fortunately, more and more writers are coming to realize that complex ideas can be expressed in plain simple language. Likewise, a broad consensus about the importance of good writing is developing among journal editors; many journals’ instructions remind authors of general precepts like clarity and concision, and some even provide more specific advice about style.

This book explains the principles of good writing in the biomedical sciences, showing us the paths to clear communication and pointing out pitfalls along the way. More importantly, it provides ample opportunities to assimilate these principles through controlled practice. “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (Aristotle, II.1103a33)

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Girona, March 2014*