

ON WRITING A CASE REPORT

Abdul Wase, MD

Communication is an essential part of medical education and training. Communications can be verbal-as with colleagues and patients, or it could be written as in recording history and physical examination or reporting findings of research. Scholarly activity by the Faculty and the Residents is a mandatory requirement by ACGME and the Residency Review Committee (RRC). Such scholarly activity is defined as:

- a) scholarship of **discovery**-peer reviewed funding or publication of original research
- b) scholarship of **dissemination**-publication of Review articles or book chapters
- c) scholarship of **application**-publication of case reports or presentation at professional meetings

For the 1st year Resident the task of publication can be particularly challenging. However, proper planning and setting of goals right at the beginning of the Residency can help in achieving the goal of publication or presentation. Right at the offset, the Resident needs to identify a mentor (a Faculty or Senior Resident) with whom he or she is comfortable with. First year resident should be on the lookout for an interesting case. Here are some tips for writing a case report.

When a single case is presented, it should be unique in its findings. While it may not be the first one of its kind, the patient's clinical presentation must add substantially to the literature. Identify, what makes the case so different from other cases. Talk to the specialist in the field about the feasibility of its publication. Once you have identified a case, now you have to do a literature search through a whole host of databases, preferably Pub Med (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?DB=pubmed) or Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>). Full length article can be accessed through WSU Library Web Page, by searching in the Free Electronic Journals. You need a WSU ID and Password to access it. Finally, you can contact your friendly local librarian to help you find the full length article.

Once all the information is gathered, the difficult task of organizing, and writing all the information comes next. Write an outline of the draft. Choose the Journal that will accept your case report. You need to look at the Instructions for Authors for each journal. A comprehensive list of instructions for authors is available at the following web site: <http://mulford.mco.edu/instr/>. Some Journals require a summary of the case followed by Key Words. If it is a full length article you have to follow the traditional format of Summary, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusions. All figures and table have to follow the format of that particular journal. Most journals accept online submission of the manuscript, making the process of submission easier. Figures should only be scanned and saved in the format required by the Journal. References have to be modified according to the format followed by that Journal. For more serious writers, one may want to use free Reference software, RefWorks provided at the WSU Library web site: <http://www.libraries.wright.edu/quicklinks/refworks/>. When used concurrently with the Write-N-Cite software, it can ease the pain of formatting the references. The Web site also has free online tutorials. A whole list of books is available to help improve medical writing. My favorite is a 200 page "Guidebook To Better Medical Writing

(Paperback)” by [Robert L. Iles](#), [Debra Volkland](#) published by Iles Pubn, average used Price \$17.00.

In medical writing, one has to be very precise and should use words to express exactly what it is intended for. Avoid using any jargons. Let each word express your thought. Begin with a topic sentence. Paragraphs should have anywhere between five to seven sentences. The sentences should be brief and to the point. The last sentence in a paragraph should sum the thoughts on that paragraph. Each paragraph should be able to stand alone to express the thought in its entirety. Every paragraph should show continuity from the previous paragraph. For more details on style refer to an excellent free source on Essentials of Style by Strunk and Williams- a classic in the field of English language. A free online version is available at:

<http://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk5.html>.

Once the Case Report is complete one should revise the document as many as two to three times to ensure that there are no errors in grammar, syntax or spelling. The editors usually reject the manuscript if there are many errors. Select the journal carefully: some journals don't even accept Case Reports. Have someone else look at the manuscript, one will be surprised at the mistakes that one made, can be discovered by someone else. Finally do not get discouraged by rejections. Most of the big authors have had their work rejected for which they were recognized later on. The process of online submission has made the task of submission process much easier. Just keep trying!