Tips for writing

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Pro’s and con’s of writing a review or article or blog (or tweet)

- Pro’s – it can structure your views, your opinions can reach a wider audience, you may have a good impact

- Con’s – need to make sense, you may be misunderstood, requires time and a few skills, it can be difficult
Approaches to writing

- Technical journals
- Non-technical news
- New media
- PRACTICE
Introduction: non-technical writing

- Define your reader.
- Community writing, especially about health, needs to focus on what you want to say.
- Target reading age: 12 years.
- Key points at the start and the end can help keep your focus.
Patient info

Aim to be:
• Clear
• Concise
• Accurate
• Relevant
• Up-to-date. Include a date.

Chose each word, sentence and paragraph to explain the information.

When more than one option is possible, explain the differences.
Patient info

Aim to:

• State clearly when something is not known.
• Facts can be more helpful than general statements.
• Quantify adjectives.
  • Instead of ‘some people’ or ‘most people’ specify a percentage or number.
  • Instead of ‘soon’ give this in hours/days/weeks/years etc.
• If referring to high or low, quantify this and include a reference range.
Non-technical language

• Assume no medical training.
• Assume low literacy.
• Assume English is a second language.
• It is more complicated to follow the meaning of a sentence, especially when the information is important, if the writer uses a style – possibly impressive and literate in other circumstances – that uses 30, 40, 50 or more words, with many qualifying ideas.

• Tabloid newspapers are written very carefully.
Words and sentences

• The simpler the better.

• Use words with 1-2 syllables rather than longer words.

• Use short sentences. Aim for 10-12 words. Short sentences make lively text.

• Rarely need dashes semi-colons and colons or exclamation marks! (– or ; or : or !)
Paragraphs

• Use short paragraphs.

• Ideally 1-3 sentences per paragraph.

• Each paragraph to make one clear point.

• Use short sentences.
Space

- Include space between paragraphs
  ... so a reader can breathe.

- Include a balance of space on every page.
Direct language

• Use the active rather than passive tense.

• If technical terms are important, explain them in non-technical language.

• Include a glossary.

• Personal stories can make the information much more real.
Layout

• Use larger heading and short subheadings to direct the reader.

• Use an introduction paragraph in a larger typeface or bold type.

• Text size should ideally be 12 point (12 pt).

• Leave space between lines with an additional half space between paragraphs.
Layout

• Leave space (no more than 75% text).
• Use graphs and tables.
• Use bullet lists.
• Include summary points for conclusions.
• Remember contrast
• Include pictures!
Thanks

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