

## Essentials of writing biomedical research papers, second edition

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The amount of new biomedical literature that the world gets bombarded with these days may sometimes seem overwhelming. Yet, research results need to be reported in peer-reviewed journals and researchers need to publish regularly. Journal publication, whether on paper or on-line, is here to stay. However, it is not just the formal end-point of a research project; it is an integral part of research that documents new information gleaned from an investigation, and in so doing inspires more research, in an endless search for truth. Peer review of manuscripts and grant proposals, journalology, meta-analysis, evidence-based medicine, and worldwide database access are elements of this search for the truth.

Unfortunately, as the author of *Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers* points out, many biomedical research papers lose the forest for the trees. The message of a paper gets lost or, even worse, misunderstood. So it is a shame that scientists and novice authors do not always receive the help and instruction needed to produce clear writing. This important skill takes time to nurture, and—like most skills—requires training and practice. Fortunately, through years of collecting examples and refining lecture material, Mimi Zeiger has compiled a hands-on workbook of journal snippets to help authors hone their biomedical writing skills. To be more precise, Zeiger presents what good style is by working through sentences and paragraphs, and showing the ‘before’ and ‘after’ versions, thereby teaching readers how to edit their own work. *Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers* is extremely detailed and analytical, and it contains many useful exercises. I recommend delving into particular sections and concentrating on

specific areas—for example, writing abstracts, choosing a title, presenting data—rather than to work through the book from start to end. This approach will especially help novice authors to start preparing a draft manuscript.

The first three chapters are actually most useful after a draft has been prepared. They contain hints for improving the sense and style of sentences and paragraphs, and increasing the coherence between them. Common problems such as noun strings, dangling modifiers, and parallel structures, as well as pet-hate words among editors, such as ‘with’, ‘for’, ‘occurred’, ‘as’, and ‘while’, are dealt with in these introductory chapters. The book ends usefully with a complete manuscript that can be edited according to the style points learned earlier.

*Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers* is suitable for authors and editors alike, and for medics as well as basic scientists (this second edition contains new examples and exercises on molecular biology). I hope that, as readers work through the book, they do not find too many traps into which articles of the *Hong Kong Medical Journal* have fallen! I also hope that, as an educational exercise, readers notice when points of good style under discussion are illustrated in the Journal. This task might be difficult: the test of good editing is that it seems invisible.

Dr T Lane  
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## Oncologic therapies

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Rather than simply being a comprehensive handbook for physicians who treat cancer patients, *Oncologic*

*Therapies* is a hybrid of a handbook and textbook of oncology. The editors aim to cover the principles and