

# The Write Stuff

*Boosting your writing  
into a higher orbit*



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## Reusing your own previously published material: When is it okay?

-- *Stephanie Deming*

The Office of Research Integrity's *Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism, and Other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing* notes that "ethical writing...entails an implicit contract between reader and writer whereby the reader assumes, **unless otherwise noted** [emphasis added], that the material was written by the individual/s listed as authors, and that it is **new** [emphasis added] and is accurate to the best of the author's abilities" (1). Thus, if an author includes material that is not new, that fact should be clear to readers.

In scientific writing, reuse of one's previously published material is acceptable in some circumstances but prohibited in others. Following are guidelines for reusing material in scientific articles and in book chapters and review articles.

## Scientific articles

**Entire articles.** Authors generally may not publish the same or substantially the same scientific article twice. This practice, known as “duplicate publication,” is forbidden because it distorts the literature in the field; wastes the time of journal editors, reviewers, and journal staff; may reduce the chance that another author will have his or her work published (because duplicate publication has used up some of the finite pool of scientific publishing resources); and may violate copyright rules.

There are two exceptions to the prohibition against duplicate publication: an important policy paper may be published simultaneously in multiple journals, and a report in one language may be simultaneously or subsequently published in a different language. In both of these exceptional cases, the duplicate papers must include explanatory notes.

It may be appropriate to publish articles that overlap with one another but are not identical. For example, perhaps an author previously published a case series on a rare disease, and now, several years later, the author wishes to publish an update including new cases. This would be fine if the author alerts the journal editor to the overlap and highlights the overlap in the paper—for example, by noting in the Methods section that “This analysis includes 21 patients originally described in our 2000 report (reference) as well as 24 new patients treated at our institution during 2000-2016.”

**Parts of articles.** Publishing two articles with the same Results section would constitute duplicate publication, except in the exceptional circumstances noted above. However, the Office of Research Integrity’s guidelines acknowledge that authors performing multiple studies in the same general area of research may “have to generate two or more papers describing truly independent studies that contain identical or very similar methodologies, background literature, and discussion elements” (2). In such cases, authors are expected to avoid reusing text in the Introduction and Discussion sections, rewriting it instead. However, most journals allow authors to reuse text in the Methods section because Methods sections must be detailed enough to allow replication of the experiment and changing the description of a complex procedure could change the intended meaning (2). When authors reuse descriptions of methods, they should provide a reference to where the methods were previously described. Furthermore, if the Methods section of a paper overlaps substantially with an earlier paper, it may be appropriate to note that fact in the cover letter.

## Book chapters and review articles

MD Anderson authors, because of their expertise, often receive multiple requests to write book chapters or review articles on a given topic. This can pose problems. Readers and the editors who commission book chapters or review articles generally expect the chapters or articles to be new. Also, as noted above, there could be a copyright issue, depending on who holds the copyright to the originally published text.

Authors can use several techniques to avoid inappropriate overlap between book chapters or review articles: i) Authors can decline to write essentially the same article twice. If asked to write on a topic previously written about, an author can negotiate to change the topic or the scope of the new chapter or article. ii) Authors can ask a colleague to co-author the chapter or article and start from scratch; another person’s input should result in a new perspective. iii) Authors can request permission from the original publisher to reprint the previous chapter or article or to “adapt” it (i.e., reuse substantial portions of the original but also add new material). For more

information about acceptable reuse of previously published material, see the related [Scientific Publications FAQ](#) document.

## References

1. Self-plagiarism. In Roig M. Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism, and other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing. <https://ori.hhs.gov/plagiarism-13>. Accessed December 22, 2016.
2. Text recycling from an author's previously disseminated work. In Roig M. Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism, and other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing. <https://ori.hhs.gov/plagiarism-16a>. Accessed December 22, 2016.

## Think. Check. Submit: Selecting a trusted journal for your manuscript

-- Don Norwood

After months of research that has produced results that the biomedical community would find interesting, you're finally ready to report your findings. An essential step in getting your work published is selecting the proper journal, but with so many publications to choose from, how do you know which ones are trustworthy? One way to determine that is to take three simple steps: *Think. Check. Submit.*

The [Think. Check. Submit.](#) website, developed by a large group of publishers and scholarly communication organizations, provides a checklist that you can use to determine the legitimacy and appropriateness of a journal. This is more important than ever because the amount of published research is increasing worldwide, as is the incidence of unscrupulous behavior among publishers. Also, new journals are appearing weekly, and obtaining timely advice about where to submit manuscripts can be difficult.

The first step in selecting a journal is to *Think* about the publishing challenges described above. In 2016, Charlie Rapple, Sales and Marketing Director of the research publishing-related website [Kudos](#), said that authors should ask themselves two questions in the *Think* step. 1) Are you submitting to a trusted journal? 2) Is it the best one for your work?

For the *Check* step, the website has a checklist for authors to consult when picking a journal.

- Do you or your colleagues know the journal?
- Can you easily identify and contact the publisher?
- Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses?
- Are articles indexed in services that you use?
- Is it clear what fees will be charged?
- Do you recognize the editorial board?
- Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative?

If your answer to most or all of these questions is yes, then you're ready for the third step: *Submit*. If you've checked the journal out, you'll be assured that it is recognized as trustworthy by your peers and that your publication in it will strengthen your reputation as a researcher and increase the likelihood of citation of your work. Furthermore, your article will be indexed, archived, and easily found. Finally, you can be confident that the journal staff will be professional in reviewing, editing, and publishing your work.

## NIH revises its grant appendix policy and font recommendations

-- Tammy Locke

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently announced a new policy that restricts the types of materials that can be included in NIH grant application appendixes. Minor changes to font recommendations were announced as well. Both changes affect applications due on or after January 25, 2017.

### New grant appendix policy

According to the new policy, only the following appendix materials are allowed.

#### **For applications proposing clinical trials (unless the funding opportunity announcement [FOA] provides other instructions for these materials):**

- Clinical trial protocols
- Investigator's brochure from an Investigational New Drug (IND) application, as appropriate for the goals of the research proposed in the application

#### **For all applications:**

- Blank informed consent/assent forms
- Blank surveys, questionnaires, and/or data collection instruments
- Other items only if they are specified in the FOA as allowable

Details of the new appendix policy are provided in NIH notice [NOT-OD-16-129](#), "New Policy Eliminates Most Appendix Material for NIH/AHRQ/NIOSH Applications Submitted for Due Dates On or After January 25, 2017," and in [NOT-OD-17-035](#) (a reminder for the new appendix policy, with minor updates to the policy wording).

**No other items are allowed in the Appendix. Simply relocating disallowed materials to other parts of the application will result in a noncompliant application (NOT-OD-11-080).**

**Consequences for submitting disallowed appendix materials:** According to NOT-OD-17-035, "Applications submitted for due dates on or after January 25, 2017, will be withdrawn as noncompliant if they are submitted with Appendix materials that are not specifically listed in NOT-OD-16-129 and this Notice, or specified in the individual FOA as allowed or required."

## Changes to font recommendations

Font changes were announced in notice [NOT-OD-17-030](#), "NIH & AHRQ Update Font Guidelines for Applications to Due Dates On or After January 25, 2017."

Previously, the text color for grant applications had to be black. Now there are no color restrictions, although "black or other high-contrast text colors are recommended since they print well and are legible to the largest audience."

Font size, type density, and line spacing requirements did not change.

Recommended fonts now include **Arial**, **Georgia**, **Helvetica**, and **Palatino Linotype** (previously recommended fonts included these four plus Garamond, Times New Roman, and Verdana). Other fonts are acceptable if they meet the requirements listed in NOT-OD-17-030.

The following reminders about grant fonts were included in this notice:

- Since some PDF converters may reduce font size, it is important to confirm that the final PDF document complies with the font requirements.
- Legibility is of paramount importance. Applications that include PDF attachments that do not conform to the font requirements may be withdrawn from consideration.

## Minimizing text on scientific posters

-- *Brandon C. Strubberg*

Scientific posters visually convey research to audiences. Often, audiences are passersby in large halls in which dozens, if not hundreds, of posters are vying for attention. A well-designed poster grabs the attention of its audience. Writing for scientific posters can be challenging for scientists, who are often more comfortable writing for scientific journals. It can be tempting to simply copy and paste whole paragraphs from manuscripts onto posters and call it done. However, the amount of text should be minimized on scientific posters to enhance the visual aesthetics and convey the poster's message effectively. Here are some tips on minimizing text on scientific posters.

### Purpose of text on a poster

Whereas text is the primary driver of a scientific article's story, the visuals are more prominent on a scientific poster. A good rule of thumb for scientific posters, mentioned in the [Autumn 2009](#) issue of *The Write Stuff* in the article "Build meeting posters with both visual and textual appeal," is the 30/90 rule. According to this rule, a scientific poster must grab an audience within 30 seconds and hold their attention for 90 seconds. It takes about 90 seconds to read one double-spaced page in 12-point type, hardly enough time for an entire research report. Therefore, text on a scientific poster must be fundamentally different from text in a scientific paper in that it must complement the graphics and summarize the study succinctly.

## Where to start

Scientific posters summarize research, encourage discussion with colleagues, and advertise the researcher's work. It is helpful to think of scientific posters as visual abstracts of scientific papers. With that in mind, start by using the paper's abstract as an outline. Pull a sentence or two from each section to use as starting points for the poster's sections and create descriptive drafts for each section. Then, highlight the key points from each section and cut unnecessary articles (a, an, the). From there, edit the text into simple phrases that clearly convey the main idea of the sentence or section.

## Actions to minimize text

Scientific posters should answer one specific question or perform a purpose stated clearly and concisely in the introduction. Make sure that each word of text on the poster is focused on the major takeaway that answers the hypothesis or purpose statement. The conclusion then should keep that focus by providing a short list of bullet points that summarize what the data mean. A recent [article about scientific posters](#) states that one pitfall of leaving too much text on the poster is that the most important section, the conclusion, ends up "on the floor"—in a lower corner of the poster. Conclusions should be displayed prominently for readability. Minimizing text will allow more room for the conclusion section to appear higher up on the poster in a more visible spot.

Long sentences are difficult to read, especially in the typically loud, busy rooms in which most poster presentations take place. Shorten long, passive sentences by writing simple, active sentences or using bullet points. Avoid acronyms and technical jargon in the poster's sentences.

*Example:*

*Original, passive sentence (29 words):*

An institutional database was searched to identify all patients who received a diagnosis of ABC between 2011 and 2014 and underwent treatment with SERMS for inclusion in this study.

*Revised, active sentence (19 words):*

We included patients with advanced breast cancer diagnosed between 2011 and 2014 and treated with selective estrogen receptor modulators.

*Revised, bullet point (16 words):*

- Included patients with advanced breast cancer treated with selective estrogen receptor modulators between 2011 and 2014.

## Consider institutional branding

Finally, remember to leave room for the required institutional branding elements on MD Anderson scientific posters. Creative Services (formerly the Department of Medical Graphics) has provided several poster templates for authors to use, available from [Brand Central](#). Creative Services and the Department of Scientific Publications are both available to help with scientific poster design and writing.

## Winter and spring schedule for the Research Medical Library webinar program

-- Jill Delsigne-Russell

MD Anderson's Research Medical Library offers webinars to enhance your research skills. You can participate in live webinars or access past webinars from the library's ["Classes & Webinars"](#) page.

### Recent and upcoming webinars:

#### **PubMed for Advanced Searches**

Presented November 16, 2016

This webinar, designed for advanced PubMed users, demonstrates how to answer clinical questions quickly with PubMed and how to construct an advanced search strategy for a comprehensive literature review. The webinar also covers how to create a custom PubMed page to find the most relevant literature quickly and how to access all of MD Anderson's full-text subscriptions.

#### **Finding Faculty Publications**

Presented December 7, 2016

Keeping up to date with current publications is challenging. This webinar demonstrates how to search for a specific author, set up author alerts, and access full-text articles. The webinar also discusses several online author profile platforms, including Scopus, Influent, and Google Citations.

#### **Keeping Up-to-Date with the Latest Research**

Presented January 12, 2017

The sheer volume of information available can make keeping up with the latest research a challenge. A range of tools is available that can help. In this brief session, a librarian discusses a series of databases, websites, and apps that you can use to keep up with the current literature in your area of interest. The webinar also covers setting up author and article alerts, news alerts, and table of contents alerts.

#### **Creating NIH Biosketches with SciENCv**

February 7, 2017, 11:00 am-11:30 am

Researchers can use SciENCv to create and maintain biosketches that are submitted with grant applications and annual reports. In this webinar, you will learn how to create and edit a profile in the SciENCv system and how to easily link a National Center for Biotechnology Information Bibliography.

#### **EndNote Basics in 30 Minutes**

March 1, 2017, 11:00 am-11:30 am

EndNote is a software tool that helps to store and manage your citations when writing a paper. This webinar explains how to add references to EndNote, organize references in groups, insert and delete citations in Word, and format references with EndNote.

## EndNote Advanced Tips

April 12, 2017, 11:00 am-11:30 am

This webinar will explore the advanced features of EndNote, including how to download full-text articles, share and combine EndNote Libraries, and edit a citation style.

To register for a webinar, please visit the library's [Class Calendar](#). Webinars are color-coded red. When you click on the link for the webinar, you will be directed to the registration screen.

## Unusual terms used in scientific writing and publishing: Predatory journals, misleading metrics, and other publishing hazards

-- Bryan Tutt

If you've never heard of "predatory journals," you may want to do some research before you submit a manuscript to a journal you're not familiar with. Predatory journals use the "gold" (or "author pays") open-access model, meaning the journal does not charge subscription fees and the authors pay the publishing costs. But unlike legitimate open-access journals, predatory journals use deceptive or even fraudulent tactics to make a profit. These tactics vary but often include charging exorbitant or hidden fees, skipping peer review, and claiming affiliation with a fake professional organization. Publishing an article in a predatory journal can damage a scientist's reputation, as these journals may publish plagiarized work or shoddy research.

"Predatory publishers" are companies or individuals that publish more than one predatory journal. Predatory publishers often send spam e-mails inviting researchers to publish in their journals or present at bogus conferences. To make their journals seem legitimate, predatory publishers use "misleading metrics" or fake measures of quality. The most common measure of a journal's influence is its impact factor assigned by [Journal Citation Reports](#) (which was recently sold to Clarivate Analytics by Thomson Reuters), but predatory journals often claim an impact factor or other value score assigned by one of several companies that will provide flattering metrics for a fee. (For more information about impact factors, see the [Summer 2015](#) issue of *The Write Stuff*.)

A "hijacked journal" is a counterfeit website made to look like the site of a real scholarly journal. Unsuspecting authors think they are submitting their paper to the real journal and pay a submission fee, but the journal never receives the paper.

Until recently, lists of suspected predatory journals, predatory publishers, misleading metrics companies, and hijacked journals were maintained by Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver. However, these lists were recently taken off-line for unknown reasons, as documented in [Retraction Watch](#) and [Times Higher Education](#).

It can be difficult to tell whether a journal you're unfamiliar with is predatory, but you can take steps to protect yourself. For example, you can see whether your target journal is indexed in [MEDLINE](#), which contains citations to journal articles from more than 5,600 journals indexed by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. These journals go through a rigorous vetting process and generally can be trusted; however, some legitimate journals, especially newer ones, might not be indexed in MEDLINE. You can also seek information about a journal from colleagues in your department, the Research Medical Library, or the Department of Scientific Publications.



## Upcoming events for authors

Please see the [Scientific Publications](#) website for more information on our educational courses.

**Writing Persuasive R01 Proposals.** This newly developed grant-writing workshop for clinical and basic science research faculty at MD Anderson focuses on the content, organization, and structure of an R01 grant application. Taught by senior editors in the Department of Scientific Publications, this 1-day workshop includes lecture, discussion, and guided grant outlining and development. Locations and times to be announced. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications. *Details: John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**February 7, 2017**

**June 20, 2017**

**November 9, 2017**

**Writing Scientific Articles (WSA): A Workshop for Faculty.** WSA is a structured, practical, in-depth writing-education program for clinical and basic science research faculty of MD Anderson taught by the Department of Scientific Publications. This 1-day, 8-contact-hour course provides an excellent opportunity to advance your skills in writing research articles with focus and clarity. Locations and times to be announced. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications. *Details: John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**February 9, 2017**

**September 21, 2017**

**Writing the Specific Aims Section of a Grant Application: Brown Bag Presentation.** In this 1-hour presentation, a Scientific Publications editor will talk about the National Institutes of Health's grant-review process and how it affects the grant proposal, present a brief overview of the structure of an R01 grant proposal, provide a model for writing the Specific Aims section, and offer some writing tips for the Specific Aims section. Location and time to be announced. *Details: John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**March 15, 2017**

**Writing and Publishing Scientific Articles (WAPSA).** WAPSA is a structured, practical, in-depth writing-education program for postdoctoral fellows and clinical trainees of MD Anderson taught by the Department of Scientific Publications. This 16-contact-hour course provides an excellent opportunity for advancing participants' skills in writing and publishing research articles while developing their in-progress manuscripts under the guidance of scientific editors.

Locations and times to be announced. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications. *Details: John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**April 11 & 18, 2017**

**September 12 & 19, 2017**

**November 7 & 14, 2017**

**Short Courses in Scientific English for Non-Native Speakers of English.** Courses last 7 weeks and meet twice a week for 1 or 1.5 hours each day. Classes are held early in the morning, during the lunch hour, or late in the afternoon. Classes are free of charge. Participants must speak English at the intermediate or higher level and be familiar with research and general biomedical terminology. Dates are subject to change. *Details: Mark Picus ([mapicus@mdanderson.org](mailto:mapicus@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-7251, or John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**Session 2 – March 20 through May 4, 2017**

**Pronunciation 1, Pronunciation 2, Conversation 1, Writing 1, Making Presentations**

**Friday Conversation Group.** The Friday Conversation Group provides an informal atmosphere for non-native speakers of English to practice their conversational abilities, learn more about American culture, and meet new friends. The class meets every Friday in the Mitchell Building (BSRB), room S3.8003, from 12:00 to 1:00 pm. No registration is required. *Details: Mark Picus ([mapicus@mdanderson.org](mailto:mapicus@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-7251, or John McCool ([jhmccool@mdanderson.org](mailto:jhmccool@mdanderson.org)), 713-792-3174.*

**Grant Writing Advice.** The Department of Scientific Publications now offers grant writing suggestions ([Writing R01 Grant Proposals](#)) in the [Writing Advice](#) section of our website. This information, stemming from the Grant Writers' Seminars and Workshops (developed by Drs. Stephen Russell and David Morrison and presented annually at MD Anderson) and from the NIH's SF424 (R&R) Application Guide, focuses on R01 grants but can be applied to other types of NIH grants as well.

**Writing the Specific Aims Section of a Grant Application.** In this video, Scientific Editor Sunita Patterson presents a summary of the National Institutes of Health's grant-review process and how it affects the grant proposal, an overview of the structure of an R01 grant proposal, and a model for writing the Specific Aims section. The [video](#) is available on the Scientific Publications website.

**Writing Abstracts Online Tutorial.** [Writing Abstracts](#), an interactive, Web-based tutorial, covers the most important aspects of writing good abstracts. The lesson includes many examples and an optional self-assessment.

**Improve Your Chances for IRG Funding.** This [PDF presentation](#) by Walter Pagel, the former Director of the Department of Scientific Publications, guides researchers through the process of applying for institutional research grants.

**Anatomy of a Research Article Video Presentation.** In this [video](#), Senior Scientific Editor Stephanie Deming presents advice on writing the parts of a research article: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, title, and abstract. The [slides](#) shown in the presentation and the [presentation handout](#) can be downloaded as well.

**Classes Presented by the Research Medical Library.** More classes will be posted on the [Research Medical Library](#) website once they have been finalized. Classes are located in the Research Medical Library classroom in the Pickens Academic Tower (FCT21.6008). *Details: Laurissa Gann ([lgann@mdanderson.org](mailto:lgann@mdanderson.org)), 713-794-1111.*

- February 2**, 10:00 am, EndNote Basics (Pickens, Floor 21)
- February 7**, 11:00 am, Online Class: Creating NIH Biosketches with SciENcv
- February 9**, 10:00 am, EndNote Advanced (Pickens, Floor 21)
- February 23**, 1:00 pm, Library Essentials for Administrative Assistants (Pickens, Floor 21)
- February 24**, 9:30 am, Literature Reviews: Searching for Evidence (Pickens, Floor 21)
- March 1**, 11:00 am, Online Class: EndNote Basics in 30 Minutes
- March 7**, 10:00 am, Library Essentials for Administrative Assistants (Pickens, Floor 21)
- April 4**, 2:00 pm, Library Essentials for Administrative Assistants (Pickens, Floor 21)
- April 7**, 2:00 pm, Systematic Reviews: Planning the Literature Search (Pickens, Floor 21)
- April 12**, 11:00 am, Online Class: EndNote Advanced Tips

All Research Medical Library classes require preregistration through the “Classes & Webinars” section of the [Library’s website](#). MD Anderson employees should register through the Education Center. For class descriptions and printable handouts or calendars, go to the Research Medical Library’s Library Classes page.

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