

The Write Stuff

*Boosting your writing
into a higher orbit*



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Celebrating 70 years of serving MD Anderson

In this issue...

- [– Celebrating 70 years of serving MD Anderson](#)
- [– Do grant reviewers read reference lists?](#)
- [– NIH encourages authors to publish NIH-funded research only in reputable journals](#)
- [– Preliminary data and R01 grants](#)
- [– Unusual terms used in scientific writing and publishing: First person](#)

Celebrating 70 years of serving MD Anderson

-- Ann Sutton

In 2018, Scientific Publications celebrates its 70th anniversary of serving researchers at MD Anderson.

When the department was founded in 1948, the staff's primary duty was to disseminate information on cancer detection and treatment to community physicians through publication of *The Cancer Bulletin* (which ceased production in 1995). Over time, our services have grown to include editing research articles and grant proposals, teaching classes to faculty and trainees on biomedical writing, and helping nonnative speakers improve their English skills.

Over the years, the editors in Scientific Publications have helped thousands of researchers at MD Anderson get their grant proposals funded and their research articles published. In fiscal year 2017, the department edited more than 33,000 pages of text, including grant proposals requesting more than \$140 million in funding. It also presented numerous workshops, lectures, and webinars and hosted writing retreats.

To celebrate its 70th anniversary, the department is presenting a series of lectures, listed below. The October 11 lecture will be followed by a reception with snacks, posters, and giveaways.

We are grateful to all of our clients and colleagues and look forward to serving the research community of MD Anderson for many more years to come.

For more information about our upcoming educational offerings, please see the [Scientific Publications](#) website or contact us at scipubseducation@mdanderson.org.

[Writing the Introduction Section of a Research Article](#)

August 7, 2018

[Significance and Innovation in R01 Proposals](#)

September 6, 2018

[Techniques for Polishing Your Paragraphs](#)

October 11, 2018

[What Are Grant Reviewers Really Thinking? An Inside Look at NIH Study Sections](#)

November 15, 2018

Do grant reviewers read reference lists?

-- *Amy Ninetto*

Staff at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently surveyed 1000 randomly selected grant reviewers who participated in the January 2018 round of reviews. According to [Dr. Mike Lauer](#), Deputy Director for Extramural Research at NIH, their goal was to find out whether reviewers look at reference lists in grant applications and, if so, how checking references affects their evaluations.

Reviewers were prompted to think about the last grant for which they served as the primary reviewer. They were asked whether they looked up any references that were included in the application or any that were not.

A total of 615 reviewers responded to the survey. Most of the reviewers (88%) reported that they had looked up references that were included in the application, and 65% had looked up references that were not in the application's reference list. When asked whether looking at the references had affected their understanding of the application, 89% of reviewers responded "yes" for references in the application, and 93% responded

“yes” for references not in the application. Most reviewers said that the references had improved their understanding.

About two-thirds of the reviewers who checked references reported that the references had affected their scoring of the application. Interestingly, when reviewers looked at references included in the application, their scores were likely to be higher, whereas when reviewers looked at references they sought out themselves, they were more likely to assign a lower score.

Several reviewers provided written comments to the survey team. One reviewer commented that “references are of immense value,” while another explained that “I look up references to judge the quality of the PI’s work in relation to the rest of the field, to learn about the field in general, and to delve into specific questions that might be key to evaluation of the application.”

The results of this survey indicate that reviewers look carefully at the reference lists in grant applications. Moreover, they read the referenced articles, look up information on their own, and evaluate applications in light of the published literature. These findings underscore how important it is to cite appropriate, informative, and reputable sources in grant applications.

NIH encourages authors to publish NIH-funded research only in reputable journals

– *Stephanie Deming*

In several previous issues of *The Write Stuff* ([Winter 2018](#), [Spring 2017](#), [Winter 2017](#)), we have discussed the problem of disreputable (also called “predatory”) open-access journals. Disreputable journals engage in practices such as hiding publication charges until after authors have submitted their manuscripts, claiming as editorial board members people who have not actually agreed to serve, and, most important, failing to provide peer review or providing only superficial peer review. Concerned that work published in disreputable journals may not be viewed as credible, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently issued a formal [statement](#) in which it encourages authors to publish reports of NIH-funded research only in reputable journals.

The NIH recommends that authors follow the [Think Check Submit checklist](#) and guidance from the [Federal Trade Commission](#) to identify and avoid disreputable journals. In a blog post published shortly after the NIH statement, Mike Lauer, NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research, offered what may be the best advice for avoiding disreputable journals: “Simply put, publish where you cite.” In other words, publish in journals that publish articles you consider good enough to cite in your own papers.

Recently, Scientific Publications offered additional guidance on avoiding disreputable journals in the webinar [“Choosing a Journal”](#) (advice starts at 12:52). For authors who would like assistance evaluating whether a particular journal follows best practices or may be disreputable, librarians in MD Anderson’s Research Medical Library are available to help. The librarians can be reached through the “Questions? Ask us!” link on the library’s [main web page](#).

Preliminary data and R01 grants

– Joe Munch

Among the Research Grants (“R” series grants) awarded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), [Research Project \(R01\) Grants](#) are by far the most common and prestigious. These grants support investigators undertaking “discrete, specified, circumscribed project[s]” in their specific area of interest. Considered the gold standard of research funding, R01 grants typically provide up to \$250,000 per year in direct costs for up to 5 years and can be competitively renewed. Thus, an R01 grant can serve as the backbone of one’s research funding for years to come.

If you plan to apply to the NIH for an R01 grant, you will need preliminary data. A competitive R01 grant proposal will have sufficient preliminary data to help establish a solid scientific premise for the proposed project and demonstrate the likelihood that the project will succeed under your guidance. If your preliminary data do not obviously meet these criteria—or if you have no preliminary data for the project you’re proposing or have preliminary data that support the pursuit of only certain aspects of the project—you may have to reconsider applying for an R01 grant. What you do next depends on many factors, including your career stage and the scope and timeframe of your envisioned project.

If you are a new investigator—i.e., one who has not yet received substantial research support from the NIH—and have a few promising preliminary data to support your project, you might carefully consider submitting a well-crafted R01 proposal anyway. Reviewers understand the limitations that accompany a fledgling research career, and so they expect fewer preliminary data from new investigators than they do from established investigators. In addition, when possible, new investigators’ proposals are reviewed alongside each other, rather than with those of established investigators. And because the NIH has a more generous payline for new investigators, your chances of being funded are slightly better than those of established investigators. In contrast, an established investigator with only a few promising preliminary data may find it difficult to assemble a competitive R01 proposal. (For more information about new investigator status and its benefits in applying for an R01 grant, visit <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/new-investigators>.)

If you are a new or established investigator with insufficient preliminary data for an R01 proposal, one option is to apply for funding through other NIH funding mechanisms that better match your project (or an easily re-tailored version of your project). For example, if you have a research idea that is new to your field but for which few or no preliminary data are available, you might consider applying for an [Exploratory/Developmental \(R21\) Grant](#). These grants, which provide up to \$275,000 over 2 years, are designed to fund projects that introduce novel materials and/or methods that could substantially advance biomedical research, including ideas, equipment, models, and technologies. These grants can also be used to carry out self-contained projects not appropriate for R01 funding.

If you have a promising but underdeveloped idea for a research project, you could apply for a [Small \(R03\) Grant](#). These grants provide up to \$100,000 over 2 years and are designed to fund small, short-term research projects, such as pilot or feasibility studies. They can also be used to fund other projects that can be executed relatively quickly, including small, self-contained research projects, secondary analyses of existing data, and the development of new research methodologies or technologies.

Although R03 and R21 grant proposals need not include preliminary data, reviewers tend to expect them, and funded grant proposals tend to have them.

Although you can apply for an R03 or R21 grant to support work that would generate preliminary data for an R01 grant, you should consider whether the budget and funding period covered by the R03 or R21 are sufficient to allow you to generate the preliminary data you require. Because both grants are limited to only 2 years and are not renewable, they may not provide enough time to complete a project that would yield sufficient data for a competitive R01 proposal. And even if an R03- or R21-funded project does yield sufficient data, it may take you longer than anticipated to successfully apply for an R01 grant, which would leave you without funding after the R03 or R21 grant period has ended. Thus, this approach may work better for established investigators looking to expand their funding repertoire than for new investigators seeking their first R01 award.

Other options for obtaining preliminary data for a competitive R01 proposal include using startup funds from the institution to complete the necessary studies (if you are a new faculty member), participating on a colleague's research project, and/or collaborating on a [Program Project Grant](#). Program Project Grants ("P" series grants) support large research efforts that often include multiple projects and diverse activities across an institution; such efforts sometimes have pilot or feasibility aspects that could generate preliminary data.

Yet another option for obtaining preliminary data for an R01 proposal is to apply for an [Institutional Research Grant](#) (IRG), which provides up to \$75,000 over 2 years. The express purpose of these grants is to enable grantees to generate preliminary data that would improve their competitiveness for extramural funding, including NIH funding.

For more information about NIH grant programs, go to https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/funding_program.htm.

For additional guidance on applying for an R01, R03, or R21 grant, visit <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/research-project-grants>.

Unusual terms used in scientific writing and publishing: First person

– Bryan Tutt

The *first person* is one of three forms a personal pronoun can have. The form of a personal pronoun indicates the relationship of the person(s) represented by the pronoun to the author(s) (1). The first person form (I, we; my, our) indicates the author or authors. The second person form (you; your) indicates the reader. And the third person form (she, he, they; her, his, their) indicates a person or persons who are neither the author nor reader.

Here are some examples:

Our (first person) study is the first of its kind.

We (first person) reviewed the records of 900 patients treated for invasive bladder cancer between 2010 and 2018.

To reduce your (second person) risk of heart disease, you (second person) should eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.

Although the patient initially responded to the treatment, he (third person) later experienced disease progression.

The first person was once frowned upon in scientific writing; for example, authors were once encouraged to write “the authors analyzed the data” or “the data were analyzed” instead of “we analyzed the data.” However, style guides published in recent decades recommend using the first person to describe your work because doing so makes your meaning more clear (2). In the Discussion section of a journal manuscript, for example, you may need to compare your findings with those of other researchers. Because “the authors” could also refer to the other researchers, using the first person when referring to your research helps avoid confusion.

References

1. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press; 2010:213.
2. Lang, TA. *How to Write, Publish, & Present in the Health Sciences*. Philadelphia, PA: ACP Press; 2010:37.

Upcoming events for authors

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

Scientific Publications’ 70th Anniversary Lecture Series. Since 1948, Scientific Publications has helped MD Anderson faculty and trainees get published and get funded by providing a wide range of editorial, educational, and publishing services, free of charge. This year marks our 70th anniversary, and we’re celebrating by offering a special series of lectures on research article writing, grant writing, and scientific communication.

[Writing the Introduction Section of a Research Article](#)

August 7, 2018

12–1 pm

Pickens Tower; FCT3, Rooms 1 & 8

In the first lecture of this series, Erica Goodoff, a scientific editor in Scientific Publications, will offer tips and strategies for writing the Introduction section of a research article.

Future events:

- [Significance and Innovation in R01 Proposals](#)

September 6, 2018; 12–1 pm, Pickens Tower, FCT3, Rooms 2 & 7

- [Techniques for Polishing Your Paragraphs](#)

October 11, 2018, 12–1 pm, Duncan Building, CPB8, Rooms 1–4

- **[What Are Grant Reviewers Really Thinking? An Inside Look at NIH Study Sections](#)**

November 15, 2018; 12–1 pm, Mays Clinic, ACB1.2345

Third Thursday Writing Retreat. The Department of Scientific Publications and the Research Medical Library are sponsoring afternoon writing retreats for faculty and trainees. These retreats, offered the third Thursday of every month from 12 to 4 pm in the Research Medical Library conference room (FCT21.6040), allow 4 hours of protected time for researchers to work on their grants and manuscripts. A scientific editor is present the entire time to answer questions, offer advice, and provide consultations on early drafts. (A separate room is available for lengthy consultations.) A librarian is also present to help with literature searches, reference formatting, EndNote issues, etc. *Details: John McCool (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.*

August 16, 2018

September 20, 2018

October 18, 2018

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 (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.

September 13 and 20, 2018

November 6 and 13, 2018

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. Registration is required through the Department of Scientific Publications and will run August 13 through September 13.

Details: Mark Picus (mapicus@mdanderson.org), 713-792-7251, or John McCool (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.

Session 5 – October 2 through November 16, 2018

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

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), 713-792-7251, or John McCool (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.

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 (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.

October 10, 2018

Writing Persuasive R01 Proposals. This 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 required through the Department of Scientific Publications. Details: John McCool (scipubseducation@mdanderson.org), 713-792-3174.

November 8, 2018

Scientific Publications Now Charging No-Show Fees. Scientific Publications' popular full-day courses—Writing and Publishing Scientific Articles, Writing Scientific Articles, and Writing Persuasive R01 Proposals—are available to MD Anderson faculty and trainees free of charge. For many courses, we have more applicants than spaces available; and sometimes those accepted do not show up for the courses. Therefore, to ensure that as many faculty and trainees as possible can participate in our courses, we implemented a new cancellation/no-show policy. Registrants are able to drop a course without penalty until a specified date and time (typically 2 work days before the course begins), but those who do not withdraw from the course by that deadline and who do not show up for the course will be charged \$95 to the chart string provided at the time of registration.

Webinars Presented by the Department of Scientific Publications. The Department of Scientific Publications continues to host a series of webinars on various topics. Dates and times, as well as links to upcoming webinars, will be posted as they become available on the [Department of Scientific Publications](#) website and in the department's "Educational Events" newsletter.

The following webinars have already been presented and recorded:

- **Writing Clinical Case Reports** (presented July 19, 2018)
In this webinar, Amy Ninetto, a scientific editor in Scientific Publications, discusses the essentials of writing an informative case report for publication. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Navigating the Peer Review Process** (presented May 23, 2018)
In this webinar, Erica Goodoff, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, talks to Dr. Shine Chang, a professor in the Department of Epidemiology and the director of the Cancer Prevention Research Training Program, about navigating the peer review process used by biomedical journals. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Choosing a Journal** (presented March 20, 2018)
In this webinar, Stephanie Deming, a senior scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, discusses strategies for selecting a journal and avoiding disreputable journals. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Creating Effective Graphs** (presented January 31, 2018)
In this webinar, Sunita Patterson, a senior scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, reviews the fundamentals of good graph design and data presentation. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Addressing ESL Issues in Scientific Writing** (presented November 9, 2017)
In this webinar, Mark Picus, PhD, training specialist, and Ann Sutton, scientific editor, both in the Department of Scientific Publications, discuss some of the challenges in scientific writing that scientists who trained at institutions outside the United States are likely to encounter as they transition to working at a U.S.-based institution. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Avoiding Wordiness** (presented October 4, 2017)
In this webinar, Don Norwood, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, explains how to identify wordiness—the use of too many words to express an idea—and shares strategies for eliminating it from scientific writing. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.
- **Ask the Editors** (presented July 26, 2017)
In this webinar, two editors in the Department of Scientific Publications field questions about writing, editing, and publishing. A [recording of the webinar](#) is available.

- **Avoiding Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism** (presented April 19, 2017)

In this webinar, two scientific editors in the Department of Scientific Publications discuss the pitfalls of plagiarism, how plagiarism is detected, and how authors can avoid plagiarizing. The concept of “self-plagiarism” is also discussed. A [recording of the webinar](#) and the [webinar slides](#) are available.

- **Creating Effective Tables** (presented January 19, 2017)

In this webinar, Joe Munch, a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications, discusses when to use a table, the elements of a table, some basic principles of effective table design, and how to use Microsoft Word to design a clear and useful table. A [recording of the webinar](#) and the [webinar slides](#) are available.

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, Sunita Patterson, senior scientific editor, 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](#), Stephanie Deming, senior scientific editor, 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 and Webinars 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 (in either FCT21.6008 or FCT21.6040). Details: Laurissa Gann (lgann@mdanderson.org), 713-794-1111.

August 15, 11:00 am, class: PubMed: The Basics

August 22, 10:30 am, class: EndNote: Basics

August 22, 11:30 am, webinar: ORCID: Creating a Unique Author ID

August 29, 11:00 am, class: EndNote: Advanced Tips

To register for a Research Medical Library webinar or class, please visit the library's [Education & Events Calendar](#).

Special Sessions Presented by the Research Medical Library. The library is offering [special sessions](#) for groups and departments this summer. Librarians are available to present a short informational session or a full class on EndNote, PubMed, the NIH Public Access Policy, and more.

Details: Laurissa Gann (lgann@mdanderson.org), 713-794-1111.

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