We’ve all seen journal articles in which clinical trials are described as being *under way*. Or is it *underway*? Both spellings are commonly used, but which is correct?

*Under way* is an adverb that refers to something that is in motion or in progress. (It’s derived from the Dutch *onterweg*, “on the way”).¹

**Examples:**

- After weeks of planning, the students’ cross-country road trip is finally *under way*.

- Various trials are *under way* to determine the effectiveness of neoadjuvant treatment in pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma.

*Underway* has historically been considered an adjective, although it is rarely used in this way.¹
Example:
*Underway* refueling was commonly used by the US Navy during World War II.

The use of *underway* as an adverb has become more common, and both it and *under way* are now considered acceptable as adverbs in writing. It is important, however, to use one spelling consistently.

References


--Ann Sutton

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