Writing for Scientific Publication

MHPE 494 – Course Syllabus – Summer 2007

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Course description. All academic health professionals are required ---and many non-academic health professionals desire--- to disseminate knowledge of research findings and scholarly information via professional publications. Many, however, receive little or no training in this skill. This course will give students the opportunity to learn and practice both the skills needed to produce a research manuscript and a conceptual approach to writing that will carry over to future projects, be they research reports or other works of scholarship.

Course goal and objectives. The central purpose of the course is to initiate the process of preparing and writing a manuscript that can be submitted for publication. The specific objectives that will enable achievement of this goal include learning to:

1. write a structured abstract and title,
2. identify a suitable journal for the manuscript,
3. narrow and focus the topic and content of the manuscript,
4. prewrite, that is, organize ideas, identify structures of various kinds of articles, and create a rough outline,
5. develop various strategies for writing the first draft,
6. revise and self-edit a first (or second, or third) draft,
7. use stylistic and syntactical tools that enhance clarity and coherence of paragraphs and sentences,
8. follow and distinguish among various documentation styles (references) used by journals, and
9. navigate the various stages of review and publication required of an author.

“What is well understood is clearly stated and the words to say it come easily.”

Boileau, L’art poétique, 1674

“The writer puts his work twenty times on the stocks, polishing it unceasingly and re-polishing it.”.
Acknowledgement. We are indebted to Emeritus Professor Suzanne Poirier, now retired from DME, who co-taught this course in the past and who wrote much of the material that we will be using for this on-line version of the course. Not only did Suzanne write beautifully but she also contributed immensely to the intellectual content of the course. We are thankful to her for graciously and generously giving us the permission to use her materials.

Course prerequisite. The course is a hands-on, applied course where each student must bring to class a personal writing project based on a study with an already available data set that has been analyzed (at least in a preliminary fashion). The topic of the study can be educational or clinical. It is an essential requirement that each student bring to class a personal writing project. If you do not have data and results to write about, you will not be admitted to the class.

Course design. Classes will be a combination of brief, informational introductions; online discussions; individual and group exercises; and online tutorials with students on their work in progress.

Course requirements and assessment. Grades will be based on student work in three areas: manuscript (60%), frequency of participation (20%), and quality of participation (20%). Grades in each area will be assigned using the following criteria:

**Manuscript**
- A  Excellent paper, almost ready for submission
- B  Good paper but needs a number of revisions before submitting
- C  Good effort, but needs major revisions before submitting
- E  Unacceptable, not at all ready for submission

**Frequency of participation**
- A  Regularly, with initiative
- B  Regularly
- C  Occasionally
- E  Rarely

**Quality of participation**
- A  Insightful, creative
- B  Helpful
- C  Superficial
- E  Obstructive

Reading resources. The following printed resources will be used during this course. The only one that you need to purchase is Huth's *Writing and Publishing Papers in Medicine (3rd ed., 1999)*. All other readings will either be on eRes or made available online.


Additional references (not required reading but often cited or recommended):

**Books:**


See two first chapters (pp. 1-33) for 22 rules (see summary of rules at: [http://www.tcnj.edu/~penny/cmsc485/strunk_summary.html](http://www.tcnj.edu/~penny/cmsc485/strunk_summary.html)).


**Articles** (available on eRes):

Course schedule. Assignments will be mapped out week-by-week in ASSIGNMENTS. Each week will follow the same working schedule:

- Friday, noon: Instructors post assignment for the coming week
- Tuesday, 8 a.m.: Students have completed readings and post their assignments for review in student pairs
- Tuesday and Wednesday: Students discuss or critique postings as assigned and revise their own work if needed
- Thursday 10:00 a.m.: Students post revised writing for review by instructors
- Friday: Instructors respond to students' postings and post assignment for the next week

Topics. The topics of the course, with accompanying reading assignments and activities, are listed below. The instructor's name in parentheses indicates which instructor will take the lead that week.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date assignment posted</th>
<th>Content of session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>May 25</td>
<td><strong>Introductions to instructors, the course, and to each other</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Three aspects of writing: Conceptual, structural, and mechanical</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Getting started in six “easy” steps (G. Bordage)</strong></td>
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<td>Exercises: Role of Writing</td>
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<td>Difficulties of Writing</td>
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<td>Writing Project:</td>
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<td>- Message and audience</td>
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<td>Readings: Huth (pp. 131-32, 42-45, 134-38, 121-123, 3-6)</td>
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Week 2  June 1  Choosing a Journal  (I. Harris)
Readings:  Huth (pp. 7-18)
Exercises:  Reality Check: Is There a Paper Here?
Audience and Format
Reviewing the Field
Selecting a Journal

Week 3  June 8  Prewriting: Argument and selection  (I. Harris)
Structure: IMRAD (Intro-Methods-Results and Discussion)
Mapping and more mapping
Readings:  Huth (pp. 19-40; overview reading: 59-92)
Bordage et al, 1997 (pp. 15-19)
Exercises:  Reality Check: Considering Your Title
Mapping and More Mapping

Week 4  June 15  Writing: Introduction  (G. Bordage)
Rough draft
Readings:  Huth (pp. 121-30, 64-67)
Lamott, "Short Assignments"
Exercises:  Introduction

Week 5  June 22  Writing: Methods  (G. Bordage)
Hermeneutics, unity
Readings:  Huth (pp. 67-70)
Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts"
Exercises:  Methods

Week 6  June 29  Writing: Results, Discussion, and Conclusion  (I. Harris)
Reporting vs. analyzing – Analyzing vs. reporting
Readings:  Huth (pp. 70-73, 139-50)
Lamott "Perfectionism"
Exercises:  Results

Bordage et al, 1997 (pp. 20-23)
Squires (pp. 619-622)
Week 7  July 6  
Re-writing I (G. Bordage)  
Coherence, paragraphs, and transitions  
Readings:  Huth (pp. 169-95)  
Bordage et al., 1997 (pp. 6-14; 24-26)  
Exercises:  Rewriting I  

Week 8  July 13  
Rewriting II (I. Harris)  
Polishing: Clarity and grace  
Sentence structure and word choice  
References  
The Submission (cover letter) and Publication Processes  
Readings:  Huth (pp. 249-74)  
"Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to  
Biomedical Journals," Annf Int Med 1997;126: 36-47.  
Bordage et al., 1997 (pp. 27-30)  
Exercises:  Rewriting II  
Polishing  
References  
Cover letter  
What’s it been like for you?  Final paper  

Classes end  Wednesday  July 18  
Papers due  Wednesday  August 22