

Book Reviews

La Rédaction Médicale. 5th edition. Hervé Maisonneuve, Gérard Lorette, Annabel Maruani, Michel Huguier. Doin éditions. Wolters Kluwer. France. 2010. 215 pages, [price], ISBN 978-2704012848



Now in its fifth edition, *La Rédaction Médicale* is designed to familiarize medical researchers (especially junior researchers and postgraduate medical students) with the conventions of medical writing, especially the basic qualities of scientific writing in general: clarity of style, rigor in expressing facts, modesty in making claims, and brevity. Along with this useful information, it also states rules and principles that

must be observed, and “recipes” that could be applied for successful publishing. The authors (internationally known medical researchers and experts in medical writing) do not take a dogmatic stance; rather, they act as good-will advisers.

Chapters and appendices

Each of the 23 chapters opens with a table summarizing the main points of the chapter, and a few sum-up tables are also interspersed within most chapters. A useful list of references ends each chapter. As can be seen, *La Rédaction Médicale* is an extremely rich volume, full of very useful information on an extremely wide arrays of topics, all related to the world of medical researching, writing and publishing. They range from the definition of an “original article” (chapter 1) to the presentation of recommendations to authors and reviewers, and of issues related to good practice and ethics (chapter 23).

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present, discuss, and clearly define the different types of medical papers (original papers, case reports, review articles, postcasts and vodcasts, doctoral theses, editorials, letters, documentary research). Chapter 5 is devoted to documentary research: where and how to find the appropriate references, alert lists, Cochrane Library, and international databases. Chapters 6 to 12 deal with the different sections of an experimental medical research paper: the introduction and its structure, the methods section, the results, how to present tables and figures, the discussion section, the list of references and the title. Chapter 13 examines research paper abstracts (making the difference between an informative and an indicative abstract), while chapter 14 focuses on conference abstracts.

Chapter 15 gives useful recommendations on how to prepare posters. Chapter 16 presents a clinical research plan on drug trials. The fundamental characteristics of a good research paper (precision, clarity and brevity, correct use of verb tenses, avoidance of the passive voice and of emotional expressions) are analysed and illustrated with apt examples in Chapter 17, while Chapter 18 discusses the concepts of authorship and conflict of interest that are so hotly debated

these days, especially in the field of medicine. The last chapters deal with the choice of a journal when submitting one’s paper; the thorny issue of how to respond to reviewers; how a scientific journal functions; biomedical electronic journals; and recommendations to authors, reviewers and good practice.

The book ends with two appendices: “Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: writing and editing for biomedical publication”, and a list of abbreviations used in French biomedical writing (and their English equivalents).

Minor details

Some minor observations could be addressed in a further edition of *La Rédaction Médicale*. Throughout the book, the authors use the word “reviewer” in italics, and it is only on page 169 where they explain why they use this English word instead of the French word “relecteur” – I feel this explanation should have been given at the outset, or the French word could have been used throughout. Also, “reviewer” is not, properly speaking, an “anglo-saxon” term, as the authors say (page 169); it is rather an “Anglo-American” term. Another expression which should have perhaps been translated into French is “peer review”: why not say “révision par des paires (aveugles)”. I know it is longer, but at least it is French!

Perhaps more information could have been provided about the impact factor and how it can be manipulated so that junior researchers can beware of this widespread bibliometric concept, and about the concept of plagiarism, only very briefly mentioned on page 88.

In regard to the famous prime directive of today’s academia: “Publish or perish” (page 3), I believe that “in English” should be added after “publish”, as publishing in French or Spanish is not as prestigious as publishing in today’s scientific lingua franca.

In chapter 13, the authors might have explained what an *indicative* abstract is. They do explain what an *informative* abstract is, but only on page 107 do they define an *indicative* abstract. Moreover, because the title and the abstract are the first sections scientists in general read, I would have placed the chapters on the title and on the abstract before all the others. But this is a question of personal choice.

I wonder whether the recommendation given on page 162 (call the journal directly in case one’s article is rejected) is realistic. If the researcher lives in France and the journal is a French journal, this may be feasible, but would not an email be a better option? If the journal is an English-medium one and the researcher a non-native English-speaking scientist, it may be easier – or less difficult – to argue in writing rather than orally. Defending one’s arguments and viewpoints is not easy, much less so on the telephone.

In chapter 17 the authors refer to the different “chapters” of a research article as if they were talking about a PhD thesis when they, in fact, refer to the different “sections” of a research paper.

Many useful pieces of advice

These minor details apart, I wholeheartedly agree with Fiona Godlee, editor of the *BMJ*, who, in the preface of this 5th edition says that we should all look for help when writing (a medical paper), and this book contains many useful ideas and pieces of advice. With chapters on the IMRAD structure, stylistic considerations, the functioning of scientific journals, the criteria needed to qualify as an author, instructions to authors, etc, this book guides us in the methods necessary for the planning and the writing of a medical paper. It will help researchers – especially junior researchers and graduate students – to enhance the quality of their papers so that they are understood, accepted, and eventually published.

This very well written and organized volume will also serve as an excellent teaching resource, not only to those who teach medical writing in French, but also to those who teach medical writing in *English* – either as a primary course

text or as a reference. Instructors with limited background in scientific writing at this level will particularly appreciate the clear explanations and rich lists of references for further reading. Additionally, instructors who live outside France, where the book was produced, will find it highly useful – provided, of course, that they can read French.

It is a pleasure to see *La Rédaction Médicale* being expanded and revised. It will make an excellent addition to any collection of books on medical writing. I teach English for medical purposes to Spanish-speaking medical graduates, and I am eager to start my next course next year so as to include in it some of the valuable information *La Rédaction Médicale* offers. I am convinced that this additional advice will help my students become more successful researchers and writers of scientific articles.

At the authors’ request, authors’ rights will be donated to the Association for the Development and Research in Medical Writing (ADERREM).

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Manual for editors of health science journals. Cairo: World Health Organization. Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, 2009. 77 p. \$15.00 ISBN 978-92-9021-688-9; 978-92-9021-689-6 online



It is difficult to say exactly how many biomedical journals are published in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (among them Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia). The preface to this manual says over 300, but this is likely to be an underestimate. Even this figure shows that journals from this region constitute a sizeable share of

international publications in health sciences. Most of these journals are relatively young and need to reach out to a wider audience, receive more diverse and better manuscripts, and have better visibility by getting indexed in well-known indexing services.

Does this sound familiar to you, although you are not the editor of a Middle Eastern journal? Although this manual was developed by the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME), it is a manual for any editor of a new, and naturally small, biomedical journal anywhere in the world. Many parts of the book are useful for editors of established journals. How did the manual come into existence? Since its establishment in 2001, EMAME has tried to improve the knowledge of editors in many ways. One was to form an Education and Training Committee, which met in 2006 to draft a guide for editors which was subsequently edited by other EMAME members, tested in different workshops, and published in 2009 by WHO.

The manual is organized under three p’s: Policy, People, and Product – the things an editor must consider when starting or promoting a rather new journal. The Policy section is the longest, since the authors believed that general journal policies are the essential foundations on which new editors must build their journal. These start with the reason for the journal’s existence, and continue with its scope, target audience, governance, ethics, etc. This might be a good reminder to editors who know how to handle a journal on a day to day basis, but do not pay enough attention to the larger perspective. Failing to see this has led to the publication of journals which either do not have enough audience or do not get enough submission to warrant their timely and regular publication.

The People section defines the roles of different people in the journal and in carrying out the policies outlined in the first section. Since there is not a universal agreement on the terminology and definitions of editorship functions, the manual tries to build a uniform terminology, at the same time explaining some of the alternatives used in journals. Interestingly, “readers” is one of the parts of this section, and this shows the manual’s attention to a very essential stakeholder in a journal; editors sometimes easily forget that the journal is published for the readers, and not the authors!

The Product is the last (and shortest) section of the manual. This section defines the role of the editor in planning ways to ensure quality and timeliness of the publication.

Annex 4. Checklists

Mechanical editing

- Ensure the manuscript is complete: all pages, figures and tables are included and required house style has been followed.
- Check the title page includes all necessary information (article title, authors' names and affiliations in full and linked, address for correspondence).
- Check the abstract is of the correct length and key words listed.

Copy editing

- Check the format of headings and paragraphs is correct and appropriate.
- Ensure the grammar, spellings and punctuation are correct and consistent with house style.
- Check the abbreviations included are appropriate and are spelled out the first time they are used.
- Ensure the use of italics, bold and quotes is appropriate and not excessive.
- Ensure units are included where necessary and used correctly (e.g. SI units).
- Check figures and tables referred to in the text are in correct numerical order.
- Check that the number of tables/figures is not excessive and comparable to the length of the paper.
- Check that tables have clear titles and column headings.
- Ensure that all abbreviations in tables are explained in the legend.
- Ensure that drawings and photographs are clear and of good quality and the caption agrees with what the figure shows.
- Check that all references in the text are also included in the reference list in the correct order, and all those in the reference list are mentioned in the text.
- Ensure that all references are in the correct format in line with journal style.
- Mark up the text ready for layout (indicate where figures, tables, etc., are to appear in the text, add journal information as required).

Technical editing

General

- Edit for conciseness and clarity of text (eliminate repetition and unnecessary text, ensure good grammar, simplify language, avoid pomposity/verbosity).
- Edit for accuracy (check errors of fact, ensure specific statements are backed up with relevant references, check numbers/percentages, additions, cross references with tables/text/abstracts, references).
- Edit for consistency – layout/check correct level of headings/check appropriate text under each heading (IMRAD).
- Edit tables/figures for accuracy and ease of reading/understanding.
- Ensure correct units are used where necessary and that they are the correct ones (preferably SI units).
- Apply house style.
- Compile queries for authors.

The Checklists annex will be helpful to editors at all levels

The book is designed as a learning tool to be used in a workshop, or for self-study. Each section starts with learning objectives for the editor and finishes with a couple of questions. These are usually very practical and directed towards the editor's own journal, such as "What support could you provide to reviewers?" and "Do you have an annual schedule for your journal?" Sometimes, though, they are more general: "Are there any other ethical issues ... that you can think of?" Each part also has "resources and further reading".

Of the four annexes, probably the most interesting one is annex 4, Checklists. This annex goes over different levels of editing (mechanical editing, copy editing, technical editing, and proof checks), and provides a checklist to

ensure that the editor does not miss anything important. This will probably be useful also to a more experienced editor of a well-established journal.

This manual – available as a pdf at <http://www.emro.who.int/dsaf/dsa1034.pdf> – provides a good learning tool for new editors all around the world. It can be a handy source for an editors' training course or workshop, as it has been tested in several country-level workshops before being published.

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