

# DON'T WRITE-OFF THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING IN PHARMACY: HOW TO HELP YOUR LEARNERS IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS

Abby Frye, PharmD, BCACP  
Clinical Pharmacy Specialist  
Providence Medical Group

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## DISCLOSURE

I have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, the attendee will be able to:

- ✓ Identify best practices for medical writing
- ✓ Discuss strategies for improving your learners' writing skills
- ✓ Practice communicating with learners regarding gaps identified as related to writing skills

3

---

---

---

---

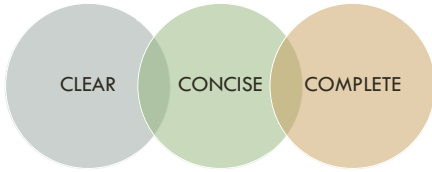
---

---

---

---

## GOALS FOR MEDICAL WRITING



Melnick, A. AuthorHouse, 2006.

4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## CLARITY

Avoid jargon and abbreviations



5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ABBREVIATIONS

What are possible meanings for the abbreviation 'MS'?



6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## THE JOINT COMMISSION "DO NOT USE LIST"

Do Not Use	As a Substitute
U, u, (unit)	"unit"
IU (International Unit)	"International Unit"
Q.D., QD, q.d., or qd (daily)	"daily" or "qday"
Q.O.D., QOD, q.o.d., qod, (every other day)	"every other day"
Trailing zero (X.0 mg)	Write X mg
Lack of leading zero (.X mg)	Write 0.X mg
MS, MSO4, MgSO4 for morphine sulfate	"Morphine sulfate" or "magnesium Sulfate"

[https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/jc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/patient-safety/do\\_not\\_use\\_list\\_9\\_14\\_18.pdf](https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/jc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/patient-safety/do_not_use_list_9_14_18.pdf)

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## BREVITY

### Use the shortest word

- Termination --> End
- Component --> Part
- Gigantic --> Big

### Avoid useless modifiers

- Round as a ball
- Surrounded on all sides
- Few in number

### Avoid wordy phrases

- It is obvious --> Obviously
- At the present time --> Currently
- In the absence of --> Without

### Avoid clichés

The grass is always greener...

### Remove unnecessary words

- Really
- Essentially
- "It...that" phrases (e.g., it is important to note that)

Melnick, A. AuthorHouse. 2006.

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## WHAT BEST DESCRIBES THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"The patient reports that she really is in a lot of pain"

1. Useless modifiers

2. Wordy Phrases

3. Unnecessary Words

4. Cliche

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

“The other doctor and I agree to disagree.”

- 1. Useless modifiers
- 2. Wordy Phrases
- 3. Unnecessary Words
- 4. Cliche

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

10

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

“The ulcer is erythematous and surrounded on all sides by purulence.”

- 1. Useless modifiers
- 2. Wordy Phrases
- 3. Unnecessary Words
- 4. Cliche

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

11

COMPLETENESS



Use exact values and avoid vague descriptions



Include units



Include counseling & patient understanding



Provide complete therapeutic and monitoring plan

Melnick, A. AuthorHouse. 2006.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

12

## WRITING WITH RESPECT

### Patient-unfriendly terms

- Management (e.g., "patient management" instead of "patient care")
- Clinical Material (to refer to individuals)
- Case substituted for a patient
- Failure attributed to patients
- Elderly
- "rule of thumb"
- Don't define patients by their disease process "patient or individual with diabetes" instead of "diabetic"

### Reader-unfriendly terms

- Respectively
- "former" and "latter"
- "This", if not immediately followed by a noun
- "There" clauses
- "It" clauses
- Vague uses of "between"
- Undecipherable references to "the authors"

AMWA Journal 2008; 23 (3): 113-117.

13

---

---

---

---

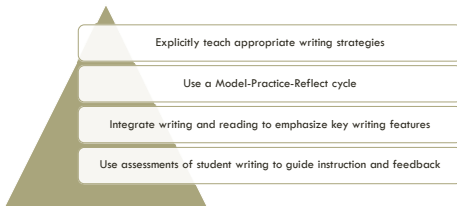
---

---

---

---

## ASSISTING LEARNERS



Graham, S et al. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. 2016

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## WRITING PROCESS



Graham, S et al. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. 2016

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## MODEL-PRACTICE-REFLECT

- For students or struggling learners, consider modeling writing process for new tasks such as consult notes and chart notes.
- For more advanced learners, use exemplary models from others.
- Have learners compare/contrast strong and weak examples.

Graham, S et al. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. 2016

16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## INTEGRATE WRITING & READING



WRITTEN SUMMARY OF  
JOURNAL CLUB



LITERATURE REVIEW-BASED  
CONSULTATIONS

Graham, S et al. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. 2016

17

---

---

---

---

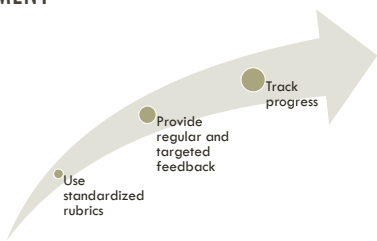
---

---

---

---

## ASSESSMENT



Graham, S et al. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. 2016

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## PRE-ROTATION WRITING ASSESSMENT

Please indicate the appropriate response below:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am confident that I possess the skills necessary to communicate clearly in writing.				
As of right now, I am generally comfortable with writing a SOAP note.				
I feel confident that I know what information belongs in the subjective, objective, assessment, and plan section.				
As of right now, I am generally comfortable with writing a journal club.				
As of right now, I am generally comfortable with writing a narrative summary of a recent topic/idea.				
I am comfortable finding and citing sources.				

My personal strengths related to writing are:

My opportunities for improvement related to writing are:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

19

## USE OF A STANDARDIZED RUBRIC

- Objectives:
- To provide clarification for students on how to write a "real-life" patient care note
- To provide feedback to improve patient care documentation

Am J Pharm Educ 2018;82(9):article 6725

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

20

## USE OF A STANDARDIZED RUBRIC

Perceived to be fair and transparent

Demonstrated to improve documentation skills

Shown to improve learner confidence

Curr Pharm Teach Learn 2014;6(4):516-526  
 Curr Pharm Teach Learn 2016;8(5):654-658  
 Am J Pharm Educ 2007;71(3):article 53  
 Am J Pharm Educ 2018;82(9):article 6725

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

21

## USE OF A STANDARDIZED RUBRIC



- A rubric developed and implemented by primary care APPE faculty members at Auburn University<sup>1</sup>
- A rubric used for evaluation of *educationally-oriented* SOAP notes at the Oregon State University College of Pharmacy<sup>2</sup>
- A rubric implemented by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region to assess the quality of pharmacist documentation in the patient health record in a more formal and standardized way<sup>3</sup>

1. Am J Pharm Educ 2018;82(9):article 6725.  
2. Retrieved from: [https://pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/sites/pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/files/soap\\_rubric\\_and\\_components\\_-\\_final\\_nov\\_2017.pdf](https://pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/sites/pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/files/soap_rubric_and_components_-_final_nov_2017.pdf)  
3. Can J Hosp Pharm 2017;70(6):423-9.

22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION



Implemented at teaching hospitals affiliated with McMaster University in Ontario, Canada



Medical students (and maybe pharmacy students?) largely learn communication skills through trial & error relying heavily on feedback from preceptors

Postgrad Med J 2015;91:303-308.

23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

1

Control Group

2

Medical student communication tutorial

3

Medical student communication tutorial  
 Resident feedback workshop

Postgrad Med J 2015;91:303-308.

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

**R**

- ✓ Adequately gathers the salient information from the history, physical exam, and investigations
- ✓ Reports information in a cohesive manner

**I**

- ✓ Integrates their findings and can make appropriate conclusions
- ✓ Formulates clear issue list
- ✓ Formulates a differential diagnosis

**M**

- ✓ Clearly determines what actions are required
- ✓ Tailors the management plan to the patient's circumstances, demonstrating understanding of medications and investigations

**E**

- ✓ Clearly develops a management plan
- ✓ Uses current literature to support decisions regarding management
- ✓ Exhibits self-directed learning around the case, defining new questions to research in further depth
- ✓ Has the confidence to take an active role in teaching others about the case

Postgrad Med J 2015;91:303-308.

25

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION



At the end of the rotation, consultation note scores had improved in each arm, but the improvement was only significant in arm 3.

Postgrad Med J 2015;91:303-308.

26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## INSTRUCT YOUR LEARNER TO ASK CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of this document?
- Who is the intended reader?
- Who else might read it?
- How will the reader use the information? How can I make the information useful to the reader?
- What does the reader know vs. what new information do they need?
- What information and details should be included?
- What sources should I consult?
- What is the best way to present the information?
- What's the take home message?
- What kind of language is appropriate?

<https://www.hurleywrite.com/white-papers/id/4085351/critical-questions-to-ask-when-writing>

27

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## COACH YOUR LEARNER TO EDIT & PROOFREAD THEIR OWN WORK

- Remind learners that when they give their work to someone else to review, they are indicating that this is their best work
- Take a break from your writing and come back to it hours or days later
- Consider printing it out; the change in medium may help you look at it from a new perspective
- Read it backwards to catch spelling errors
- Read it out loud to yourself, your dog, etc.
- Consider using a checklist

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

28

## PROVIDE A CHECKLIST TO HELP LEARNERS EDIT THEIR OWN WRITING

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the content complete?                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Are grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage correct throughout? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Should any content be deleted?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Have abbreviations and acronyms been defined?                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is all the content accurate?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Are numbers, if any, in the correct style?                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does the content of the piece suit the audience?       | <input type="checkbox"/> If references are cited, are they in the appropriate format?      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are sections and paragraphs of the appropriate length? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the writing clear, exact, concise?                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Should any tables or figures be added or deleted?      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the piece well organized?                           |  |

Adapted from: Gastel & AMWA Journal 2015;30(4): 147-151.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

29

## BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO WRITING

- Prioritize your comments; focus on global issues first
- For major grammatical issues or other recurrent issues, make 1-2 comments & provide examples, and then ask the learner to apply that principle to the rest of the document/note
- Point out opportunities for improvement with open ended questions or general comments, instead of marking the document up with too many tracked changes

Haswell. (2006). Retrieved from <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/haswell2006.pdf>  
<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/tipsheets/respondingSB.pdf>  
<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/providing-feedback-to-writers>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

30

## BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO WRITING

- Spend your time commenting on early drafts (instead of the final draft)
- Don't neglect the value of positive reinforcement
- Avoid vagueness (both positive and constructive)
- Make your constructive feedback actionable
- Responding to writing doesn't have to be in writing

Haswell, (2006). Retrieved from <https://woc.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/haswell2006.pdf>  
<https://woc.colostate.edu/docs/tipsheets/responding58.pdf>  
<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/providing-feedback-to-writers>

31

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## SUMMARY

- Preceptors play an important role in helping learners to improve their writing skills.
- Explicitly teaching the writing process, using a model-practice-reflect process, integrating writing with reading, and providing regular feedback can help learners improve.
- Standardized rubrics provide fair and transparent feedback.

32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## WEBSITES/TEACHING RESOURCES



34

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## BOOKS



Meinel A. AuthorHouse. 2006.  
Hofmann AH. 2017.  
Kemper D, Meyer V, Sebranek P. *Writers INC: a Student Handbook for Writing and Learning*. 2001.

35

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## TEST QUESTIONS

Based on the 2016 U.S. Department of Education review, which strategy has the highest level of evidence for improving writing skills in secondary education?

1. Explicitly teaching appropriate writing strategies & using a model-practice-reflect teaching style
2. Having learners integrate writing and reading
3. Using assessments of student writing to guide instruction and feedback

36

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## TEST QUESTIONS

Use of a standardized rubric has been shown to do which of the following:

1. Improve students' documentation skills
2. Improve students' understanding of expectations
3. Improve students' confidence in their SOAP note writing ability
4. All of the above

37

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## TEST QUESTIONS

Best practices for responding to writing include:

1. Providing specific actionable feedback, both in writing and verbally
2. Using "track changes" to re-write the draft
3. Only identifying the writer's opportunities for improvement
4. Correcting the spelling and grammar first, before addressing content and organization

38

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## REFERENCE LIST (1/2)

- Andrus MB, McDonough SLK, Kelley KW, et al. . Development and validation of a rubric to evaluate SOAP note writing in APPE. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2018;82(9):Article 6725.
- Baranski B, Bolt J, Albers L, Siddiqui R, Bell A, Semchuk W. Development of a documentation rubric and assessment of pharmacists' competency for documentation in the patient health record. *Can J Hosp Pharm.* 2017;70(6):423-9.
- Brown WC, Kelley M, Conway JM, et al. Integration of an internet-based medical chart into a pharmacotherapy lecture series. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2007;71(3):Article 53.
- Critical Questions to Ask When Writing. Hurley Write, Inc. [www.hurleywrite.com/white-papers/id/4085351/critical-questions-to-ask-when-writing](http://www.hurleywrite.com/white-papers/id/4085351/critical-questions-to-ask-when-writing)
- Gastel B. Editing and Proofreading Your Own Work. *AMWA Journal* 2015;30(4): 147-151.
- Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., Kim, J., Lytkawa, J., Olson, C.B., & Smither, Wainio, C. (2016). *Teaching secondary students to write effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: <http://iatahawaii.edu.gov>
- Haswell R. (2006). [Wvcolostate.edu/docs/ctd/articles/haswell2006.pdf](http://wvcolostate.edu/docs/ctd/articles/haswell2006.pdf)
- Hofmann AH. *Scientific Writing and Communication: Papers, Proposals, and Presentations*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2017.
- Kemper D, Meyer V, Sebronek P. *Writers INC: a Student Handbook for Writing and Learning*. Wilmington, MA: Great Source, Great Source Education Group; 2001.
- Knaflterud M. With Respect to Patients and Readers: Deadly Terms to Excise? *AMWA Journal* 2008; 23 (3): 113-117.

39

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## REFERENCE LIST (2/2)

- Melnick, A. Medical Writing 101 A Primer for Health Professionals. AuthorHouse. 2006.
- Melvin L, Connolly K, Pitre L, et al Improving medical students' written communication skills: design and evaluation of an educational curriculum Postgraduate Medical Journal 2015;91:303-308.
- Oregon State University College of Pharmacy. (2017) [pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/sites/pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/files/soap\\_rubric\\_and\\_components\\_-\\_final\\_nov\\_2017.pdf](https://pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/sites/pharmacy.oregonstate.edu/files/soap_rubric_and_components_-_final_nov_2017.pdf)
- Providence College Writing Center. <https://academic-services.providence.edu/writing-center/faculty-resources-test/>
- Purdue University Online Writing Center. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\\_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html). Accessed 4/13/21.
- Sharma S. How to become a competent medical writer. Perspect Clin Res. 2010;1(1):33-37.
- Shogbon AO, Lundquist LM, Momary KM. Utilization of a structured approach to patient-based pharmacotherapy notes in a therapeutics course to improve clinical documentation skills. Curr Pharm Teach Learn. 2016;8(5):654-658.
- The Joint Commission (2019) [https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/jc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/patient-safety\\_dto\\_not\\_use\\_list\\_9\\_14\\_18.pdf](https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/jc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/patient-safety_dto_not_use_list_9_14_18.pdf)
- The Writing Center at George Mason University. (2016). <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/providing-feedback-to-writers>
- Villa KJ, Sprunger TL, Walton AM, et al. Inter-rater Reliability of a Clinical Documentation Rubric Within Pharmacotherapy Problem-Based Learning Courses. Curr Pharm Teach Learn 2014;6(4):516-526
- WAC Clearinghouse (2006). [wac.colostate.edu/docs/tipsheets/responding58.pdf](https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/tipsheets/responding58.pdf)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---