



PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING CLINICAL RESEARCH. WARREN S BROWNER. BALTIMORE: LIPPINCOTT WILLIAMS & WILKINS; 1999. IX + 206 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$34.95. ISBN 0-683-30745-2.

Warren S Browner has written a manual designed to teach clinical researchers how to report the results of their research in journal articles, poster sessions, and oral presentations. The 14 chapters of this book cover various skills needed to present the results of clinical research effectively. The parts of the journal article—title and abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion, illustrations, and references—are covered in detail in separate chapters. Chapters on oral presentations and posters walk the reader through the basic techniques and give advice about avoiding common pitfalls. Chapters on authorship issues, journal selection, and good writing round out the book.

Read selectively and used as a reference, the book will serve physicians during their training and as they begin their academic careers. Read completely, it will be useful to physicians and academics involved in training physicians and physician-scientists for careers in academic medicine. Experienced academic physicians and clinical researchers will find selected chapters useful as reviews.

There are many fine chapters to highlight. Chapter 5, on Results, contains much useful advice for the medical investigator on reporting research results. The advice is generally well motivated and lucid. The emphasis on effect sizes and confidence intervals is particularly noteworthy. The discussion of risks, odds, and rates is also good. Chapter 10, on Authorship, deals effectively with a subject that is especially troublesome for young investigators. In particular it provides model scripts for discussing authorship issues with senior faculty. Finally, the chapter on Oral Presentations stands out. Discussions of how to make slides, deal with presentation anxiety, and answer hostile questions are especially helpful.

There are limitations too. The chapter on Results, for all its good qualities, suffers from incomplete coverage of multivariable methods, methods for reporting skewed numerical data, methods for time-to-event data, and methods for paired data. It also uses several statistical terms without defining them and contains some relatively minor technical errors. Suggestions for Writing Well (chap-

ter 14) are limited in scope and technical foundation, but that is not surprising given the limited space that could be devoted to the subject.

The topics in Browner's book are covered well, to the extent that space permits. Entire texts are available for those who want greater understanding of these topics. For example, a more comprehensive reference for advice on reporting results in the clinical literature is the recent book by Thomas Lang and Michelle Secic.¹ That book shares the virtues of accessibility and appropriate emphasis, but at book length it has the luxury of more comprehensive coverage and more careful exposition. Of course, even the best job of reporting cannot repair damage done by poor study design or poor data analysis. To reduce the problems associated with such deficiencies requires collaboration with experienced, well-trained biostatisticians and a fair understanding of the issues and concepts by the investigators themselves. Every medical investigator and author of research reports should have easy access to a well-written, comprehensive statistics text aimed at physicians, such as that by Douglas Altman.²

Similarly, good writing is given more extensive treatment in, for example, a book-length text by Edward J Huth.³ It should be acknowledged that Browner himself lists several of these and other books as supplements to his text.

A burgeoning industry has built up around publishing texts about writing and speaking for academic physicians. These how-to books, generally based on experience in academic life, cover a wide range of communication skills in a small number of pages. Adoption of those characteristics acknowledges that not everyone wants the depth of understanding provided by more comprehensive texts and that many of those who might want it do not have the time. Although it suffers from some of the same weaknesses as its predecessors, Browner's book benefits by the breadth of his own experience and skill as a teacher. He adopts the same didactic style as the others (do this, don't do that), but he gives readers the

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confidence that comes from knowing that analysis of results and writing and speaking about them are learnable skills based on a finite set of principles.

Kenneth Hess and Walter J Pagel

References

1. Lang T, Secic M. How to report statistics in medicine: Annotated Guidelines for authors, editors, and reviewers. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians; 1997.

2. Altman D. Practical statistics for medical research. London: Chapman & Hall; 1991.

3. Huth EJ. Writing and publishing in medicine, third edition. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1999.

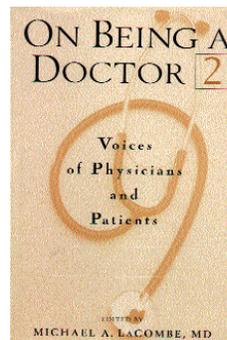
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Book Notes

ON BEING A DOCTOR 2: VOICES OF PHYSICIANS AND PATIENTS. MICHAEL A LACOMBE, EDITOR. PHILADELPHIA: AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS-AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INTERNAL MEDICINE; 2000. 363 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$26.00. ISBN 0-943126-82-7.

Consisting of prose from the "On Being a Doctor" and "On Being a Patient" sections and poetry from the "Ad Libitum" section of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *On Being a Doctor 2* offers much good reading.

Although all the pieces are medically related, they range widely in subject matter. As might be expected, recurrent themes include recent changes in medical practice and medical education, the physician as a patient or a family member thereof, and the circumstances of female physicians. However, the collection also includes, for example, an account of caring for victims of the 1995 bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City, a basic scientist's insights from several weeks of accompanying a doctor on rounds, advice on successful retirement, an essay on communication with and by people who have disabilities, an overview of classic literature related to dying, a poem by a retired nursing supervisor on what nurses do, and a narrative that begins

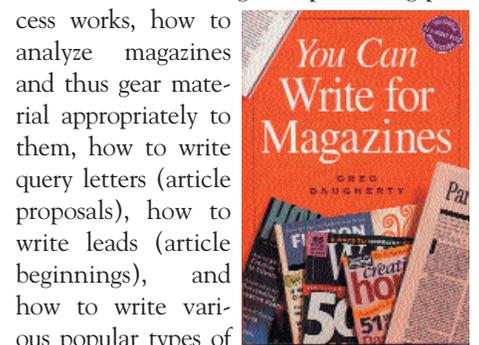


with "I am a hypochondriac." Uniting the pieces are thoughtfulness and effective crafting, including some nice use of surprise. May Michael A LaCombe, who edits "On Being a Doctor" and "Ad Libitum" and edited *On Being a Doctor* (1994) and the current collection, also produce *On Being a Doctor 3*.

Barbara Gastel

YOU CAN WRITE FOR MAGAZINES. GREG DAUGHERTY. CINCINNATI: WRITER'S DIGEST BOOKS; 1999. 124 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$12.99. ISBN 0-89879-902-3.

Drawing on more than 20 years of experience as a magazine editor and freelance writer, the author of *You Can Write for Magazines* concisely and engagingly presents much useful advice. Among topics dealt with are how the magazine publishing process works, how to analyze magazines and thus gear material appropriately to them, how to write query letters (article proposals), how to write leads (article beginnings), and how to write various popular types of articles (for example, how-to pieces, personal-experience essays, and book and other reviews). The book also includes advice on finding time to write and information on financial and legal aspects of freelance writing. Structured much like a series of magazine articles, the



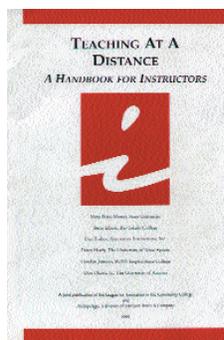
with "I am a hypochondriac." Uniting the pieces are thoughtfulness and effective crafting, including some nice use of surprise. May Michael A LaCombe, who edits "On Being a Doctor" and "Ad Libitum" and edited *On Being a Doctor* (1994) and the current collection, also produce *On Being a Doctor 3*.

book exemplifies the type of writing in which it provides instruction. Although this book is intended mainly for those wishing to become more adept at freelance writing for magazines, it can also aid those who write magazine-type pieces for journals or who edit journal sections that contain such pieces. Indeed, some prospective contributors to such features as “On Being a Doctor” (see book note above) might well benefit from glancing at parts of this book.

Barbara Gastel

TEACHING AT A DISTANCE: A HANDBOOK FOR INSTRUCTORS. MISSION VIEJO (CA): LEAGUE FOR INNOVATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND ARCHIPELAGO PRODUCTIONS; 1999. V + 92 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$15.00. (TO ORDER, SEE WWW.LEAGUE.ORG OR CALL 949-367-2884.)

Distance education via the Internet and other media has rapidly become more common, and teachers of scientific writing and editing are increasingly providing instruction at least in part through such means. The slim handbook *Teaching at a Distance* offers helpful advice on serving “the growing population of anywhere, anytime learners”. Aspects addressed include course design; choice and use of video-, audio-, and computer-based approaches; effective communication with students; and testing and other assessment. There is also a glossary, mainly of technology-related terms. Structured for easy consultation, with extensive use of headings and bulleted lists, the handbook balances reminders about basics of good teaching and pointers peculiar to teaching at a distance. One piece of advice especially relevant to teaching scientific communication at a distance is to supplement course materials with abstracts and other text already posted on the Web. Some parts of this handbook seem geared largely to the instructor, others to the technology specialist or the administrator.



Nevertheless, teachers of scientific writing and editing can find much in it to draw on as they explore teaching at a distance and refine their ways of doing so.

Barbara Gastel

THE EDITOR IN CHIEF: A PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT GUIDE FOR MAGAZINE EDITORS. BENTON RAIN PATTERSON AND COLEMAN EP PATTERSON. AMES (IA): IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 1997. VII + 193 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$29.95. ISBN 0-8138-1084-1.

Written by an emeritus journalism professor with editorial experience at major magazines and a junior faculty member specializing in management, *The Editor in Chief* provides readable guidance in editing a periodical. Among aspects addressed are serving as an effective manager, acquiring written material and illustrations, planning an issue, designing the table of contents, and preparing the cover. Although intended mainly for new and prospective magazine editors, it also can be a resource for journal editors and book editors with various levels of experience. For example, the management advice tends to apply to editing various types of publications, as does the section titled “How to Live Happily with a Printer”. Editors at science periodicals that contain news reports or feature articles may also draw usefully on sections such as those on working with freelancers, obtaining good content inexpensively, salvaging articles, and working with photographers and illustrators. Although editorial technology clearly has changed since this book was written, the wisdom presented remains valid. I wish I had had this book before starting to edit *CBE Views* and *Science Editor*. And just maybe if I follow more of its advice I will one day be the “prudent editor” who has “enough pieces in the inventory at all times to make three or more issues”.

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