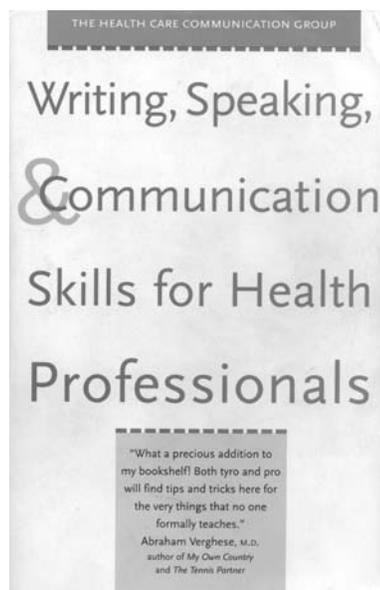


edited by Stephanie Deming



WRITING, SPEAKING, AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS. THE HEALTH CARE COMMUNICATION GROUP. NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2001. XIII + 338 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$40.00, SOFTCOVER \$17.95. ISBN 0-300-08861-2 (HARDCOVER), 0-300-08862-0 (SOFTCOVER).

Strong instructional publications often evolve from teaching materials refined through repeated presentation. Such is the case with *Writing, Speaking, and Communication Skills for Health Professionals*, a collection of seminars-turned-chapters on topics as varied as drafting a journal article, teaching in clinical settings, and running an effective meeting.

As explained in the preface, the book is based on the Writing and Speaking for Excellence seminars presented throughout North America under Bayer Corporation auspices during the 1990s. The 10 presenter-authors, known as the Health Care Communication Group, come from backgrounds in professional communication, medicine, and science. Some worked for Bayer when the seminars were given; others gave the seminars as consultants while self-employed or working in academic or other settings.

In its 14 chapters, the book addresses a wide variety of topics in biomedical communication and related realms. It begins with a chapter on critically assessing reports of clinical studies. Then comes a six-chapter section on writing, starting with chapters on style and the creative process; progressing to chapters on journal articles, grant proposals, and scientific posters; and ending with a chapter on curricula vitae and other job search materials. The next three chapters address public speaking, classroom teaching, and clinical teaching. The book ends with a four-chapter section, "The Business Aspects of Health Care", that discusses communicating with patients and others in health-care settings, building a practice, running a meeting, and preparing letters, e-mail messages, patient-education materials, and other business communications.

Each chapter contains useful advice and is accessibly written. Some chapters, however, are stronger than others or contribute more distinctively to the literature. One especially fine chapter is "How to Ask for a Research Grant", by Janet S Rasey. Drawing on her experience as a scientist and as director of the Research Funding Service at the University of Washington,

Rasey readably presents an abundance of helpful information, insight, and advice. Especially valuable are the examples—good and bad—of selected sections of grant applications. For grant applicants and their institutions, this chapter may literally be worth many times the price of the book.

The preface, by Deborah St James, also is noteworthy. In an engaging seven pages, St James tells the story of the book and the traveling seminar series behind it. For program builders, publication planners, and fans of nonfiction narrative, this is one preface not to skip.

Another excellent part of the book is that on preparing a curriculum vitae (CV), in the chapter "Dynamic Job-search Materials", by Catherine Coffin. As well as providing a sample format for a CV and presenting general advice on the content of each section, Coffey incorporates helpful guidance for those early in their careers. For example, in discussing the Publications section of a CV, she advises, "If you are a student or resident and have a paper in progress or submitted but not yet 'in press,' consider including such information in the Research Projects section instead."

Readers well beyond their student years also are likely to find new tips in this book. Three I had not encountered before: In a draft of a paper, underline all nouns ending in *-tion*, *-sion*, *-ing*, or *-ment*; then strengthen the sentences in which they appear by using, instead of these nouns, the verbs from which they came. To assess a draft of a poster at the distance from which most viewers will see it, put the draft on the floor next to a table and then stand on the table to look at it. In a lecture course, help students to focus their attention appropriately by consistently using different parts of the "stage" for different purposes; for instance, stand behind the lectern to present main course content, step in front of it to discuss course logistics, move toward the other edge of the room to provide examples, and go to the writing board to answer questions.

The book has some minor limitations. For example, the title seems internally redundant. (Aren't writing and speaking

communication?) Some sections, such as that on “Speaking to the Media” (in the chapter on public speaking), appear rather cursory and less insightful than most of the book. And although the relatively small type helps to keep the book compact, it might leave readers over 40 wishing for stronger reading glasses.

Those earlier in their careers, however, seem to be the main intended readers. Overall, the book appears to serve this audience well. It also can be a good resource for teachers of medical communication and related subjects. The authors seem to have achieved their goal of extending the reach of their seminars.

Barbara Gastel

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Book Note

LAPSING INTO A COMMA: A CURMUDGEON'S GUIDE TO THE MANY THINGS THAT CAN GO WRONG IN PRINT—AND HOW TO AVOID THEM. BILL WALSH. CHICAGO: CONTEMPORARY BOOKS; 2000. 245 PAGES. PAPERBACK \$14.95. ISBN 0-8092-2535-2.

No ordinary reference book, *Lapsing Into a Comma: A Curmudgeon's Guide to the Many Things That Can Go Wrong in Print—and How to Avoid Them* is full of humor and wit. Author Bill Walsh, copy desk chief at the *Washington Post*, has written a wonderful companion to any style manual.

Half commentary and half style guide, *Lapsing Into a Comma* addresses such issues as when to capitalize *the* in institution or publication titles and how the Internet influences word evolution. Walsh also complains about the prevalent use of *email* rather than *e-mail* and of *online* rather than *on line* or *on-line*. Lighter topics include whether one should hyphenate “bad hair day” and the difference between a Playboy Bunny and a Playmate.

Throughout the book, Walsh discourages what he calls the “search and replace” tendency of some editors and stresses the importance of critical thinking. His suggestions for when and how to apply existing style rules to new situations are especially valuable in scientific fields, where new words and abbreviations are coined almost daily.

Although some of Walsh's examples pertain specifically to newspapers, many are relevant to all publication types. From passive voice and split infinitives to “Britishisms” and sloppy similes, this helpful guide is bound to elicit a few chuckles, if not an occasional guffaw.

Finally for those who can't get enough of Walsh's wit, a wealth of amusing commentaries (including some from *Lapsing Into a Comma*) are also available on his Web site *The Slot: A Spot for Copy Editors* at www.theslot.com.

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