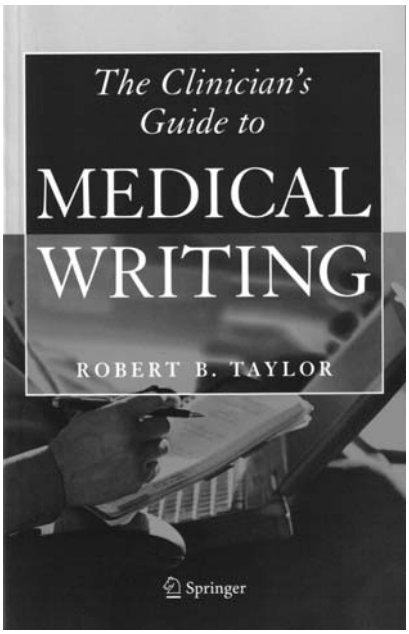
edited by Beth Notzon and Edith Paal



THE CLINICIAN'S GUIDE TO MEDICAL WRITING. ROBERT B TAYLOR. NEW YORK: SPRINGER; 2005. XIV + 266 PAGES. SOFTCOVER. $29.95. ISBN: 0-387-22249-9.

This small book by Robert B Taylor, perhaps best known as the editor of *Fundamentals of Family Medicine* and *Family Medicine: Principles and Practice*, is packed with good information for anyone—not just clinicians—looking for guidance in the preparation and publication of a wide array of medical communications, from letters to the editor and book reviews to edited books and research reports. Readers need not be new at the business of medical writing; there are nuggets of information that would interest even the most seasoned medical-writing veteran.

My favorite chapter was Chapter 8, "Writing Book Chapters and Books", not because this is a particularly enthralling topic, but because Taylor has so much sensible and worthwhile advice for anyone embarking on a book project or on writing a book chapter. In addition, the material is clearly presented and well organized. So much of it is on the mark that I found myself thinking yes, YES, YES. In this chapter, Taylor covers everything from the various types of books—textbooks, reference books, and what he calls enrichment books—to a discussion of book contracts to a description of the book production stages and the responsibilities of the editor and authors at the various stages. The best part, though, is Taylor's advice regarding serving as the editor of a multiauthor text. He obviously speaks from experience. Most important, he has used his experience to gain a valuable perspective on and important insights into the role and responsibilities of the editor, all of which he shares with readers. Other assets in this chapter include Table 8.1, which lists the questions anyone invited by a prospective book editor to write a chapter should ask, such as "What other books have you edited, and who has published them?" "Who is going to publish the book, and do you have a signed contract?" "Who will be some of the authors in the book?" He also includes some tips on how to choose chapter authors and how to work with authors as they write their chapters. He finishes the chapter with what he calls "random thoughts". These include such sections as "Do Not Underestimate the Effort" and "Book Publishing and Personal Relationships", which has some particularly valuable observations. Any prospective editor, book author, or chapter author who reads this chapter should be thoroughly prepared for what lies ahead.

Chapter 6 on "How to Write a Review Article" also has helpful information for what can be a deceptively difficult writing task. That chapter and Chapters 2 and 3—in which Taylor discusses developing the idea for a review, focusing the topic, structuring the presentation, researching the topic, preparing the outline, and then writing the various drafts—are appropriate for writing a review article or a book chapter, which can have a lot in common, as he notes. Several tables add to its value: Table 6.1 lists various journals that publish review articles, Table 6.2 lists samples of review articles that illustrate a certain "concept and structure", and Table 6.3 lists Web sites of evidence-based medicine sources; the latter complements a discussion on evidence-based clinical reviews and their focus on "the quality of the studies included for analysis".

Being involved in teaching young researchers how to write research articles, I was particularly interested in what Taylor had to say on the topic. Although he covered many of the high points of writing research reports, I expected to see more space devoted to the topic, given researchers' extreme difficulty in writing such articles. However, only 18 pages are spent on research articles, whereas eight pages are devoted to writing book reviews. This short description does not compare with Mimi Zeiger's or Edward Huth's more exhaustive treatments of the topic. In his chapter on writing books, Taylor notes that "in most areas of medicine, there really is no room for another major edited book", and it would appear that Taylor takes his own advice in not writing a book that attempts to compete with those others. Nonetheless, all the content is accurate and helpful, and the chapter is thorough if not in depth. I would, however, have liked him to provide a similar table listing

examples of research articles that illustrate the model, as he does for review articles.

The one chapter that gave me pause was the first chapter, "Getting Started in Medical Writing". Among the reasons Taylor gives for medical writing is to "assert 'ownership' of a topic" and "enhance one's personal reputation". To be sure, he also lists "report research", "advance one's discipline", and "generate discussion", which are loftier goals. And he does ultimately note that "the most enduring reason to be a medical writer is the intellectual stimulation", with which there can be no quarrel. But the clear intimation is that one writes, at least in part, for personal gain, and some of the book is devoted to the various means by which one can become recognized as a medical writer. That does not seriously detract from the content as much as it seems to get the book off slightly on the wrong foot.

All in all, this book meets the stated aims of the author and should edify anyone seeking good solid guidance in becoming a better medical writer.

Beth Notzon

BETH NOTZON *is a scientific publications manager at the University of Texas M D Anderson Cancer Center.*

Book Notes

TRADING THE GENOME: INVESTIGATING THE COMMODIFICATION OF BIO-INFORMATION. BRONWYN PARRY. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2004. 319 PAGES. HARDCOVER $39.50. ISBN 0-231-12174-1.

The ethics of collecting and using biologic materials has been widely covered in the popular and academic press. In *Trading the Genome*, Bronwyn Parry looks at a less-examined aspect of the field—the economic implications.

Modern biologic commodities—such as cell lines, extracted DNA, and tissue samples—are relatively recent examples of natural resources, but other natural materials have been gathered for hundreds of years, Parry writes. The 18th and 19th centuries' voyages of discovery were prompted, in part, by domestic economies' inability to provide enough raw materials to keep pace with European scientific and industrial development at the time, she writes. Like their modern-day biologic counterpoints, those resources became valuable once they were removed from their natural habitats, collected into related groupings, and made readily available for study and economic use.

Trade practices and regulatory environments developed during the industrial era have had to adapt to the modern information age. The US pharmaceutical industry merits particular study in this regard because of its long history of research involving natural products, Parry writes. Raw materials used in pharmaceuticals, such as plants from which medicinal extracts are derived, are often collected in developing countries until they can be grown (or their extracts artificially produced) in sufficient quantity locally. The developing countries of origin have therefore pushed for the implementation of policies regulating the use and collection of the resources and of the distribution of benefits derived from them. Parry discusses some of the international regulatory mechanisms that have developed from this collection and use, such as the International Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992.

Trading the Genome is an ambitious, wide-ranging, exceedingly well-researched text. The dense, academic tone of the writing, however, creates an extremely challenging read that will probably limit this book's readership to people with an academic or professional commitment to the topic. The writing also highlights the need for solid editing—given the number of typographic errors in the finished text, the book probably didn't get it. The discussion of this timely topic would need substantial rewriting to make it appeal to a general readership.

Edith Paal

EDITH PAAL *works in human-subjects research oversight at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.*

THE GENOMICS AGE: HOW DNA TECHNOLOGY IS TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE LIVE AND WHO WE ARE. GINA SMITH. NEW YORK: AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION; 2005. 254 PAGES. HARDCOVER $24.00. ISBN 0-8144-0843-5.

The Genomics Age is a well-written, comprehensive book offering a look at the past, present, and future of DNA technology. Gina Smith describes the discoveries of the DNA structure by Watson and Crick in 1953 and the complete sequencing of the human genome almost 50 years later, ensuring that the reader appreciates these momentous events. The rest of the book explores the effects that those findings will have on our lives in criminal justice, human aging, cancer, and gene therapy and hence their effects on society as a whole. She does not shy away from the more controversial issues, such as stem-cell research and cloning, providing a factual account of the technology and allowing readers to come to their own conclusions about the ethical components of these problems.

Smith explains many interesting facts, and they are interspersed with more in-depth explanations of the technology and quotes from major players in the industry. She stresses that although DNA technology provides the potential for a revolution in medicine, the discoveries are still in the future. She does, however, give a few examples of breakthroughs that have already occurred. For example, two new, very effective chemotherapeutic agents on the market for breast cancer and leukemia (Herceptin and Gleevec, respectively) were developed as direct results of our understanding of the genetic defects driving these types of cancer. The future promises many more such therapeutics.

The Genomics Age was written at the perfect time: several years after the sequencing of the human genome, when the world is just starting to appreciate the implications of this information. Gina Smith provides a global look at the future of this field and some insight into how it will affect our lives. It makes for enjoyable, informative reading for scientists and nonscientists alike.

Sabine Lange

SABINE LANGE *is a graduate student pursuing her PhD in carcinogenesis at the Graduate School of Biological Sciences of the University of Texas.*

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORM: FINDING THE SECRETS OF LIFE IN A TINY HERMAPHRODITE. ANDREW BROWN. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2003. 244 PAGES. HARDCOVER $65.00, SOFTCOVER $19.95. ISBN 0-231-13146-1 (HARDCOVER), 0-231-13147-X (SOFTCOVER).

British Prime Minister Tony Blair once hailed the Human Genome Project as "a revolution in medical science whose implications far surpass even the discovery of antibiotics, the first great technological triumph of the 21st century". As grandiose as that assertion seems at first glance, it might actually be an understatement. And it all began with an almost invisible worm. *Caenorhabditis elegans*, a transparent nematode about a half-millimeter long, is the worm in question, but *In the Beginning Was the Worm* is far more than the story of the worm. The book explores the work of John Sulston, Bob Horvitz, and Sydney Brenner, who shared the 2002 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine. In late 1963, Brenner wrote a one-page grant application to the United Kingdom's Medical Research Council proposing the following: "To start with we propose to identify every cell in the worm and trace lineages. We shall also investigate the constancy of development and study its control by looking for mutants." This rather vague plan was funded and kept Brenner and his team occupied for more than 20 years, and in 1998 the worm became the first multicellular organism to have its genome sequenced. Author Andrew Brown is a journalist and columnist for London's *The Guardian* newspaper, and he put his skills to good use in conducting numerous interviews that revealed the eccentricities and passions that drove this project and then writing about it in a highly engaging, often humorous style.

David Galloway

DAVID GALLOWAY *is an editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at the University of Texas M D Anderson Cancer Center.*