

HOW TO REPORT STATISTICS IN MEDICINE. ANNOTATED GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS, EDITORS, AND REVIEWERS. SECOND EDITION. THOMAS A LANG AND MICHELLE SECIC. PHILADELPHIA: AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS; 2006. 488 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$54.95. ISBN 10: 1-930513-69-0; ISBN 13: 978-1-930513-69-3.

Usually when one wants to find a book on a desired topic, there are plenty of books to be found. That does not seem to be the case when you are searching for a book on how to report statistics when writing, reviewing, and editing medical-research papers. Thomas A Lang and Michelle Secic understood the need and rose to the challenge, again, in updating the 1997 first edition of this book. The authors have added chapters on epidemiology-related reporting and revamped other sections. Lang and Secic note that chapters should be more accessible in the new edition, and they have greatly expanded on topics that were given a brief overview in the previous edition. With those changes, *How to Report Statistics in Medicine* becomes more than just a guide to reporting statistics. It is a well-rounded book that contains a wealth of guidelines for proper reporting of statistics, reporting on various types of research-study designs, reporting on integrated research studies, and handling tables and figures. The book also includes a minidictionary of statistical terms and tests and several useful appendixes. It seeks to fulfill the statistics deficiency of researchers who need to write research articles and cite statistics appropriately. The authors accomplish that goal and give the reader a bonus by dishing up a minicourse in research-study design. Lang and Secic have compiled time-saving guidelines and tips for researchers, writers, and editors to access easily as they prepare and review papers. This book is an excellent reference tool for anyone who writes, edits, or reviews articles with those kinds of content.

The book has a simple layout that ensures finding a desired topic quickly, with five basic sections (labeled parts), an appendix, and an index. The index provides quick and easy access to topics of interest. Each chapter has detailed (but not overwhelmingly detailed) information with tips and notes on common mistakes. Examples of proper wording appear throughout.

Part I is composed of 12 chapters that present guidelines on reporting different statistical tests and proper application of

the tests. Editors, reviewers, and researchers alike will greatly benefit from the well-organized chapters covering all the basics of the major statistical tests used today. As a young researcher, I find it often difficult to explain results correctly. The book gives excellent examples of what to do—and what not to do—when reporting and explaining results. The authors do a nice job of providing basic statistical knowledge for people who are not statisticians. Although Lang and Secic do not go into theoretical details of statistical tests, they provide simple, basic definitions of commonly used tests and explain their correct use.

The second part offers guidelines for reporting on the four most basic research designs in the biomedical arena: experimental trials, cohort studies, case-control studies, and cross-sectional studies. It provides a layout for each type of study and gives writers a template to follow in writing up their work. One can almost think of each chapter as a handy checklist of things that researchers should consider when writing their articles. For each part of the scientific method, the authors discuss specific items. I expect this section to save me time when I get ready to write my next article.

Part III covers guidelines for studies that integrate information from more than one study into an analytic perspective. The authors specifically cover systematic reviews and meta-analysis, economic evaluations, decision analyses, and clinical-practice guidelines. I struggled more with the chapter on economic evaluations because it deals with a subject that I am not familiar with. The authors deserve praise for explaining each type of study on a simple level that is easy to understand even for readers not familiar with it. As in the previous section, they go through each type of study and walk the reader through general reporting guidelines.

The fourth part is dedicated to guidelines for data and statistic presentation in tables and figures. The authors give detailed recommendations for presenting information in tables, graphs, and charts. I found this

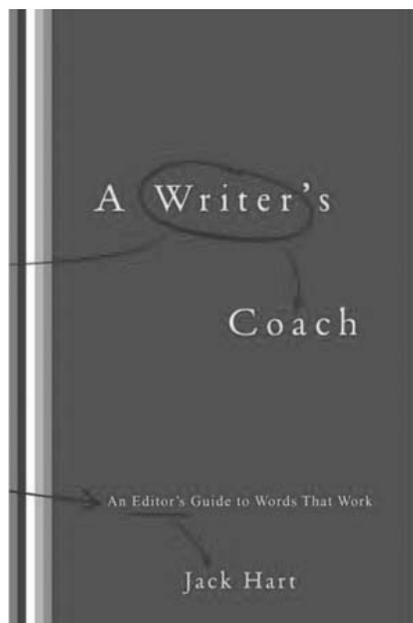
section to be one of the most valuable parts of the book. Part V is a minidictionary of common statistical terms and concepts; it is written on a basic level that will give a novice a simple understanding of statistical language.

In summary, *How to Report Statistics in Medicine* is a handy guide for those who need a quick reference on how to report statistics and research studies when writing or editing. The book is already a welcome addition to my bookshelf. This modest-size book provides basic knowledge of reporting and phrasing of statistical language.

The text contains detailed instruction in statistical tests and appropriate referencing and descriptions of the tests. Science editors, authors, and reviewers who are unfamiliar with or need refreshment in statistical knowledge will greatly benefit from this concise guide.

April Mahoney

APRIL MAHONEY works in the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.



A WRITER'S COACH: AN EDITOR'S GUIDE TO WORDS THAT WORK. JACK HART. NEW YORK: PANTHEON BOOKS; 2006. 283 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$24.95. ISBN 0-375-42327-3.

Her Dr Pepper fizzed in its can to the right of her keyboard. Her son's finger-painting of a penguin—white paint a brighter white than its white paper, with three jagged black marks and two small splotches of orange—was as abstract as she felt. But as she concentrated, she remembered the editor's advice, and she began the process of writing her book review. Little dots formed letters that developed into words, sentences, paragraphs.

Writing is not a result of magic. According to Jack Hart's *A Writer's Coach: An Editor's Guide to Words That Work*, the best writing results from a practical approach. Hart, a managing editor and writing coach at *The Oregonian*, makes this point clear on the first page of his introduction and then uses his chapters to help us to remember what we as readers, teachers, writers, and editors may forget: Writing is a step-by-step process. His book clarifies the steps.

Such useful advice provides scientific writers with approaches and reviews of how to appeal to and keep an audience, how to communicate effectively, and how to avoid common errors in writing.

Hart's tone benefits experienced and novice writers. He encourages without being effusive. He is practical but not dry. He challenges without overwhelming. He displays intelligence but is not pedantic. The quotations that begin each chapter help to carry his tone throughout the

book. For example, Hart begins his introduction with a prompt from Jack London: "You can't wait for inspiration; you have to go after it with a club" to motivate and provoke. His first chapter refutes a common complaint about writer's block by pointing out, in the words of Roger Simon, "My father never had truck driver's block." Other quotations include the Bible's "Let the speech be short, comprehending much in few words" to emphasize conciseness and George Orwell's "Good prose is like a window pane" to stress clarity.

Each chapter ends with what Hart calls a "cheat sheet", a list that reviews the main points of the chapter and functions as a study guide. Chapters on method, process, structure, force, brevity, clarity, rhythm, humanity, color, voice, mechanics, and mastery discuss the writing and revising process. A section on writer's resources follows, listing books peculiar to different modes of writing, grammar and style guides, and recommended "collections of great writing", including the Pushcart Prizes and series on *The Best American Magazine Writing*, *The Best American Essays*, *The Best American Short Stories*, and *The Best American Poetry*. Hart does not discriminate among genres. Instead, he focuses on what all writing has in common and gives advice that can benefit journalists, scientific writers, and poets alike.

Hart divides each chapter into sections, emphasizing writing as a process as well

as the benefits that structure brings. For example, he discusses the wide variety of ways to introduce a piece of writing in what, using journalistic terminology, he calls leads (summary leads, blind leads, wraps, shirttail leads, anecdotal leads, narrative leads, scene-setting leads, gallery leads, significant-detail leads, single-instance leads, and wordplay leads). Each type of lead appears as a boldface numbered subheading with an example in italics followed by a paragraph in definition of the term. He then illustrates pitfalls to avoid in introductions (question leads, quotation leads, topic leads, and teaser leads) and leads to avoid (suitcase leads, generic leads, and cliché leads). Hart discusses the body of the writing, transitions, and conclusions with similar attention. He makes use of flow charts, diagrams, and lists to illustrate his discussion.

We want to be around “powerful people”, Hart maintains, so he asks us to think of a piece of writing as though it were a person. Just as we are attracted to an authoritative person, he describes how we are attracted to writing that has connected characteristics of force, assurance, diligence, and order. He gives examples of good and bad prose to help us to understand his characterization.

Hart uses Mark Twain’s quotation “Don’t say that the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream” to emphasize effective use of dialogue and quotations in writing. He discusses a writer’s natural tendency to intrude on quotations and shows, with a variety of examples, how dialogue can reveal more than description can ever tell. Showing, not just telling, is a common

theme in Hart’s book, and he follows his own advice.

He gives answers to typical questions. What are the top clichéd words and phrases to avoid? He lists seven pages of them. He provides a basic grammar review, handy rules about such troublesome elements as hyphens, and easy-to-remember spelling rules. For instance, is it *offered* or *offered*? Hart’s rule is clear: “When you add a suffix, you double the final consonant in the root word only when the spoken stress is on the last syllable,” so the answer is *offered*. He gives a similar rule concerning the addition of *-able*. True to the practical nature of his book, he also encourages writers to use tools to check such elements as spelling and grammar on their own. Hart also dispels common myths, such as the prohibition of starting a sentence with *and* or *but*, splitting an infinitive, and ending a sentence with a preposition.

Hart’s book proves that “mastery is not some closely guarded mystery, but the step-by-step conquest of craft.” With the book open on her desk, between the chocolate hearts left over from Valentine’s Day below her son’s abstract penguin, she looked up a word in the dictionary, deleted inflated phrases with a highlight and control+C, and came full circle in the end.

Angie Macri

ANGIE MACRI worked as a scientific writer and editor before becoming the English Department chair at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock, Arkansas.