

Peat, J., Elliott, E., Baur, L., Keena, V.: **Scientific Writing. Easy when you know how.** – BMJ Books, London 2002. ISBN 0 7279 1625 4. 292 pp., GBP 22.50.

Every year a few books appear that teach students, scientists, and practitioners how to deal with scientific writing. Many of the textbooks are in the field of medicine: this is connected with the huge amount of medical journals that appear in all world countries and are read by a wide audience. Therefore the clear readability of the papers is in the first line of interest. Four Australians (three associate professors in paediatrics and child health and one information manager) prepared a very practical textbook that brings many examples. Even if the examples are mostly from medicine, the recommendations contained can be used universally. Well chosen mottoes introduce each chapter and part, recommendations and examples are in boxes marked by green tinge. Websites and references bringing further information are always supplemented.

The book consists of twelve chapters. First chapter is on scientific writing in general (reasons, creativity, thought, structure, and style). The following three chapters show how to start, write, and finish a paper. This includes paper planning (preparation of and work with drafts), choosing a journal, keeping to journal instructions (a very important recommendation!), deciding authorship, preparing individual parts of an article, choosing proper title, preparing references, creating a good impression, submitting the paper, *etc.* Practical information is always included, *e.g.* how to report numbers, prepare tables and figures, correctly use statistics, write readable discussion, prepare a letter to the editor, *etc.* Chapter 5 deals with peer review and editorial processes, including author's reaction to reviewer comments, paper revision and resubmitting, reading proofs, and also with becoming a reviewer, writing review comments, and becoming an editor. Chapter 6 on publishing includes questions such as duplicate publication, data sharing, electronic journals, citation index, and impact factors. Chapter 7 deals with other types of documents, such as letters (brief communications), editorials, review papers, case reports (used only in medicine), and university theses.

Next four chapters explain in detail the writing praxis.

Examples of bad and good writing always supplement the explanation. Chapter 8 is on writing style. Writing in plain English, using understandable and short sentences, without fog, respecting word and sentence order, with correct word order, maintaining flow of ideas, avoiding repetitions, removing redundant phrases, eliminating tautologies, *etc.* are underlined here. Chapter 9 elucidates basic rules of grammar, dealing with nouns, sneaky plurals, adjectives, verbs, infinitives, adverbs, pronouns and determiners, conjunctions and prepositions, phrases, clauses, *etc.* Correct word choice is topic of the next chapter, which recommends avoiding emotive terms, distinguishing level and concentration (content should be added for dealing with cells and tissues!), removing improper use of negatives and abbreviations, and so on. Chapter 11 deals with punctuation (full stops, ellipses, question and exclamation marks, colons, semicolons, commas, apostrophes, parentheses, brackets, slashes, and dashes).

The final chapter 12 is on support systems such as internet search, activities of writers groups, and benefits of mentoring. A detailed subject index is supplemented.

I have only a few critical comments to this textbook. The information on preparing illustrations should be more detailed: inexperienced authors often use computer programmes that may result in not optimal presentation of results. Also the labelling of figure axes must avoid confusion. Use of SI units should be stressed. Some given recommendations supporting text understandability may lead to talkative papers. Compared numbers should always have the same amount of decimal places (*i.e.* -0.08 to 0.70, not -0.08 to 0.7 as shown on p. 75). Numbers in columns should not be centred as those in the third column of Table 3.5.

Generally speaking, all beginners in writing scientific papers (and not only in medicine) will certainly find useful information in this book. Orientation in its texts is easy and most examples are well chosen.

Z. ŠESTÁK (*Praha*)