

Preface

Fundamentals of Writing for the Biomedical Sciences began in 1990 as an undertaking to help students with literature reviews, research proposals, and scientific projects. Because poor writing can undermine the value of good research, there was a need to develop a resource that dealt exclusively with communication skills. As a result I developed this handbook, which can be used as a self-instructional guide. Because examples were selected from a variety of disciplines, this book should be useful to workers in any of the biomedical sciences.

Grammar and writing style are indispensable to writers who want to use precise, lucid language. Mind you, how we express ourselves depends largely on our intended audience. How many of you have overheard a conversation similar to this?

“Lookit!” said Olive. “Did you see the new shift schedule?”

“Yeah, I read it,” Bill replied.

“What a rip-off! Is there any way you can work Saturday for me?”

“Nope,” said Bill, “I’ve got tickets to the Oilers. Hey, gimme back my pipette!”

Since we may use poor grammar when speaking informally, we sometimes need to be reminded of the conventions of English usage when writing.

There are dozens of books on the market to help writers with grammar, style, and usage. There are even a few designed specifically for scientific writers. Many of these books are excellent in their own way.

Unfortunately, some grammar texts give so many rules that all but the most persistent reader can be overwhelmed by the volume of information. Others are too concise, offering prescriptions for good writing but never

explaining how to write well. *Fundamentals of Writing for the Biomedical Sciences* presents a minimum of guidelines consistent with literacy and offers practical suggestions for improving writing.

Most grammar books give examples for writers in the arts, in government, or in journalism. This book gives examples drawn from a variety of biomedical disciplines, including clinical biochemistry, hematology, immunology, medical microbiology and infectious diseases, molecular genetics, research methodology, and transfusion medicine. Because adult learning is task oriented, learning is more meaningful when it correlates closely with the conditions in which it will be used.

Compared to most scientific writing guides, *Fundamentals of Writing for the Biomedical Sciences* is more comprehensive on grammar, punctuation, organization, and revision. This text starts before the scientific guides begin and gives the essentials of how to write forcefully, concisely, and clearly. What I have tried to do with this text is to bridge the gap between grammar and scientific guides and make the material relevant to biomedical writers.

I encourage you to consult the sources in the bibliography for more information on the topics in this text and welcome comments and suggestions to help improve future editions. Please use the feedback form at the back of the book or write a letter if you prefer.

I am pleased to share credit with my husband Peter, who collaborated with me in writing this book. Besides being a constant source of ideas, criticism, and encouragement, he served as editor and desktop compositor throughout numerous drafts of the book.