



# Avoiding Pitfalls in Medical Editing

Presentation by Katharine O'Moore-Klopf, ELS

---

- Medical editing conventions
- Terminology and jargon
- Word pileups and hyphenation havoc
- Patient-friendly language
- Statistics
- Reference lists
- Vital sections of the *AMA Manual of Style*
- Necessary reference works
- How to move into medical editing
- Where to find clients

# Our focus here today

2



- Original research reports
- Case studies
- Product reviews
- Medical book reviews

# Medical Editing Conventions

## Types of Journal Articles



- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

# Medical Editing Conventions

Research Article Format: IMRAD



- Beginning, middle, and an end
- Tight writing
- No reference citations
- Abbreviations or not?

# Medical Editing Conventions

## Abstracts



- Don't duplicate info from the text
- Is it really a table?
- Can readers understand the table without looking at the text?
- Simplify
- Check the math
- Give credit

# Medical Editing Conventions

## Tables



- Don't duplicate info from the text
- Is it really a figure?
- Can readers understand the figure without looking at the text?
- Check the axes
- Provide a key
- Protect study participants' privacy
- Color or black and white?
- Give credit

# Medical Editing Conventions

## Figures



- Normal or abnormal tests?
- *Article* versus *manuscript*
- *Assure*, *ensure*, or *insure*?
- *Due to* versus *owing to*
- *Classic* versus *classical*
- *Die of* or *die from*?
- *Disc* or *disk*?
- *Dose* or *dosage*?
- Full terms or casual shortened versions?
- *Regime* or *regimen*?
- Normal patients?
- Other preferred usages

# Terminology and Jargon

## Correct Usage





- Consider readability by audience
- Get rid of clichés
- *In order to* versus *to*
- *Upon* versus *on*
- *Above* and *below* as location markers
- Euphemisms versus plain English
- *Chart* (noun) versus *medical record*
- *Normal* patients or volunteers?
- *Preemie* versus *premature infant*
- *Prepped* versus *prepared*

# Terminology and Jargon

## Fillers, Clichés, and Euphemisms



- Avoid too many ideas in a single sentence
- Fixes

# Word Pileups and Hyphenation Havoc

## Adjectival Pileup



- Don't hyphenate unless required for clarity
- Don't hyphenate multiword anatomic terms as modifiers.

# Word Pileups and Hyphenation Havoc

## Hyphenation Havoc



- A patient is not a case
- *Study participant* versus *subject*
- Don't equate people with their diseases or disabilities
- Psychologists and psychiatrists treat *clients*, not *patients*
- Diseases, not patients, are diagnosed
- *Sex* = physical maleness or femaleness; *gender* = how people represent their identity

# Patient-Friendly Language

## Part 1



- *Manage cases; treat patients*
- *Have a disease, not suffer from a disease*
- *Treatments fail; patients don't fail treatments*
- Don't use *elderly, middle-aged, or young*; define age groups
- Use inclusive language
- Avoid stereotypes

# Patient-Friendly Language

## Part 2

- Data in figures and tables that don't match data in text
- Math errors in finding the mean of a set of numbers
- Errors in reporting the number of study group participants
- Rounding errors
- Mixing data sets when 2 kinds of statistics are analyzed for the same groups



# Statistics

## Mistakes Authors Make

- Analysis of variance
- Chi-square test
- Confidence interval
- Correlation coefficient
- Degrees of freedom
- Dependent variable
- Dose–response relationship
- Hazard rate
- Independent variable
- Intent-to-treat analysis
- Kaplan-Meier method
- Mann-Whitney test
- Multivariate analysis
- Nomogram
- Odds ratio
- *P* value
- Relative risk
- Standard deviation
- Standard error
- Standard error of the mean
- *t*-test (aka Student’s *t*-test)

# Statistics

## Terms to Learn

- 
- 
- **Humanities style**, from *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition
  - **APA style**, from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition
  - **AMA style**, from the *AMA Manual of Style*, 10th edition

# Reference Lists

## Style Examples



- Reference to a journal article: section 3.11 (pages 47–52)
- Reference to printed books and chapters within them: section 3.12 (pages 52–56)
- Reference to newspaper articles: section 3.13.1 (page 57)
- Reference to government or agency bulletins: section 3.13.2 (pages 57–58)
- Reference to thesis or dissertation: section 3.13.4 (pages 58–59)
- Reference to unpublished material: section 3.13.8 (pages 59–61)
- Reference to electronic media (eg, online journals, Web sites, online conference proceedings, e-mail list messages): section 3.15 (pages 63–72)

# Reference Lists

## Guidelines Within *AMA Manual of Style*

- PubMed: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>
- “International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals” (Vancouver style):  
[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform\\_requirements.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html)
- California Digital Library Online Catalog, at <http://melvyl.cdlib.org>
- Library of Congress Online Catalogs: <http://catalog.loc.gov/>
- Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com>

# Reference Lists

## Where to Go When Reference Entries Are Incomplete



- Chapter 3: on references
- Chapter 11: proper usage
- Chapter 14, section 14.11: abbreviations for clinical, technical, and other common terms
- Chapter 14, section 14.12: units of measure
- Chapter 15: specialized terminology


# Vital Sections of the *AMA* *Manual of Style*

- *AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors*, 10th edition
- *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 31st edition
- *Mathematics Into Type*, updated edition
- Medical spelling-checker software: *Stedman's Medical/Pharmaceutical Spellchecker*, Inductel, Spellex
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th edition
- *Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*, 8th edition
- *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*, 28th edition

# Necessary Reference Works

- Read medical journals
- Read medical materials written for the general public
- Study the *AMA Manual of Style*
- Take a medical terminology course; search online for these.
- Take anatomy and physiology courses (find them online) or read textbooks in these areas.
- Join the American Medical Writers Association (<http://www.amwa.org>) and take its certification courses
- Take online courses from the Drug Information Association (<http://www.diahome.org/DIAHOME/Education/FindEducationalOffering.aspx>)

# How to Move into Medical Editing

- 
- Join the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA; <http://www.amwa.org>)
  - Join the Council of Science Editors (CSE; <http://www.councilscienceeditors.org>)
  - Study the Toolkit for New Medical Writers: [http://www.amwa.org/toolkit\\_new\\_med\\_writers](http://www.amwa.org/toolkit_new_med_writers)
  - Take medical writer Emma Hitt's 6-week course: <http://www.hittmedicalwriting.com/coach.html>
  - Read the blog post “How to Find Medical Editing Freelance Work”: <http://editor-mom.blogspot.com/2011/09/how-to-find-medical-editing-freelance.html>

# Where to Find Clients

22