



Report Writing Guidelines

Adapted from Grammar and Writing Skills for Healthcare Professionals,
Doreen and Lorraine Villemaire, Delmar/Thomson Learning, 2000

The diversity of writings in the healthcare profession is vast, ranging from a single one-page information sheet to a research paper/report containing multiple pages. The following information will provide the healthcare student with suggestions and requirements regarding: research, formatting, editing, and document processing.

Research

Research is often necessary in all types of healthcare writing. Research is a diligent and systematic investigation into a topic to discover facts and theories. Changes occur rapidly in the development of diseases, health conditions, treatments, and technologies. Some of the places where students could locate materials for reports include:

- Medical, Public, and School Libraries
- Internet
- Healthcare Periodicals
- Public Health Department
- Healthcare Organizations
- Hospitals, Offices, and Clinics
- Interviews with Healthcare Personnel
- Computer Technology
- Clinical Studies

The Writing Process

The most important word in the preceding subtitle is the word ***process***. A process is a series of steps from beginning to end for achieving a desired result. Writing becomes easier when broken down into manageable steps. A process is not a one step operation that magically produces a finished project on the first attempt. Many people wrongfully assume that once something is written, it is acceptable and the task is over. Whether a beginner or an experienced writer, the implementation of all steps in the writing process is crucial to successful documentation. Dr. Seuss, a prestigious writer of children's literature, pondered hours and days on which preposition (to, of by, for) conveyed the best meaning and rhythm.

The writing process includes five steps: prewriting, writing, rewriting, finalizing, and proofreading. The steps remain the same for any type of writing: a single sentence, narrative, speech, proposal, instruction, summary, description, paragraph, short story, novel, report, memo, letter, or medical documentation. To demonstrate the steps of the writing process, a short paragraph about legal issues in healthcare will be used as an example.

Step One: Prewriting

The prewriting stage is the planning stage during which an outline of everything the author wants to write about the topic is prepared. At this initial step, the writer thinks about the reading audience and begins to focus more clearly on the subject. Details are jotted down in any order. If necessary, the author researches and limits the amount and length of writing. Correct spelling is not necessary at this stage.

Step Two: Writing

In the second step of the writing process, a pencil/pen is placed on paper or fingers on the keyboard. The task is to start writing and to keep it flowing. Forget about spelling, grammar, or punctuation at this point. Do not try to make things perfect. Just write. Let anything happen. Present facts or ideas about the topic.

Step Three: Rewriting

Read the first draft. Does it say what it is meant to say? Is the message clear and complete? Are facts and events in the right order? Does the writing follow the plan established in the prewriting stage? Concentrate on *each* word. Now correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. (When using a computer, never depend solely on it to check spelling and grammar.) Change what needs to be changed. If necessary, consult others for feedback. Notice any satisfaction or discomfort that comes with reading the words. If there is discomfort, more work is needed.

Step Four: Finalizing

Once you are satisfied with the corrections, rewrite or type the final version.

Step Five: Proofreading

The purpose of proofreading is to check and correct the final printed product. The proofreading stage is not the time to make major changes. It is the time to check for typing errors or slips of the pen. Mistakes reflect a negative image to the reader about the preparation and professionalism of the author. Patients could even equate poor office practices with poor patient care.

In summary, it should be evident that good writing does not just happen. A writer must follow a systematic approach that calls for planning, organizing, writing, evaluating, and revising. Just as you learn to read by reading, you learn to write by writing. Each paper and report you write will help you develop the attributes of a successful writing style.

General Formatting Guidelines

Reports written about topics in the healthcare field should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) style of writing. Consider these basic APA guidelines when organizing and editing a report/paper:

- Standard white bond paper, 8 ½ by 11 inches
- One inch margins on top, bottom, left, and right sides
- Lines typed unjustified, or uneven (ragged) at the right margin
- Pages numbered consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, using Arabic numerals
- Paper should be double-spaced with the exception of long quotations.
- A standard block-style font should be used (examples: Arial, Times New Roman, Helvetica, Courier). Students should avoid script and symbol fonts.
- Students should prepare all reports using a 12-point font, unless otherwise directed by their instructor.
- Pages arranged in the following order:
 - Title page
 - Text/Body of paper
 - References/Bibliography

A copy of the complete APA Style Guide can be purchased at any book retailer or can be downloaded/copied from:

<http://www.wooster.edu/psychology/apa-crib.html>

Title Page

On the title page, the main title is typed in uppercase and lowercase letters. If the main title is more than one line, use a double space between the lines. An abbreviated version of the title is called a running head(er), which may be used for identification of the report on subsequent pages. The name of the author appears on a separate line beneath the title. Immediately following the name of the author, the course for which the paper is required should appear. The final line of the title page information should be the date on which the paper was submitted. Author, course, and datelines should be single-spaced.

Example:

The Final Breath of a Second-Hand Smoker

Suzie Q. Student
HS212/Law and Ethics
January 1, 2001

Text/Body of Paper

- double spacing in paragraphs/between paragraphs
- set your tab to indent 5 spaces in from the left margin
- title is centered on first page/first line is one doublespace below the main title

Citations/Bibliography

-journals

-newspapers

-books

-reference materials

-on-line citations

-unpublished materials