Book review

Successful Scientific Writing by John M. Bowen, Janice R. Matthews and Robert W. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, 1996. $19.95 (181 pages) ISBN 0 521 55948 0

In their Preface, the authors of *Successful Scientific Writing* claim to have over 25 years experience in teaching scientists how to write. The depth and scope of their book clearly comes from this extensive background. The wealth of relevant information substantiates their claim that the manual has been rigorously 'field-tested'.

The book takes a novice writer step-by-step through the decisions of whether or not to publish, where to publish, and what type of format to use. Next, the authors walk the reader through the process of creating the first draft and selecting the proper visual aids (tables, illustrations, etc.). The book does a good job of explaining when, where and how to use the various media. Even veteran writers would find gems in this latter section.

However, the strongest parts of the book, from the perspectives of both novice and experienced writers, were the chapters (approximately half of them) that dealt with word smithing. The authors have done a remarkable job in communicating proper punctuation, grammar, clarity and brevity. Instead of generalities that are difficult to apply, the authors use creative and often humorous examples of specifics. A writer who edited his or her paper using these techniques in a step-by-step fashion could create an almost flawless presentation. Reviewers might wish to recommend this book when manuscripts must be rejected for publication because of 'poor writing'.

The book concludes by advising the reader about submitting the manuscript, dealing with reviewer comments, and making proof corrections.

I could find only one area for which I could propose additional ideas. The authors suggest a variety of techniques for organizing data (outlining, clustering and brainstorming). Next, the authors suggest a 'go with the flow' approach to the first draft. But how does the scientist, especially the inexperienced one, decide what's important and what's not? Faced with this dilemma, how do they avoid a serious case of writer's block? One method that has worked well in my courses utilizes a series of specific questions applicable to most experimental papers. The writer works backward from conclusion to introduction and never has to outline, cluster, etc. Because everything is in bite-size chunks, writer's block is largely avoided. The decision about what to say has already been made before the first draft has begun. Such a cook-book approach for junior scientists might be a helpful addition in the next edition of *Successful Scientific Writing*.

Anyone engaged in scientific writing knows that it is an art. Ultimately, no publication on the subject will be perfect. *Successful Scientific Writing*, however, comes very close. Any scientist who needs a writing manual will be delighted with the wealth of guidance found in this book.

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In short...

Targeted Genetics (Seattle, WA, USA) recently announced positive results for two phase I trials testing their AAV-CFTR gene therapy product in patients suffering from **cystic fibrosis** (CF), an inherited disease caused by a defect in the CF transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) gene. The AAV-CFTR gene product comprises a functioning CFTR gene contained in a modified, non-replicating form of the adeno-associated virus (AAV), a common virus that is not known to cause human disease. In a recently concluded phase I trial, AAV-CFTR was administered at five dose levels to the sinuses of 10 CF patients suffering from chronic sinusitis. The three highest dose levels resulted in gene transfer, and the longest persistence of the CFTR gene was 70 days, which is significantly longer than reported for other vectors. No adverse effects were observed, even after repeat delivery. Data from the second phase I trial, which is still continuing, demonstrated the safety of the AAV-CFTR gene product.

The AAV vector is also reported to be suitable for the delivery of other genes. Scientists at **Avigen** (Alameda, CA, USA), in collaboration with researchers at **Johns Hopkins**, have used the vector to deliver the α-glucosidase gene, which is associated with **Pompe's disease**, an inherited fatal heart disease in children. Using the AAV vector, the team was able to deliver the normal gene for α-glucosidase into muscle cells of children who died from Pompe's disease and subsequently restore the normal level of α-glucosidase activity in these cells.