



CAME Voice/Voix

Easing the agony of academic writing: Tips and resources for medical education scholars (Part 2)
Lorelei Lingard, Centre for Education Research & Innovation, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University (lorelei.lingard@schulich.uwo.ca; Twitter [@LingardLorelei](https://twitter.com/LingardLorelei))

“It's none of their business that you have to learn how to write. Let them think you were born that way” Ernest Hemingway

Medical educators have to write. Writing is how we share and develop our scholarly work, and we recognize that our work's value is increased if it appears in print. Many of us don't find that writing comes easily, and we're not sure how to improve. In this second installation of a 2-part series, we continue reviewing common sources of struggle in academic writing and offer strategies or resources for developing writing skills.

The fear of grammar: Grammar terrifies many writers. If you've been told in the past that you “write poorly” (spectacularly unhelpful feedback!) you may have inferred that you are a grammar idiot. This inference may give you a good dose of writer's block, or even a profound case of imposter syndrome. But grammar is set of tools – that is all; it is not a reflection of intelligence. Put aside your shame and get your grammar challenges diagnosed. A knowledgeable colleague can help, but if you haven't got one handy, try Helen Sword's website, The Writer's Diet (writersdiet.com). Here you can paste a paragraph of your prose to assess its grammar and syntax patterns. Don't get hung up on the details of the assessment, especially your score! (My score varies widely, depending on which paragraph I insert.) Instead, use the tool to identify patterns: Do you over-use prepositions? Do you rely on the passive voice? You can't alter these habits until you can see them.

The myth that writers are born, not made: Many of us believe that good writers always were good and poor writers never will be. That's not true. Writing is a learnable skill, developed more readily if you seek support. Many sources of support are available, from virtual to in-person, and from free to fee-based. If your institution has a medical education center, then that is likely a community where scholars provide feedback on one another's drafts. Your university may also offer writing workshops for faculty and graduate students. There are also published resources on writing that you can use, either on your own or as a basis for a community faculty development exercise. For instance, Perspectives on Medical Education has a regular section, “The Writer's Craft”, which features short lessons directed at helping medical education writers improve the energy, clarity and persuasiveness of their prose. Social media such as Twitter is also a good resource for writing pearls and connections to virtual writing communities (see for instance [@Write4research](https://twitter.com/Write4research)). Many medical education conferences, such as the Canadian Conference on Medical Education (CCME) and the International Conference on Residency Education (ICRE), offer workshops on writing. If you can invest more time, consider attending a Writing Masterclass. A Masterclass offers writing strategies, grammar pearls, and the opportunity to apply this learning your own writing and receive individualized coaching and feedback.

Writing is an important currency of academic knowledge exchange. And it is a skill, not a trait. We can all improve as writers, and these strategies and resources can help us in that journey.

For more on the writer's craft see: Lingard, L. The Writer's Craft - Editorial. Perspectives on Medical Education. 2015, 4(2): 79-80. <http://bit.ly/2oRLWxw>

The CERI Masterclass in Writing Research for Publication will run just before ICRE in Quebec City in October 2017. More details at:

http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/continuingprofessionaldevelopment/faculty_development/masterclass_2017_QuebecCity.html