

THE NITTY GRITTY:
How to get writing done for
biomedical journals

Sharon K. Inouye, M.D., M.P.H.
Professor of Medicine
Harvard Medical School



NIDUS



Join NIDUS to connect to Delirium Research

What is NIDUS?

- NIA-funded research network dedicated to advancing the study of delirium through development of research resources, career development opportunities, and dissemination of delirium science.

How to be involved:

- Apply to attend the **Delirium Boot Camp** – 2-day workshop on delirium research, Oct. 29-30 2020, Remote meeting
 - **Applications due July 17:** deliriumnetwork.org/career-development/boot-camp-application/ Small grant application for mock review
- Join a **Junior Faculty Working Group**—email us!
- Participate in the American Delirium Society Meeting, March 2021
- Register for website deliriumnetwork.org to access our blog, resources and receive NIDUS newsletter and announcements.

Follow NIDUS online!

Twitter: [@nidus_delirium](https://twitter.com/nidus_delirium)
[@sharon_inouye](https://twitter.com/sharon_inouye)

• Facebook: [NIDUSDelirium](https://www.facebook.com/NIDUSDelirium)

• Email: nidus@hsl.harvard.edu

Expert by a Different Definition

Definition: A person who has made every possible mistake in his/her field that there is to make

TRUE CONFESSION

...I HATE TO WRITE

*...Lessons learned from >300
articles*

NOT THE CONTENT, BUT THE PROCESS

- Today, we will discuss the process of getting writing done.
- For the content of the paper: ideas, analyses—work with your mentor or writing group (NIDUS junior faculty working group!).
- This talk is focused on HOW to get the writing done.

Paper Timeline

- Setting your paper-writing timeline is key.
- Set deadline to identify key steps and establish benchmark dates; work with your mentor
 - Make it realistic
 - Consider other factors
- Put them on your calendar as hard deadlines (like abstracts/grants) and stay on track!!

WRITING THE PAPER

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- Lay out your tables and figures
- Create a detailed outline
 - Start with Specific Aims
 - Then Methods and Results
 - Finally end with key points for Introduction and Discussion

OUTLINE

- SPECIFIC AIMS/HYPOTHESES
- BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION
 - Pertinent review of background literature
 - Key points (2-3) about your topic
 - Lay the groundwork for the importance of your topic:
 - How common is the problem?
 - How bad is the problem? Dollars spent on problem?
 - Justify why this new study is needed
 - Limitations in previous work
 - What it will add to the existing work

METHODS

- Setting and subjects. Include IRB statement at end of this section.
- Study design
- Intervention (if applicable)
- Assessments
- Outcome(s)
- Statistical analyses (include software used)

RESULTS

- Line this up according to tables and figures
- Highlight key results
- Stress important points which will not be in tables or figures.

DISCUSSION

- Summary of key points
 - Do not reiterate results
 - Emphasize key points: take home messages
- Strengths of the study
 - Emphasize 2-3 key strengths
- Limitations of this study
 - Despite strengths, some caveats deserve mention
 - For each caveat, indicate why it does NOT invalidate the study
- Conclusions, implications, future work
 - Key take home messages and implications
 - Future work needed

WRITING

- Start writing; one section at a time
- Set goals to write so many paragraphs/sections per day
- Break each section down into more components, creating a more detailed outline that you will fill in
- Break it down to make it doable and feasible, and not overwhelming

REVIEWING AND REVISING

- First draft should be reviewed by coauthors and mentors for feedback
- Revised draft: two external reviewers
- Once all advice incorporated, ready to send out
- Adhere to all guidelines in journal's "Information for Authors"

There is no such thing as
great writing, only great
rewriting

--Louis D. Brandeis

More than a half, maybe as much as two-thirds of my life as a writer is rewriting. I wouldn't say I have a talent that's special. It strikes me that I have an unusual kind of stamina.

--John Irving

IMPROVING STYLE OF WRITING

- Read through articles, papers or grants
- Adopt patterns/wording that are highly effective
- Be succinct and clear
- Have experienced mentors carefully review your manuscripts

CLEAR SCIENTIFIC WRITING

- Cut out the ornamentation, extra words that are not needed

“Write it as straight as you
can” --*Ernest Hemingway*

HOW TO GET WRITING DONE

- Block off time
- Defend the time--
keep it uninterrupted!
- Set your goals; be disciplined
- Set appointments for reviews
or other motivators

In academic medicine

- Why is writing important?
- Writing is our job—it's also the ***main currency for promotion***
- Nothing else matters as much as the papers
- Get it done!

SELECTING YOUR JOURNAL

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Target your manuscript toward the audience you want to reach:

- Search on your topic
- Put abstract into “JANE” website
<<https://jane.biosemantics.org/>>
- Speak to experts in the field
- Pull past issues of potential journals and review

ONCE JOURNAL SELECTED

Once you have narrowed down to the journal:

- Get that journal's guidelines (Information for Authors)
- Review Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals

www.nejm.com/general/text/requirements/1.htm

Writing during COVID-19

- So many competing pulls and demands on our time during this unprecedented pandemic
- Create focus: 2-3 essential things to get done each day—break it down
- Lessen expectations, but keep yourself accountable
- Prioritize to what's most important

Get it done....

**“Things may come to those
who wait,
but only the things left by
those who hustle.”**

~ Abraham Lincoln

Don't be afraid to make mistakes

“It is a mistake to suppose that men succeed through success; they much oftener succeed through failures. Precept, study, advice, and example could never have taught them so well as failure has done”.

~ Samuel Smiles

Never give up...

After it took Thomas Edison 2000 tries to invent the light bulb, a young reporter asked him how it felt to fail so many times. Edison said:

“I never failed once. It just happened to be a 2000-step process”



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