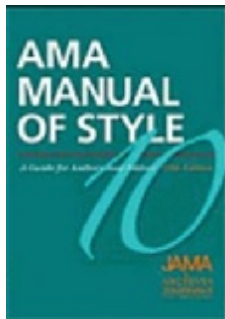


In the Bookstores...

Standards on style and guidance on policy for medical journals



Iverson C, Christiansen S, Flanagan A, Fontanarosa PB, Glass RM, Gregoline B, Lurie SJ, Meyer HS, Winker MA, Young RK. *AMA Manual of Style, a Guide for Authors and Editors, 10th ed.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-19-517633-9 (Hardcover). Approximately EUR 40.00, GBP 32.00, USD 55.00. 1022 pages.

That's not a typo—the new edition of the *American Medical Association Manual of Style* (AMA MOS10) has one thousand twenty-two pages, and weighs almost 2 kg.

Especially for researchers, writers, editors and translators who prepare material for health science journals published in the USA, this reference work provides detailed guidance in six main areas: Preparing an article for publication, Style, Terminology, Measurement and quantitation, and Technical information. This last section covers typography, manuscript editing and proof-reading, publishing terms and additional resources such as dictionaries, other guides to terminology, style and usage, writing, ethics, peer review, illustrations, databases, guidelines and professional organizations. The manual is thorough and authoritative (especially on objective elements of technical style such as units and nomenclature in different medical and scientific specialties); the content is carefully referenced, and the references on all topics are impressively up-to-date.

However, the manual's main virtue—its comprehensiveness—may threaten to become its downfall. The last page of the index is numbered 1010 in my copy, and there are 12 preliminary pages not counting the Contents page. I haven't figured out why the publisher lists the number of pages as 1032 on their website, but that may be just another of the editorial and production glitches that mar this monumental update of the *AMA Manual of Style*. In a complex project involving many contributors it is hard to keep oversights from proliferating in proportion to the total number of pages. Fortunately for users, the publisher maintains a list of errata at <http://www.us.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195176339/errata/?view=usa>, and users should be sure to download the list and check it for updates from time to time.

The publisher's website also has links to other types of useful information about AMA MOS10, including an excerpt from the Preface that summarizes the main changes and additions compared to the previous edition, published in 1998 (the "What's new" link at <http://www.us.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195176339/whatsnew/?view=usa>

for details). The sheer size and level of detail of the manual sometimes slow efficient consulting. For example, advice on the use of hyphens versus en-dashes for words and numbers is located in different sections of the manual with no cross-referencing. Guidance on some policy issues (for example, acknowledging contributors other than authors) is also treated in different sections, making some of the coverage redundant.

In Chapter 5 on Ethical and legal considerations and Chapter 6 on Editorial assessment and processing, the authors have done a great job of reporting on the most recent ethical issues and recommendations crafted by, among others, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. However, the 290 pages this material adds to the manual might be more at home in a separate handbook aimed specifically at editors, managing editors and others with responsibility for deciding what to publish and ensuring compliance with the most current professional and ethical guidelines.

The Forward notes that the manual "contains everything that a group of editors from the *JAMA* and *Archives* family of journals believe is essential to produce a manuscript that is well organized, clear, readable and authoritative" (p. v). The writing in the chapters on editorial practices and policies, typography, and manuscript editing and proof-reading does not always make clear when policies followed at *JAMA* and the *Archives* journals are being described to illustrate one possible approach among many alternatives, and when the manual is recommending a specific evidence-based practice as the most effective solution. Users should be aware that alternative methods for peer review, editorial processing and journal production are used by many successful journals published inside and outside the USA. International editors and authors need to be aware of certain differences in style rules between the US and the UK (AMA MOS10 naturally follows US usage), and as the text reminds readers in several places, the instructions for authors of individual journals need to be checked to detect and comply with alternatives to the AMA MOS10 recommendations for manuscript preparation.

Editors of small journals with limited resources must choose their priorities for quality control and quality assurance carefully to stay within their limited budget. These users can be forgiven for feeling that AMA MOS10 has overlooked the fact that most journals survive on a much smaller allotment of resources than *JAMA* and the *Archives* family enjoy. Advice on which of the recommendations deserve priority when available resources are limited would make the manual more useful to editors and publishers of small journals that cannot hope to implement all the guidance in the manual.

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The index still lacks entries for “author’s editor”, “medical writer” or “translator”, and these entries are also missing from the updated and expanded Glossary of publishing terms. However, the manual supports recognition of the work these professionals do by stating, in section 5.1.2 on Guest and ghost authors, “[t]o give proper credit to medical writers and author’s editors, journal editors should require authors to identify all persons who have participated substantially in the writing or editing of the manuscript. Substantial editing and writing assistance should be disclosed to the editor at the time of manuscript submission and mentioned in the Acknowledgment” (p. 132). This message is reiterated in section 5.2.1 on Acknowledging support, assistance and contributions of those who are not authors (pp. 140-141), and again in section 5.5.2 on Reporting funding and other support (p. 173). Translation is mentioned only in connection with secondary publication (pp. 149-150); it’s a shame translation was not included in the list of “contributions commonly recognized in an acknowledgment” on p. 140, because many researchers, aware of their linguistic limitations, prefer to submit a professionally translated manuscript rather than inflict on reviewers and editors a paper composed in their own English. After all, Chapter 5 (section 5.11.5) recognizes that poor writing alone is now considered a legitimate reason to reject a manuscript (p. 265). Whether this policy is fair to international authors is debatable, but it’s a fact of life.

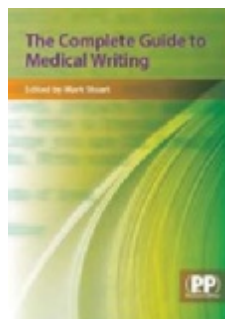
Given the thorough, up-to-date coverage and the well-deserved prestige this reference work has earned over the years, it’s an excellent investment, glitches and all, at about 40.00 euros. The layout and typesetting are more legible than in the previous edition, and with frequent use navigating the manual should become easy.

Now that the book has become so bulky, however, it is much less easy to consult on a cluttered desk top than previous editions were. So the time has come for publication in a fully searchable electronic format, and the Preface ends with an invitation to sign up at <http://www.amamanualofstyle.com> for news of progress on the electronic edition. It would be helpful meanwhile to incorporate thumb indexes or tabs to allow users to quickly access the start of each chapter, where the first pages list the contents down to the lowest level of subheading. This information, missing from the Table of Contents, is a substantial aid to navigation and should be easy to access without having to fold down page corners or add makeshift sticky-note tabs.

Publication transparency survey

Medical writers are asked to take part in the ‘PPP’ survey [see *TWS* 16(2) p92], which can now be accessed via EMWA’s website at <http://www.emwa.org/MEMBERS/InDevelopment/PPPSurvey.htm> or directly at <http://www.zoomerang.com/recipient/survey-intro-zgi?p=WEB226SPGYXRDx>

A self-training aid for developing medical writers



Mark C. Stuart, editor. *The Complete Guide to Medical Writing*. London: Pharmaceutical Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-85369-667-4 (Paperback). GBP 19.95, Approximately EUR 29.60. 512 pages.

This book treats medical writing not as a technical writing and documentation task performed to meet the publication and regulation needs of the pharmaceutical industry, but more broadly as any sort of communication in any medium with medical content, whether aimed at specialists or the general public. So the book is not intended as a reference work for the experienced medical writer, but as a career change or continuing professional development aid for physicians and students who wish to learn how to prepare different types of material that contain medical or health information.

The contents are generally well organized, and the main chapters are clearly sign-posted with headings and sub-headings, boxes and checklists, and so are easy to navigate. The front matter consists of a Foreword by Julia Forjanic Klapproth, a preface by the editor Mark Stuart, a note about the editor, and a list of contributors and their professional qualifications (most have a background in pharmacy). The 22 chapters are divided into 6 sections that cover Medical writing essentials, Reviews and reports, Medical journalism and mass media, Medical writing in education, Medical writing for medical professionals, and Medical publishing. Cross-references here and there refer readers to sections in different chapters that pick up on specific topics and develop them more fully. Five appendixes provide partial lists of Common medical abbreviations, Measurements, Normal values for common laboratory tests, Proof correction marks, and an A to Z of medical terms in plain English. The index seems complete and detailed, and checking the number of pages indexed for certain entries will give browsers a good idea of how well the topics that interest them are covered.

Each of the six sections contains some outstanding chapters and many solid contributions. The stand-outs are Chapter 7 on Conference posters (how to design them, how to prepare the all-important 1-minute introduction, and how to ensure that your poster earns attention and contacts), Chapter 10 on Writing for magazines and newspapers (equally useful for freelancers, in-house writers and academics), Chapter 14 on Presentation materials (i.e., slide shows), Chapter 18 on Writing marketing authorization applications for medical products (featuring a detailed anatomy of the Common Technical Document) and Chapter 21 on Writing for the internet (an excellent introduction to website quality and usability, with good advice