

The Webscout

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Software – What will help me?

The right software can save you a lot of time and make your life much easier. You can choose from a huge range of packages for different medical writing or related activities.

It is worth taking a look at what other medical writers recommend to use. Here is a compilation of suggestions and recommendations from medical writers for medical writers:

http://www.hittmedicalwriting.com/hmw/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Week2_EquipmentandSoftwareforMedicalWriting_10042011.pdf.

The web offers many presentations and tutorials to help you decide which software to use and to help you get familiar with it. On the basis of the above compilation I have surfed the web for more information on some of the suggestions.

Word processing software is by virtue of our profession obviously one of the most important tools. It is needless to talk about Microsoft Word[®], but there are alternatives out there, such as the now also widely used Open Office with its word processor 'Writer' and the Open Office spin-off LibreOffice:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sloEMUt7n5Q>.

Open Office Writer is not very different from Microsoft Word. Convince yourself by having a look at this tutorial:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtPIL-L6OuY>.

Another word processing software tool mentioned in the compilation is Scrivener:

<http://euanlawson.com/scrivener-medical-writing/>.

It is familiar among fiction writers, but could be an interesting resource for medical writers as well.

Spelling and consistency checks are standard activities when it comes to quality control. Again, software can help you. Unfortunately, spell-checking utilities that come with word processing software do not know too many pharmaceutical or medical terms. To overcome this, you can install

Stedman's spellchecker, which then replaces the original spellchecker of your word processing software:

http://lww.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/5100.

By the way, Stedman's Medical Dictionary is one of the most trusted databases for medical terms and definitions. Look what it offers:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnQv2xc9IX4>.

For consistency checks, you can use software like PerfectIt. It helps you to check for consistent hyphenation and capitalisation, for example:

<http://www.copyediting.com/perfect-your-documents-consistency-tests>.

The right referencing software might be a matter of taste, but choosing unsuitable software can cause you a lot of distress. EndNote[®] is well known, but in Mendeley[®] and Zotero you have alternatives with more or less the same basic package. Some differences exist and are worth considering:

http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/lls/choose_citation_mgr.html.

When you have finished your work you might wish to create a pdf to share, or you might need to edit your pdfs at some point. If you use Open Office, you can use its pdf-creating and -editing utility, which you need to install separately:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTkf2ciZzuM>.

Foxit Reader[®] is a pdf reader with some typewriting and commenting functions:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm5gi7dBB4I>.

For further editing or optical character recognition, Foxit Phantom might be your choice:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HJKcTTiRg>.

Anyway, there are many alternatives to Adobe software.

Do you sometimes struggle to keep track of your projects? Maybe you could see whether planning software would help you. MindManager can be used for mind mapping:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8JhAMuFFcY>.

It can also be used for project planning:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkU7UbVccdQ>.

Time-tracking software can help you organise yourself and manage your clients. TraxTime is worth a try:

<http://www.spudcity.com/traxtime/>.

As we near the end of this Webscout section, we are going to experience every medical writer's nightmare:

<http://inkthinkerblog.com/2009/06/02/massive-computer-crash-simultaneous-backup-failure-writers-worst-nightmare/>.

Backing up your work saves lives. Well, no it does not, but it saves your files and nerves! A well-recognised online back-up system is Carbonite:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH8sBDgnWyE>.

See whether it could be the right choice for you. Another suitable solution is CrashPlan. Just watch this video to learn about it:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjtWYOhPATA>.

Did this Webscout section help you or do you have any questions or suggestions? Please feel free to get in touch and share your thoughts.