

The Medial Writer's Tip Sheet

1. I find the following *software* invaluable if doing a lot of medical writing (check out the descriptions of each online):
 - a. EndNote (or other referencing software). Gone are the days when you number all the references at the end and then cringe when there are extensive revisions and you have to renumber. You can even have PubMed throw in the citations to EndNote with a click of the mouse! EndNote also formats the citations based on the specific format (eg, for a journal's style) you need.
 - b. Stedman's Medical Dictionary: Microsoft Word and PowerPoint do not know how to spell drug names and disease states. This add-on does.
 - c. SnagIt: a free program to put images into your document
 - d. Adobe Professional: worth the cost. Discount for students and faculty. Allows you to edit PDF documents and other things you can't do with the free version.
 - e. PDF Unlock: free download. It does what it says!
2. *Proofread*: quality control is everything. Spell checkers do not pick up everything (eg, fever vs. fewer, verse vs. adverse, etc. Those are all real words so only a close read can pick them up if they are accidentally typed).

Closely read your charts, tables, titles, and reference list especially (I've even had EndNote throw in references from other documents so you still need to check). These are hiding spots for errors. After you've proofread your piece, put it away, and read it again the next day. I find printing it out to read is more accurate than reading it on the computer screen. If you can have someone else read it, a second set of eyes is priceless.
3. *References*: make sure your references make sense. Are you using foreign package inserts? (Find the US ones). Are you using references that are not from a reliable source? Most of your references should be from the primary literature.

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Providing essential communication...not just essential information



- a. Do not use abstracts as references. Go to the full source. Abstracts sometimes are inaccurate.
- b. If a reference cites another reference, obtain the original source, read it, and then cite that. For example:

Excerpt from Alvarez, et al, 2015: PD-L1 is present in malignant cells as well as antigen presenter cells, myeloid cells, epithelial and lymphoid cells, and represents a constitutive or acquired mechanism of immune resistance.³³

You cannot cite Alvarez as the reference if you use the information from this sentence.

You must find #33: Pardoll DM. The blockade of immune checkpoints in cancer immunotherapy. Nat Rev Cancer 2012;12:252-264.
Read it. And then cite this original source.

- c. Cite your references in AMA style (in order of appearance in your document – not alphabetically). Look online for the latest updates. Examples of common reference types formatted in AMA style:

Website:

FDA approves new, targeted treatment for bladder cancer.
<http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm501762.htm>.
Accessed May 24, 2016.

Journal article:

Pennock GK, Chow LQ. The evolving role of immune checkpoint inhibitors in cancer treatment. *Oncologist*. 2015;20(7):812-822.

Package insert: (go to the manufacturer's US website to make sure you are using the latest one)

Neupogen [package insert]. Thousand Oaks, CA: Amgen, Inc.; 2015.



4. *Plagiarism*: changing a word here or there in a sentence is not enough. Read up on plagiarism and make sure you are writing about ideas not just rewriting text.
5. When describing *clinical trials*, make sure you include the primary endpoint of the study.
6. What does it mean to “*annotate references*” and why should I do it? This means to go to your pdf or hardcopy of your reference and underline/highlight/or similar exactly where you obtained information from that article for your piece. (Some clients want you to not only highlight it, but label the reference section(s) with letters and then a corresponding letter in your document). This is a great double-check for you that you are citing the correct references and have the right information, and also makes fact-checking easier for whomever you are writing the piece for.
7. *Version control*: make sure you save all versions of your work and put the old versions in a folder named “Archive” or similar. Name your documents with version number and date so you know you are using the latest one.

