

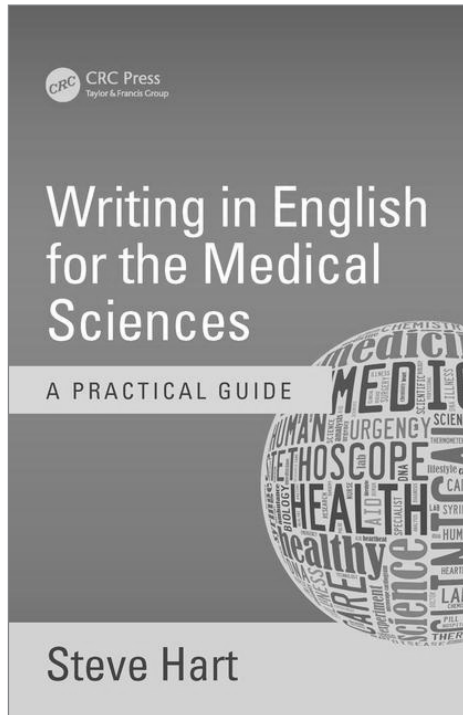
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## Book reviews

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### Writing in English for the Medical Sciences: A Practical Guide

Steve Hart, November 20, 2015, CRC Press, 231 pages, 79 black and white illustrations, ISBN 9781498742368



As articulated in its Preface, this book is intended as a practical handbook for writers in the field of medical sciences for whom English is a second or third language. The book consists of small paragraph- or page-sized discussions of various aspects of grammar and style that these writers might find difficult, ranging from the proper use of articles (including medically-relevant exceptions such as the expression “in hospital”) to instructions on writing correct references or a clear abstract. Even a cursory glance at the contents of the book makes it clear that the author has a good understanding of the difficulties that plague non-native English speakers attempting to write in the academic style. The writing errors discussed in the book will be familiar to any language editor who has worked on texts by writers from whom English is not the first language.

The focus is on practical advice that is directly useful in avoiding mistakes, and each issue is accompanied by a clear example of a mistake, with an indication of the correct usage. The explanations of these issues are short, clear, and

concise; there are no amusing pictures, anecdotes, or more extensive or deeper explanations. On the one hand, this means the book has no superfluous content to distract from its main goal of educating the reader in avoiding common errors, and every paragraph read is a lesson learned. On the other hand, new information being packed together so densely makes it hard to maintain concentration and retention of information when reading the book cover-to-cover. However, the book’s extensive index of terms makes it easy to find discussions of specific issues of interest to the reader – when it is needed.

The main difficulty a reader from the book’s target audience will encounter is the use of formal grammatical terms. For those whose English classes may be years or decades behind them, expressions such as “coordinating conjunctions join independent clauses” may present a challenge even if their overall proficiency in English is quite high. The author does a good job of briefly explaining such terms as they are encountered, but the overall effect of the copious use of grammatical terms in explanations may be intimidating or reduce readability for the very users the book is intended to help. Those that can comfortably navigate grammatical terminology probably do not need the advice as badly. This, however, only applies to the grammar sections of the book, whereas the sections on style and writing techniques are useful to everyone, including native speakers.

The book closes with a fairly brief but excellent practical exercise section. I would actually recommend new readers to start with these exercises and then read the parts of the book addressing these issues.

In conclusion, this is a very helpful book for any non-native and perhaps some native English speakers that regularly write academic texts. I do not think it quite hits the sweet spot between conciseness and readability, and may be a challenging read for those who need this advice most. Even for those that find it too difficult to read the book cover-to-cover, however, it is a great tool to have on hand to consult on specific writing issues as they are encountered.

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