

Tips to avoid weak scientific English

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In the present issue of Acta Biomedica is published a contribution of Rago V on “**Scientific writing like a native English-speaker: tips for Italian researchers**”. The Author, over the past years, has collaborated with Italian researchers and has generally noticed that their English status is relatively weak. Therefore, he gives “tips or *dritte* that do not always refer to incorrect English, but rather to weak scientific English” (1).

The Rago considerations and suggestions for improving the English style of a manuscript deserve full consideration because a paper weakly written in English even if scientifically valid could stumble in a “not-so-fatal” flaws that can implicate its rejection. Basically, I agree that today knowing English is an essential skill for all researchers but I am also aware that “not every native English-speaker or non-native English teacher / translator who writes well in English can write well for the scientific literature”.

An individual’s training, may improve accrued paper writing skills. Such courses could be delivered e.g. by experienced faculty, science writers, and especially the editors of the academic journals (2). In many graduate courses and medical specialization schools there are now English language courses but most of the time they are a photocopy of high school programs. Therefore, I believe that obtaining the help of a mentor and working in a team with someone more experienced with scientific writing can be especially helpful for first-time authors and for those with less experience in writing scientific papers.

Moreover, a number of excellent resources are further available to help authors with the writing aspect of manuscript preparation and to help for becoming a

better writer. One of my favorite guide is *How to Write a Good Scientific Paper*, written by Chris A. Mack (3). Reading its content I found very shareable messages:

“The best way to become a good writer is to become a good reader”.

“Like children learning language, we learn writing best by imitating good writers. Either consciously or unconsciously, copying the style and approach found in the very best scientific papers is a great way to write good scientific papers”.

“Only by reading good writing and paying attention to what you like can you develop an ear for what sounds good, or not, in your own writing. A writer should try to teach the readers, not impress them”.

“The easiest way to do that is to draft the passage using the words that come most naturally, then revise, re-write, and revise again with accuracy, precision, and clarity in mind. Sleep on it, let someone else read it, then revise it again. Writing is mostly the act of rewriting, and it is work”

In conclusion, writing scientific articles is a creative intellectual process which requires professional training in the subject area and accrued writing skills (4). It is an art and an important way to contribute to the dissemination of research and other forms of medical knowledges. According to Lock (5), a former editor of the British Medical Journal, has three main objectives: prevent publication of bad work, improve scholarship, and improve language and data presentation. Reviewers and editors have to increase their awareness of the challenges of nonnative English contributors and maximize ways for supporting their efforts to publish (6). Reading and writing are part of the same process and knowing English is an essential skill for all researchers.

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