

MEDICAL WRITING

Seeking work as a medical writer

WHAT IS A MEDICAL WRITER?

A medical writer is a scientist who understands the rules of data, can find data and translate clinical, nonclinical, and preclinical data into documents that may be manuscripts, slideshows, posters, regulatory documents. A medical writer needs a strong background in life sciences, otherwise the manuscripts written can look beautiful, and make no sense.

DO YOU WANT TO BE A MEDICAL WRITER?

Are you sure you can be a medical writer? The first requirement is that the market has to exist: in the Americas, Europe, and Asia the market exists because these continents house thriving pharmaceutical industries. The second requirement is a firm yes to each of the following questions: Do you love to write? Do you love the English language? Do words, phrases, grammatical constructs excite you? Do you read everything you can about health and science? Do you read every article in the New York Times health section? When you were growing up, did you agonize between a career in the humanities or life sciences? When you discovered the existence of the career of medical writing, did you feel for the first time that the universe understood you?

DO YOU HAVE MEDICAL WRITING SKILLS?

All these questions need a yes. Are your English language skills superior? Are your research skills superior? Are your editing skills superior? Do you understand biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, anatomy, pharmacology? When you are given a therapeutics area: can you find out everything about the disease, therapies, clinical trials, drug manufactures of drugs for the disease within a day? Do you know which documents are required by the Food and Drug Administration? Can you prepare these documents? Can you prepare a slideshow from a clinical study report? Can you prepare a slideshow on a disease? With notes? Or edit one?

WHAT STORY DOES YOUR RESUME TELL?

Does your resume give confidence that you are versatile, willing to learn anything, rapidly able to come to speed on any therapy topic, that you know documentation and presentation, that you can conduct yourself in a meeting, and prepare reports from the meeting? Do you have anything in your resume that makes you unique? Does your resume show that you are a team player, that you volunteer, that you care about life and the world, and that you care about the placing of a space, a comma? The employer reading

your resume is walking through the marketplace with money to find the right medical writer.

WHAT IS YOUR MARKET?

Do you know who would hire you based on the resume you have prepared? How many jobs does that open yourself to?

HOW DO YOU MARKET YOURSELF?

Do you have a website? When your name is googled, what is found? Lines of articles you have written, community service, statements on online groups? Are you visible in the marketplace?

WHERE DO YOU MARKET YOURSELF?

Do you know any medical writers? Are you a member of American Medical Writers Association, amwa.org? Do you have your capabilities listed in its freelance market? Do you have details about your skills on Monster, on LinkedIn, anywhere else?

HOW WILL WRITING AND EDITING ARTICLES FOR MJO TA HELP GET JOBS AS A MEDICAL WRITER?

MJoTA is the first and only themed publication prepared by medical writers, and all articles are peer-reviewed. If you write the article, you are the author. When you write for MJoTA, you write on an aspect on health and wealth creation that builds your credibility as an expert. You can showcase your skills in research, writing, editing and demonstrate that you are an expert in a particular field. If you want to be an expert on FDA documentation, we encourage you to write articles on FDA regulations and documentation. Writing articles for MJoTA shows that you care about humans outside your own condition, because you are writing about humans living, working and dying in the 53 countries of Africa.

HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS?

Do you spend a day, or a week, preparing for a phone interview? Do you find out everything you can about the company and the job? During your preparation, do you realize that you are lacking skills? Do you really want the job? In the interview, do you listen to the client tell you what the job requires? Do you tell them what you want? Do you explain your skill set? Do you invite the potential client or employer to a webinar where you present what you can do by Powerpoint? I heard a story about an actress who wanted a job so badly she told the employers that she certainly was an expert roller skater, and skating backwards and to music would be no problem. She was hired, and on the way home from the interview enrolled in rollerskating lessons.

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Medical Writing Training

MJoTA works with life sciences professionals, who have graduate degrees, towards a regulatory writing career or a marketing writing career. Core training is needed in both: you cannot write manuscripts, abstracts, posters and powerpoint presentations if you do not understand clinical trial documentation. The training is not complex, but does involve a large time commitment from the professional. The goal of training is simple: show you can write documents that are believed by your peers.

WEEKLY WEBINARS

We give medical writing training.

1. Choosing topics for articles, editing articles for upcoming issues, MJoTA Editorial Meeting, Mondays
2. Medical writing marketing & editing, Tuesdays
3. Clinical trials data & health statistics, Mondays
4. Regulatory documentation, Thursdays
5. MJoTA Talks. Thursdays. Open to all.

MJOTA MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

At MJoTA we work with professionals in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa with strong science backgrounds, and with advanced degrees in life sciences (MS, MD, PhD, RPh, PharmD, DHA, DBA). We also accept trained journalists.

We require students in the mentorship program to write at least 3 articles for Medical Journal of Therapeutics Africa over 3 months.

You have a choice in the mentorship program:

RW1: Writing documents for regulatory authorities. If you are local to Washington, or can visit, we invite you to come with us to open FDA sessions.

MW1: Medical writing for continuing medical education, medical journals, magazines, sales representatives, poster presentations, monographs.

HOW WE TRAIN MEDICAL WRITERS

We are online, but students are always welcome to stop by. We teach by phone, by e-mail, by discussion board on Linked-In, by Skype, and by GoToMeeting.



Minimum requirements for award of a MJoTA Medical Writing Certificate

1. Prepare resumes, post them on online
2. Prepare a portfolio which includes:
 - a. CME-style PowerPoint presentation
 - b. Peer-reviewed articles published in MJoTA (at least 3)
 - c. Presentations and documents demonstrating competency in FDA documentation preparation and rules
3. Pass a 3-hour exam on clinical statistics and data
4. Pass a 3-hour exam on clinical study report writing competency
5. Prepare a poster from a clinical trial article published in NEJM
6. Prepare an article from data from databases.

"During the 4 years I was the Director of the medical writing program at USP, I designed and taught many courses, and was involved in curriculum development for all courses. One thing was clear: highly educated professionals do not need another degree, what they need is direction, and the "killer ap" of medical writing training is work as a medical writer."

*Susanna J Dodgson BSc(Hons), PhD,
Publisher and Editor-in-Chief,
Medical Journal of Therapeutics Africa*

The global economy. MJoTA has watched with its mouth open the Dow Jones Index going up and down from day to day since the end of September, and is cheering on the stimulus package. What we know is colleagues in the pharmaceutical industry are being laid off: clinical trials specialists, regulatory affairs specialists, statisticians, programmers, medical writers, lawyers, recruiters. We believe that the pharmaceutical industry is tightening its belt for the long haul, and that it will be hiring again as soon as it can get credit to run clinical trials and continue with research and development. When this happens, MJoTA wants all our people to be ready with glistening resumes, portfolios and shining faces.

Fees until August 2009

We charge USD110 to participate in an individual webinar, or USD1,000 for unlimited webinars forever with mentorship and help getting jobs.

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How MJoTA Mentors

A. WEBINARS

1. Once weekly editorial webinars Mondays 7-9pm.
2. Weekly webinars for regulatory documentation, data and statistics, medical writing skills for mentorees.
3. Weekly MJoTA Talks (Thursdays 4-5pm, repeated 9-10pm) is open to the public, and is an opportunity to showcase articles and MJoTA staff. MJoTA writers are encouraged to present their work, or talks on any topic that relates to MJoTA.
4. Articles will be worked on until publishable.
5. Resumes, cover letters will be assessed, changed.
6. We stay with you until you have a job, and are there for you when you look for your next job. We are a co-operative, everyone is expected to work together.
7. We will work with you on your portfolio, on MJoTA articles, slideshows, posters, abstracts, websites and anything you have contracted externally to write. These are your credentials; writers must be able to research, handle data, write a great story and edit. Your portfolio shows that you can do these things.
8. We will tell you about conferences, webinars, events where you can attend for information or networking.
9. We will work with you to focus on what you need to succeed. We can help you succeed if you work on your portfolio, on your networking, and work to address gaps in your understanding.
10. We assign writing, we will work on the assignments with you. Occasionally we may pay you for work on external contracts MJoTA wins.
11. We assign reading. Writers read. Nonstop. Everything. Every article in MJoTA.
12. We let you write for MJoTA on topics that interest you, but if you do not have any topics, or you need them assigned, we will assign them.

What is Required of a Mentoree

A. APPLYING FOR JOBS

1. Know why you want to work as a medical writer, and why preparing articles for MJoTA will get you there. Know that MJoTA is a tool for visibility, displaying your skills as a writer and researcher.
2. Keep an ongoing document of long-term and short-term goals for career, which jobs are wanted, why you think you can be hired for the job, which jobs you have sought, what has been the response. Always ask for feedback, if you have not been hired, find out from the recruiter or the employer why not.
3. Once weekly attend a group meeting in which expectations for applying for jobs are reassessed, and strategies are changed, and resumes and cover letters are tailored for the jobs.
4. You must be patient. If you have been unemployed for a long time, you are reinventing yourself.

B. GETTING YOUR RESUME OUT THERE

1. Profile on LinkedIn. Link to as many groups as you can (50 is permitted), as many recruiters you can find, link to everyone connected to the pharmaceutical industry.
2. Resume and portfolio on MJoTA
3. Resume on Monster.com, on AMWA.org
4. Get on Facebook
5. Join AMWA, go to events.

C. BECOME A MEDICAL WRITER

1. Prepare articles for publication in MJoTA. They are due to first of every month. During our weekly Monday editorial meetings we discuss articles in progress and suggestions to make them work. We need you to find questions, look for answers, write articles on these answers.
2. Target companies that you want to hire you. Call the CEO, interview him. Write articles about products marketed by the company, about their clinical trials, their web-sites, their presence in Africa.
3. Write articles about FDA documentation, about NDAs, regulation in South Africa, Libya, Egypt.
4. Write articles about the regulatory laws, and clinical trials, FDA approvals, World Bank; eg, look through the clinical trials database, analyse the trials by indication, by country, by ethics, by therapies.
5. Build a portfolio. A huge portfolio. Write about everything related to health, drugs, devices, biologics. Write about data, because that is why medical writers with strong life sciences backgrounds have the edge: they know data and they can interpret it. Write medical fiction. But write, and joyfully.

By the Publisher

