Book Review

Scientific Writing and Communication: Papers, Proposals, and Presentations

The book “Scientific Writing and Communication: Papers, Proposals, and Presentations” is written by Angelika H. Hofmann, who teaches scientific writing at Yale. The book is divided into six subsections that cover a total of 29 chapters. The first section on style and composition covers topics such as word choice (Chapter 2), word location (Chapter 3), technical sentences (Chapter 4), and paragraph structure (Chapter 6). Discussion on how one reads a sentence (e.g., stress position) or paragraph (e.g., topic sentence with one message) add helpful insight on writing clearly. The second and third sections discuss various components of writing a manuscript, including writing a draft (Chapter 7). A decent description is provided for various sections, such as materials and methods (Chapter 11), results (Chapter 12), and discussion (Chapter 13). For those who have not written a manuscript, these sections provide a basic foundation regarding expectations in each of these areas. Another section (Chapters 19–26) is devoted to grant writing. A chapter is devoted to each of the various components of a grant, from significance and background to preliminary results and resubmission. Throughout the book, the author provides multiple examples of effective and ineffective writing, and ways of avoiding common mistakes. This allows the reader to understand the key ideas presented in the section and their applications. As with any book, certain sections of the book are more helpful and unique than others. For example, the author has a unique take on writing the first draft and suggests outlining in an old notebook in which one is not afraid to write. Does anyone write a draft in a notebook anymore? Perhaps it is a good idea. There are a few useful examples on proper use of English for those whose native language is not English.

The latter sections of the book (Chapters 27–29) focus on oral and poster presentations. The ideas presented here are similar to materials found on the web.

This book, like many others on scientific writing, discusses the value of clear communication and will be a valuable addition to most laboratories where no such books are on the shelves already. In most respects, the book is similar to others on the same subject, such as “From Research to Manuscript: A Guide to Scientific Writing” by Michael Jay Katz or “Craft of Scientific Writing” by Michael Alley. In addition, this book contains sections on grant writing, poster preparation, and oral presentations. The book also provides exercises at the end of each section to reinforce the key points or to facilitate the use this book for teaching purposes.

If you have not organized your own materials to teach undergraduate or beginning graduate students to write scientific manuscripts, this book will provide the basic information in its 700+ pages and will do so in a clear manner with a great deal of space devoted to examples. For those who have not evaluated their own writing or presentation styles, you will certainly benefit from reading this or a similar book on writing and presenting your work. If the publishers provide various sections of the book separately (especially the sections on manuscript writing), it may be more manageable for an undergraduate level science writing course, which typically focus on one of the several topics discussed in this book.

Dr. Neena Grover
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Colorado College
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903

This paper is available on line at http://www.bambed.org DOI 10.1002/bmb.20483