

The **JOURNAL** of Cosmetic Dentistry

The Official Journal of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry®

Writing Workshop

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FOUR TYPES OF ARTICLES

1. CLINICAL CASE REPORT

In this type of article, the writer is presenting a clinical case study (that was conducted by the writer him or herself) with narrative and graphic documentation. This is a primary report relying on no outside sources. *The Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry* has established Guidelines for Submitting a Manuscript that outline how to prepare your manuscript, text, references, etc.

2. CLINICAL CONTENT REPORT

The purpose of this type of article, which might be a review or critique, is to report on a methodology, material, or procedure. It is documented with research in secondary sources, which are cited. The Journal's Guidelines for Submitting a Manuscript provide a significant amount of help in preparing clinical content reports for publication.

3. NON-CLINICAL CONCEPT REPORT

A non-clinical concept report might be a review of the data in a specific non-clinical area: for example, cosmetic procedure utilization rates, insurance reimbursement patterns, or fee analysis. The report should be documented with data cited from primary sources.

4. OPINION PIECE

An opinion piece is written by someone who has expertise in the area about which he or she is writing. It is understood that the article reflects the opinion of the author and may or may not be accompanied by research or cited secondary source data.

Because the guidelines for writing clinical articles are well set, our focus in this workshop will be writing non-clinical concept reports and opinion pieces.

PLANNING YOUR ARTICLE

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

Although this may not sound like such a daunting task, many writers have difficulty selecting a topic that is appealing to the reader. Here are a few questions to help you select your topic:

Who is your target audience? Be as specific as you can in defining your audience. AACD members are a different audience from AACD members and their teams. The audience for whom you are writing the article will determine the structure of the piece, the verbiage you will choose, and the message you will deliver.

What is the goal of the article? If the goal is to inform, the article should be written differently than if the goal is a call to action. If the article is intended to instruct, you will require more detail than if it is designed to simply provide a general overview of a concept.

2. DETERMINE YOUR TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

After reading the article, what do you wish your reader to retain? The more specific the take-home message, the more likely you are to achieve your goal.

3. CHOOSE A TITLE

Choosing a title is very important because a title can determine whether your article is read at all. Titles must be enticing and yet not misrepresent the main point of the article. Keep the title short and punchy.

4. SELECT YOUR SUBPOINTS

The sub-points must all relate to and advance the goal of the article. Much like $2 + 2 = 4$, subpoint 1, plus subpoint 2, plus subpoint 3 must add up to the take-home message you determined for your arti-

cle. Many writers include too many extraneous messages that take the reader too far afield and don't draw the reader back to the article's main purpose.

5. CHOOSE A STORY OR ILLUSTRATION FOR EACH SUBPOINT

The best writers make their concepts come alive with real examples that convey the message or make the point. Because many of your readers will struggle with the application of your message, you can help them (and thereby make your article more effective) by using frequent illustrations. Your stories or illustrations must be short, to-the-point, and strong rather than barely relevant.

6. WRITE YOUR INTRODUCTION

After the title, the first paragraph must be the most compelling part of your article, because it sets the stage for what follows. There are several ways to ensure that your introductory paragraph entices the reader to go further:

- Pose a question of likely interest to the target audience.
- Convey a story or situation that leads into the message.
- Open with a quote that sets the stage for your points.
- Relate a discussion between two people (real or imagined).

You must avoid just jumping into the content of your message in the first paragraph. It is too abrupt and leaves the reader without a context within which to read your article.

7. PUT "MEAT ON THE BONES"

Now it is time to go back to your subpoints and expand the general concept. In many cases, you will want to expand each subpoint to several paragraphs, including relevant stories or illustrations.

8. CHOOSE TRANSITIONS WHERE APPROPRIATE

In some cases, you will want to help the reader move from one point to another by creating transitions. A transition can be constructed in several ways:

- As a transitory paragraph bridging one point to the next.
- As a header or subhead introducing the next point.
- As an illustration or story to segue to the next point.

9. WRITE YOUR CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

The main purpose of the concluding paragraph is to bring the article to closure without leaving the reader adrift. Although you may not choose the words "In summary," it is wise to leave the reader with the summary of your points. You might think of the concluding paragraph as being similar to the punch line of a joke.

10. READ YOUR ARTICLE SIX TIMES FROM START TO FINISH

Each time you read the article you should focus on a different variable to ensure that you do not get lost in your own words and forget something important. Here are the themes for each reading:

- Does the article flow well?
- Have you made each of the subpoints?
- Do the subpoints add up to the main point?
- Are the stories and illustrations concise and punchy?
- Is the grammar correct?
- Is there anything that does not fit and should be left out?

11. GIVE YOUR ARTICLE TO TWO PEOPLE FOR REVIEW

After you have worked so hard on your manuscript, it will be difficult for you to be objective in proofreading or editing your own writing. This is when it makes sense to enlist the help of someone who represents the target audience you have chosen for your article. Ask them to read it through with a critical eye. They should focus first on the take-home message and how the article flows for the reader. While the way in which the article is written is important, a review of those aspects must follow the actual content and whether you have been successful in achieving what you set out to do.

THINGS TO AVOID

The following are things you should avoid when writing your article. The more sophisticated the writer, the less he or she has to rely on mechanisms that are over-used or don't work.

Do not talk about yourself

Your article will be received best when it focuses on a concept, a set of principles, or a review of someone else. Do not use your piece as an autobiography or self-aggrandizing essay.

Do not use the article to promote yourself or your services

Your article should deliver a worthy message on its own and never be a commercial for your services. Besides being unprofessional and unethical, promoting yourself is unfair to the readers. If your message is compelling enough, people will want to know more about you and your work.

Do not plagiarize

It may be hard to write your own material, but you **must not ever** copy the work of others. Plagiarism is a legal violation of the copyright laws and the Journal, and the author can be held accountable for the theft of someone else's material. Don't do it.

Do not use someone else's best-selling book as your format

While you may have enjoyed Stephen Covey's book or a management guru's latest work, you should not rely on their work as the structure for your writing. Let the readers of the original work figure out how the "Seven Habits" apply to dentistry and leadership or how "emotional intelligence" fits into the dental team. Your work must be a reflection of your own thinking, not simply a re-working of someone else's thoughts. It can be compelling to borrow the strong concepts of others but it is wrong.

Do not employ too many or over-used metaphors

Enough with the sports metaphors! Basketball and other team examples and applications have lost their impact because they have been over-used. If you use a metaphor, be creative and use your own thinking to come up with one that applies yet doesn't cause the reader to groan.

Do not tell stories that are not your own

Do not tell Jerry Seinfeld's jokes or repeat the stories you have heard others convey, even with attribution. You must create your own stories and illustrations, and it is best when you do so from your own experiences. That way, they will be your signature stories and no one else will be able to claim them.

Do not use trite verbiage or cliched concepts

The Wow Factor! Getting people to Yes! Ritz-Carlton service! Value-added. Stop the silliness—be original.

Do not write in overly complicated sentences

It doesn't make you sound more intelligent to use sentences that are excessive and complicated. People relate to people who relate well to them.

TO-DO TIPS

The following suggestions will help you write a stronger article:

- Write your headings using strong verbs and specific nouns
- Write in plain English
- Use active verbs rather than passive verbs
- Keep your average sentence between 10 and 20 words
- Edit wordy phrases
- Avoid jargon and keep technical terms to a minimum

For help with your article, call or e-mail Sandy Roth at (800) 848-8326 or sandy@prosynergy.com.