



How to write a medical book chapter?

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ABSTRACT

Invited medical book chapters are usually requested by editors from experienced authors who have made significant contributions to the literature in certain fields requested by an editor from an experienced. Before the start of the writing process a consensus should be established between the editor and the author with regard to the title, deadline, specific instructions and content of the manuscript. Certain issues concerning a chapter can be negotiated by the parties beforehand, but some issues cannot. As writing a medical book chapter is seen as an honor in its own right, the assignment needs to be treated with sincerity by elucidating the topic in detail, and maximal effort should be made to keep in mind that the chapter will reach a large target audience. The purpose of this review article is to provide guidance to residents and junior specialists in the field of urology to improve their writing skills.

Key words: Medical book; medical writing; writing book chapter.

Introduction

Important advances in communication technologies within the last 10-20 years have led to major changes in the perception of a “book.” Despite quick access to any medical information via means of communication, the habit of taking the book in hand, reviewing, and reading it still sustains. On one hand we have the opportunity to have hundreds of cell phones or portable small computers at hand, while on the other hand the books take their proper place besides us on book shelves in our study room or office. Despite technological developments in other fields, production, and distribution of printed medical books have not decreased. Without doubt, herein, increasing number of publishing companies, experience, and potential candidate authors, development, and specialization in commercial fields, and medical areas of interest play important roles.

When historical process is taken into consideration, limited number of medical books were available in the past when compared with current number of medical publications. The convention to write medical books dates back to Egyptians, and Antique Greek/Rome. Turkish-Islamic World also contributed to the writing of medical books with its reknown medical scientists as Avicenna, Ebu'l Kasım

El-Zahravi, and Serefeddin Sabuncuoglu, and played important roles in the development of Western Medicine. In Anatolia, medical works have been started to be written from the XIV century. These works are primary sources for medical, and science historians, researchers in Turkish Language, and Literature. One of the most important works was *Cerrahiyyet'ül Haniyye* which reflected the Ottomanish, Turkish language, and medical practices of that period. The work written by Serefeddin is also worth mentioning for miniature art.

Medical books can be defined based on their contents. Text books, reference books, enrichment books, edited books or authored books written by a single author can be enumerated. Each type of book demonstrates differences as for the audience it addresses. Translation books generally have a chief editor, and a few associate editors. Sometimes only one editor can be responsible for all of the translation process. During planning phase these differences is taken into consideration. Based on the characteristics, and objective of the book, in addition to the audience it targets, number of sections, and authors, scope, and size of the book will change.^[1-15] For example in a medical book written on “erectile dysfunction”, number of sections, and authors will be limited (ie. 10-15). However if a textbook on

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“Andrology” is planned then many fields of andrology (erectile dysfunction, Peyronie’s disease, infertility, prostatic diseases, and female sexual dysfunction etc.) will be encompassed requiring higher number of book sections, contributing, and associate authors.

The objective of this review article is to try to guide especially urology residents, and junior urologists through the pathway to be followed, and conditions to be attentive in writing a section of a medical book. Since the main title of this manuscript is “writing a chapter in a medical book”, we will not deal with types of medical books individually. In this section the following topics will be discussed: invitation phase for writing a section in a book, determination of the title, and contents of the book, planning, and collection of literature references, phases of the writing, and conclusion.

Invitation Phase

Since invitation to write a chapter in a medical book is a reward for certain accumulation of academic knowledge, it doubtlessly honours an academician. Invitations are generally made to the authors who accumulated a certain amount of knowledge, and contributed considerably to the relevant medical literature in a specified field of medicine or sometimes in a more specialized topic. In the determination of the contributing authors, the editor of the book should absolutely make a preliminary investigation. For example, in a book to be written on infertility, if a chapter on varicocele is planned, and you have considerable amount of studies published in international medical periodicals, then your contribution on this subject may be requested.

Novice academicians, more properly said, those at the bottom of the ladder may be assigned as an associate author by the mentor. This task is very important regarding serious contribution to the academic development of an associate author. During writing, and evaluation stage of the chapter, novice academicians will benefit from the experiences of the senior author, and contribute considerably to the independent scientific production in their future academic lives.

Occasionally, you may be invited to write on a subject not previously written or you have not adequate accumulation of knowledge about. In this case it will be hard to overcome this challenging situation. Still, editors invites you to write this chapter because of their belief in your capability to manage this issue.

During the invitation phase to write a chapter in a book, one of the issues worrying especially senior authors is that whether they will get paid for their work or not. Publishers usually have a tendency not to pay honorarium. Indeed, contributing to the writing process of an important book is in itself a honorable condition, and the author does not anticipate any payment for

his/her contribution. For some writers recognizable/reknown in national or international academic circles, a serious contribution to his/her CV, and gaining an important piece of experience are generally considered as important gains.

Consensus with the Editor

Before switching to the writing phase of a chapter (chapters) in a book, one should agree with the editor on some issues. The publisher of the book, the deadline of your delivery time, the planned publication date are important issues to be considered. Since processes of planning, collection of literature sources, writing, and finalizing the writing process are time-consuming stages, you should be in consensus with the editor about the deadline suggested to you.

You should also arrive at a consensus with the editor about the required topic title. Sometimes topic title recommended by the editor may not reflect the subject matter exactly. In this case, you can suggest the editor the modification/alteration of the title name. Since you are one of the experienced academicians on this subject, you can request a change in the topic title, suggest different proposals, finally decrease or increase the number of words in the title.

During, planning phase of the writing process, one of the points to be taken into consideration is assignment of other chapters of the book to their respective authors. Even though, editor (s) priorly plans/plan contents of the book, it is helpful to know the contents of the book in order to concentrate more intensively on our topic, and avoid repetitions of the same topic. For example if you are assigned to write a chapter on “Pharmacological Treatment of Erectile Dysfunction”, it might be helpful for you to know whether as a pharmacological intervention, intracavernous vasoactive agent injection is to be dealt with in further chapters. Besides knowing areas of interest of other academicians who will write other chapters may contribute to the construction of our chapter.

If you are a senior author of a chapter of a book, you can allocate associate contributing authors, and inform the editor before you start writing the chapter. Writing process of a chapter should be also considered as a part of the education, and novice authors (residents, and fellow physicians) should be included in the writing process.

During the writing process of a chapter you should arrive at a consensus with the editor concerning the abovementioned issues. In some issues, consensus can be achieved, while in others it might not be possible. Therefore, before attempting to write a chapter, you should evaluate the questions in your mind with the aid of the editor, and reach a consensus. The issues which require consensus are tried to be summarized in Table 1.

Planning Phase before the Onset of the Writing Process.

Each phase of the writing of a chapter requires certain period of time. When deadline for the delivery of your chapter is planned, generally time intervals spent by you are taken into consideration. Prior to the writing process, you should plan the time to be spent for writing a chapter. Before the writing process, most of the time is usually spent for literature screening, and access into references. It takes approximately 1-3 weeks dependent on the peculiarity of the subject matter, and your available facilities. Clarification of the title name, and subtitles, full revealment of the contents, configuration of the tables/figures should be planned before starting the writing process.

Preparation of the first draft is the most time consuming part of the writing process. The course observed during writing original article can be used for writing a chapter (chapters) of a book. Accordingly, construction of table(s), and figure(s) which will reflect/summarize the main text is one of the important phases. Completion of this phase greatly facilitates writing of the main text. In Table 2, different phases of a manuscript, and estimated time period for each phase is summarized. In the evaluation of the time periods, peculiarities, updatedness, originality of the subject matter, number of contributing authors, and length of the text should be taken into consideration. Therefore, it should not be forgotten that the time period allocated for the completion of the manuscript may change.

Writing Phase

Preparation of a cover page is the first thing to be done during the writing phase. Cover page should contain topic title, name, academic title, and medical institution of the author, a running title, key words, and address of communication of the responsible author. Typeface, line spacing, and pagination recommended by the editor are minor but important considerations.

Construction of tables, and figures is the most important stage of any text. Though it is more important especially for original articles, presence of table(s), and/or figure(s) summarizing the topic will provide the readers important information about your subject matter at a single glance. If editor does not impose restrictions, then the number of tables/figures can be increased as far as possible.

For the Introduction section, usually a classical beginning statement is preferred. Briefly, the previous considerations concerning the topic, its current status, and the objective of the topics analyzed in the chapter(s) can be delineated in a few paragraphs. In further sections the topics are treated in compliance with the predicted subtitles. Detailed evaluation of the topic, inadequacies encountered, experiences cited in the literature, your experiences, and future perspectives should be analyzed. Classical approach in writing subtitles of chapters in a medical book is summarized in Table 3. According to the peculiarities of the topic these subtitles will naturally demonstrate differences.

If as an expert of the subject matter, writing a chapter is requested from you, you should refer to your previous studies in the text. It is very important to compare, and blend your experiences with those of mentioned in the literature. Dependent both on your experiences, and accumulation of knowledge in the literature, you will be expected to make some predictions about the future. In the main heading you are working on, inadequacies of the relevant literature, and the issues to be focused on should be absolutely dealt with.

After completion of the main body of the text, the outcomes of the topic should be evaluated in 1-2 paragraphs, and referred to the researchers. Nowadays we have user friendly software pro-

Table 1. In writing a part of a book the issues on which consensus between the author(s) and the editor(s) may or may not be achieved

A consensus may be achieved	A consensus may not be achieved	Irreconcilable
Topic title	Topic	Copyright transfer
Associate authors	Delivery deadline	Use of all of its content by the publisher
Handling the subject	Honorarium	Writing references
Subtitles	Number of pages	
Permission to use figures	Number of figures and tables	
Transfer of original figures	Number of references	
Other sections		
Other authors		
Sending printed copies		

Table 2. The stages of the writing process of the chapter(s), and estimated time spent for each stage

Stages	Estimated time period
Planning of the draft	1-3 days
Literature survey, and procurement of literature references	1-3 weeks
Determination of the title, subtitle, and contents	1-2 weeks
Preparation of tables, figures, and illustrations	1-2 weeks
Writing the first draft of the main text	1-3 weeks
The first revision, elaboration of the written text	1-2 weeks
Waiting period (forget your written test)	2 weeks
The second revision	1-2 weeks
Evaluation by our colleague and/or experienced medical editor	1-2 weeks
Finalization of the text	1 week
Submission to an editor	1 day

Table 3. Classical subheadings used in writing a chapter (Chapters) of a medical book

Subtitles
Description/definition
Epidemiology
Etiology and pathogenesis
Clinical characteristics
Diagnosis, physical examination, and diagnostic tests
Treatment
Prognosis
Prophylaxis
Conclusions

grams. Naturally, number of references will be more numerous than the original article manual entry of references will bring along some risks. Therefore software programs which automatically enter and sort the references in a format requested by the publishing company should be used.

In conclusion, invitation to write a chapter in a book, is in itself an honour for every academician. Therefore, this task should deserve due emphasis, and a draft should be constructed with proper planning before the writing process. After completion of the manuscript, you may request the help of your experienced or senior colleague in the evaluation of the manuscript. In manuscripts written in a foreign language, you should not hesitate to request the help of an editor who is competent in that language. Main text should contain adequate number of tables, and figures for easy comprehension of the topic by the readers. Finally, if we consider that the editor will spend considerable amount of time during the evaluation process, the task assigned should be delivered in due time.

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