Medical writing for publication is done for various purposes: The publication of original work is integral to an academic career, allows an individual to contribute to the growing body of medical literature, and serves as a vehicle for the worldwide communication of medical information. Medical writing is also a skill, one which, like performing an obstetrical delivery or counseling a dysfunctional family, requires training and practice to be mastered.

Medical writing may be considered one of the final steps in conducting a research study and should be undertaken with the same diligence as other steps of the project. The results of outstanding research or the description of an excellent educational program may fail to be published if written poorly.

For the experienced medical writer, following a methodical, stepwise approach to writing a medical article will increase the chances of successful publication. The following will describe 10 steps in writing a medical article. The steps are presented as a workbook which may assist in the writing of an article and as a review for assessment of subsequent writing efforts. A period of time is suggested for each step to illustrate the relative effort that may be required.

More than one author may be involved with the writing of an article. While any of the following steps may be a shared activity, generally one author takes responsibility for writing the first draft and the other(s) for additions and revision. The authors should agree ahead of time as to their
respective responsibilities and who will be the primary author of the article.

**Conceptualize the Subject of the Article (1–3 Days)**

Careful planning before beginning to write greatly enhances the flow of words. Ask: "What am I trying to say in this article?" When the answer to this question is clear in your mind, write a topic sentence or working title. Limit the subject and be as specific as possible in order to bring into focus what will be reported in the article. The following are examples of broad topic areas which should be limited before writing:

**Broad:** Quality of care in a community hospital.
**Specific:** Peer review using retrospective audits in a community hospital.
**More Specific:** Peer review using a retrospective audit of coronary care in a community hospital.

**Broad:** What is wrong with tenure in medical education?
**Specific:** The impact of tenure on productivity among medical school faculty.
**More Specific:** The impact of tenure on research activity among faculty in a clinical department.

**Review the Literature (1–2 Weeks)**

Defining the topic of the article simplifies the next step, which is to review the medical literature. A medical librarian, acting as an expert consultant to the writer, can be very helpful in acquiring the appropriate background material.

A computerized search of the recent literature is generally the best way to begin. Index Medicus, FAMLI (specific articles for *Family Medicine*), or the Index and Table of Contents of selected journals may also be used to find current articles on the chosen subject. The bibliography of these articles may be useful in identifying the earlier background literature.

After the published literature on the subject has been identified and read, a good idea may be to telephone a known expert to discuss current thinking and inquire regarding unpublished information.

After reading the medical literature, the goals and subject of the article should be reconsidered. A change in the research hypothesis or in the article concept may be appropriate, and it is much easier to do so at this stage than after several rejections of a finished manuscript.

The final step in the literature review is to select potential references and categorize them according to points to be covered in the article.