

## **The AIMS academy hands-on medical writing course: a 3-year experience analysis and survey**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Despite its importance, the ability to produce high-quality scientific manuscripts is often perceived as the domain of academics and researchers. Traditional medical writing courses often focus on the critical appraisal of existing articles, which, while informative, may not fully equip participants with the skills needed to independently develop and submit a manuscript. These limitations highlight the need for innovative approaches to medical writing education that prioritize hands-on experience and practical application.

**Objective:** To evaluate the effectiveness of a hands-on medical writing course developed by the advanced international mini-invasive surgery (AIMS) Academy in improving scientific writing skills and publication outcomes among clinicians and medical students.

**Methods:** A prospective, non-randomized educational intervention study conducted over three years (2022–2024). Each course included manuscript drafting, peer collaboration, expert review, and a final workshop. The courses were held by the AIMS Academy Clinical Research Network, involving six surgical centers across Italy, including Desio Hospital, Niguarda Hospital, and other affiliated institutions offering tertiary-level care.

**Results:** All eighteen participants contributed to and completed a clinical manuscript, resulting in three peer-reviewed publications following minor revisions. Questionnaire responses showed high satisfaction: 83% rated the course 9–10, and 72% reported significant improvement in writing skills. All participants expressed willingness to attend again and recommend the course.

**Conclusions:** The AIMS Academy course is an effective, replicable model for improving medical writing skills among clinicians. Its hands-on structure, emphasis on co-authorship, and tangible outcomes—such as successful publication—enhance engagement and address common barriers in medical writing education.

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## Original Manuscript



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**Keywords:** Medical writing | outcomes | manuscript | survey | education

## Introduction

The advancement of medical and surgical treatments hinges on the ability to question and refine established paradigms. This iterative process, rooted in critical thinking and evidence-based evaluation, is fundamental to driving innovation in clinical practice.<sup>1,2</sup> As medical professionals engage in daily challenges that push the boundaries of existing knowledge, their insights hold the potential to significantly enrich global healthcare practices. However, the true value of these experiences is realized only when they are systematically documented, analyzed, and shared with the broader medical community through the literature. Without effective communication of these contributions, their impact on professional growth and the advancement of medical science remains limited. Scientific writing is an essential skill for translating clinical observations and research into knowledge that informs medical progress.<sup>3-5</sup>

Writing a scientific article facilitates the dissemination of clinical findings, fosters peer engagement, and ensures the integration of novel insights into the medical canon. Despite its importance, the ability to produce high-quality scientific manuscripts is often perceived as the domain of academics and researchers.<sup>6</sup> Studies have noted that many clinicians, residents, and medical students find medical writing daunting, citing difficulties in structuring research, insufficient guidance, decreased financial support, reduced clinical demand and incentives, and excessive administrative burden as significant obstacles resulting in an underutilization of their valuable experiences and perspectives.<sup>7-9</sup>

The barriers to scientific writing are multifaceted. They include limited exposure to manuscript preparation during medical training, inadequate understanding of scientific language and structure, lack of mentorship, and the perception that medical writing is an overwhelming and inaccessible task.<sup>6,7,10,11</sup> Furthermore, traditional medical writing courses often focus on the critical appraisal of existing articles, which, while informative, may not fully equip participants with the skills needed to independently develop and submit a manuscript.<sup>12-16</sup> These limitations highlight the need for innovative approaches to medical writing education that prioritize hands-on experience and practical

application.

Recognizing these challenges, the advanced international mini-invasive surgery (AIMS) Academy Clinical Research Network developed a course model designed to actively engage participants in the process of manuscript creation and submission. Unlike conventional courses, this model emphasizes practical learning by assigning participants to collaboratively draft, revise, and submit a clinical manuscript to a peer-reviewed journal. This approach not only enhances medical writing skills but also fosters a sense of ownership and motivation by positioning participants as co-authors of the resulting publication.

This study aims to evaluate the outcomes of the AIMS Academy medical writing courses. By analyzing participant feedback, course effectiveness, and the success of manuscripts publication, we provide evidence for the utility of this hands-on training model in addressing the gaps in medical writing education.

## Methods

Between 2022 and 2024, three sessions of the AIMS Academy Clinical Research Network medical writing courses were conducted. The objective was to provide practical medical writing training by guiding participants through the composition of a manuscript intended for peer-reviewed publication.

### Participant Selection

Each course included six trainees selected from six centers participating in the AIMS network. Eligibility criteria included a base involvement in scientific publications, certified proficiency in English, and the ability to independently draft a scientific article's initial version. All participated on a voluntary basis and signed an informed consent. This study was approved by the local review board.

### Course Structure

The AIMS network scientific committee predetermined the manuscript's topic and title, using pre-analyzed data from the AIMS academy's network database. Each participant was assigned specific sections to draft: introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion (data interpretation and comparison with the literature), and/or references.

Each participant had one month to submit their draft section. A designated AIMS network member subsequently compiled these sections into a single draft and created an abstract, which were reviewed by an invited medical writing expert. All the course participants were listed as authors of the article.

### Practical Workshop

A one-day workshop was conducted one month after the submission of the draft to the expert. During the eight-hour session, participants presented their sections, explained their writing decisions, and engaged in group review and revision under the guidance of the medical writing expert. The manuscript was finalized for submission to a peer-reviewed journal, and all participants were credited as co-authors. One participant from each course was collectively assigned the role of

corresponding author.

### **Evaluation Metrics**

Participants completed a post-course questionnaire using a 10-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 10 = extremely) to assess their experiences. The questions are presented in Table 1. Publication of the prepared manuscripts served as an additional outcome measure. The questionnaire scores were reported as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation.



## Results

All 18 participants successfully completed their assignments and actively engaged in the workshop. Each course concluded within the planned eight-hour duration.

### Questionnaire results

Table 1 illustrates the results and the mean (SD) scores of the answers. Participant's perception of involvement was high, as 61% (11/18) reported a score of 10, 22% (4/18) gave a score of 9, and 17% (3/18) rated it 8. Proactive participation in group discussions was also high, with 39% (7/18) scoring it 10, another 39% (7/18) scoring it 9, and 22% (4/18) scoring it 8.

In terms of knowledge acquisition on the discussed topic, 39% (7/18) of participants scored their learning as 10, 39% (7/18) rated it 9, and 22% (4/18) gave a score of 8. Medical writing skills improvement was rated as 10 by 28% (5/18), 9 by 44% (8/18), and 7 by 28% (5/18). The perception of corrections as discrediting was minimal, with 67% (12/18) rating it as 2, 17% (3/18) rating it as 3, and 17% (3/18) rating it as 1.

The presence of a medical writing expert was deemed beneficial, with 28% (5/18) rating it 10, 17% (3/18) rating it 8, and 56% (10/18) rating it 7. Involvement due to being listed as an author was scored 10 by 44% (8/18), 9 by 28% (5/18), and 7 by 28% (5/18). When asked if they wanted the manuscript to be published, all participants (100%, 18/18) scored this question as 10.

The course usefulness was highly rated, with 17% (3/18) of participants scoring it 10, 67% (12/18) scoring it 9, and 17% (3/18) scoring it 8. All participants (100%, 18/18) expressed a willingness to attend the course again and to recommend it to their peers.

### Publications outcomes

All three courses resulted in manuscripts that were successfully published in indexed journals following minor revisions.<sup>17-19</sup> The time from submission to publication was 98 days for the first manuscript, 85 days for the second, and 73 days for the third, showing a decreasing trend.

## Discussion

The demand for continuous professional development in medicine underscores the importance of medical writing skills. While traditionally associated with academic careers, these skills are equally crucial for clinicians involved in direct patient care.<sup>6,20</sup> Despite this, many clinicians refrain from manuscript preparation due to time constraints and insufficient training, leading to missed opportunities for sharing valuable clinical insights.<sup>6,7</sup>

Our study highlights the effectiveness of a novel, practical approach to medical writing training. By engaging participants as active contributors to a manuscript intended for publication, the course fosters a deeper commitment to the learning process, as noted also in other scientific sections.<sup>21</sup> The hands-on experience contrasts with traditional methods that rely solely on the appraisal of existing literature, which may not adequately prepare participants for independent manuscript preparation.<sup>13,14,22</sup>

A recent study by Astaneh *et al.* focused on a two-day workshop on medical writing, revealing that it had a positive impact on enhancing participants' confidence in various writing skills such as utilizing figures in the results section, summarizing the main findings, crafting the conclusion, and adhering to checklists.<sup>23</sup> Their post-test total scores substantially increased after the workshop.

The high satisfaction scores and a 100% successful publication of manuscripts from all three course editions of the AIMS Academy underscore the approach's efficacy. Minor revisions requested by peer reviewers indicate the manuscripts' initial quality, affirming the rigor of the training process and resulting in a faster time to publication, which also improved during the 3 years.

A key feature of the AIMS course model is its emphasis on motivation, which was demonstrated by the questionnaire results. Participants were highly engaged, realizing that their efforts directly contributed to a tangible outcome—a published article. This sense of ownership enhanced their dedication to the course and encouraged proactive participation in discussions and revisions, as suggested in other educational scenarios.<sup>24</sup>

Notably, none of the participants felt discredited during the reviewing process, while they felt a benefit in having an expert in the group, which is consistent with the literature.<sup>25,26</sup>

Future iterations of this model could explore expanding eligibility criteria to include a broader range of participants and incorporating mentorship components to provide ongoing support beyond the workshop. Further research should also assess the long-term impact of such training on participants' subsequent publication rates and career trajectories.

In conclusion, the AIMS Academy Clinical Research Network's medical writing courses offer a replicable model for empowering clinicians, residents, and medical students to contribute to the scientific literature. By transforming participants into authors, these courses provide an effective and motivational pathway for advancing medical writing proficiency. All the participants felt enriched by the course, with a 100% publication success rate and a mean time to publication of 85 days.

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All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article

## Abbreviation

AIMS: advanced international mini-invasive surgery



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## Tables

**Table 1. Results of the post-course questionnaire given to the participants.**

Questions with Likert scale (1-10) results, n (%)	Participants N=18	Mean score $\pm$ SD
Did you feel involved in the work?		9.4 $\pm$ 0.8
10	11 (61)	
9	4 (22)	
8	3 (17)	
Were you proactive in the discussion?		9.2 $\pm$ 0.8
10	7 (39)	
9	7 (39)	
8	4 (22)	
Did you learn something new about the topic that was discussed?		9.2 $\pm$ 0.8
10	7 (39)	
9	7 (39)	
8	4 (22)	
Did your medical writing skills improve?		8.7 $\pm$ 1.2
10	5 (28)	
9	8 (44)	
7	5 (28)	
Did you perceive the corrections received as a discredit?		2.0 $\pm$ 0.6
3	3 (17)	
2	12 (67)	
1	3 (17)	
Was the presence of the medical writing expert useful?		8.0 $\pm$ 1.3
10	5 (28)	
8	3 (17)	
7	10 (56)	
Did knowing that you were part of the writing of the article make you more involved in the work?		8.9 $\pm$ 1.2
10	8 (44)	
9	5 (28)	
7	5 (28)	
Would you be happy if the article were published?		10.0 $\pm$ 0
10	18 (100)	
Was the course useful?		9.0 $\pm$ 0.6
10	3 (17)	
9	12 (67)	
8	3 (17)	
Would you propose the course to your peers?		10.0 $\pm$ 0
10	18 (100)	
Would you participate in the course again?		10.0 $\pm$ 0
10	18 (100)	