

FACING THE CHALLENGE OF EFFECTIVE WRITING

In 2016, Dr. Iain Patten will once again offer a two-part training programme for MPI-CBG postdocs. In the Part 1, participants will explore the two main writing challenges faced by all researchers—effectiveness and efficiency. A key theme will be how to make writing a natural part of the research process rather than a distraction from the interesting work of science. Later in the year, Part 2 will provide participants with an opportunity to extend their learning while actively working on a manuscript for publication or on a grant or fellowship application. A key element of this workshop will be the opportunity to receive individual advice on the development of your specific piece of writing. Participation is therefore restricted to people who are actively working on an article or funding application.

PART 1

This 4-day workshop is designed to help postdoctoral researchers consolidate their writing skills and understand how to write more effectively and efficiently as part of their normal working lives. The workshop will introduce ways of understanding the process of writing before looking at the primary challenge of achieving clarity when presenting complex scientific information. Emphasis will be placed on applying common principles to different types of writing while recognising the specific requirements of each. Throughout the workshop, participants will consider how to apply these principles to the main writing tasks they face in their work, such as scientific publications and funding applications. Participants will also explore how to use writing as a powerful and creative tool to enhance their scientific research by exploiting the relationship between critical scientific thinking and effective writing. Finally, participants will use these insights to develop a more efficient approach to writing and publication that will benefit their productivity.

The workshop will be held on March 14-17, 2016. Each day will begin at 9 am and finish at 5 pm. Participants should expect to do additional preparation in the evenings.

Maximum of 20 participants.

PART 2

This workshop provides a rare opportunity for participants to enhance their writing skills with the close support of an experienced writing consultant. Emphasis is placed on identifying solutions to real writing problems and recognising how the experience can be used in future writing projects. The use of extensive individual tutorials provides an important experiential learning opportunity that is not possible in other training formats. Consequently, participants will learn how to overcome many of the challenges of particular types of writing through their own experience. Throughout the workshop, emphasis is placed on how to apply that learning throughout participants' careers.

During this 4-day workshop, participants are expected to work on their own research article or funding application. All participants are required to have participated in Part 1 in 2015 or 2016 (or to have previously participated in a Making Sense of Writing workshop with Dr. Iain Patten).

The workshop will be held from November 28 to December 1st, 2015. Each day will begin at 9 am and finish at 5 pm. Participants should expect to do additional preparation in the evenings.

Maximum of 10 participants.

TRAINER'S BACKGROUND

Dr. Iain Patten is an independent writing consultant with over 12 years' experience of facilitating scientific writing and communication. He originally trained as a biomedical scientist and undertook research in neuroscience and embryology in the UK, USA, and Spain. He later shifted his attention to scientific communication, working initially in Spain as an editor and translator of biomedical science and later in the UK in the medical communications industry. He currently provides an integrated scientific and medical communications service with an emphasis on individually tailored training and consultancy. In addition to his work with authors and researchers, he provides training to professional writers, editors and translators on the professional development programmes of organizations such as the European Medical Writers Association.

Dr. Patten's approach to facilitating scientific writing involves far more than correcting grammar and style in English. He focuses primarily on helping authors to understand their own writing process and engage more effectively with it. The goal of this approach is to produce independent, effective writers who are able to generate well-structured, clearly written articles as part of their normal professional activity. In parallel, he provides training and consultancy for group leaders and institute directors designed to help them develop a strategic approach to managing writing and publication and to work effectively with their groups to implement that vision. He draws heavily on his experience as a professional writer working with authors, research groups and organizations to produce materials ranging from research articles to science policy documents.

Dr. Patten's professional background allows him to engage comfortably with researchers on the scientific content they intend to present, not just the language that is used to communicate it. In addition to his research training, however, he has extensive experience of working with authors whose first language is not English. As a native English speaker who uses Spanish regularly in his professional and personal life, he also has direct experience of the challenges presented by working in a second language. This awareness is particularly useful when working with groups in international research institutes.