



MicroResearch Virtual Writing Workshop Report

Maternal Neonatal Child Health Institute / Mbarara University of Science and Technology



Feb 3, 5 & 10, 2021

“I am now confident to write because I feel I know what to do in each section of the manuscript. Thank you for your support.”

“I learnt a lot more on the logical presentation of the paper, particularly the Gold nugget.”



BACKGROUND

The virtual MicroResearch Writing Workshops have been developed to address the constraint problems due to COVID-19 pandemic. The first virtual one was held over two-half days in November 2020 over four sites, in addition to the MicroResearch core site in Nova Scotia.

The purpose of this virtual workshop was to provide hands-on experience for MicroResearch workshop graduates and other professionals involved in research to enhance their technical writing skills using their project data. The format was modified from the 2 half-day virtual workshop to a 3 half-day format. As with previous writing workshops, each participant was required to come to the workshop with a developed project and data. The workshop was focused on adult learning principles and adapted to virtual learning. Given the importance of hands-on mentoring in the writing workshop, the teaching sessions were compressed and participants were given the opportunity to workshop their paper outline. Participants were broken into small groups and paired with a coach mentor. To grow capacity, three local coaches and two Nova Scotia coaches were recruited.

The much needed infrastructure/internet access needed to permit this virtual workshop was supported by Academics Without Borders, without which the workshop would not have been a success.

MICRORESEARCH WRITING WORKSHOP

MicroResearch Writing Workshop Facilitators

The workshop was facilitated by Noni MacDonald who also functioned as a coach along with Bob Bortolussi and local coaches from MUST, including Jerome Kabakyenga, Elizabeth Kemigisha, and Catherine Abaasa. The coaches brought writing and reviewer experience to the workshop. On Day 3, Shawna O’Hearn from Dalhousie University’s Office of Global Health joined to provide further feedback on presentations.

Coaches and Facilitators

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Objectives

The objectives for this MR Writing Workshop were to:

1. Outline steps in development of a manuscript from research data
2. Identify the “gold nugget” in the data
3. Identify journals of interest to submit
4. Describe factors that should raise suspicion of predatory journals
5. Draft a rough outline (bullet points only) of a manuscript based on IMRaD
6. Describe next steps for writing first draft

Preparation before Workshop

Prior to the workshop, participants were made aware of the requirement to have a project and data to work on and to register for the online MR curriculum.

Work was also done to see on assessing quality of internet access

Participants and Pre-assessment

MUST had worked on the previous Virtual Writing Workshop held in November, so they were well aware of requirements for participants for the workshop. The timing, time commitment, prerequisites, work needs to be done outside of the workshop time etc. were discussed with potential participants. Due to connectivity issues, work commitments, and COVID requirements ten participants attended the workshop on Day 1 and keenly completed the work (Appendix 1). Appendix 1 also lists their project topics for development into a paper. All participants had data as required.

Of the ten, six participants completed the pre-workshop assessment (See Appendix 2). Only 5 of that 6 had done a MicroResearch training workshop and all of these were working on their MR project. All participants were keen to learn to write and publish a research paper

Program Overview

An agenda was developed to meet the identified objectives, the compressed timeframe compared to the five-day and two-day in-person versions. The focus of the workshop was to facilitate participants developing a rough bullet outline for their first draft paper for their study.

See outline course over view below:

Day 1: (Feb 3)

- Introduction to course
- Organize approach- to tell story to arrive at “gold nugget”
- Learn how to find journal –using “JANE”

Breakout groups- meet coach, gold nugget discussion

- Overview of **IMRaD**:
- **Introduction** - questions to answer
- **Methods**-questions to answer
- **Results**-questions to answer
- **Discussion**- questions answered
- Authorship, Abstract & Title
- Define next steps to get to first draft
- Review homework (see Appendix 3). Prepare for Day 2

Day 2 (Feb 5)

- Review and discuss draft slides for summary 5 min presentation for Day 3 with coach and fellow small group participants

Day 3 (Feb 10)

- Each participant presents 5 slides in 5 minutes followed by 6 to 10-minute critique from facilitators and coaches. Slide outline:
 - Rough title, gold nugget, journals considering
 - Introduction,
 - Methods,
 - Results,
 - Discussion
- The purpose is to tell story and show logic to arrive at gold nugget and then show its importance

Day 1: The program ran from 4:00pm to 6:30 pm (Uganda time) – a time that worked well for participants to be able to complete their “day job” and still be back home for the COVID curfew. Following an introduction to the faculty, coaches, and participants and the first virtual lecture on “gold nugget”, the participants were divided into five teams, each with their assigned coach, into breakout rooms for 35 minutes. The purpose of these breakout rooms was to present their research topic and their gold nugget. This went relatively well- better than the 30 minutes in previous virtual workshop. However, several groups only had two participants, so it was not clear if the time would have been long enough if three participants had been able to zoom in.

The next lecture section was about finding journals that fit their purpose, using their gold nugget statement as the input for “Jane” (<http://jane.biosemantics.org>), as well as a presentation regarding predatory journals, with an emphasis on how to recognize and avoid them.

This was followed by sections on the importance of “telling a story”, logic flow, and how to develop the outline of a paper using IMRaD template. In IMRaD, the “I” stands for

“Introduction”. To explain this component, each participant was given the following questions to answer in bullet format: Why did we do the study? (i.e. the problem); What do we know? What don't we know? What did we do? The importance of logic and storytelling were re-emphasized. The same process was used with the **“Methods”** section focusing on: What did we do? What was the design/method? Where did we do it? When did we do it? Who were the participants and how were they recruited? What were the inclusion/exclusion criteria? Which tools were used? etc. This was followed by being tasked to develop **“Results”**: What did we find? Who was recruited? Who was approached but chose not to participate? How many participants dropped out? What were the major findings in detail, using tables or figures or themes, etc.? All the while paying attention to what results must be included for the “gold nugget” for this paper. Finally, the **“Discussion”** section section was outlined, followed by a discussion of authorship, how to overcome disharmony in writing with several authors, and an outline of what to include in a paper abstract, title, and acknowledgements.

Following each section there was an outline of what tasks needed to be completed for each section, as a part of the homework component of the workshop (See Appendix 3).

Day 1 concluded with a short review of the steps in writing the outline of the paper, what would be needed for the Day 2 (February 5) session with the coaches, what materials would be sent, how the recorded session could be accessed on private “YouTube”, where to find materials on the website, and a reemphasis that as each section of homework was completed, it should be shared with the coach during the Day 2 session (See Appendix 4).

Day 2.Of note, not all were able to attend on Day2 because of technical and internet issues for participants and some coaches. Those who were able to connect discussed their paper outline in more detail with their coach. Those who were not in attendance set up an alternate time to meet with their coach.

On **Day 3** (February 10), nine of the ten participants presented a summary of their paper outline. After each presentation, the coaches and facilitators offered short critiques and feedback. One participant could not attend due to a scheduling conflict but sent in his overview slides and received comments back via email. The importance of telling a story and the “gold nugget” that made the study important was emphasized. All participants were encouraged to move forward and the next steps were summarized on moving from outline draft to a full paper.

Next steps following the workshop were then outlined:

- Review comments from today
- Revise your paper backbone
- Review with your co-authors & coaches
- Review author instructions
- Write first full draft
- Review with your co-authors & coaches
- Keep revising until all are satisfied
- Write Abstract
- Choose Title
- Write acknowledgements

- Review author instructions
- Submit
- Keep revising until all are satisfied

MicroResearch offered the opportunity to review revised versions of the manuscripts. All were requested to send in an evaluation and then receive their certificate.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

A post-workshop assessment of the program was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted anonymously with 9 of 10 (90%) participants completing the form. The scores and summary of comments from the workshop evaluation are presented in Appendix 5. They much valued the ratio of small number to coach so each had individual attention to their manuscript backbone development. They highlighted how helpful answering the questions to fill out IMRaD backbone was as well as understanding the value of knowing their gold nugget. Internet connectivity was noted to be key – need stronger link from site. Most notably, there is a commitment to work more with their coaches to move their draft backbone of the paper into a full manuscript.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUDGET

Internet access and IT support were much appreciated by both coaches and teachers. More work is needed to ensure even more stable access. Having an IT person from MUST on hand to assist with troubleshooting issues was a major help, as shown by the improvements from Day 2 to Day 3 connectivity. It is also noteworthy that the majority of the participants were able to access the program for the nearly 3 hours required for the final day. This would not have been possible at this site on the first virtual workshop.

WEEKLY WRITING GROUPS

Shawna O’Hearn, who attended on Day 3 to provide comments on presentations, offered to host a virtual writing group on a bi-weekly basis to help focus time for writers to move manuscripts along. This might also be done locally if COVID restrictions allow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administration

1. *Virtual Space*
Zoom worked well for the main presentations and for the breakout groups because the number of participants was low.
2. *Internet*
The workshop is only possible if stable internet access is established. The site had ensured this was achievable and it worked reasonably well, however several participants still had

issues with connectivity. The support from AWB to provide improved internet access, as well as having an IT person on site to troubleshoot issues helped and need to be continued for all virtual workshops.

3. *Program Logistics*

Teams of two or three seem optimal, with only ten participants max at the workshop.

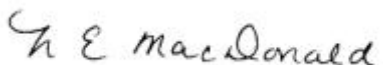
Education

4. Request not just topic area but a summary of the project before the workshop. This would allow the coaches to have more understanding of the projects when broken up into groups on Day 1.

Cover only the gold nugget before the breakout session on Day 1. This is a new concept for many and needs to be highlighted.

5. The 3-day program worked well, as did the timing in the late in afternoon/early evening for the participants. This allowed them to join the workshop at the end of their work day. Using a Wednesday, Friday, and Wednesday schedule seemed to work well to allow participants to work on their presentations over the weekend. Consideration needs to be given to expanding to 4 sessions – i.e. lectures, 2 coach sessions and final day
6. For the final day, participants need to be remind that presentations are ONLY an overview of their project and should be restricted to five minutes. This portion of the session ran too long, reducing the amount of feedback coaches were able to provide to the presenters. It was helpful that the MR Coordinator took notes of the coaches' feedback to send to each participant and the session was recorded to You Tube so participants could review if needed.
7. Encourage participants to join a local or virtual writing group to set aside time each week to write and further their manuscript.
- 8 Try to avoid having two different MicroResearch virtual workshops overlapping as decreases options for coaches and facilitators

Respectfully submitted



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