



MicroResearch Virtual Writing Workshop Report

Linking: Nova Scotia, Guyana, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda



**Participant Alexandre Mubiligi missing from group photo*

November 6 and 11, 2020



BACKGROUND

In response to the impact of COVID on the ability to carry out in-person workshops and in follow-up to the previous writing MicroResearch Writing Workshop held at MUST in 2019 and 2020, a virtual MR Writing Workshop compressed into 2 half days was developed and piloted in November, 2020.

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 and data. The format was based on the 2-day in-person workshop to a virtual format with a number of modifications. As in the past, 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 small groups were formed, each with a coach

MICRORESEARCH WRITING WORKSHOP

MicroResearch Writing Workshop Facilitators

The workshop facilitators included Noni MacDonald and Shawna O’Hearn, who gave the virtual presentations, and the three experienced writing coaches: Bob Bortolussi, Beth Cummings and Tony Otley. They brought extensive writing, editorial and reviewer experience to the workshop.

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.

Participants and Pre-assessment

Ten (10) participants were recruited by sites in Rwanda, Guyana, Kenya and Uganda (see Appendix 1) following a series of zoom discussions with site leaders on need for such a virtual MR writing workshop. The timing, time commitment, pre-requisites etc. were discussed. Initially, 10 registered in advance. Ten of the 10 completed a pre-workshop assessment (see

Appendix 2). Only 5 of 10 had done a MicroResearch training workshop, but these 5 were working on their MR projects. All 10 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 in developing a rough bullet outline for their first draft paper for their study.

See outline below

Day 1: Introduction to course Organizing your approach- your “gold nugget” Breakout groups- meet coach, tasks Journal selection process, Predatory	State “gold nugget” from the research data Select appropriate journal(s) Review author instructions for each Write Draft bullet point Introduction
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	As write– always check with author instructions Write bullet points to answer introduction questions Write bullet points to answer methods questions Write bullet points to answer results questions Write bullet points to answer discussion questions Check with you coach and fellow breakout group members as develop these sections via zoom and/or emails Remember – telling your story
Final Day: Present you overview of the paper -6 min each + 10 min class discussion	

Following an introduction to the faculty and coaches and the first virtual lecture on “gold nuggets”, the participants were divided into 3 teams (3 to 4 participants each) with their coach in a breakout room for 35 minutes to present their research topic and their gold nugget. This session could be expanded to 45 minutes and pre-work should require all participants to provide a short abstract or summary of their project which would allow more for discussion of the gold nugget.

The next lecture was about finding journals that fit their purpose using their gold nugget statement as the input to “Jane “: <http://jane.biosemantics.org/>, as well as a presentation regarding predatory journals, with an emphasis on how to recognize and avoid them. The class then was assigned the first homework (see Appendix 3).

This session was followed by talks on the importance of “telling a story”, logic flow and how to use IMRaD to set up the back bone of the paper. Each section had a homework session assigned (Appendix 3). For example, for I – Introduction, each participant needed to in bullet format answer the following questions: 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? Tools? 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 dropped out? What were the major findings in detail – tables or figures or themes, etc.? While paying attention to what results must be included for the “gold nugget” for this paper. Then the Discussion section was outlined, followed by discussion of authorship, how to overcome disharmony in writing with several authors, and an overview of paper abstracts and titles.

A short session on how to set up a writing group was presented with a brief discussion on why this can be helpful and tips on making it work.

Day 1 concluded with a short review of the steps in writing the framework for the paper, what would be needed for presentation on Day 2 (Nov 11), what materials would be sent, where to find materials on the website and reemphasis that as each section of homework was completed, it should be sent to the coach and their teammates.

Of note only 9 of 10 attended the second formal day (Nov 11) and presented their project overview.

The Day 2 presentations of the outline for the papers went well. The 9 who completed the course presented their work to date. While each had a gold nugget and outline, each received suggestions on how to refine and move forward. All were keen to move their work along. The value of the coaches was noted.

The next steps are for each participant to draft a manuscript and the coaches were willing to continue to work with them to move towards sufficient preparation and refinement to be ready for the submission of their manuscript to an appropriate journal.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

An assessment of the workshop was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted with 7 of 9 participants completing the form. The scores and summary of comments from the workshop evaluation are presented in Appendix 4. Key points to note:

- Many positive comments on how helpful and useful – especially valued time with coaches and clear guidance on what is needed in each section of the paper.
- Suggestions included the need to access online materials earlier and would like access to lectures after for review.
- Follow up support with writing also would be valued.
- Stable internet access was an issue for some participants.
- Participants valued hands on aspect of the workshop (i.e. practical not just theory).
- Recognition that there is a need for more work on data analysis (qualitative and quantitative) which would require a separate workshop

“A heart felt thanks from me and the guys. We enjoyed every bit of the workshop. These will be life long skills that will aid in our careers. No doubt every time we engage in research activities in the future we will keep you in mind. Stay safe. All the best.”

– Writing Workshop participant

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administration

Virtual Space

1. Zoom worked well for the main presentations and breakout groups during the Day one session. Follow-up team meetings presented some problems due to scheduling and time zone differences (see below).

Internet

2. Local site organizers (or Hub site coordinator) should pre-test internet quality and ensure participants have adequate connectivity, computers, headsets and video cameras. Smart phones do not appear to be adequate due to their limitations in sharing screens, etc.
3. Local sites should facilitate group meetings post-workshop to help foster a team working environment for writing, as described in the model provided by Shawna O’Hearn.

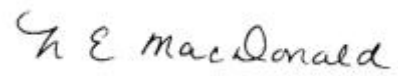
Program Logistics

4. The breadth of time zones was key in limiting full group session length as well as trying to keep teams in same time zone for small group sessions.
5. Registration time and criteria should be extended to guard against last minute drop outs
6. Local sites should set a list of confirmed and standby attendees to fill in the drop outs. They should rank potential participants in the order of who to prioritize.
7. Should pretest each participants’ audio and Zoom connections.
8. Criteria for participation should be established- i.e. provide a summary of work or rough abstract as well as ensure time protected to attend.
9. Teams of 2 or 3 seem optimal, with all team members being from the same site if possible.
10. The post-workshop evaluation should be conducted in a way that ensures participants’ anonymity. This could be done via an online survey tool (e.g. Google Forms or Select Survey). Strategies of how to ensure all participants complete the evaluation will have to be considered.
11. Include a photo consent disclaimer on first slide of PowerPoint for screenshots taken of the Zoom group.

Educational Experience:

12. Need to ensure participants have access to the online workshop materials well in advance. This requires contacting potential participants early-on and getting them to register for access to the curriculum website.
13. A summary of each participants' research topics should be provided during registration. This would allow the coaches to have a better understanding when going into the breakout session on Day 1.
14. Increase the length of the first breakout session to 1 hour (i.e. 15 to 20 minutes per participant).
15. Add a second breakout session after the methods slides to discuss with the coaches. Again, an hour would be ideal.
16. Make overall program 3 formal days – Day 1 as is- entire class. Day 2 - a few days later, with smaller Zoom sessions with each coach's group for at least an hour to review the homework. During this day, coaches will discuss homework feedback and provide advice regarding the slides the participants need to prepare for the 5-minute presentations for the final day. The homework (word document) should be due 24 hours before that is set. Day 3 will remain as the final presentations.
17. For the proposed 3-day Workshop: It may be helpful to start Day 1 on a Thursday, Day 2 on a Monday, and Day 3 on a Wednesday or Thursday. This will provide participants with a weekend in the middle to complete their homework. This is needed for interaction with coaches in the intervening time.
18. For Day 3 the facilitators need to be very clear not needing answers to the questions raised about their paper outline. Each presenter should document points to incorporate into their work. This would make the final day more efficient and allow more participant to participant interaction and input.
19. Need to be clear about week of workshop and post-workshop commitment for coaches and team participants.
20. Try to keep the groups within the same site and time zone to encourage teamwork.
21. Need to review and consider how to address different levels of expertise within a group e.g. professor and student power-dynamics within a country
22. Local sites should ensure participants have their data before they are able to attend. This will ensure that participants are at the appropriate stage of research and will benefit from experience.

Respectfully submitted

Handwritten signature of Noni E. MacDonald in cursive.

Noni E. MacDonald

MicroResearch
Dalhousie University

Handwritten signature of Shawna O'Hearn in cursive.

Shawna O'Hearn