



Ever thought about being a 'medical writer'?

What is a medical writer?

The nature of the work undertaken by a medical writer can be very varied – developing confidential medical and/or scientific materials for pharmaceutical companies, working with these companies and the investigators of their studies to assist in the development of publications, or working with companies and key experts in the field in developing the content for scientific/medical meetings. Medical writers will develop materials for a variety of audiences and for a range of media.

Medical writers are employed by the pharmaceutical company directly, by the agencies that work for the pharmaceutical industry, or are self-employed. This information focuses on the role of the medical writer within an agency – typically referred to as a medical communications agency.

What does the job entail?

Medical writers work within multi-functional teams to deliver editorial work to their clients. Their work will be directed by a senior member of the medical team, and medical writers will liaise directly with the client in its delivery. Much of the work delivered by an agency requires collaboration with leading experts in the therapy area and writers work closely with these highly-knowledgeable individuals.

Writers work on one or two main 'accounts', that is they write on one or two different products and build knowledge of these therapy areas. Over time, writers transition from one account to another to build knowledge of several different therapy areas as well as different types of writing and 'deliverables'. Where writers are involved in developing materials for meetings (which may happen anywhere around the world), they may well attend that meeting and support activities 'on-site' as well.

What qualifications do I need?

Agencies look for the scientific/medical background rather than the writing background, so most medical writers have a life science PhD and many have been involved in post-doctoral research. Having written research as manuscripts and presented at national and international conferences is definitely an advantage.

Some agencies will also consider candidates with BSc Hons or MSc degrees in a life science. We do not expect candidates to have undertaken any courses in general or medical writing, but we do expect someone to demonstrate they have taken an interest in the area.

What skills do I need?

In addition to good writing skills, you will need to have great oral communication skills and be able to work well as part of a team as well as individually. You will need to be confident, be able to adapt and be flexible to the needs of the client and the business. You also need to be up for a challenge! The business we are in is hard work, but very exciting and extremely rewarding. Many medical writers will work within the same agency for years, expanding their skill sets and moving up the career ladder.

Will I get any training?

Yes! Lots! It takes several years to become a great medical writer and good agencies will invest in building your experience and knowledge levels. Much of the training may be carried out 'on the job', with close mentoring from experienced colleagues, other might be self-learning packages you work through and discuss with your line manager. Most agencies will also offer group training with courses conducted either by senior agency staff or through outside training companies.

How do I apply?

Agencies are often on the lookout for good medical writing candidates. Some advertise on their web sites (www.caudex.com) and there is never any harm in writing speculatively about potential opportunities. Many agencies also advertise in the local press, in the scientific press (such as New Scientist), or through medical writing communities (such as the European Medical Writing Association).

The email address for the HR administrator at Caudex is jobs@caudex.com

What happens next?

If your CV is of interest to us, you'll be asked to complete a writing test. If the test is of a good standard you will be asked in for interview. If you get that far, remember to be prepared – think about what we'll be asking you and you want to ask us. Good luck!