International Journal of Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine is a peer-reviewed evidence-based clinically-oriented publication produced quarterly with periodic special releases in print and/or digital formats (per author request/permission and Editor judgment), available as pay-per-issue, free/open access, or as a membership benefit (included or discounted), in English and/or other languages. As the title of the journal indicates, the focus of the journal is human nutrition (i.e., we publish only human-referent information, not animal studies; however, we will publish translational summaries of new animal research) and functional medicine, a broad clinical and conceptual discipline that seeks to protect, restore, and optimize human health by appreciating human physiology’s systems biology construct and thus the necessity of addressing the totality of factors that influence health and disease outcomes in the psyche and soma of individual patients as well as the social corpus of local and international groups of persons. The journal is dynamic and adaptive; updated information about the journal is available on-line at the website www.IntJHumNutrFunctMed.org.

Statement of Social Responsibility: Due to the recent mis-use of science and the misuse of prominent positions to mis-direct public opinion away from science and logic, ICHNFM has found necessity in forming a statement of social responsibility. ICHNFM requires—starting in 2015—that educational materials be socially contextualized with a humanistic emphasis; humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and requires critical thinking and evidence (rationalism, empiricism). In direct opposition to any notion that science and intellectual work are and should be separate from the goal of benefiting human life (ie, financial profiteering, or political misuse of science), we affirm that work in the sciences, healthcare, and medicine should hold preeminent the goal of providing benefit to humanity at large and not private or political interests, in particular what we have defined as the goals of healthcare: physical health and psychosocial freedom, both of which are required for the optimization of human potential and human culture. Likewise, faculty members and teaching staff are required to model beneficence, nonmaleficence, ethics, and justice; repeated violations of these ethical considerations will result first in conversation and if not resolved will result in termination of any working relationship because ICHNFM will maintain its ethics and integrity and will not be tainted by affiliation with faculty or presenters who are socially reckless or maleficient, regardless of the scale or medium (ie, including private emails and public/social conversations and comments). ICHNFM will maintain the highest standards of science, clinical applicability, ethics, and social effect/influence/beneficence.

Notable publications in 2014—

1. Lab Fraud in Functional Medicine,
2. ISIFMC Position on HPS2-THRIVE;
3. Unified Antiviral Strategy,

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How to Improve Scientific Writing and Journal Editing: A Short Narrative-Video Guide, Part 1

Alex Vasquez DO ND DC FACN

**Introduction**

“Hello everyone, Dr. Alex Vasquez here, and today I'm going to start a different series of videos, and this time the conversation is going to focus around journal editing and writing. I'm calling this “Editing and Writing Tips #1”, and I'm going to start with a few of my own perspectives and experiences, then I'll talk about a few basics, and a few influential ideas. In later videos, I will talk about some more specific examples, and then perhaps at some point we will have a review and conclusion.

**Early Experiences and Influences**

Very briefly I'll talk about some of my own experiences, and the reason for my doing this is to share with you and segue into some examples that I think are very important. Basic though they might be, a lot of our success in various fields of life actually comes from respecting and appreciating and utilizing those basic concepts.

Let us start here with some of my initial experiences. I started becoming aware of language and the fact that I had some facility for it, first, when I was about 12 years old. I remember writing a poem in class, and again this is somewhat peripheral to the main topic of today, but I do remember that experience, and that was kind of my entryway, I think, into writing. I remember that our assignment was to write a poem, and I just remember writing this poem in class and it just kept going on and on, and—compared with some of my classmates—I just realized that writing for me was actually pretty easy.

Then again, when I was 18 years old and in military school, I remember in our English class we were being asked questions, and I remember just how the answers to understanding grammar and language just came very easy to me, and I do remember feeling like I had some facility for the structure of language.

Another influential experience I had when I was about 11 years old, totally unrelated to language, is that we took, in the late 1970s or early ‘80s, a Computer Science class in our elementary school, and I remember that class also specifically having some influence on me, in terms of structuring logic. We basically had to write our own computer programs and this was back when computers were very new. Obviously today everybody has computers; back in the late ‘70s, computers were a novelty. I consider myself lucky to have taken this Computer Science class; it was obviously extremely basic, but we did have to write some code and what I remember from that is just the sequential manner in which communication has to take place in order to be successful. In this case, we were writing programs for computers and doing basic graphics and moving illustrations and things like that. Again, it did have some influence on me.

Also very important in my upbringing was that my father gave me a some of audio cassettes when I was in my teens, and I'll share with you two very specific examples here.

1. **Earl Nightingale, Lead the Field:** One was from Earl Nightingale, and you can find audio recordings of...
Earl Nightingale quite freely and widely on the internet, and I'll provide a few excerpts from those audios later in this video and in some upcoming videos. One of the things that really helped me develop my writing ability and perhaps even public speaking ability was what Earl Nightingale called the “castle technique.” The example that he gave was using the image in your own mind of what you want to communicate. In your own mind, when you are communicating with someone, you have—or in my case, I have—certain ideas or perhaps even a certain image or paradigm or model that I am trying to share with someone, or that you are trying to share with someone. The image that Earl Nightingale shared was that in your mind you have this huge idea, somewhat analogous to a castle. And your goal is to transfer that castle from your mind into the mind of your reader or listener. The analogy that he used was, transferring that castle, brick by brick, in a sequential and logical manner, so that eventually you have transferred your castle, piece by piece, into the mind of the other person. I found that to be a very useful analogy. I have used that technique mentally when I am constructing arguments or presenting at conferences and of course in writing books and articles. So before leaving that point, I'll just read it word for word: Earl Nightingale discussed using the castle technique of communicating whereby the communicator imagines transferring a castle, which is the overall idea, to the other person brick-by-brick, that is idea-by-idea, building each upon the other in a logical sequence. Again, I'll add some audio excerpts within these videos.

2. Denis Waitley, The Psychology of Winning: Another audio cassette that I kind of “apprenticed myself to” very early was a series of audio cassettes, and also a book, from Denis Waitley PhD, who taught that “Winners take full responsibility for the success in the communication process. . . . Winners take full responsibility for being certain that you understand what they are saying.” I will here use a recent example from my journal editing experience: I just read and reviewed an article for publication wherein the authors assumed that the reader had supremely detailed knowledge about a certain subject that most educated readers would not have, and people who are unfamiliar with the topic would have no chance at all of understanding this article. So obviously that is an article that needs to be at least partially rewritten or at least fine-tuned, but what I could see very clearly in this particular article is that the authors were assuming a certain level of knowledge that was really inappropriate for even for an educated audience, let alone an audience that may not have known the specifics of what they were discussing. So again, any time I am writing, or any time you are writing, we collectively need to take full responsibility for that communication process. For example, when introducing new terms in an article or a presentation, we have to define those terms. Now if I am presenting to an audience of doctors, I can assume they know certain things of course, so I don't have to start from Biology 101. But even in that setting, a quick review of some basics often helps to set the stage and refamiliarize people with the language and the vocabulary that we are going to be using as I develop the more advanced concepts. So again, responsibility is with the author to ensure that they have structured the conversation, the book, the article, the presentation in such a way that they attendee or the reader or the listener has a chance of following along without too much effort. Again going back to that article that I recently reviewed: even I as the editor, found myself struggling to understand what these authors were saying. I could only imagine that someone perhaps distracted or marginally disinterested would give up on such an article, even though it was only a few pages. If the effort required to read something on a voluntary basis is too much, especially these days when people have a million distractions, people will not persevere through that process. And ultimately that means a failure of the communication process. Because a writer—and the reader—only succeeds, at best, if the person reading the article actually finishes reading the article and actually has a chance to consider the argument being proposed. But in this particular case,
Some other early experiences I had are that I started writing articles in my early 20s and also reviewing for the Journal of Naturopathic Medicine. And what I'll state later is that writing certainly helps the editing process. So, if I'm a writer and then I'm tasked with editing an article, the fact that I have writing experience obviously helps me edit that article, but the reverse is also true. Editing is a critical process of reviewing someone else's work, pretty much word for word, and looking at it from the author's perspective, from one's own perspective, and also trying to kind of intuit the experience of the reader so that as a good editor one has to imagine what would this reading experience be like for someone who doesn't have a specialty degree in this topic, or for someone who works in whatever field that is, whether they are a nutritionist or a dietician or a nurse practitioner, or a physician, or a politician. “Good editing” requires that perspectivism and gaining that perspectivism as a reviewer or editor will also help the writing process as well because a characteristic of being ultimately what is considered "a good writer" is writing in such a way that your message, or the message, is accepted and accessible by a larger audience.

Here is another citation. Early in my 20s I read a book called Zen in the Art of Writing by Ray Bradbury. One of the things he said that I remembered from that book is, "Read poetry every day of your life." I am sure most of us would like to have time to do so; I certainly do not. I don't read poetry every day, but I do read some poetry and I certainly do read a lot of what we might just call “literature.” And I'll give you two citations to that as well, especially with regard to the work of Ayn Rand and Friedrich Nietzsche. So, as I've already alluded, I've certainly reviewed and edited for many journals and professional magazines by now. I've also published approximately 100 articles and letters and also books ranging from small letters and introductions and overviews to my largest book, which in Inflammation Mastery, which is 1200 pages and I've estimated it to be about 1.5 million words, plus diagrams.

Nonliterary experiences, which I feel are important to my own writing ability and my perspective, include some of the following. I do think, and Nietzsche says this as well, and I'm sure other authors have said this as well, writing comes from one's entire experience. So you know anything that you've lived through or in my case anything that I've lived through is going to find its way out in the things that we talk about and the things that we think are important. For example like I read a lot of psychology and philosophy. I'm sure that anybody who's followed my work knows that intuitively whether I say it outright or not. Philosophy and psychology are kind of woven into my work, even if I'm talking about nutrition and biochemistry and physiology and pathophysiology.

I think the fact that I grew up in the '80s and listened to punk rock when I was a teenager, I think that influences my writing even now as a mature, older adult. In fact some of the music that I listened actually segued into the books that I read and specifically when I was about 18 or 19 years old I read a book—One from None—by a punk rock artist or singer named Henry Rollins. That book actually totally changed my life and that was probably my formal introduction into writing by reading his work which modeled some ideas for me. Also, growing up as I did in the '70s and the '80s in Texas, I think that that influenced me. Skateboarding, I also participated in martial arts—kung fu, jiu jitsu, and Tae Kwon Do—when I was younger. Also, I went to military school. And in military school we took a series of classes called Leadership Development and, of course as you would expect, part of Leadership Development is clear communication.

By now I've published, again, somewhere around 100 articles in various publications, and I have listed some of those here (in the video presentation) as well. I've written books; I've written articles. Those feed one into the other because I use my articles to justify what I'm saying in the book and to peer-review that information. When I write books, that is my way of consolidating a lot of information which then I use for rapid publications when the time arrives for me to publish an article.

**List #1: How to Improve Scientific Writing**

On the next page let's get into some specific writing and editing tips, and again I'm calling this basically “Presentation #1” or “List #1.”

1. **Work to develop the skill of writing, even if you have natural ability:** First of all, and perhaps obvious, is that writing is a skill. Some people have natural talent, just as with athletics, and fluidity with words and a natural instinct for logic. Other people don't have this and they either do or don't develop these abilities, but certainly all of us can improve our abilities and that improvement is a continual process. So one thing I will say is to not expect that you have writing talent if you've never worked to develop that talent. And certainly getting a PhD or MD degree...
Ayn Rand read my *Zarathustra*, based her book on its main character and themes, then misrepresented my entire philosophy in the introduction to her book. Laughably, she called me a "mystic" even when Martin Heidegger more accurately stated that my work "was the end of metaphysics."

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**20th Century Collector’s Notes**

*The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand

Illustrated by Victoria Vebell

Published in May 1943, Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* has been considered one of the most influential books, especially in American society. Now, I could say that that has good and bad justification, and I can also, in my opinion, say that people have misread that book because the messages contained within that book are often not the messages attributed to that book. The same thing is true of Nietzsche's writing as well. Some books might be popular, but that does not make them good, but some books that are popular are popular for a reason. Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead* is a masterpiece, whether you agree with her or not, or whether you like her or not. I personally don't like her; I find that she has many personal flaws and the people who know her would also say the same. I'm not a fan of her necessarily as a person, but her book *The Fountainhead* is a bonafide literary masterpiece.

1. **Writing will improve your editing, and editing will improve your writing:** As I said before, writing will improve your editing, and editing will certainly improve your writing. Writing talent facilitates editing talent and vice versa. Gain as much experience with critical, logical, structural language as possible to become “well rounded” with various types of experience.

2. **Explain everything, and do so with concision:** My third tip is to make an effort to explain *everything efficiently*. Again, I refer back to Earl Nightingale's concept of the castle technique. Experienced readers do not mind a quick review, and the more scholarly of them will appreciate your concision. If you can, then summarize something very quickly. Let's say we are going to talk about mitochondria in clinical medicine, and I give a one paragraph or five sentence

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review of mitochondria, the scholars will enjoy that
and the novices need that in order to orient them to
the material that follows. Again as I say here, the
more scholarly readers will appreciate your concision
and the new students need the definitions. Make both
groups happy and you’ll be well received, which of
course is your goal. You are responsible. Do not make
your reader struggle to understand you—again, unless
you are really writing to a specialized audience such as
Nietzsche was—because the ultimate result is that
**if you make your work too complicated then your
work will not be popular, and your work “needs to
be popular” in order for you to get your message out.**
Don’t make your reader struggle to understand you
because this will result in your being unread or
unpublished, or just not gaining the popularity that
you want in order to disseminate your ideas, which of
course is your ultimate goal.

4. **Read science to get the rhythm and logical
structure of science:** I have read, since my early 20s,
thousands of articles and book pages, especially
primary research and major reviews, and again even
within science we find some authors are notably good
with their skill in writing and communication of
supremely complex and novel ideas. I have a few
authors for example within the rheumatology field
and I try to read everything that they write because
not only is their work incredibly progressive, but their
manner of communicating that work is also what I
consider to be a positive influence on my own reading
ability, ultimately editing ability, and all of this
ultimately comes down to one’s thinking ability. So as
I said again, read science to get the rhythm and logical
structure of science.

5. **Read literature to get a certain style and cadence
that lends some style to your work:** Some people are
considered masters of language and for good reason.
Again I can refer you back to Friedrich Nietzsche's
work, arguably quite complicated, especially if you
do not have an overview of his psychology and
philosophy and what he was trying to accomplish. But
Nietzsche was a very talented writer, and he is well-
known among philosophers and writers as having a
very unique and innovative style of communication.
Difficult though that might be at times, reading
Nietzsche will make you a better writer and a better
reader, just like that experience has done for me.
Again, Ayn Rand’s *Fountainhead*, an absolute
masterpiece; I have probably gone through that
particular work somewhere between 50 and 100
times.

6. **Make every word count:** When you are writing,
makes every word count. And one way that you can
really learn this discipline is by authoring letters,
which I have done from the start of my writing
experience. I published my first “formal” kind of “big
league” letter when I was about 24 years old. I wrote
a letter for the American College of Rheumatology's
journal, *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. That was my first
experience in writing again kind of a high-level letter.
But I have written many, again what I would consider
high level letters in other journals, especially more
recently. And what I'm trying to communicate in
giving you those examples is to say that what writing
letters forces you to do, what it forces me to do, is to
take a lot of information and compress it into a certain
word limited space, typically 500 words, 250 words,
or most recently in my experience with the *New
England Journal of Medicine*, 175 words. So like
look at my experience of writing books where the
space is relatively unlimited. I might have to take
ideas that have spanned over 40 or 50 pages and
compress those into 500 words or 250 words. Doing
that forces me to select every word with ultimate
precision. And doing that multiple times has certainly
helped me gain an appreciation of how to use
language in a more precise and concise manner
because ultimately I think one of the goals that a good
writer should always keep in mind is what I call
intellectual density. And that is trying to convey the
most information possible with the least amount of
space and effort and time required by the reader.
Ultimately what I want, and ultimately what you
want, is for the reader to leave thinking, "Wow. I read
in half a page something that completely changed my
perspective or changed my life or changed my
approach," to whatever that topic might be. That's
writing with impact. We don't want to achieve that
goal over the course of 500 pages if we can do it in
500 words. And, again, writing letters as opposed to
articles… Writing letters as opposed to articles, which
are longer, and books which are unlimited, helps
refine that word selecting and wordsmithing skill.

7. **Writing is ultimately your logical sequence with
the reader in mind:** The more imaginary readers you
can accommodate, the better. The more you have
cleaned out the cobwebs from your own life and
mind, the better will be your writing and editing
because your entire existence will seek, embrace, and
tolerate nothing less than clarity. Some of that idea
actually comes from Nathaniel Branden's work on
psychology. And perhaps I'll talk about that more in
an upcoming video, but in the meanwhile just for
emphasis let me repeat that last point, number seven.
Writing is ultimately your logical sequence with the
reader in mind. The more imaginary readers you can
accommodate, the better. The more you have cleaned
out the cobwebs from your life and mind, the better
will be your writing and editing because your entire
existence will seek, embrace, and tolerate nothing less
than clarity.

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Closure
This brings us to the end of writing and editing tips number one. In the future we will of course talk about writing tips number two. I will provide some more examples, some more excerpts, and at some point perhaps provide a review and conclusion to these ideas. Thank you very much for your attention and I look forward to sharing the next video with you.

Main citations:
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About the author and presenter: Alex Kennerly Vasquez DO ND DC (USA), Fellow of the American College of Nutrition (FACN), Overseas Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine: An award-winning clinician-scholar and founding Program Director of the world’s first fully-accredited university-based graduate program in Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine, Dr Alex Vasquez is recognized internationally for his high intellectual and academic standards and for his expertise spanning and interconnecting many topics in medicine and nutrition. Dr Vasquez holds three doctoral degrees as a graduate of University of Western States (Doctor of Chiropractic, 1996), Bastyr University (Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine, 1999), and University of North Texas Health Science Center, Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, 2010). Dr Vasquez has completed hundreds of hours of post-graduate and continuing education in subjects including Obstetrics, Pediatrics, Basic and Advanced Disaster Life Support, Nutrition and Functional Medicine; while in the final year of medical school, Dr Vasquez completed a Pre-Doctoral Research Fellowship in Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research hosted by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). Dr Vasquez is the author of many textbooks, including Integrative Orthopedics (2004, 2007 2012), Functional Medicine Rheumatology (Third Edition, 2014), Musculoskeletal Pain: Expanded Clinical Strategies (commissioned and published by Institute for Functional Medicine, 2008), Chiropractic and Naturopathic Mastery of Common Clinical Disorders (2009), Integrative Medicine and Functional Medicine for Chronic Hypertension (2011), Brain Inflammation in Migraine and Fibromyalgia (2016), Mitochondrial Nutrition and Endoplasmic Reticulum Stress in Primary Care, 2nd Edition (2014), Antiviral Strategies and Immune Nutrition (2014), Mastering mTOR (2015), Autism, Dysbiosis, and the Gut-Brain Axis (2017) and the 1200-page Inflammation Mastery 4th Edition (2016) also published as a two-volume set titled Textbook of Clinical Nutrition and Functional Medicine. "DrV" has also written approximately 100 letters and articles for professional magazines and medical journals such as TheLancet.com, British Medical Journal (BMJ), Annals of Pharmacotherapy, Nutritional Perspectives, Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics (JMPT), Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), Original Internist, Integrative Medicine, Holistic Primary Care, Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, Journal of the American Osteopathic Association (JAOA), Dynamic Chiropractic, Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, Current Asthma and Allergy Reports, Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, Nature Reviews Rheumatology, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, and Arthritis & Rheumatism, the Official Journal of the American College of Rheumatology. Dr Vasquez lectures internationally to healthcare professionals and has a consulting practice and service for doctors and patients. DrV has served as a consultant, product designer, writer and lecturer for Biotics Research Corporation since 2004. Having served on the Review Boards for Journal of Pain Research, Autoimmune Diseases, PLOS One, Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, Neuropeptides, International Journal of Clinical Medicine, Journal of Inflammation Research, BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine (all PubMed/Medline indexed), Integrated Blood Pressure Control, Journal of Biological Physics and Chemistry, and Journal of Naturopathic Medicine and as the founding Editor of Naturopathy Digest, Dr Vasquez is currently the Editor (2013-) of International Journal of Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine and Editor (2018-present) of Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine, published for more than 50 consecutive years by the International Society for Orthomolecular Medicine.
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- **Citations**—Beyond the example below, see [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK7256/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK7256/). For journals: Authors (if 6 or more, list only first 3 then "et al").
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Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 - 1962)