Equipment and Software for Medical Writers

A compilation of collective wisdom from subscribers to the HittList™

October 04, 2011
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**Introduction**

When it comes to equipment and software for medical writing, I know what I like, but for this piece, I thought that the best strategy would be to send an email out to the HittList and see what everyone else said about what is useful for them. I am so glad I did, because this article turned out to be packed with some incredibly useful information—much beyond what I could have come up with myself.

The article first describes software (separated out by PC and Mac) and equipment. There is also a section on comprehensive lists, which is useful to those who are setting up shop from scratch; and finally, a section called “keeping it simple,” shows that you can function as a medical writer without being fancy about it or spending much money. In this updated version I have added a section on Books also.

The basics that medical writers need are a computer and a monitor (with lots of people suggesting 2 monitors), MS Office, and the Internet. The most popular referencing program used by medical writers by far was Endnote X4 (although I do see a predominance of RefMan use among my clients). Several alternatives to the expensive Adobe Acrobat were suggested. Medical spellcheckers Dorland’s and Stedman’s were also extremely popular. Dropbox seems to be popular for transferring large files. Olympus was the most popular brand of recorder.

New in this updated version is a table of contents on the next page and an index. Information added in this version is denoted by (October 04, 2011) after the contributor’s name.

Thank you so much to all who responded! Please note, I mostly copied information from people’s emails. Also, names are cut and pasted from people’s signatures, which may not include their degrees and certifications.

If you see one of your favorites missing, please email me at emma@hittmedicalwriting.com. I will save your email and update this piece periodically. Again thanks to all who contributed!

Warm Regards,
Emma Hitt
Software

For PCs

Possibly but not necessarily compatible with Macs.

Word Processing Alternatives

Open Office. I'd like to say that it's a great FREE suite of office programs -- at least as good as Microsoft Office, and it includes a drawing program, which MS Office does not. It is a big download -- just under 200 MB as I remember. If one is familiar with MS Office, it should be absolutely no problem to find his/her way around in OO. OO allows saving files in various formats, including MS Word, Excel, Access, etc., and it opens files received in such formats. I suggest that users set the default "Save as..." format to MS Word format to ensure compatibility with colleagues when sending files around. The same goes for MS Excel.

OO looks and feels just like the MS programs (with only very slight and rare differences). I go back and forth between MS and OO on my various computers and really notice no difference in functionality, ease of use, or compatibility.

OO does not include a contact manager, such as Outlook (and neither does MS Office). However, Mozilla Thunderbird is an excellent e-mail program and includes an address book/contact manager that will import contacts from other programs. Thunderbird is another free program.

Dan Keller

Voice Recognition


Karen Cooksey

I consider Dragon Naturally Speaking software to be very useful in helping me transcribe taped interviews. It's a speech-recognition product that offers easy-to-use voice commands for a hands-free PC experience. I use the home version, and it saves me a lot of time transcribing taped interviews, and it's great when it comes to recognizing medical terminology. It's currently on sale on Amazon.com for 36% off the regular price $99: http://www.amazon.com/Dragon-NaturallySpeaking-Home-Version-11/dp/B003VNCRNQ / Dragon Naturally Speaking website: http://www.nuance.com

Jamie Lazare

I use Dragon on my iPhone for quick dictations, or if I'm pressed for time and the ideas are flowing. I also use documents to go into my iPhone to sync documents between my desktop and my phone, if I want to review a paper or article and do some light editing while on the metro...

Ruben J. Nazario, MD

FTP/file transfer and Collaborative Reviewing

See also the section under Macs.

Emma Hitt

I highly recommend PleaseReview for collaborative reviewing of documents. It has a few glitches but is incredibly useful for documents that have multiple simultaneous reviewers. Everyone reviews the same document (online access). The author can allow reviewers to see each other's comments, and reviewers can comment on others' comments. I don't have the latest version (4.0) which also does collaborative authoring, but that feature looks very useful. PleaseReview is web-based, so it works using either PCs or Macs.

Linda Gritz, PhD (October 4, 2011)

http://pleasetech.com/

Transcription Programs

Express Scribe is a great free audio transcription program -- easy to use, and a very small program. It loads, starts, and stops the audio. (It does not convert speech to text.)


Dan Keller

Another description about that program: Express Scribe from NCH, an Australian company. It allows the use of keyboard commands and runs in the background so that I can write in Word while using the controls. Best of all, it's free!


Neil Osterweil

ExpressScribe (freeware) is indispensable. Like a pro transcriber, it has an adjustable back-up function so that you can re-catch a phrase that has you puzzled without having to “rewind.”

Walter Alexander (October 4, 2011)

Here is the info from Express Scribe website: Express Scribe is free professional audio player software for PC, Mac or Linux designed to assist the transcription of audio recordings. A typist can install it on their computer and control audio playback using a transcription foot pedal or keyboard (with 'hot' keys). This computer transcriber application also offers valuable features for typists including variable speed playback, multi-channel control, playing video, file management, and more.

Medical Dictionaries, Grammar and Spellchecker Software

Most useful software is Stedman's Medical Dictionary. Even though most of my clients use Taber’s, Stedman's comes with dictionary software that loads into Word so spellcheck doesn't flag every 3rd word as potentially misspelled because it's not in Word's basic dictionary. This has saved me a LOT of time.

Caryl Haddock

Stedman's Plus Medical/Pharmaceutical Spellchecker: http://www.stedmans.com/product.cfm/376/228 Works seamlessly with Word's dictionary to spell check medical and pharmaceutical documents. According to the web site, "Stedman's Plus Standard Edition delivers solid, dependable medical and pharmaceutical spellchecking, with content updated annually. If you need more than a yearly update,
check out Stedman’s Plus Premium Edition, our subscription product. The Premium Edition keeps you on the cutting edge of medical and pharmaceutical terminology with three comprehensive issues per year."
But you don’t need the premium edition to reap the benefits.

*Melissa L. Bogen, ELS*

Stedman’s Medical Spellchecker Plus

http://www.stedmans.com/product.cfm/642/216

*Lynn Yoffee*

Whitesmoke writer for Bio-Tech available at whitesmoke.com

*Mercy M. Davidson*

From the Whitesmoke website:

- **Grammar and Spelling**
  Comprehensive grammar check, along with spelling, punctuation, style and more!
- **Full Text Translation**
  Translate full texts from any application in one click
- **Multi-Lingual Dictionary**
  Don’t let languages be a barrier! Now you can understand them all with one easy click
- **Artificial Intelligence**
  With algorithms based on artificial intelligence and natural language processing technology, your writing couldn’t be in better hands.

*Dorland’s medical spellchecker*

*Ingrid Sprague*

Medical dictionaries are available for free download at Filebuzz.com

*Mercy M. Davidson*

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**Translation Software**

I’m working with source documents in different languages so I use www.google.com/translate all the time. It’s fast and free, not necessarily accurate but good enough.

*Raquel Billiones, PhD (October 4, 2011)*

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**Backing Up Work**

Backup software is often overlooked, but I rely heavily on mine. I use Carbonite (www.carbonite.com). Other than signup, which takes five minutes, you don’t have to do anything. The software works in the background to back up your files whenever you have an internet connection. I’ve used it to recover documents I accidentally deleted or wrote over, and I have colleagues who have used it to recover all their documents after a laptop was stolen or broken. Recovery is simple and can be achieved on any device that has internet access. It costs less than $5 a month. Recovering a single lost document will make it worth the cost of a year or more. (Emma Hitt says—I use Carbonite too—it has saved me more than once.)

*Bryan DeBusk, PhD*
I have every single email automatically copied to a Yahoo account that I don’t check. I have 58,000 emails in my inbox going back about 4 years! I am waiting for the day when Yahoo tells me to delete some of these emails, but they haven’t yet. Whenever my computer has died, I have been so thankful to have all my email backed up. Yahoo makes it incredibly easy to search through emails too. I have looked for and found an obscure email I have needed many times. Also, I usually need files backed up real time because I don’t want to lose minutes or hours of work (as opposed to Carbonite which has a delay time of a few hours when it is running in the background). When I am working on a piece, I might email the piece to myself once or twice, and because it goes to my Yahoo account also, I know it is backed up and accessible from any computer if my laptop dies.

*Emma Hitt*

You mention using a yahoo backup email. Gmail does the same. I have emails that are over 5 years that I can easily find in a search on gmail. I also organize emails in folders on gmail to help me keep organized!

*Susan Schade-Bijur (October 4, 2011)*

Backing up data to an external drive is good, but redundant backing up is better. One low tech solution is to have a drive that you basically store offsite, and bring in periodically to back up everything. Backing up to the cloud is also good. Check out crashplan: http://www.crashplan.com/ It’s not expensive, it runs in the background, very transparent in case you need to retrieve something.

*David Cohen, PhD (October 4, 2011)*

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**Time Tracking/Invoice Creation**


*Anne Mattarella (and many others)*

When it comes to administrative tasks, I remain organized with the help of Harvest. It's a Web application used to track time spent on assignments and to create invoices. I use it to track my time on projects, to determine how much time I'm spending on billable/non-billable tasks, and to create invoices for clients. [http://www.getharvest.com/](http://www.getharvest.com/)

*Jaimie Lazare*

Fanurio. This is time tracking and billing software for freelancers and I love it. It is very reasonably priced, does exactly what I want it to do, has customizable templates etc. for invoices (you can add your own logo etc.), and very fast and helpful customer support. Link: [http://www.fanuriotimetracking.com/](http://www.fanuriotimetracking.com/)

*Jennifer Gan*

Free time tracking programs:


[http://www.paymo.biz/](http://www.paymo.biz/)

*Amy Dear, PhD*

1. TraxTime - I track my hours, for my clients and for myself. It keeps me honest and helps me see how I manage my time
2. WorkPace - I use it to make sure I get breaks from the computer and to prevent repetitive strain injuries.

*Laurie Bouck (October 4, 2011)*
An excellent free time-keeping and invoicing software for the PC is Grindstone.

Jane DeLartigue, PhD (October 4, 2011)

**Referencing Software**

EndNoteX4 - It's useful to have reference managing software so that adding references into pieces is quick and easy. This latest version of Endnote is even better, as it will take a whole file of PDFs and extract the data to make up references for each individual file, so you can quickly and effortlessly build an endnote library in minutes. You can get a 30 day free trial ([http://www.endnote.com/](http://www.endnote.com/)).

Jane de Lartigue, PhD

EndNote (X4 version is the best by far). Available at a discount to AMWA members ([www.amwa.org](http://www.amwa.org)).

Meenakshi Kashyap

EndNote, especially for those times when a long document is being prepared, and at the last moment a few references are inserted in the middle of the document. Automatic reference list generation and re-numbering. It's beautiful. EndNote can be purchased at [http://www.endnote.com/](http://www.endnote.com/). I think there may be an AMWA member discount.

Joanne M. McAndrews, PhD

Zotero has made my life so much easier: [http://www.zotero.org/](http://www.zotero.org/). I can easily organize my references and access them from anywhere because they are stored on the net. I also can use it to cite, so I was able to get rid of EndNote.

Cindy Porter

This is my new favorite software for managing my references: [http://www.mendeley.com/](http://www.mendeley.com/) It was originally designed for scientists, but I find it useful for my medical writing as well.

Karen Ventii


Suzanne Elvidge (October 4, 2011)

I like the Collections facility of PubMed - allows you to store references under your own subject headings.

Anna Poppa (October 4, 2011)

Paying for journal articles is expensive, and you can usually get them for free at hospital or medical school libraries. Take advantage of the wealth of resources available at these libraries. You can get free access to the usual books, journals, and databases used by their students and staff. I find that Access Medicine, Clinical Evidence, Cochrane Library, DynaMed, MDConsult, and UpToDate are extremely helpful. (MD Consult is also available through the AMWA website for its members.) DynaMed offers a free 30-day trial, and UpToDate has a feature that allows you to send an article along with a free 30-day trial to anyone. If you don’t own a copy of the AMA Manual of Style, these libraries will usually have a reference copy, too.

Kim Tran-Kerr, MD (October 4, 2011)
Acrobat and Acrobat Alternatives

My business would be stuck at critical moments were it not for Adobe Acrobat Pro.  
Dr. Lisa Raenae Hoverman (October 4, 2011)

There's the expensive Adobe Acrobat Professional of course, but also...

Foxit Reader. It's free and downloadable at [http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/reader/](http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/reader/). Unlike Adobe Reader, it allows you to highlight text and make comments on pdfs, both of which are visible when the document is saved and opened up in Adobe. It seems to be an effective alternative to Adobe Professional and similar programs, although I believe it's only available on Windows platforms.  
Aimee Zisner

Nitro PDF professional. This is a cheaper alternative to Adobe Acrobat and does pretty much everything I want it to, for about half the price of Adobe. Link: [http://www.nitropdf.com/](http://www.nitropdf.com/)

Jennifer Gan

I am a HUGE fan of PDF-XChange viewer from Tracker Software. [http://www.tracker-software.com/product/pdf-xchange-viewer](http://www.tracker-software.com/product/pdf-xchange-viewer) There is a free version, which is essentially a reader-only version, and there are inexpensive professional versions that include PDF editing tools. It is a versatile piece of software that enables comments and highlights on PDF documents for collaborative work. I use it constantly to mark passages for fact-checkers, and for many other things.  
Valerie D Mulcaire

This is not an Acrobat alternative, but an Acrobat Restrictions remover to unlock secured pdfs, e.g. NCCN guidelines (you know, when you can’t cut and paste from a pdf? How annoying is that??). I use A-PDF Restrictions Remover available at [http://www.a-pdf.com/security/restrictions_remover.htm](http://www.a-pdf.com/security/restrictions_remover.htm) (free trial and then very cheap). An alternative suggested by Meenakshi Kashyap is ([http://freemypdf.com/](http://freemypdf.com/)).

Emma Hitt


Suzanne Elvidge (October 4, 2011)

The main piece of software that I couldn't do without as a medical writer is Bluebeam PDF Revu for creating/annotating PDFs. Bluebeam has several PDF software products; this is the basic software. It's about $179.00, produces documents that are seamlessly compatible with Adobe, and they offer a free 30-day trial.

Katherine DeYoung, PhD (October 4, 2011)

Project Planning and Mind Mapping

Project Planning: [https://trello.com/](https://trello.com/)  
Project Planning and Organization: [springpad.com](http://springpad.com)

Joseph West (October 4, 2011)
MindManager by Mindjet: This is essentially a very powerful mind-mapping program that I use to organize and access large, complex information sets needed to compose articles and other big writing jobs. For example, my latest project, an article on the orthopedics of ski boots, draws on 7 interview transcriptions, 5 scholarly articles, and two books. I can collapse and expand each piece of source material with one click, section it out with summaries on each section, and view it on the same screen as my writing. Each source can be color coded, flagged with a variety of markers, etc., allowing me to always remember where my quotes and attributions come from as I move it around in the document. I can also copy or drag any material from the sources directly into my outline, then write within or over it as I would in a word-processing program. I can collapse and expand any section or sections of the "map" so that I'm only viewing what I want to see and can scroll through a document without getting bogged down. Everything can be formatted with styles that stay constant or can be easily edited. I always finish up my writing in Word to make sure the formatting is ready for the client, but I find MindManager invaluable for mentally managing complex information.

Morgan Stanfield (October 4, 2011)

I think that you and the "HittList Community" would be interested in a unique app that I have recently discovered and begun to use. It is a mindmapping app called Sciplore that links mind maps with reference and pdf management. It works with both PC's and Macs. A mind map - essentially the outline of a manuscript - can easily be linked sequentially with a few mouse clicks to content of collected and annotated pdf files as the manuscript is being written in MS Word or OpenOffice. Metadata including reference to highlighted text in the pdfs is automatically extracted from the references used and inserted into the manuscript. When the writing is finished, Sciplore creates a formatted reference list. It's compatible with Zotero, Mendelay and Endnote. The Sciplore internet site says it all better than I can, and with a great short video that shows the app's features.

http://www.sciplore.org/software/sciplore_mindmapping/

Clement Weinberger, PhD (October 04, 2011)

OmniOutliner is a way of creating bulleted lists, so you might wonder what it offers over MS Word. In reality, Outliner is a compact, no frills programme that allows you to collect and organise ideas, source information, files and images. Its simplicity enables very rapid work and ensures conceptual and factually accurate written pieces. It is particularly useful for reviews and slide decks.

Nigel Eastmond (October 04, 2011)

Miscellaneous

SnagIt (screen capturing software)
Jennifer Gan

SigmaPlot for graphing
Lowell Stacy
Without a doubt, text expansion software is the most useful tool for writing I use. They're available for Mac and PC -- I've used AutoHotKey and TextExpander -- but they all do the same thing: type long and difficult to type words and phrases with just a few keystrokes. For instance, when I type fdax, the program types Food and Drug Administration. It's extremely helpful for words that you have to bold or italicize because you can include that step (Ctrl-B or Ctrl-I) at the beginning and end of the expansion: nm becomes Nature Medicine.

Brian Orelli, PhD

The most useful software for medical writing--besides PubMed--is a database called UpToDate. It's essentially a collection of medical textbooks in virtually all the specialties, updated every THREE months. It's not cheap. Last time I checked, an individual sub was about $500/year.

http://www.uptodate.com/home/index.html

Paul Cerrato

The two that I have found most useful are ISI Writer and ISI toolbox.

http://www.imagesolutions.com/isiwriter/ (Emma says this looks like document authoring software for regulatory writers)

Tegra Rosera (October 4, 2011)

TimeStamp (www.syntap.com) for timing work, and PerfectIt for checking consistency throughout a piece.

Tina Allen (October 04, 2011)

One thing that I've found extremely helpful is the "split window" or "new window" feature in Word (or PowerPoint or any other Microsoft program). It is really helpful when you find yourself going between different parts of a document. At least with my version of Microsoft Word for Mac 2011, you go to Window -- New Window, or Window -- Split. It's so helpful!

(Emma says—thanks so much for this—I didn't know about it and now I use it constantly!)

Cecelia Shertz (October 4, 2011)

I find the Yahoo Desktop Search to be especially useful. I have a folder containing many refs, and it indexes them all so that I can quickly find a ref using any word in the ref, or combination of words. Very useful. Google has one also, but I like Yahoo better. I think this type of indexing is part of the new Windows operating system.

Clyde R. Goodheart, MD, MBA (October 4, 2011)

For Macs

Possibly but not necessarily compatible with PCs

Time Tracking/Invoice Creation

One of my must-have resources is my time tracking tool. I'm a Mac user, and not all the available trackers are created equal for Macs. But I'd recommend TaskTime4 (http://download.cnet.com/TaskTime4/3000-2066_4-44992.html) This lets me keep track of my time, which I break down by category, and track project status. I can also run reports on how long particular kinds of projects are taking me, or create reports by client, so it's a great tool to systematically monitor
your billable hours. Although it can be used to invoice, I don't (I'm just about to move to Quickbooks for that).

_Alexandra Howson MA, PhD_

iBiz ([http://www.iggsoftware.com/ibiz/index.php](http://www.iggsoftware.com/ibiz/index.php)), which is useful for capturing the time you work on a project, the billable hours and for generating invoices, and keeping track of multiple projects at once.

_Jane de Lartigue, PhD_

For accounting I use Excel and to log my time and produce timesheet for clients I sometimes use Tick Spot - this lets you down load a free widget that acts as a timer and links through to your daily timesheet - also available as an iPhone app.

_Sara Freeman_

I'm also using an online business management solution called WorkingPoint. This service includes invoicing, expense tracking, basic financial reporting, online banking, contact management, email marketing, and other features. So far, I've only used the invoicing feature, and I was happy with the results. There are two plans: $9/month for 1 user and up to 10 invoices; $19/month for unlimited users, unlimited invoices, and some other bells and whistles, including the ability to collect payments via PayPal. I believe you can also import data from other similar systems. There's no long-term contract. You get a free 30-day trial, and then you just go month-to-month, and you can change between the 2 plans whenever you want/need to.

_Katherine DeYoung, PhD (October 4, 2011)_

### FTP/File Transfer

Fetch Softworks ([http://fetchsoftworks.com/](http://fetchsoftworks.com/)) the file transfer client that supports ftp and sftp. It's a Mac compatible alternative to programs such as Ipswich on the PC. It's reliable, fast, costs $49 and has a cute little dog that runs across the screen as you transfer files (what more could you ask for?). Also, file sending programs such as Yousendit ([https://www.yousendit.com/](https://www.yousendit.com/)) and Dropbox ([https://www.dropbox.com/gs](https://www.dropbox.com/gs)) are very valuable for transferring large files to clients. Dropbox can also be used to back up important files on your computer as an alternative to an external hard drive, which you can then access from any computer with an internet connection. However, I also use an external hard drive so that I have multiple backed up copies of everything on my computer.

_Jane de Lartigue, PhD_

I store all my documents on Dropbox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)). Each time I save a document, it stores it, and also saves the previous version, so I have access to every copy of my document. If I really get in a bind, eg, I accidently delete a portion of the document or the file becomes corrupt, I can go back to an earlier version. I've also used it as a collaboration tool, although it wasn't designed for that purpose.

_Cindy Porter_

### Optical Recognition

VelOCRaptor - a piece of optical recognition software. If clients send PDF files that have been scanned, in order to be able to use markup tools on the file it is necessary to put them through optical recognition
software so that Adobe Acrobat recognizes them. This is a Mac compatible version for $49; you can have a free trial as well (http://www.velocaptor.com/).

**Acrobat Alternatives**

Preview already installed on my Mac will work as a limited PDF editor. The most recent version of Preview in Snow Leopard lets you annotate PDF documents (you can highlight in one color, draw shapes, write text, etc). Is that all I need to be able to do? I have also come across another piece of free software for annotating PDFs on Macs called Skim, which looks more powerful... Also http://skim-app.sourceforge.net/ "Skim is a PDF reader and note-taker for OS X. It is designed to help you read and annotate scientific papers in PDF, but is also great for viewing any PDF file."

*Amy Dear, PhD*

**Miscellaneous Mac Software and Apps**

I just heard about Scrivener software and am eagerly awaiting its release for Windows – currently only for Macs. It looks perfect for organizing large reviews as well as for creative writers (I am involved with both currently). If you Google “scrivener” you’ll find the website. It is very reasonably priced too.

*Margaret Groves, M.Phil., M.Ed. (October 4, 2011)*

I'm a Mac user and use the Grab utility for screen grabs when developing slide sets (with all due respect for copyright, of course).

*Anna Poppa (October 4, 2011)*

Another useful iPad app has been Docs to Go. It is cheaper than buying the full Microsoft Office app and essentially does most of the same things. You also get a free download of Docs to Go software for your computer that allows you to link up with your iPad and transfer documents to and from your iPad. If you have the Dropbox app on your iPad (another useful app) you can also save documents you've been working on directly to Dropbox.

*Jane DeLartigue (October 4, 2011)*

**Lists of Mac Compatible Products**

I use a MacBook Pro for my work. I have found Dragon Dictate <Macspeech.com> allows me to dictate faster than I can type. Also available is MacSpeech Dictate Medical. I have found DEVONthink Pro Office to be a very useful database of my saved information. That database and the Internet can be searched with DEVONagent. DEVON Technologies has several useful smaller programs, all available at <devon-technologies.com.>

RapidWeaver is an excellent, simple website construction tool available at <realmacsoftware.com.>

*Clyde M. Burnham, MD*

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1) Default Folder X (for Mac users) which makes your OSX act more like OS9 when it comes to folders and files. Under 9, you rarely lost anything. Somehow it intuitively knew which folder you were working in and it almost always put newly saved files in the right folder. Then X came out and files ended up all over creation. It's too much like Windows and saves newly created files to the folder you last used,
which is stupid and counterproductive. And 2) A multiple paste utility. I use Jumpcut, which saves dozens of your most recent clipboards (you can control the total number in preferences.) It's not perfect but it's better than having only one clipboard at any given time. There are other utilities that perform the same function.

Sal (October 4, 2011)

1. iProcrastinate (free from Apple's App Store). A simple task manager that I’ve come to count on. I've tried others, but this one clicked with me. maybe I'll actually use it and keep it current!
2. Blast Utility (free from Apple's App Store). keeps track of files you've opened. No need to wander through Finder to locate a recently used file. Blast keeps a running list so it's just one click on the Blast icon and choose from the scrolled list.
3. Evernote (free from Apple's App Store). keep notes in folders. Think you want to remember something but don't want to bookmark it or put it on a real or electronic sticky note? This is the tool. (Blast and Evernote are among the top free productivity utilities available at the App Store, in terms of # of downloads as well as user ratings).
4. Dropbox-for file sharing
5. Scrivener-this is a new tool I've started using. It's more than an alternative for MS Word. It's designed for big writing projects so book authors, screenwriters, etc. use it. A little hard to describe, but I'm using it to assemble an NIH grant submission and I think it will be useful. All the items for a grant (or book) are kept in one file or Binder. The binder then has 'chapters' and each chapter can then have sub-chapters. So instead of having a Folder for the grant and subfolders for Specific Aims, the Applicant (and subfolders for candidate's background, career goals, development activities, yadda, yadda, yadda), it's all contained in a single binder. Switch back and forth with a simple click on the Binder's TOC. Cheap, too. $45. And this I think has a PC version. But like I said, it was designed for big or complex writing projects, not necessary to prepare a simple manuscript but would be great for an edited book. Can use EndNote with it, but requires some maneuvering. I don't think RefWorks is an option.
6. EndNote X4. Need I say more? Love that one can keep a bunch of pdfs in a folder and then have Endnote import the pdfs so I don't have to type each in separately (that's not foolproof, I still have to manually fix up to about a third of each import). I've used RefWorks, too, but if one is involved with a multi-site writing project and the other sites are not RefWorks customers, I've heard it can get pretty pricey to make a RefWorks file accessible to others. Not quite sure how all that works.

Don Kirkendall (October 4, 2011)

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Equipment

Monitors

The most essential piece of equipment I have is a second monitor. If I could have 3 or 4 hooked up to my Mac, I would be in heaven. (Emma says “amen” to that!)

Jennifer Maybin, MA, ELS

At least 2 monitors-the bigger the better.

Belinda Peace
My most useful piece of equipment by far – for both writing and editing – is a second monitor. It saves a lot of time by avoiding tabbing or clicking on different icons or tabs to jump from one screen or program to another. When I copy and paste text for flow or to compare documents, I can’t live without the extra monitor. I copy and paste words right from documents into online medical dictionaries, sources into PubMed, all from one screen to another. I just plug the extra monitor from my old desktop into the side of my laptop, so it’s easy and didn’t cost me extra.

Teresa Odle

One tip I have is to get a big monitor (AT LEAST 24 inches) so that you can get 2 Word documents side by side up on the screen at the same time. Additionally I am looking into getting a video card, which allows you to run 2 monitors from the same computer. Most Laptops have this capability, but desktops do not.

Angus McLean PhD (October 04, 2011)

Several people noted that a second monitor is extremely useful. I wholeheartedly agree with that statement and was on the verge of buying another monitor when I discovered Air Display. With it you can use your iPad as a second monitor. You can also use any other computer as a second monitor, if you have another laptop or a desktop computer. That has been very useful.

Jane DeLartigue (October 4, 2011)

Recording

The most useful piece of equipment I use is a very simple digital recorder that allows me to tape lectures and interviews discretely and with good audio. The device costs $119 Canadian, and it has never failed me. It is the Digital Voice Recorder WS-311M made by Olympus and it's great!

Pam Harrison

I use my Olympus digital voice recorder (DM-620) multiple times every day. I record teleconferences and interviews and even just phone conversations in which I receive instructions or information about projects. When the recorder is on, I don't worry so much about taking notes, so I'm better able to participate in the conversation. And I rarely ask people to repeat what they've said (which I used to have to do before I got the recorder). Often, I don't go back and listen to the recording, but I feel comfortable knowing that it's there if I need it. Plus, if there's a lot of information on the recording, I just email the file to my transcription service (record@att.net), and they transcribe it for me.

Karen Cooksey (October 4, 2011)

My primary digital recorder is an Olympus DS-71 -- excellent microphones -- it picks up well in conference halls (as well as can be expected). My advice is to sit near the loudspeaker, not necessarily near the actual person speaking. This recorder has wonderful battery life and records hundreds of hours of very good quality audio before it gets full.

http://www.olympusamerica.com/cpg_section/product.asp?product=1399 For even better (near-broadcast) quality, I use a Sony PCM-M10 digital recorder. It has excellent sound, especially when a professional quality external microphone is plugged into it. It also has excellent battery life. --

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Sony+PCM-M10&N=0&InitialSearch=yes Another similar choice is the Edirol R-09HR, but the Sony has much better battery life. --

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Edirol+R-09&N=0&InitialSearch=yes

Another very good digital recorder is the Zoom H2. It has pretty good battery life, and the internal mikes are really quite good.

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Zoom+H2&N=0&InitialSearch=yes
There is also a Zoom H4n, which I have not yet tried, but it has some features that the H2 does not have. -- [http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Zoom+H4n&N=0&InitialSearch=yes](http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Zoom+H4n&N=0&InitialSearch=yes) The Zoom H1 is only $99. Reviews say the sound is very good, but supposedly it feels cheaply made. It’s fairly compact. -- [http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Zoom+H1&N=0&InitialSearch=yes](http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?Ntt=Zoom+H1&N=0&InitialSearch=yes)

Dan Keller

Zoom H2 digital recorder provides excellent fidelity. It has a sensitive mic for recording meetings, and it can store many hours of digital files.

Neil Osterweil

I do a lot of different types of work but one of my most useful pieces of equipment is my digital tape recorder. Having upgraded several times I own several but my current favorite is a SONY ICD-SX750. It has a bidirectional microphone and noise cancellation. It’s easy to use and really battery efficient. The adjustments on playback are great

Maria Vinall (October 4, 2011)

A useful tool at times is my LiveScribe pen. It records audio (pretty well 1-on-1 or in a conference hall). It also copies everything you write on its special paper (only slightly more expensive than conventional notebook pads) and will transfer an image of it to your computer. There is also a $30 add-on program that will convert written (script) text to editable text. It also plays back the specific audio beginning wherever you touch the pen to a written word. -- [http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/](http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/)

Dan Keller

Evernote- note taking and organization software. Includes OCR software that will read and index handwritten notes (direct from your LiveScribe pen). [http://www.evernote.com/](http://www.evernote.com/)

Gavin Buffett

I am using something called a Pulse SmartPen ([http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/](http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/)). It has since been released as a newer version, the Echo SmartPen. I use it to record conversations and take notes simultaneously during interviews, among other things. It is quite remarkable, as you can point to a word in your notes and hear what the speaker was saying at that moment. There is a small learning curve, and I probably don’t know all the things it can do. In theory, audio files can be exported to transcription software, although there is apparently a transcription software add-on (I have not used this yet). I did have trouble with the battery in the first pen I bought, but the company replaced it with no hassle. Also, some of the software add-ons seems too silly for such a smart pen, but perhaps they are busy working on more applications.

Catherine Wernette, PhD, ELS

Recording Device: Pulse SmartPen by Livescribe: The SmartPen uses an infrared camera and MP3 recording device on 3D ear microphones to electronically link what you hear to what you write with the pen. The final product is a clickable electronic image of the page you wrote notes on that plays the soundtrack of your writing experience. It can be slowed down or speeded up considerably, bookmarked in various ways, and shared with colleagues through links to the company's free storage cloud. I've found the recording quality to consistently be head and shoulders above any other recording device I've used (and I've owned about a dozen different kinds), and has been 100% reliable for the past 4 years of use. It also effortlessly records telephone conversations, including those on cell phones. Combined with Dragon 11, my current transcription time is approximately 1 hour of transcription to 1 hour of recording.

Morgan Stanfield (October 04, 2011)
You can record sounds on your computer with Advanced Sound Recorder: http://www.soundrecorder.net/. However you can't type and record at the same time because the microphone picks up the sound of the typing. Recently I ran out of memory on my Olympus and recorded on both my iPod and my Blackberry. Both were usable. The iPod worked better than the Blackberry, but neither as good as the Olympus.

Laird Harrison

One very useful resource I use is FreeConference.com for interviews or conference calls with larger groups. If you want to record the call, it costs just $6.50, and they will provide an mp3 audio file for download. There's also a better monthly or yearly rate. The conference calls can be short or run all day. They provide professional looking confirmation emails and separate dial-in numbers for both participants and the moderator.

Denise Johnson

For recording off your cell phone I recommend the Olympus TP-7 Telephone Recording Device – Olympus available for $10.49 from Amazon.com. Very simple--it connects any type of phone including a wireless to a recorder with a mic jack.

Emma Hitt

Recording wise, depends on what you what to do with the recording, but a good all-rounder (which is great for audio interviews, large meetings halls and the like) is the Edriol R-09 by Roland. Used without a mic it picks up great sound. Also the Olympus recorders mentioned already, I've got one that is a USB drive too, which is very handy when someone wants to give you a document or slides unexpectedly or to transfer the files to your laptop. I forget how long ago it was, but relatively recently I met a writer who was still using a cassette recorder!

Sara Freeman

Digital audio recorder for conference recording--Sony PCM-D50. I have experimented with many audio setups over the years, but this studio-quality Sony leaves them all for dead. Almost anything works adequately in an acoustically good room with no background noise, but I have found that the PCM-D50 is far better than anything I've tried when the going is a little tougher. Even if I have to park it on the floor under a chair, the sound quality leaps out at you, using only the built-in microphones. If you could make out what was being said by the heavily accented speaker over the noise of the air conditioner and the rattle of knives, forks, glasses and plates while you were there, you'll be able to hear it on the recording, too. This is often not the case with even quite expensive pocket-sized recorders that I have used in the past. The file format is uncompressed stereo .wav, so no proprietary software is needed on your computer. The recorder is a bit of a handful compared to compact models, but still small enough to hand-hold for interviews, and you can direct the built-in microphones towards the interviewee for a strongly directional recording that greatly reduces background noise.

Steve Pridgeon (October 04, 2011)

**Headsets**

Here's a possible addition to your equipment list: Plantronics cellular & cordless headset. I use a model M135 which easily plugs into my cordless phone, so I can type in all my notes and quotes while I'm doing a phone interview. I'm a fast typist, so this saves me from having to transcribe a recorded interview. I've had the headset for 10 years, so there may be newer models, but the M135 does everything I need.
**Cameras**

My preferred camera is a Canon G10, using the anti-shake feature when I have it racked out to telephoto focal lengths. The latest iteration is the G12. --

http://www.usa.canon.com/cusa/consumer/products/cameras/digital_cameras/powershot_g12

Photographic equipment I'd recommend would be the Panasonic Lumix TZ6 or similar - a pocket sized snapper that'll take good head shots close up and speaker slides. For more high quality images, the Panasonic G1 with a telephoto lens often works well.

*Sara Freeman*

Camera for photographing PowerPoints and posters. The criteria for choosing a camera for conference work is rather different than for general purposes. I use a Canon A590 (which is probably no longer available). Here are the characteristics to look for when making your choice:

- Low light capability. Flash is out, so look for the ability to photograph at ISO 400 or greater, and a wide lens aperture (smaller number - wider lens). Image stabilization is also a plus.
- Standard batteries. There's nothing worse than low batteries in the middle of a symposium! Choosing a camera that takes AA or AAA batteries means you can just slide another set in without having to buy overpriced special batteries and chargers.
- Optical viewfinder. You can't be unobtrusive (or steady) if you have to hold your camera at arm's length to see an electronic viewfinder. Holding the camera against your face adds to the stability.
- Compact size. A camera you can palm is less distracting to fellow attendees.
- Minimal capture delay. Don't you hate it when the slide changes just after you press the button - but before the camera has made the shot?
- Forget about resolution. Anything over about 5 MP can capture the smallest text on a poster. Modern cameras all exceed this comfortably.

*Steve Pridgeon (October 04, 2011)*

**Printers and Scanners**

My Lexmark networked 4 in 1 color duplex printer (fax, scanner, copy, print) prints on both sides of the paper with the flick of a setting. I can print from any computer in the house (4 levels). Prints 14 PPM. Best part? Only cost $69 at Staples! Windows 7 and Mac compatible.

*Jill Shuman*

Flatbed Scanner (for contracts) $99.


HP Duplex laser printer (double-sided printing improves the quality of a writer's life). HPs have been great to me and surviving the writer abuse.


*Heather Haley, MS*
I use daily my printer/scanner to email (pdf) converter - my particular piece of equipment is the Brother MFC-8690DW. Although it has a fax component, I find I rarely use it and have disconnected the function in favor of "fax to e-mail as pdf document" function.

*Jennifer Hensel (October 4, 2011)*

The best $500 i spent in many years was on the fujitsu scansnap s1500M. i have been able to get rid of lots of the paper in my office. moreover, being able to sheet feed large documents into the scanner and have a pdf in minutes has increased my productivity and my performance for clients.

*Jennie Fiber, PhD (October 4, 2011)*

I highly recommend the CamScanner+ App for the iphone and ipad. It is $4.99 from iTunes. This app can replace a scanner and in fact, I no longer have a scanner. It is virtually a portable scanner. The app is reasonably easy to learn and comes with a tutorial. I have used it multiple times at home and while traveling to capture a document, annotate or edit a document, convert to a PDF, print it by AirPrint, or email, upload to online storage or fax it. It would be a great back up for the scanners that inevitably fail when you most need them.

*Shelby Umland (October 4, 2011)*

**iPhones etc.**

As a Mac user (I converted the instant I went freelance almost 4 years ago, and never looked back) my iPhone keeps everything synced - address book, calendars, mail - and I use the Mobile Me software so I can access important files wherever I am. I've got an iMac and a laptop - which gives me two screens if I need it and it’s there for when I travel, there's also an iPad lying around as got to keep up with the latest gadgets so I can help build web apps and the like.

*Sara Freeman*

**Wifi Stuff**

In the US, seriously think about getting a MiFi device. This not only gives you freedom to access email and the net from anywhere, but also can save a small fortune in hotel or airport internet charges. There is no contract, so you can sign up for a single day or month when required.


*Gavin Buffett*

Two travel-related devices that I use fairly regularly. One is a portable router. Comes in handy when working in press rooms, hotels, etc. that have only hard-wired Internet access. If there are a limited number of Ethernet access points or the access is in an inconvenient location, the portable router allows me to "share" a connection with someone else or to set up my laptop wherever it's most convenient for me. The other device is a mobile power kit. Has a variety of cables/adapters that allows me to access electrical outlets on airplanes, cars, etc.

*Charles Bankhead (October 04, 2011)*

The best investment in technology? An air card as it allows me to work just about anywhere and transform what otherwise might be wasted hours into productive time (most recently when I was stranded at Newark Liberty Airport in the aftermath of Irene). (Emma says: couldn't agree more!!)

*Eileen Smith Dallabrida (October 4, 2011)*
**Ergonomics**


Heather Haley, MS

Rollermouse Pro: [http://www.rollermousepro.com/](http://www.rollermousepro.com/) This saves me moving my arm back and forth to the mouse constantly. There is a slight 'learning curve' of getting used to it, but now I love it and dislike using a normal mouse.

Kinesis Freestyle split keyboard: [http://www.kinesis-ergo.com/freestyle.htm](http://www.kinesis-ergo.com/freestyle.htm). This helps my hands to be in more neutral position when typing, to avoid repetitive strain injury.

*Jennifer Gan*

Trackball or mouse, an ergonomically designed desk with ergonomic keyboard tray, and a good office chair.

*Monica Nicosia, PhD*

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**Books**

Books I keep handy include the following:

- Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers - Mimi Zeiger
- How to Write, Publish, & Present in the Health Sciences - Tom Lang
- How to Report Statistics in Medicine - Tom Lang
- Medical English Usage and Abusage – Edith Schwager

*Eileen Girten (October 04, 2011)*

The most valuable piece of software I COULD possibly have is a USABLE AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors, 10th edition It doesn't work. The search function is feeble: you never get your answers; you get the most convoluted links to chapters to whatever might be related to your search. If you could only just GO TO a sample of what you want, you'd have the answer immediately! (For example, how does p value appear?) It won't even take you to the Index, which sometimes answers your questions instantly or at least MAY point you to the correct page. The search online sends you to section 1.6.5.3.7.3.5.34.3 capitals, for example, and then another similar section, and then another. You might as well read the book.

Anybody who could figure this one out would be a zillionaire! But of course, the rights are Oxford's, so how to proceed? Perhaps if you mentioned this, someone would take it upon themselves to contact and work with Oxford to bring them into the 21st century! Having worked with AMA since the 9th edition, I
know how critical it is to be able to find stuff in this unwieldy tome. I thought the online edition would be a vast improvement, but alas, it is so awkward and cumbersome, I am not renewing online and will just look stuff up in the book unless somebody enlightens me on how to use the ridiculous thing.

Mary McTigue (October 04, 2011)

Comprehensive Lists and Commentary

Several people contributed lists and inclusive descriptions of what equipment they needed—I thought those would be useful to leave in list form. Some commentary was also provided.

Software:

- Microsoft office
- EndNote for bibliography
- Adobe Acrobat professional
- Mozilla Firefox web browser
- Links to Pubmed, NCBI sites, Genomic databases
- Medical Dictionary -- some are available for free download, at Filebuzz.com
- QuickBooks for billing and accounting
- Adobe Illustrator or some graphic software for PowerPoint presentations
- Grammar and Spellchecker software (Whitesmoke writer for Bio-Tech at whitesmoke.com)
- A voice recognition software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking 10 Preferred

Equipment:

- A heavy duty desktop computer with GB of HD and MB of RAM
- Double hard drive which has the same data
- A big monitor, 23” or more to have multiple pages open, or a desktop which drives multiple monitors
- A dedicated landline and telephone
- Laser printer
- Copy, Scan and Fax machine
- A smaller netbook for travel
- A voice recording device such as iPhone

Mercy Davidson

- Computer (purchased from Dell, with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat and CD/DVD player and burner); I purchased Adobe Reader separately and it is necessary if you want to be able to highlight articles for annotation.
- We also have Norton Security as our firewall/protection.
- I have a combined laser printer, scanner, fax machine (Brother MFC-8640N); purchased at Office Depot, I have had it for 5 years and no issues.
- I have a colored printer (HP6940) that I use occasionally; I bought it on line for $24 years ago, and I don’t remember where.
- I organize everything in notebooks. Each project or client has their own notebook. (purchase notebooks at www.costco.com).
Equipment and Software for Medical Writers

- Phone with speaker feature, so I can take notes while speaking with a client.
- A heater for my office, so that I don’t have to heat the whole house when I am working away at my desk.
- A calculator.
- A shredder (Fellowes S8 89Ci): I went through 2 shredders until I found this one...works great (I think this is also Costco).
- To get everything in my notebook, I have a Swingline electric 3 hole punch (I love this thing).

Kim Haines

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- For covering a conference:
  The computer should be light enough to be carried around but powerful enough to be productive. I don’t prefer Mac over PCs since each different model has merits. However, I would advise that the computer has a CD drive since many conferences still put the abstracts on discs rather than on USB sticks.
- The Digital voice recorder if possible should connect directly with the computer to transfer data rather than require a cable.
- The digital camera should have a good battery life, and be easy to connect to the computer, i.e. have SD card.
- A method of secure backup is essential. Example: USB hard discs or data stored securely on a web “cloud” based service like box.net or dropbox.

Gavin Buffett

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Here's a brief list of useful equipment and software:

MSWord and office (MSWord, PPT, Excel, etc), preferably 2010
Endnote X4 or X5 (or other reference managing software)
PosterGenius
QuickBooksPro
Antivirus
Adobe Acrobat reader X which allows reader to comment on text.
Snapashot
RAR
High speed internet access (eg. FIOS): I prefer hard wired for security reasons.
email (preferably 2 carriers)
website

Computer with 2 monitors
laptop (optional, unless you travel)
Contour rollermouse pro
power strips

Speaker phone
Digital recorder
Comfortable chair
Extra hard drive storage
scanner
Fax machine

Good lighting, and preferably a window

Katherine L. Molnar-Kimber, Ph.D. (October 4, 2011)

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My list would include:
laptop
-laser printer
-Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
-EndNote and Ref Manager
-Adobe Photoshop and Acrobat Professional

Marie Fernandes, PhD (October 4, 2011)

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I recommend the following:
Two large monitors (I use two 23 inch monitors)
A Logitech wireless keyboard. Mine is model K750, which is solar powered (no battery hassles!) and very comfortable to type on.
Wrist support. I find 'Wrist Donuts' (www.wristdonuts.com) very effective.
A comfortable office chair. I use a kneeling chair (from www.sitkneelchairs.co.uk) which is great, and unlike other similar kneeling chairs it does not cause shin discomfort. One advantage over traditional office chairs is that it takes up far less space.
For learning to touch type, I recommend www.goodtyping.com. It's free to use!
If, like me, you're based in the UK, Switchboard Free is a great tool for managing incoming business calls and means I don't need a separate landline. The basic service, which is all I need, is free.

Jane Etheridge (October 4, 2011)

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This may seem very basic, but I think the most essential software includes a word processor, in which you can easily and clearly track document changes, and a presentation tool of some sort. I use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. To me, it is more important to be proficient with the software that I chose versus always having the hottest new software. That said, I also stay on top of Microsoft updates and try to keep myself aware of any new software, so I'm not completely clueless.

As far as equipment goes, I think the most useful tool is a reliable laptop that is lightweight, has a long-lasting battery, and runs the vast majority of the software that I need. For me, it is very valuable to be able to work and stay on top of email from anywhere without having to lug around a mammoth laptop. I would say the second most useful tools are storage devices. I use a 1 or 2 GB USB memory drive when I'm on-the-go, and I have a 500GB external HD at home to back up everything on my laptop.

Unfortunately, I don't have any specific suggestions for where to buy these items. I think Microsoft applications are pretty easy to come by, as are build-your-own-computer websites. I can say that I have been very pleased with my 2 GB Geek Squad USB drive and my 500GB Seagate external HD.

Trish Pruis
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**Essential equipment:**
Large screen laptop (with wireless capability to use when working at home and away) plus external flat screen monitor (to be able to work on 2 screens, providing lots of useful real estate for having multiple programs open, makes our work more efficient), an external high-capacity portable backup drive (eg, Seagate FreeAgent GoFlex drive [http://www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/external/](http://www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/external/)), MP3 player with good recording capabilities (to record phone and live interviews), a Laser printer, calculator, phone/fax machine, scanner, DSL or FIOS high-speed access, and a USB flash drive.

**Essential software:**

_Monica Nicosia, PhD_

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Here is a list of programs/software other than MS Word:
SAS viewer
Excel
Bookmarks in PDFs
Cross-referencing/referencing tools
Visio

Other tools:
The largest monitor you can find!
Ergonomic keyboard and mouse
A comfortable office chair

_Roopashree Vijaykumar_

1. Multiple monitors. Easier and quicker to jump back and forth between multiple windows on 2 or 3 screens than it is to have them all open on a single desktop.
2. EndNote or some other bibliographic system.

_Don Kirkendall (October 04, 2011)_

_Ms Word
Adobe acrobat
Sigmplot
PowerPoint_

_David Lowell Stacy (October 4, 2011)_

I cannot live without my Macintosh computer (PC's are fine too but I have a mac), Microsoft Office (mainly Word, PowerPoint, and Outlook), my computer mouse (can't stand to operate any other way),
and the Internet (a must for research and communication) - I use Safari to access but it's only b/c that's what came with the computer. I also use pen and paper in meetings, either on the phone or in person.  

*Meredith Rogers (October 4, 2011)*

Aside from Microsoft products -- Word (which I hate, but it's the only real option for word processing) and PowerPoint -- I can't live without the following:

Endnote  
Express Scribe (for transcribing interviews and conference talks)  
Stedman’s spellchecker

In terms of equipment, what I have is pretty basic. But I have a wish list. One thing that would be helpful is two monitors, in which case I would need an adapter.  

*Lynne Christensen (October 4, 2011)*

Following (in no particular order) are my top 20:

1. Laptop computer (eg, MacBook)  
2. Microsoft Office, especially Word, Excel, and PowerPoint (eg, 2008 for Mac)  
3. Wireless mouse (Logitech)  
4. Wireless Internet access (eg, Safari)  
5. Email (eg, AOL)  
6. PDF manager (eg, Adobe Acrobat)  
7. Media player (eg, QuickTime)  
8. MP3 player (eg, iTunes)  
9. Color laser printer  
10. Scanner  
11. Fax  
12. DVD drive  
13. USB drive (memory stick)  
14. Mobile phone with voice mail, texting, email, and Internet access (eg, Blackberry)  
15. Tape recorder (ie, cassette and/or minicassette)  
16. Calendar  
17. Calculator  
18. Clock or watch  
20. Car

I probably could use an image editor (eg, Adobe Photoshop) and a relational database (eg, Microsoft Office Access), but haven't yet learned to use either. Also, I have Skype, but haven't had much need for it. Last, I have no need for a GPS; I can read a map.  

*Ed (October 4, 2011)*

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(1) I think it is my ginormous monitor that I invested in last December. I can fit 3 pieces of paper (word documents) across it. I don't know how I used to work with my 'regular' monitor, with everything on top of each other and constant clicking.

(2) I used to have a 'tower' and a 'laptop'. And, I used to swap out between the two by using my USB key and emailing myself stuff and other such 'transfer' vehicles. When I bought the ginormous monitor, I
replaced both my laptop and my tower with a supped-up laptop (mucho memory, mucho disk space, fast processor, etc.) When I work in my office (at home), the laptop sits there closed, basically functioning as a 'tower' -- and connected to my monitor, mouse, and keyboard through a USB 'hub' that makes for one-cable connects and disconnects. When I need to work remotely, or cover a conference, I simply unplug the one cable and walk out the door -- and I automatically have everything I need without playing USB or email games (and invariably forgetting to transfer something).

(3) Along with those 2 technology upgrades, is the fact that I went totally 'electronic' -- so that when I grab my laptop and walk out the door, I truly do have everything I need. What doesn't come to me electronically, I scan in and make electronic.

*Cheryl Lathrop (October 4, 2011)*

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Here are a few items I found most helpful.

- A good ergonomic keyboard tray. I use one by Workrite ergonomics. My preference is the single shelf or inline mouse: [http://www.workriteergo.com/shop/scripts/prodList.asp?idCategory=38](http://www.workriteergo.com/shop/scripts/prodList.asp?idCategory=38)
- Essential software: Stedman’s medical spell checker; Adobe Acrobat Professional; Visio (Microsoft) along with the basic MS Office suite of products including Outlook.
- For meeting with clients I am more and more often bringing my iPad. The “Goodreader” App is great for bringing reference documents with me.
- I use the Timewerks app on my ipod to track project and billing hours. You can enter multiple clients, projects and rates. I hit the timer when I start a project and when I finish.

*Gerri Smoluk, PhD, PMP*

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A list of FREE software

- As a beginning medical writer who could not afford expensive software, my most useful was FREE software:
- PDF995 for making pdf's (pdf995.com)
- FOXIT for redlining & yellow highlighting references (foxit.software.com)
- SNAG-IT for taking screen shots for artwork (techsmith.com)
- OPENOFFICE (word/excel/pp clones) (openoffice.org)
- PAINT (for graphics alteration) (came free with MS windows)
- OUTLOOK EXPRESS (for email) (came free with MS windows)

*Requested to leave name off—but thanks very much for this!!*

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I cannot live without:

**Software**

- EndNote (X4 version is the best by far). Available at a discount to AMWA members. ([www.amwa.org](http://www.amwa.org)). Also available from Thomson Reuters ([http://www.endnote.com/pr-enx4win.asp](http://www.endnote.com/pr-enx4win.asp)).
- Adobe Acrobat 9 pro to highlight text, make pdf portfolios, etc. Available from adobe ([www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)).
- Free my pdf to unlock secured pdfs e.g. NCCN guidelines ([http://freemypdf.com/](http://freemypdf.com/)).
Application
- Dropbox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)) for file sharing. Eliminates the need to email huge attachments. Allows easy collaboration.

Equipment
- Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-300M for recording interviews with KOLs
- Brother MFC-780W all in one black and white printer/scanner/fax (black and white)
- Ergonomic mouse and mouse pad
- A flat screen monitor to attach to my laptop for viewing multiple documents at the same time
- My HTC phone that lets me check my emails while I am out

Meenakshi Kashyap

These are most useful to me:
- Google - obviously!
- Wikipedia - not exactly peer-reviewed, but a great jumping off point in research
- Post-it notes, both real and virtual, for making notes
- A white board, for keeping track
- Skype and a headset, for handsfree, cheap and recordable calls
- A radio to keep my sanity!

Suzanne Elvidge

Endnote; Jing (for copying graphics), fast computer; neat receipts for scanning contracts and receipts; large bottle of aspirin.

Debra Gordon, MS

I use conventional writer’s stuff--a computer (a Compaq, 5-years old, which I will soon replace); a Philips monitor--old fashioned, but BIG and perfect for my needs; a laptop computer; a printer (black & white, an inexpensive Brother); a little Fax machine (Panasonic); a Sony digital recorder; a Sony camcorder with a tripod, and a Canon camera. --That’s about it--nothing really special here. But this covers my basic needs.

Sandra Pelus, MS

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In my own scientific writing and editing for medical/science journals I find websites such as PubMed and Google Scholar to be most helpful. The most helpful software packages are: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, SPSS, Endnote, IMovie, QuickTime, and Photoshop. The latter 3 programs are invaluable for graphics and figures.

DeAnna L. Adkins, PhD

Waxing Philosophical
I think that, instead of this or that too, the most essential thing regarding software and equipment is to get the basics right, such as reliable internet access and mastering your word processing software. Packages and products for writing come and go, but you have to have a solid basis to build upon. Anyway, burnishing and improving your writing is much more important than the actual equipment you use to write.

Your question reminded me of a bon mot by an old-time Brazilian journalist. Back in the 50s, he quipped that "People who work in newspapers nowadays may be awful journalists, but they are invariably excellent typists." To put it another way, we have to write instead of just type.

Paulo Mendes

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**Keeping it Simple**

I don't use anything beyond the basic, essential MS apps (Word, PP, Excel), although I've often thought about buying a defibrillator! (Emma Hitt says I KNOW what you mean although trying to picture how to use that!)

Meg Phelan

Pretty simple here:
- Word
- EndNote
- TraxTime ([www.spudcity.com](http://www.spudcity.com); handy time-tracking, "punch clock" app)
- Firefox Web Browser
- HP all-in-one printer/copier/scanner

Michael J. Stillman, Ph.D.

For software, my top 3 would be MS Office (Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Outlook) > Reference Manager > Adobe Acrobat. For hardware, just a laptop and web connection is enough for me.

Kerry Padilla

Endnote, Microsoft Word and the Internet are the top 3. Also of note is Microsoft Visio for making flow charts - but maybe that counts more for graphic artists.

Chris Pung

Just one: Endnote.

Cdbloomerphd (October 4, 2011)

I would not be able to function without my laptop computer and my 4 in 1 printer/scanner/copier/fax machine. MS Office Suite is also absolutely essential.

Susannah Rubenstein (October 4, 2011)

I use nothing fancy: Word 7 for writing and the internet and phone for research. My most essential equipment is my brain!

Margot Fromer
I use a computer and Word. That's it!
Debra Beck

1) PC
2) MS Office Suite
3) Internet/email access
Without any one of these, I am out of business.
Carl S. Hornfeldt, PhD, RPh (October 4, 2011)

I'm a medical editor and don't really use any special software for that.
John McCleery

My computer; Microsoft Word, Excel
Marjorie Winters (October 4, 2011)

How about Aspirin?
Alan Brown

In the spirit of this week... does an Rx for valium count?
Unnamed (but many of us can probably relate!)
Concluding Note

If you read this and see one of your favorites missing, please email me at emma@hittmedicalwriting.com. I will save your email and update this piece periodically. Thanks again to all who contributed!

This piece will be posted permanently on my home page at www.hittmedicalwriting.com.

Please link to it at http://tinyurl.com/6ylyh46; it’s for everyone.

About Hitt Medical Writing, LLC

Hitt Medical Writing, LLC, specializes in continuing medical education (CME), news, and other types of writing for a clinician audience and has been serving clients for more than a decade.

Clients include CME and pharmaceutical companies, trade publications, news outlets, and others. The focus is exclusively on “fair-balance,” non-promotional writing for a clinician audience. Genres include review articles, needs assessments, slide sets, web content, search information, and others. Areas of expertise include targeted therapies in hematology/oncology, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV, and others. For more information please visit www.hittmedicalwriting.com

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About Emma Hitt, PhD

Since 2001, Dr. Hitt has specialized in writing about targeted therapies in hematology/oncology, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV, and other diseases. Her focus is exclusively on “fair-balance,” non-promotional writing directed towards a clinician audience.
Dr. Hitt earned her doctoral degree from Emory University in the area of cancer-related signal transduction. She also has an MS in technical and professional communication.

Her mission is to serve her clients, help other medical writers and to have fun doing it.