

# Useful Software and Equipment for Medical Writers

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## Summary

This “Useful Software and Equipment for Medical Writers” report is compiled by yours truly, but essentially written by responders who generously contributed their time. Thanks to everyone who provided such useful suggestions in response to a survey put out on the HittList™.

The survey this year allowed for mostly open-ended responses, which I think provides more useful information than asking a multiple choice question. The individual responses are available in the remainder of the report, beginning on page 7. Below are some observations, mostly anecdotal on my part, but hopefully helpful.

This report is free, but if you are interested in any of these products, please go to [www.6weekcourse.com/resources](http://www.6weekcourse.com/resources) and purchase there if available (this page is currently under development). If you do it that way, we earn a small affiliate fee, which would be much appreciated. Thanks in advance!

Emma Hitt Nichols

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Some observations about the responses (*my editorial comments in italics*):

### Respondent Background

- Over half of the 124 participants (58%) had more than 5 years of experience as a medical writer.
- Over two thirds (69.3%) described themselves as predominantly self-employed.

### Q1. The one piece of software (or software as a service) that you find helpful or essential as a medical writer

- Overwhelmingly, the major response was MS Word for Mac or PC, although a few people expressed that they are not necessarily a fan.
- Some people said that they could get by on Word and the MS Office suite alone, especially the subscription based Office 365.
- “Google Docs” was notably absent from the responses, except one person mentioned that it is useful when collaborating.
- A few people expressed positive feelings about Scrivener for organizing research. Learning curve is steep though. ReadCube – “allows me to comment and store my references simply and links through to PubMed”
- Endnote seemed to be much more popular than RefMan or other referencing programs. With Endnote you can automatically download citations from



PubMed. AMWA members may receive a discount. There's also ProQuest's RefWorks with Write n Cite.

- PerfectIt3 (and PerfectIt Pro) looks interesting. "Editing software that goes above and beyond grammar/spell-check. It functions as a copy-editor and final check for all projects before I send them to the client." 30-day free trial and then \$99 <http://www.intelligentediting.com/products-pricing/>
- Medical spellcheckers: Inductel (Mac and PC), Spellex for Mac, and Stedman's for PC. I think every medical writer should use have a medical spellchecker loaded on their computer.
- Dragon Naturally Speaking might now be worth purchasing now. Improve its accuracy with a good mic. That really helps. *I am buying my copy today.*
- Statistical analysis: R, SAS, MS SQL Server.
- Adobe Creative Cloud (Acrobat, Photoshop, Audition, etc.).

**Q2. Any other useful pieces of software (or software as service) that you find helpful or essential as a medical writer?**

- I would encourage you to read the individual responses associated with question 2. There are too many interesting ones to list in the summary and it's worth a quick read. So many useful things are mentioned.
- Adobe Acrobat comes in is a close second to Microsoft office suite to being indispensable.
- *I am using Dragon Naturally Speaking as I write this on the basis of a recommendation in these responses. (Cost = \$175 for the Mac version). I have tried using this program over and over again for years and have not been happy with the quality. But now the quality seems to be sufficient to use it. Yay. You have to use it with a headset and microphone for the best results. I am using a Logitech headset H540 that cost about \$30 at Best Buy.*
- *Jing SnagIt is amazing for a quick capture of a screen. I find myself using this several times a day and don't know what I would do without it.*

**Q3. What websites do you visit most often while performing work as a medical writer? (113 responses)**

- PubMed was the overwhelming winner in this category.
- Please go through the individual responses to see many interesting useful websites.
- Google Scholar got some high rankings.
- AMA manual of style online is useful.
- Here is a comprehensive list of the biggest hits from one responder:  
PubMed - NCBI  
NIH.gov



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#### Individual Medical Journals websites

ScienceDirect.com

Merck Manuals

CDC.gov

HHS.gov

Medscape.com

Medicinenet.com

BioMed Central

Freemedicaljournals.com

NEJM.org

WebMD.com

#### **Q4. Any additional comments for anyone equipping their home office (or corporate office) these days**

- Lots of interesting comments in this section. Again, would suggest going through and picking out the interesting information.
- As in previous years, two monitors are considered essential by many.
- Several people cited a walking treadmill as being essential.
- Several valuable comments on what type of desks to buy.



# Respondent Background

## Years of experience as a medical writer

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Not applicable			5	4.0%
<1 year			11	8.8%
>1 year 5 years			24	19.3%
>5 years			72	58.0%
Other ( <a href="#">View all</a> )			11	8.8%
No Responses			1	<1%
<b>Totals</b>			<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Are you predominantly self employed?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes			86	69.3%
No			38	30.6%
No Responses			0	0.0%
<b>Totals</b>			<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Individual Responses

**Q1. What is the one piece of software (or software as a service) that you find helpful or essential as a medical writer? Please describe why you like it. Does it work on mac or PC or both? (121 responses)**

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### Answers

Scrivener Writing Software for Mac and Windows.

I 'stumbled' upon Scrivener while writing a 100 page research report for my first major client. Having everything I need in one application (media files, pdfs, any and everything) easily accessible saved me valuable time. Being able to add files / documents during literature review and research, just drag and drop (love easy!) and viewing documents side by side - the 45\$ was worth it. Also sync with MS Word. However it does have a fairly steep learning curve, but once you get the hang of it - its easy!

Scrivener for Mac. Organizes long stories and different kinds of research sources.

Reference Manager. I believe it does but I'm not sure. I use a PC.

EndNote. Both PC and Mac. Best way to retrieve, manage, and format references.

Word, PC (hate it but there is no real alternative)

EndNote, PC, literature references

Adobe Acrobat X Pro, PC, for pdfs

Excel, PC

PleaseReview

For any very limited writing I do perform, I use MS Word.

EndNote X7.5 for organizing references and creating content. The new update works on both Mac and PC and finally allows you to share, although it's limited to one library and 14 users. Some limited features with PowerPoint as well.

I am PC based.

WP obviously, so a good word processor. I default to Microsoft Word.

I'm also a big fan of Scrivener.

Word

primarily use Word (as well as PowerPoint and Excel), no fancy software aside from that

N/A

MS Office is a basic requirement, mostly Word and PowerPoint. Although there are alternative WP programs, compatibility with client systems means MS is just so much easier to work with, either PC or MAC

Open Office

Word

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Microsoft Office - it's universal, everyone operates on this platform  
Endnote - it is indispensable. These two make up my core work package.  
There are mac and pc versions of each that work interchangeably.

MS Word (works on both platforms)

Word - I guess for obvious reasons, any word processing program is an absolute must for my job.

Endnote

Microsoft 365 is well worth the annual fee because new versions of software are free. The latest version of PPT, for example, is vastly improved and I saved money with the subscription rather than having to buy the new version - and I can install on laptop, PC, etc. Works on both MAC and PC.

Endnote - saves me so much time when formatting references. Works on MAC and PC.

MS Office -PC

PerfectIt3 I use it with Microsoft Word for windows. It is editing software that goes above and beyond grammar/spell-check. It functions as a copy-editor and final check for all projects before I send them to the client.

Microsoft Word

I use Word 2003. Any version from 2000 up is perfectly usable - I regularly work with documents created by clients on the most recent Word versions, with no problem. There are no significant capabilities missing from earlier versions, plus there is no need to deal with ribbons, low-contrast layouts, etc., and it's easy to create custom buttons for my macros.

I work on a Mac exclusively... the software I use every day is Word for Mac (used to use Pages, but had some problems with outlines when exported to Word for clients).

Nothing fancy.

Word

Excel

Endnote - so useful for compiling and managing references and has so many options for formatting in a bibliography. Couldn't live without it. I think it works on a mac, but I always use it on a PC.

AMA Manual of Style 10e--great reference (I work on PC)

MS Office -- it's the only one I can't live without. I use it every day for project I work on. Available for both Mac & PC.

Reference Manager because it simplifies importing references, citing references, and creating the reference list.

EndNote - absolutely essential, ties in with PubMed, automatically looks for PDFs if they are available for free. The cite-while-you-write add-in for MS Word is also an essential tool, especially when working on large reports or reviews.

MS WORD - 1st

Work horse

Currently I find I use Google drive quite a lot, although





I have office installed. Some software just seems to have too many options for word processing.

Endnote works great on a PC with Word 2010 and 2013. You have to look for an extension/add in for Firefox to automatically download citations from PubMed. Once you have this, it is easy peasy to use.

Sorry, no idea how/if Endnote works on Macs.

Libre office writer. It is compatible with Windows and I use it on my PC (I am not aware if this will work on Macs).

I really like Adobe Acrobat Reader DC because it's very easy to use, accessible for my proofreading projects. I own a PC; I'm afraid I don't know enough about Macs to comment.

SharePoint - mostly works on PC - essential for file sharing with editing team

I use MS Word every day. It is the one tool I consider essential to my craft. I write the vast majority of my content in Word, as do most of my clients; that facilitates editing and commenting on each other's drafts. I use a PC, but there's usually no problem working with Word documents created on a Mac.

Microsoft Office suite including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. I use the software on PC. Nearly all of my project deliverables are in the form of an MS Word file. I use Excel to track project details and PowerPoint to create info graphics and prepare slide presentations.

Microsoft Word

EndNote

There are certain topics that I work on a lot. EndNote makes it a lot easier to produce deliverables with different referencing formats for different clients while maintaining one archive of sources. Well worth the investment for the time I save.

There are both Mac and PC versions.

Microsoft office

Microsoft office

I think Endnote is pretty useful for reference management, especially when revising an article and having to delete reference numbers in the text as Endnote updates the numbers automatically, which saves a lot of time and stress.

MS Office

MS Word because that is the only software I use to write.

For general writing I find an online Thesaurus very useful. I intend to get the AMA style guide.

As a medical editor, I find Inductel's Medical Spellchecker essential because I work primarily in Microsoft Word, with occasional forays into PowerPoint, and their spellcheck functions are thoroughly discombobulated by medical terms. Inductel works with both programs and has an extensive medical dictionary. I use a Mac but it's



available for PCs as well.

Dragon Naturally Speaking dictation software. Helps me save significant amounts of time. I think it is available for both Mac and PC systems.

Express Scribe - PC

Microsoft Office!

Software: R

Works on: both mac and PC

Why I like it:

This free program produces excellent graphics and statistical analysis.

Word processor - MS word - both mac and pc

Adobe CC. Cloud storage, Mac and PC functionality.

Microsoft Word & Both.

Dropbox

Dragon Naturally Speaking on a computer that lets it type as fast as I speak increases my efficiency. I use it on a PC and have no experience with it on a Mac.

Microsoft Office

MS Word

I work on a Mac (desktop and lap top) but many clients have PCs.

Adobe professional PC

EndNote-- absolutely essential for managing a list of references in a document. I believe that AMWA members receive a discount.

The program does work on Mac and PC

<http://endnote.com/product-details/compatibility>

MS Word. Work on both Mac and PC. I use PC.

Datavision

Microsoft Word.

I use the subscription service, Office 365 for PC. The Personal version has been sufficient for my needs as a solo freelancer. Although it comes with cloud storage, I save my documents locally, so it works the same as an installed version of Word except that it includes updates to new versions.

Endnote - reference manager that works on Mac and PC

Word processing of course and due to work am limited to Microsoft Word. I miss Word Perfect (old school). PC version of Word similar to Mac for the most Part.

I have used Microsoft Office: Word, PowerPoint, and Excel during my academic career. I continue to use these programs as I transition to Medical Writing.

I like Office mainly because I know it pretty well, having used it since the early 90s.

I use a PC, but it's compatible with Macs.

I tried to upgrade to Office 365, but so far it doesn't seem to be compatible with



Windows 10. At least, after installation, I haven't been able to find it! Working on it...

Nothing special, but good data backup on Google or MedMD and so on are helpful

I've only used Word

Word for PC. Mac version of Word not as good.

I don't use anything more sophisticated than Word and adobe. I am probably missing out on some useful software.

I haven't had to use these programs yet, but SAS, MS SQL Server and R will come in handy. They work on PC, as far as I know. These software packages are for analyzing data and producing statistical output.

AMWA. It works both on PC and mac. I am new to this and would like to pursue a career as medical writer. I use Endnote for writing manuscripts. Hope this answers the question.

EndNote is essential when I am writing for clients that don't have a platform that includes a reference managing system put in. It is important in keeping track and organizing the literature sources I use.

Word

Word 2016

Microsoft Office. On both my Mac and PC. Need Outlook to organize email. Need Word to work. Excel helps with figures. Need PowerPoint to work.

Kana Reminder - Incredibly easy-to-use reminder software. Can set up reminders for future events days, weeks, months in advance. Can specify when to receive the first reminder and how frequently thereafter. Has saved me from missing more appointments and deadlines that I can begin to count. For people who are into cloud computing, the saved reminders can't be saved to the cloud, although I haven't checked on any bells and whistles that might have been added to the basic (free) version that I continue to use. I've used it only on PCs. Don't know whether a version for Mac exists.

Word 2010; I only use a PC.

MS Word--on PC.

I work on Mac and Word is my indispensable piece of software. It's not always intuitive, but for my needs - which include rough layout and design - it can be made to do the job. Of course, I also use other elements of the Microsoft Office suite.

Endnote bibliography software. The ability to organize and subdivide the databases make it so easy to create customized libraries to share. Works on both mac and pc.

.Microsoft Word

Microsoft Office - I couldn't be a medical writer without this package.

Word

Microsoft word, Mac Pages and Adobe Photoshop

EndNote! I mostly do editing for academics. EndNote is just essential for references. I find so many errors when someone tries to enter them manually.

Adobe Acrobat Pro is great for commenting and making screen shots of anything you'd like to share with someone else. It's available for both mac and pc and is incredibly expensive but the expense is tax-deductible if you're a freelancer!



Microsoft office/mac

MS Office

Microsoft Office

Words on both Macs and PCs

MS Word. Couldn't work without it. Don't like it, but it's industry standard. Have tried most of the copies, starting with OpenOffice, but all seem to lack compatibility in important areas like tracked changes. Mac & PC

Microsoft office (pc and Mac)

Word on PC

MS Office suite

PubMed and Google

no specific software

Microsoft word

Microsoft word for mac

ReadCube - allows me to comment and store my references simply and links through to PubMed. Only use it on a PC, not sure if it works on a Mac

MS Word, weirdly enough. If you know how to program autocorrect and if you use replace all almost as though it's a program, you can do quite a lot. I often write slide kits on Word first, because editing is so much easier.

Endnote. Helps in referencing. Works on Microsoft word

This may not be relevant, but I use coschedule.com, which syncs with Word press, to automate the social media scheduling of my blog posts. You can set them and forget them and get more mileage from each post.

Libre Office on PC (not sure about Mac)

Word

Mostly, it just works.

It is the standard across platforms.

Microsoft Word

Microsoft Office for the Mac. Been using it for over 35 yr

Word

MSWord for Mac -- I can't imagine trying to use another word processing software program.

EndNote for reference formatting. It works on both PC and Mac, but I use the Mac version.

Microsoft office. I couldn't write anything without it.

Google Docs. MS Word is standard and useful, but I do collaborative work, and Google Docs makes it very easy.

Word for PC. All my writing is done in Word. While the changes from version to version can be annoying, mostly it has improved over the years.

Microsoft Word. I use the Mac version, but of course it works on PC also. I don't necessarily like everything about it, but it does have many useful features for my work

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(more editing than writing) and it is the industry standard.

I would also be lost without high-speed internet.

MS Word

Office 2011 for Mac

I don't especially like it, but my clients use Office and this version is reasonably stable on my Mac Pro running OS X El Capitan.

I love my 11-inch Mac Air, which I connect to a large monitor and keyboard when I'm in my office. When I'm working elsewhere, I just use it as is.

Dropbox is an essential for me. I pay for extra storage space and use as a backup for active project files so I can access them while traveling. I also use for general backup in addition to a portable hard drive. And I like that I can use it to transfer large folders of files to clients, really useful when I have to transfer large numbers of annotated PDFs and PowerPoints with a lot of content, e.g., animation and those clients have a limit on the size of attachments they can receive by email. I like that I can put files there from my desktop then pick them up on my Surface Pro while traveling.

ProQuest's RefWorks with Write n Cite. I use it on a PC. Not sure if it's available for Macs. I like it for managing references and citations when writing papers.

MS Word. I create all my documents in Word. I use it because it is the gold standard for regulatory and publications documents. I like it because I know it - foibles and all. I can make it do what I want. Word is available for use on Mac and PC, of course, but I have no interest in Mac and in my working life, I have no need for Apple's closed environment.

Microsoft word. Works on both.

Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) in order to write documents, analyze data, and create slide kits.

Microsoft office



**Q2. Any other useful pieces of software (or software as service) that you find helpful or essential as a medical writer? Please describe why you like them. Do they work on mac or pc or both? (89 responses)**

**Answer**

Scapple

Scrivener's twin mind mapping software.

I need my ideas and thoughts in visuals that I can build on as the project progresses.

Scapple serves me as road map through the unknown terrain of a new project.

Easy to use and customize can be imported to scrivener too.

Skype with Call Recorder for Mac is indispensable--has saved me a fortune in phone bills and has only corrupted one audio file in 8 years. Also RSI Guard for Mac is helpful;

forces you to take breaks. f.lux for Mac dims blue tones on screen at night for

melatonin preservation. And Pomodoro Pro app for Android is an excellent motivator.

Statistical Package for the social Sciences (SPSS). My company does a lot of survey work, and SPSS allows us to quickly calculate frequencies, etc.

Currently trying Function Fox for time management and generating invoices. Might be more than I need, but free technical support.

Adobe Acrobat, although I have not upgraded to DC

WatchMe allows you to track time spent on multiple jobs at once.

Write again for contact, manuscript tracking, even billing.

adobe

N/A

AcroBat Professional is an essential for document portability, referencing, artwork corrections and searchability. I rent it to stay constantly updated.

A yearly worldwide subscription to Skype is good; means not getting big phone bills talking to clients and colleagues on other continents, also allows screen-sharing and other webconferencing advantages with little, if any additional cost. Also means being able to talk to others 'hands-free' while continuing to work on screen. If not using a laptop, a mike and speakers will need adding to your desktop PC for this.

Carbonite for automatic backup. Peace of mind.

Excel and Power Point

Skype, Acrobat, QuickTime, Firefox, WebEx

MS PowerPoint (works on both platforms)

Both Word and PPT are industry standard packages

Adobe is pretty essential to me too, just because of having to constantly access PDF journal articles.

SmartDraw

Adobe Acrobat

The TurboScan phone app is the best scanner I have ever used. Can create multipage



scanned attachments in seconds. Very useful for travel/conference coverage/receipts or scanning handwritten notes or whiteboard notes, etc.

Microsoft WORD. Most ubiquitous software for writing and sharing documents.

Adobe Pro for annotations - PC

Dropbox, cloud storage. It allows me to access my files from any computer or device.

Also useful for quickly sharing files with clients.

PDF Password Remover for the large number of documents that don't allow copy to clipboard and other important functions.

Ashampoo Snap 8 for copying charts and illustrations from any document.

Dragon Naturally Speaking. It's come a long way, and I'm constantly surprised at its ability to deal with complex medical terms that I have difficulty in pronouncing (I don't use the Medical version of Dragon, just the regular one). A good microphone is the key to consistent performance.

Irfanview, a superb free "Swiss Army Knife" image editor for general image handling, resizing, etc. I love its single-key shortcuts. This little program will handle most jobs, leaving Adobe Photoshop for only the more demanding tasks.

I use BOX (app.box.com) for uploading and transferring references to clients after highlighting. It's very simple and clients can access references using a link exclusive to each upload without having to sign in or register. BOX works for both Mac and PC.

Some other software that I use:

XMind for mind-mapping

Kashoo for accounting

Toggl for time tracking

Office for word processing

Prezi for presentations

Endnote--I can use my literature library over and over again as I expand it

Dragon Naturally Speaking--great for dictation

Adobe Acrobat --great for working with pdfs (marking them up, converting to Word or jpg)

I work on a PC

I use QuickBooks accounting software for my business -- I can't say I like it, it's not exactly intuitive. I use it because it's used so universally, including by my CPA, so it makes most sense for me to have it. I've mastered how to enter the things I repeatedly need it for - and it's easy enough for my CPA to give me mini QB tutorials when I need them for more complex/new issues.

Adobe Acrobat



I have recently purchased a LiveScribe pen which I find very useful for covering expert meetings. It records voice and you can get a free app that converts your notes into typed text. In small meetings I find a) I can't type quite fast enough and b) It is too loud/rude to be typing in a small meeting. The LiveScribe Pen solves this problem. You can also go back and listen to what was being said exactly when you wrote your notes which saves a lot of time.

Adobe Acrobat Professional

Great for editing

MS Power Point

For putting together presentations

MS EXCEL

Create graphics

I like active inbox for dealing with email. It works with Gmail turning emails into actionable tasks. Since it is connected with Gmail it works with any computer.

I use MS Excel 2013 and 2010 to make graphs/charts for papers. I have not yet had to resort to Adobe Illustrator, but I hear it is pretty powerful. There are monthly subscriptions that are very reasonable for the cloud format.

Again, no idea how this works on a Mac...

Printer, of course!

I absolutely love Snagit; that's a lifesaver when I need to take screenshots of my work or invoices.

Dropbox - video file sharing

GarageBand - audio file creation

I don't use EndNote often, but on those occasions when I do, it saves me several steps in referencing.

Adobe is also essential, though I find the latest version more clunky than the previous versions. Since there are so many important documents (particularly journal articles), I can't imagine functioning without Adobe.

Endnote for reference citations.

Adobe Acrobat Standard for generating PDFs and marking up source PDF documents.

Tresorit for cloud file storage.

N/A

Spellex Medical Spellchecker for Mac. Stedman's doesn't work on Mac products.

Spellex has been an excellent alternative.

Endnote, snagit, and Photoshop

EndNote

Endnote

Internet browser for research. Not sure I am understanding these questions with such





obvious answers.

I have seen entries in the discussion mentioning editing software. I would be interested in those.

Toggl ([www.toggl.com](http://www.toggl.com)) for time tracking and Intuit Quickbooks<sup>1</sup> for invoicing. Both are inexpensive and help save significant amounts of time. They can also be accessed across multiple devices.

I also use Google Apps for Business as my e-mail service provider and for file storage through Google Drive, which help me access my files from anywhere. It also helps that I don't have to worry about backing up my files.

Acrobat professional for editing/highlighting purposes

EndNote for managing references

PDF writer for editing PDF documents

Excel for manual calculations of summary tables

MS Visio for preparing charts, scheme

MS Project for Gantt chart / project planning

MS Power point for presentations

Babylon for thesaurus / dictionary

All programs work on both PC and MAC

MS Office Suite.

Sigma Stat & Not certain.

Carbonite: excellent product, tech support and customer service

The rest of the MS Office Package (MS Outlook, MS Excel, PowerPoint); Drop Box; QuickBooks; TurboTax

Graph Pad Prism 6, PC

MS excel. Good number cruncher and organizer. On both MAC and PC.

Adobe Pro. Must have for ensuring document sharing across many platforms + good commenting tools.

n/a

I haven't encountered others as of yet.

Microsoft office is the main software package I use. I believe it is has user friendly software.

For ppt, I wish it had a few more professional looking options for backgrounds and patterns.

Excel is pretty good for spread sheets but I sometimes rely on other softer (GraphPad prism) when doing statistical analysis.

Reference manager

Adobe pdf; Excel; Olympus DS

Endnote and Adobe Acrobat Pro. Endnote helps with references for manuscripts (can get around and do manually but much more difficult). Acrobat Pro is critical for annotating references - can read without the Pro, but can't highlight without it.

PerfectIt 3 - PC only. Catches common errors (words spelt differently, capitalization,



heading styles,...). Absolutely essential before sending off a piece.

Stylewriter 4 Pro. It does allow for different styles of writing but it's meant for more "ordinary" writing than professional papers. It is useful to get a quick overview of the worst sentences.

Excel

PowerPoint

Visio

Prims

Adobe Acrobat is essential for converting PDFs to Word docs.

Endnote - great for referencing

Dropbox - great for ensuring backup of documents

Evernote - for capturing research (particularly internet research)

Toggl - for tracking time

Both

The "Track Changes" function in Word. I also do quite a bit with PDFs, so Acrobat Pro.

Endnote

PerfectIt3

EndNote for Bibliography works on both Macs and PCs and is very useful to work with a MS Word document.

Skype. Mac & PC as far as I know. Great way to save money on international calls.

Most researchers and a lot of clinicians already use it, especially outside the US, which means free calls between Skype users. Can also use it to call phones (land line and mobile) for cheap rates. Not always the best quality, but have used successfully for podcasts.

Adobe InDesign (Mac/pc)

Adobe Acrobat (Mac/pc)

Excel, PowerPoint

Endnote or Reference Manager; GraphPad Prism

Zotero for reference management

Nope.

Nitro PDF, on PC (not sure about Mac)

Acrobat Pro

Any platform.

Although I don't edit PDFs, the ability to manipulate PDFs files is such a time saver -- rearranging pages, exporting to Microsoft office formats, etc.

I use it multiple times per week.

Adobe Acrobat (full version); Microsoft PowerPoint and Excel

I only write for journals so Word is sufficient for me.

Livescribe smartpen is great at conferences where I'm taking notes and photos.

EndNote--if you're writing anything that needs referencing, this makes it much simpler. It works on both Mac & PC, and sharing libraries in the latest version is much



easier.

Fanurio--it's a time tracking software product. I use it to reference past projects when I'm submitting estimates for future projects.

EndNote/RefMan and Prism

Natural Soft Natural Reader- I find the ability to listen to work incredibly useful in self editing, and it saves me so much time. I know it works on PC. There may be a Mac version as well.

Firefox. Where would we be without the net? I began as a freelance medical writer making long trips to the medical library and long hours at the copy machine. I do all that from my desk now.

Express Scribe for transcribing. Easy to use, crucial for interview-based work.

PDF Converter Professional from Nuance. I use it for reading and annotating papers, as well as making PDFs. Well worth the \$80 investment, many times over.

Excel for keeping track of invoices and payments.

Document clean-up software for Word documents:

Consistency checker (limited version of PerfectIt for Mac), FREdit (compilation of clean-up macros from Paul Beverley).

Adobe Illustrator, Endnote, Adobe Acrobat,

EndNote (love/hate, mostly the latter)

Firefox

Still looking for a good time-tracking and billing app

(all Mac)

Apple iPhone with AT&T, which lets me be online and on the phone simultaneously.

MS PowerPoint

MS Project

Cisco Jabber or MS Lync (for IM and video conferencing)

Please Review

MS Excel (least favorite)

I use these on a PC. I don't know if there are versions that work on a Mac.

Endnote for referencing. Works on both.

EndNote referencing software - great time saver while writing needs assessments, etc. Also formatting will always be correct - stress free.

Adobe Acrobat Pro for editing pdf docs.

Dropbox is useful for transferring large files.

If you dabble in editing images, Photoshop is also great if you know how to use it.

refman or endnote



**Q3. What websites do you visit most often while performing work as a medical writer? (113 responses)**

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Pubmed

Google scholar

Fierce Pharma

Bloomberg

Prn News Wire

PubMed

PubMed

OncLive

Journals - NEJM, Lancet, JCO

PubMed

FDA

[www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda)

ICH

PubMed

Mayo Clinic

Johns Hopkins

UpToDate.com

PubMed

PubMed Health

healthonnet.org

Google, PubMed, Google Scholar

Google Scholar

PubMed

N/A

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>

Google, whatever meeting I am reporting about. Linked In

Up To Date

PubMed, Google, Up to Date, clinicatrials.gov, drugs.com, rxlist, FDA, shutterstock, science source

Google and PubMed

PubMed, by far.

PubMed

clinicaltrials.gov

Medscape

PubMed

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Google Scholar is fantastic - every medical writer should use - better algorithmic search mechanism than PubMed

PubMed

NIH

Professional Associations

CDC

NIH

PubMed and Medscape

PubMed, Medscape, RxList, and of course Wikipedia when I need a quick overview of a topic.

National Library of Medicine (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>)

National Institutes of Health

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Individual disease state organizations (eg, American Diabetes Association)

PubMed

Drugs@FDA

PubMed

mygenome

NCCN

Merck Manual

nih.gov

cancer.gov

cancer.org

oncolink.org

PubMed for almost every project

ClinicalTrials.gov for all projects that reference clinical trials

Google for random things, such as looking up a clinician's full name/credentials/workplace to cite in an article

AMWA especially when I need guidance on the ethics of a work situation

PubMed

PubMed

Google Scholar

Pub Med

Google Scholar

QUOSA

Just starting out, so no favorites yet.

PubMed, of course.

Google

Another fantastic resource is the ICMJE ([International Committee of Medical Journal](http://www.icmje.org)



Editors). This organization offers their guidelines for all, at no charge, on the website "<http://www.icmje.org/>".

Also, in the free-content arena is the Equator Network posted at "<http://www.equator-network.org/>".

I visit Google, the CDC website, and PubMed (my bible). I also use the online Merriam-Webster medical and general dictionaries.

Government and professional association sites

PubMed

OneLook Dictionary

NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms

Google

PubMed

Google, twitter, Medscape

PubMed.gov

MedScape.com

[medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com](http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com)

PubMed

Trello

I visit PubMed frequently, as well as JCO (for ASCO abstracts) and Blood (for ASH abstracts).

Pub Med, those found with Google search, primary sources used by Wikipedia

At this point I use NCBI most frequently. I also use Medscape, WebMD, and Wikipedia (as an introductory guide).

PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/citmatch/>)

Google

CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

PubMed, UpToDate (subscription required), and online version of AMA Manual of Style (subscription required).

PubMed

Various ophthalmology websites

PubMed

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>

PubMed for articles

FDA and EMA websites

NIH.gov for searching clinical trials

different disease societies

DIA home

AMA online, PubMed.

For my current Masters Program journals such as Health Affairs.

pubmed.com

PubMed; FDA.gov; ICH

PubMed



Google

PubMed

Stedman's

Dorland's

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)  
for research

[www.toggl.com](http://www.toggl.com)  
(time tracker)

[www.square.com](http://www.square.com)  
and

[www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) for invoicing  
NIH, CDC, FDA (terrible), PubMed.

I've used PubMed and will continue to do so. I'm sure I will add more websites in the future.

many too many to cite

On-line medical journals

On-line dictionary, thesaurus, RAE

PubMed

Merck Manual

ScienceDaily

National Library of Medicine

American Psychological Association

[www.healthwriterhub.com](http://www.healthwriterhub.com)

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

PubMed

PubMed and Medscape,

PubMed

PubMed; NHS; CDC

PubMed. Without question. Need to research references.

PubMed

ASCO

NCI

FDA

CDC

MedPage Today

Google

Google (including checking citations), on-line dictionaries, target journal's website:  
author guide & sample papers.

FDA



ICH

Other regulatory websites

One: start with Google Scholar.

Two: Even without a subscription, Ovid is an excellent research tool

For general background information, I visit association websites. WebMD is similarly helpful for a basic overview.

Visual Thesaurus

PubMed

Google searches, lots to answer questions on A MA style.

PubMed

Google; PubMed

Health Finder. Gov

PubMed.

medical acronym finders

Pubmed.gov

PubMed

CDC

Professional organizations of the specialist physicians who attend to the disease

Non-profit organizations for specific diseases

PubMed - NCBI

NIH.gov

Individual Medical Journals websites

ScienceDirect.com

Merck Manuals

CDC.gov

HHS.gov

Medscape.com

Medicinenet.com

BioMed Central

Freemedicaljournals.com

NEJM.org

WebMD.com

Google Scholar. good access to journal articles, often works around or outside pay walls

PubMed

PubMed, ClinicaTrials.gov, WWW.USPTO.gov, www.FDA.gov, specific drug companies

PubMed; FDA; EMA; Google scholar

Pub Med

Google

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various medical specialties sites and specific medical journals

PubMed

www.pubmed.com

www.nice.org.uk

PubMed, PsycNET, WebMD, Mayo Clinic

Pubmed.com

pubmed.gov

PubMed, Thesaurus.com (for headline writing), timeanddate.com, various society and association websites, MedPage Today.

When I have the budget, I image it will be an online style guide.

Free dictionaries, especially MW

Google

PubMed, AMA Manual of Style, Drugs.com, ICH/FDA

UpToDate

ePocrates

PubMed

Google images

Scholar.google.com

Pinned.gov

Flights.google.com

PubMed.com

Numerous websites in my specialty area

NIH

EMA/NICE

FDA

PubMed

Wiki, EMA, FDA and guidelines

PubMed, CDC, FDA, AVMA member library (I do veterinary work)

Google

PubMed

Wikipedia (surprisingly accurate for biomedical information). The application instructions and evaluation criteria for the grant application that I am working on at any one time.

NIH and related sites, FDA, Twitter

PubMed

I most often visit PubMed and specific journal sites as I write mostly in oncology. I also check Google for quick background and ideas, and occasionally Google scholar although it is not as useful as PubMed.

PubMed

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PubMed

fda.gov

ich.org

PubMed

In order of most often used: PubMed, Medscape, Wikipedia (for overview),  
UpToDate, and clinicaltrials.gov.

PubMed

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**Q4. Do you have any additional comments for anyone equipping their home office (or corporate office) these days? (74 responses)**

Answer

YES--it's basically free to make a stand-up desk with cardboard boxes or upturned laundry baskets placed on regular desk. Have done this for years. Put laptop at eye level and keyboard and mouse at elbow level. Using ergonomic Kinesis keyboard and Evoluent vertical mouses have kept my RSI from getting any worse over the last few years.

Two monitors (at least) are essential.

I really enjoy a second (or third) screen for my laptop.

Get good lighting and a comfortable chair

All in one printer/scanner/fax.

"Copy Holder" vertical document stand.

Shredder for confidential client documents.

External hard drive for backing everything up.

Docking station with ergonomic keyboard and oversized extension monitor attached.

Walking treadmill.

A real window for natural light or a "Happy Light" lamp.

A real radio so you don't have to stream NPR.

A picture of nature.

A different chair for reading.

It helps to have two monitors, so you can view your reference and then your document at the same time.

make sure you set up apps on your cell phone so that you can do at least some of your work while on the move

N/A

You need at either an 34" (21:9) ultrawide screen or at least two good working screens to manipulate multiple documents simultaneously, plus enough processing/memory and video power to handle simultaneous multiple windows/documents/programs.

If not using a laptop as the main processor, a UPS (uninterruptible power supply) is a useful thing to have in case of power glitches - like many other freelance writers I have the freedom to live way out in the sticks where these things happen, and it's no fun losing hours of work when the power fails. Even if you are using a laptop, the UPS can power the additional screens to enable you to keep working when the power fails.

Get a good printer that is wirelessly connected to your computer. Always have a WiFi hotspot as Plan B if you attend meetings on site.

Get a wireless keyboard and mouse

Get the latest editions of key textbooks, both general med and specialist textbooks in the fields you work in. They are indispensable for getting quickly (re)acquainted with material, for ideas on how to set up figures to illustrate content on a slide, and can really



help out with basic information in a disease education deck. I recommend at a minimum, Harrison's Internal Medicine, Guyton and Hall Medical Physiology, McCance's Pathophysiology. If you do oncology, DeVita is a must.

High spec laptop and mid-range printer

a reliable phone with speaker

Large computer monitor

For those in northern climes, a light box from Northern Light Technologies may be worth every penny many times over. Not only combats seasonal affective disorder very effectively, but increases energy levels and productivity, even if you don't have SAD, and is safe on the eyes. Sits on my desk to the side of my screen, and I use it every day, even though I no longer live in the far north. :)

Likewise, a large screen is well worth the investment. Significantly increases productivity and reduces eye strain; much easier to handle complex projects; much more ergonomic than a laptop because of the ability to separate the screen and keyboard.

Try a standing desk if possible. I like to check my email and attend virtual meetings standing.

I have a laptop and a desktop. For some things I do, it is helpful to use both side by side so I don't have to toggle between applications. Same would be achieved with a dual monitor.

A two-monitor setup is a joy to work with - acres of real estate, and you can have a reference document on one screen and your manuscript on the other.

Don't feel you need to have the latest versions of your productivity software (particularly Office); take a critical look at the features in your version compared to what's in the latest update. Are you really likely to make use of the new functions? More often than not, you're just putting money in the vendor's pocket.

Get a comfortable chair and workspace with good light.

I love my Mac, but if you're starting out, most clients still work with PCs, so might be wise to use that platform.

Invest in a second laptop (I use a MacBook Pro) that's lightweight but with full capabilities (eg, Mac Air) so you can take your work with you...and enjoy the outdoors or a change of scenery now and then (but still take work-free vacations, too).

A random comment - I love my L-shaped desk. When I left full-time employment for self-employment, I initially used the regular desk I had at home. I came to realize that I'd had L-shaped desks (that spanned the corner of an office) for the past 12 years or so, and I really missed that arrangement -- I think it was something about having all the stuff on my desk within arm-reach (which isn't possible if you just have a large rectangular desk). I then found an L-shaped desk for my home office and all was good again! I guess the moral of my odd little story is that, if you were previously in f/t employment, think



about the configuration of the office that you had, & translate the good parts to your home office. Most of us are creatures of habit, even if we don't consciously realize it -- we can make our lives easier & more productive by keeping the good habits/comforts.

Do NOT cut corners on buying your desk, chair, keyboard and monitor. After getting a sore neck and back I can honestly say it is false economy and it simply isn't worth it. If you are going to spend all day at your computer you simply must have everything set up ergonomically. A fully adjustable (on an arm that can move up down, back forwards and side to side - not just up and down) and a really large monitor is essential. Invest in a good chair, consider a stand-up sit-down desk, foot rest, back cushion etc. Also think about having several different spots to work in your home - it is good to change it around now and then to avoid RSI type injuries. One friend of mine regularly works on her laptop in bed to change the pressure on her neck/back around - not a bad idea!

Buy a Brother printer - not HP

Buy two identical monitors and mount them side by side. There is a mechanical arm that is easily purchased through Best Buy or New Egg.

Find someone local who will solve your IT issues by coming to your house in a timely manner

Computer, printer scanner, shredder, waste basket

File cabinet. Desk or couch. Coffee! And I usually

Write my drafts long hand. So I need pen or pencil and paper.

Phone.

I would say to pick a system/platform that you are comfortable with and learn how to use it well.

Most technical questions (e.g. how do I get program x to do y) can be answered through a Google search.

I also have a back-up system called Carbonite, which I recommend highly.

I have both a PC and a Mac and would recommend that.

I used to have an all-in-one printer/scanner/copies/fax, but when it broke down, I bought an all-in-one that doesn't include a fax machine, as I found that none of my clients or contacts used a fax any longer. I find it rather curious that so many hospitals and medical practices still send and receive faxes, but none of my agency or corporate clients still do. Faxing is, essentially, obsolete. When someone wants a copy of a document, rather than faxing it, I scan it and send a pdf of the scanned document.

Need a good audio recorder for interviews. I use a Zoom. Also a video camera, tripod and lavalier mic help

I reserve my home office space for work-related activities only. I don't do anything else when I am sitting at that desk. This seems to make it easier to stay focused and on task than if I'm trying to write on the couch or at the dining room table.



## Dual monitors!

Have both a desktop machine and a laptop and the best internet connection you can afford and a separate portable hard drive for file backup.

I recently purchased a height-adjustable sit-stand desk from The Human Solution that lets me customize the height and permits me to use a recliner rather than a chair. Helps elevate my legs as I work.

\*\*\*

People who REALLY REALLY need something comfortable can check out the Alwork Station ([www.altwork.com](http://www.altwork.com)) but it is quite expensive. Looks good but it is still not in production at this time.

## Additional software for any freelance/self-employed

Scanner for scanning documents

TimeTrack for tracking time worked and invoicing clients

Payroll software for salary processing

TurboTax for doing taxes

Desktop and Mobile skills have different functionality that affects how a site is planned and designed, so knowing how these designs differ is advantageous to putting the content together for the best fit of functionality and flow.

Yes, I would like to know how to acquire library access to online journals and inter-library-loan? Please advise.

I recommend

- Three 27-inch monitors side by side
- Fujitsu ScanSnap scanner
- Comfortable chair, orthopedic cushion, footstool, balance ball
- Dense bird-filled walkable woods

I would like to hear a review of experience using GIMP (free) instead of Photoshop (expensive).

A second (or even third) screen is very useful.

On the low-tech side, I use a dry-erase board hung on the wall to keep track of ongoing projects. It's immensely satisfying to cross things off and then erase them all at the end of the week.

Find an academic affiliation or professional membership to allow access to major journals with paywalls.

no

I need a laser printer plus inkjet printer.

A newbie so don't have any input on this

I have done some remote training and communication through web ex, so depending on the client, the freelance may have to learn this videoconferencing medium.

I would love to get some additional advice myself since I am relatively new to writing.



Use pdf for documents when possible and practicable

Get an all-in-one printer/fax/copier. Have good Internet connectivity.

Laptop with extended desktop monitor works fine for me.

Of course you need a phone, a mobile phone, and a website.

I still use the basics - desktop, cell phone, color laser printer and fax machine.

Go PC. Go Windows 10. Subscribe to Microsoft Office.

Dual monitors rock!

No

High speed internet is a must.

Get at least 2 screens! Once you have multiple screens it's really hard to go back to one.

Get a MacBook air if you need to work while traveling

Suggest using two monitors.

1) The Office environment and set up is very important for clear thought process and should be pleasant to work in.

2) Computers with Updated software is essential.

3) Network of medical professionals and writers are helpful

Don't use fax often, but have been grateful to have it on my multifunction printer/copier/fax.

Invest in effective video conference tools and an Internet connection which can support their use.

good vast computer with storage

Get either two screens or one huge screen--even better, two huge screens--for your computer. It's great to be able to see, oh, Word and PPT and Mayo Clinic and PubMed all at the same time.

Adobe writer

If you are working with Microsoft Windows products, find out from the employer/assignment edit what version of various programs they are work with (e.g. PPT 2013 vs PPT 2016). Sometimes, upgraded versions of software are not compatible with older versions, which can lead to problems with formatting and/or file opening.

No. I do not have my office optimized at all and look forward to seeing the answers for this.

No

Keyboard tray to save your wrists

Large screen. Excellent internet connection. Good ram and high speed processor.

Get a comfy chair. Doesn't have to be expensive.

Multiple large screens for efficiency in being able to display multiple windows without overlap.

VoIP service through ooma - very good quality

Scanner

Printer



### More than one monitor

Be sure to build in time to stretch and exercise.

I hang onto my wired phone. It is a big help with a source has a bad mobile or is located in an office that otherwise relies on iffy phone service.

I like my 22" monitor for my desktop so I can keep multiple documents in multiple windows open and see everything. I have a Surface Pro for travel, occasionally will access meeting video on that while writing on the desktop.

Get a really good headset-phone combination.

Stand up desk.

A large monitor and hard drive are useful.

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Nascent Medical, LLC

## About Emma Hitt Nichols, PhD



Dr. Emma Hitt Nichols is CEO of Nascent Medical, LLC, and has worked as a full-time medical writer since 2000. In 2003, she founded the popular FREE [HittList weekly email](#) listing jobs for medical writers, which 13 years later, still goes out every Tuesday.

In 2011, she morphed from being a one-person shop freelancer and created a process to bring on subcontractors to her company, Hitt Medical Writing, LLC. This grew the company, and in 2015, Emma brought on an equity partner to form [Nascent Medical](#), LLC, a full-service medical communications company.

Emma also hosts the weekly [Medical Writers Speak](#) podcast, in which she interviews people about topics relevant to medical writers.

Emma has a PhD in Nutrition and Health Sciences (molecular biology) from Emory University, an MS in Technical and Professional Communication, and a BS in Biology. Nothing is more important to Emma than time with her family. She's married to her best friend (lawyer and legal thriller writer, [Nick Nichols](#)) and is the proud mother of her 12-year-old soccer-loving daughter, Madeleine. This is why she is so passionate about the 6-week course—it helps science types trade a career where they have to work in a lab or hospital for one where they can work from home, put their science background to use, and still make good money. Success, of course, requires skill and hard work on the part of the individual, but she's seen it happen over and over. It's extremely gratifying.

## About the 6-week course

The 6-week course covers **everything** you need to know to start your freelance medical writing business. Although everyone is welcome to take the course, it is directed towards people with writing knowledge and also with a PhD, MD, or other degree in a science.

The content for the full-length course will be available starting April 11, 2016 and distributed over the 6 weeks following that date. Please [go here](#) to access free content and to sign up for the course. The course will be available for sale from April 4th at 11am EDT, 2016 to April 10th at 10pm EDT, 2016. Please check the [6weekcourse.com](#) website for future courses.

What does the course include?

### **Week 1—Prerequisite Skills and First Steps**

Mistakes Medical Writers Should Avoid

Medical Writing Style

A Checklist for Pieces You Really Care About



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Preview of the AMA online Manual of Style  
Potential Medical Writing Markets  
How to Get Your First Freelance Medical Writing Clients

### **Week 2—Setting Up Shop**

Rules of Website Design for the Freelance Medical Writer  
Useful Software and Equipment for Medical Writers  
Checklist of Questions to Ask Clients When Taking on a New Project  
When to (And When Not to) Network and Help Others 101  
Freelance Integrity—Meeting Deadlines, Plagiarism, and Other Issues  
Part-time Clinician/Part-time Writer  
Getting into Regulatory Medical Writing

### **Week 3—Writing the Medical News**

Scope of Medical News Writing  
Interview With the Director of Medscape’s Medical News  
How to Write the Medical News  
Review of a couple of news pieces  
Interviewing Tips and Techniques for News Writers  
How to Get Medical News Writing Work  
Covering Medical Conferences

### **Week 4—Writing CME and CPD**

Understanding Fair Balance  
Getting the “Ghoul” out of “Ghostwriting”  
Writing Needs Assessments  
Needs Assessment Checklist  
Needs Assessment Examples

### **Week 5—Feature Article Writing**

Scope of Feature Article Writing  
How to Get Feature Article Writing Work  
How to Write Feature Articles  
Interviewing Tips and Techniques When Writing Feature Articles  
Emma goes over a couple of feature articles that she recently wrote

### **Week 6—Running Your Freelance Medical Writing Business**

Positioning Yourself  
New Business Trends  
Negotiating and Collecting Your Pay  
Contracts 101 for Freelance Medical Writers  
Invoicing Your Clients



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## Organizational Tips for Freelance Medical Writers

A Few Apps to Improve Productivity

When to Break Up With a Client

Freelance Customer Service

Self-Care for the Busy Freelancer

For more info, please go to [www.6weekcourse.com](http://www.6weekcourse.com)