

# Hiring Freelance Medical Writers: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly from the Agency Perspective

FROM THE 2009 FREELANCE WORKSHOPS

*By Mary Howe*

In her presentation at the 2009 Freelance Workshop, Mary Dominiacki, PhD, Medical Director at AOI Communications, explained what medical communications agencies value in freelance writers. The bottom line, from the agency perspective, is that their freelance writers must meet deadlines and deliver high quality products.

Dominiacki suggested that, given these priorities, short writing tests or paid, trial projects may be better tools for screening potential writers than writing samples because tests and projects involve deadlines and primary work products, whereas writing samples may not. Moreover, high-quality questions about source material, formatting, project requirements, and deadlines are signs that the writer is professional and competent. Conversely, typos in resumes, tests, or work products, and questions that are off topic or irrelevant can send a strong, negative signal.

For writers who want to develop strong working relationships with medical communications agencies, Dominiacki provided the following straight-forward recommendations:

- Develop expertise in a small number of subject areas
- Work on projects within your comfort zone
- Communicate clearly and honestly about your strengths.

Writers who follow these suggestions are likely to get projects done well and on time and, consequently, become very valuable to people within the agency. Dominiacki pointed out that a single writer need not do all things well to be valuable. She relayed the story of “Bob,” a fantastic but technically challenged writer. She found a simple solution; Bob writes for her, but he doesn’t build data tables.

*Mary Howe is a freelance writer.*