

Sloppy Copy Is a Poor Reflection on Chiropractors

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The chiropractic profession has been getting a lot of press coverage recently -- a lot good, some not -- and, if we're smart, there will be a lot more in the future. Doctors of chiropractic will be writing more for publication in scientific journals, newspapers, newsletters and letters than ever before.

Every chiropractor who sits down to write anything to anybody should remember one thing: the document you produce will reflect on you and your profession. It should, therefore, be as well-written and error-free as possible.

As an editor, I have seen thousands of articles and press releases and letters to the editor. Many reflect intelligence and professionalism on the part of the author; others are opened and thrown into the trash without a reading due to the sloppiness of the copy. If you want your document to be read -- and that is, after all, the reason you wrote it -- then make the extra effort to produce professional looking and sounding copy.

Here are some suggestions I would make to every doctor who writes anything for public perusal:

1. Type it. Unless it's a letter to a friend or lover, never, never submit hand-written copy. Make sure it is neatly typed and free of typos. If the document is for publication, double-space it (so editors can insert editing marks between the lines); many publications will not even consider copy that is not double-spaced.
2. Triple check your spelling. Misspelled words imply ignorance or lack of care by the author. If you don't know the difference between "its" and "it's" or "compliment" and "complement," look it up. Write with a dictionary by your side.
3. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Many writers aren't sure where to break a paragraph, and they end up with one- and two-page paragraphs. Any time you begin a new idea -- or, if you were speaking, where you would pause -- begin a new paragraph. Copy is much easier to read when it is broken up into small paragraphs of no more than five or six sentences at most.
4. Limit capitalization. Never use capital letters for emphasis. It's true that D.D. and his contemporaries loved to do this, but it's taboo in the publishing industry; all it does is make work for editors who have to "strike them down" to lower case, and if there's a lot of capital letter emphasis, your copy might get filed in the round file. Editors can be lazy sometimes.

Also, don't capitalize titles unless they are formal titles that precede a name. Chiropractic is not capitalized (neither is medicine, dentistry, or osteopathy). Doctor is not capitalized unless preceding the name (Dr. Smith). The same rule goes for vice-president, dean, professor, board, and even the president.

5. Don't use italics for emphasis, except in the rare instances where emphasis is required to change the meaning of a sentence. Let your words be their own emphases. Chiropractors, in

particular, have a tendency to pound the podium with their words by using capitals and italics. If the piece is well-written, such written voice-raising is unnecessary.

6. Italics (which are words underlined on an ordinary typewriter) are used for titles of books, magazines, journals and movies. Chapters and articles are placed in quotes, but books and magazine titles are always italicized (underlined).
7. "Write tight." In other words, don't be wordy. Most publications have limited editorial space. So say what you have to say in as few words as possible. If you don't, some editor somewhere will choose which of your words gets printed and which do not, and his judgement might not be the same as yours. So to be safe, be terse.
8. Always be professional in your approach. Even if you're writing to a publisher to protest an article which was derogatory to chiropractic, never let your letter become a harangue. Use logic, not name-calling.
9. Finally, don't embarrass yourself and the profession by including degrees less than a doctorate after your name -- unless that degree is an M.S. in an associated field (as with a post-doctoral master's). It is professionally and stylistically unacceptable to include a B.A., B.S., M.A., M.S. (or GED) after your name. Your doctorate implies the completion of lower degrees, and it displays professional insecurity and ignorance of protocol to include them (have you ever seen an M.D., M.A., or B.A., D.D.S.?).

So, don't hide behind the time-worn excuses of "I'm a scientist -- I can't write," or "I just can't spell." Make the effort to send out only professional looking documents -- be they letters to our customers, a letter to the editor, or an article for *JMPT*.

Don't let sloppy copy reflect poorly on you and your profession.

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