



REVIEW

Review of the book: *Medical Editing – A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career*

Reviewed Book

Gastel, B. (2025).

Medical Editing – A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career.

Chicago, IL, USA: The University of Chicago Press

Reviewed by

Mark Bos  and **Nathalie Kuijpers**

Abstract

In *Medical Editing – A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career*, Barbara Gastel delivers exactly what the title promises. Moving from introductory overviews to practical insights to ethics and career advice, the book offers a nice entry point for those new to the field. While primarily focusing on medical editing, its insights make it a useful resource for most starting in scientific or academic communication.

Keywords

Health communication; Science writing

Received: 31st October 2025

Accepted: 4th November 2025

Published: 26th November 2025

All scientific communication demands accuracy and clarity, but in the medical domain especially, miscommunication can have serious consequences. In *Medical Editing — A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career*, Barbara Gastel takes her readers into this specialised world of medical editing and offers them a comprehensive overview of what editing is, what editors do, how they do it, and why this matters.

The book is part of the University of Chicago Press's series on writing, publishing, and editing, and fits effortlessly into this collection. Based on decades of teaching and professional experience — Gastel directs the graduate program in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University — the educational origins of the materials are evident throughout the book. From reading the book, it is easy to imagine Gastel teaching in her classroom in a clear, structured, and instructive manner.

The book encompasses nine chapters, framed by a preface, acknowledgements, and an appendix containing answer keys, checklists, and sample style sheets. The chapters progress logically from foundational questions (what is medical editing?) to more practical ones (what tools to use? what workflow to follow?), ending with questions on ethics and career planning. While reading the book from cover to cover, I felt the overall organisation could have been different. Gastel does indicate that the book is not necessarily meant to be read in this sequence, and the modularity does make it suitable for dipping into specific topics. The decision to design the chapters as self-contained is pedagogically sound, but does introduce occasional redundancy, as key principles reappear across chapters (although there is power in repetition, of course).

The preface immediately sets a collegial and reflective tone. Gastel introduces herself not through abstract credentials, but through a personal narrative of entering and growing in this field. The preface also situates the book geographically and linguistically: it is U.S. and English-language focused. One limitation Gastel acknowledges is the relatively brief — or near-non-existent — treatment of artificial intelligence in editing. Of course, developments in this field are rapid and information becomes outdated quickly, but a chapter on the current status of AI would have been helpful, especially for more established editors who did not grow up with this tool.

The more practical chapters offer a wide-ranging inventory of resources, from style manuals (e.g., AMA, APA, Chicago) to online platforms, conferences, and communities of practice. But a more critical discussion of the differences between these manuals, or clearer guidance on when to use which resource, would have strengthened these chapters. Similarly, her discussion of structure using the IMRAD format and of guidelines such as CONSORT, PRISMA, and CARE demonstrates her command of scientific rigor and editorial nuance, while some of her advice verges on the obvious; valuable for beginning editors, perhaps still a useful reminder for more established ones. Gastel explores editing as an iterative, collaborative process embedded throughout the research and publication lifecycle. I fully agree with her view that editing is not merely the “final polish” but a creative and intellectual contribution that can enhance writing at every stage — from proposal to publication. In this regard, the tables mapping editorial roles to stages in this cycle are particularly helpful. Personally, I would have liked to see more hands-on examples of actual editorial interventions, or annotated before-and-after texts, in these chapters.

From a scholarly perspective, *Medical Editing — A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career* is a welcome contribution to a field that often leans on informal learning and

practice. I can imagine the book being used to introduce medical students to the art of academic writing and editing; while more experienced editors may enjoy moments of recognition and remembrance. While reading this book, I had the occasional realisation that knowing something is not the same as doing it.

Gastel's book fits well within the growing body of works addressing this intersection of science communication, (academic) writing, and editorial practice. It differs from these in its explicit pedagogical orientation and focus on medical content rather than science writing more broadly. Her previous work [Day & Gastel, 2020] with Robert A. Day — *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper* — was more from the perspective of the writer, with the editor's role being only minor; making this book a relevant complementary counterpart. Saller's [2016] — *The Subversive Copy Editor* — is similar in tone and approach; this book is much more general. Of course, the various style guides referred to in the book remain the authoritative references for style and formatting, but these are not always as reader-friendly, and Gastel's writing is less prescriptive and more explanatory about the how and why behind the prescriptions.

Overall, the book's educational orientation — its tone, the exercises, the frequent lists and sources, and key points for some of its chapters — means it will be useful as a teaching text, and as an entry point into the profession, it will serve commendably. The book embodies the ethos of good editing: it is well-written and reader-focused. Its key principles of clarity, consistency, and collaboration are universally important in the publication lifecycle.

References

- Day, R. A., & Gastel, B. (2020). *How to write and publish a scientific paper*. Cambridge University Press.
- Saller, C. F. (2016). *The subversive copy editor: advice from Chicago (or, how to negotiate good relationships with your writers, your colleagues, and yourself)*. The University of Chicago Press.

About the authors

Mark Bos is assistant professor of Public Engagement and Science Communication at the Freudenthal Institute at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His main research interest is on visual science and health communication, primarily in the public domain.

✉ m.j.w.bos@uu.nl

Nathalie Kuijpers is an experienced editor and secretary at the Freudenthal Institute. Along with ongoing editorial input on many of her colleagues' academic articles, she supported the then Educational Studies in Mathematics editor-in-chief from 2019–2021, and was part of the editorial team on two national Dutch professional journals for math teachers before that.

✉ n.kuijpers@uu.nl

How to cite

Bos, M. and Kuijpers, N. (2025). 'Review of the book: *Medical Editing — A Guide to Learning the Craft and Building Your Career*'. *JCOM* 24(07), R02.
<https://doi.org/10.22323/363720251104192426>.



© The Author(s). This article is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution — NonCommercial — NoDerivatives 4.0 License. All rights for Text and Data Mining, AI training, and similar technologies for commercial purposes, are reserved. ISSN 1824-2049. Published by SISSA Medialab. jcom.sissa.it