Effective writing and oral presentation skills are essential tools for any scientist. Nothing less than one’s employment, grant support, publication record, and scientific impact all depend on these abilities. It is surprisingly rare, however, for graduate training programs to address these issues through formal study. As a consequence, I suspect that many young scientists enter the world of independent research with less than stellar writing skills, and I know from unfortunate experience that many seasoned scholars have yet to fully master the art of the scientific seminar. There is a clear need for instruction in these areas, but how can graduate trainers effectively teach their students these skills when they most likely acquired them only through the horrors of trial and error, or the luck of natural talent? Furthermore, how can an established scientist or a motivated student polish his or her communication skills through independent study? Malmfors, Garnsworthy, and Grossman provide lucid and concise answers to these questions in their very useful, no-nonsense handbook.

The recurrent theme in their book is that scientific communication should be accurate, audience-adapted, brief, and clear. The book itself serves as an excellent example of these principles. The opening chapters describe the sections of a typical research paper as well as other types of scientific writing, such as popular science articles. The characteristics of each are outlined, and useful advice on textual and visual content is also provided. The next four chapters focus on the nuts and bolts of the writing process: how to get started, how to improve, how to conduct literature searches, and how to get a paper published. Based on my experience as an instructor, the chapter on improving one’s writing covers the most common errors made by students. It explains in simple language why each problem is grammatically incorrect or stylistically awkward. Because I teach a course on scientific proposal writing, I expect this chapter alone will save me many hours when providing students with written feedback because it will now be possible to refer them to this handy reference. The chapter on literature searches effectively explains the use of keywords to broaden or narrow electronic searches. The chapter on getting a paper published will be particularly useful to novice authors. Oral presentations and poster presentations are covered in separate chapters, but both appropriately emphasize the importance of effective visual content in these formats. The authors also provide valuable advice on how to organize and perform the presentations. The final chapters of the book focus on training students in scientific communication and on reviewing papers and presentations. There are suggestions here for both graduate and undergraduate instruction, as well as for scientists asked to peer-review scientific manuscripts. The value of this compendium is due in large part to its brevity and clarity. Because the information on any given topic is presented succinctly, even the most harried scientist working on a tight deadline can afford the time required to read the information relevant to his or her task.

The international team of authors responsible for this book (representing Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America) reflects the international face of modern science and they have intentionally written a book that is relevant and accessible to both native and non-native speakers of English. Each author has considerable experience in teaching scientific communication skills. In particular, this book is the offshoot of their joint participation as tutors at a series of annual communication workshops sponsored by the European Association for Animal Production and the publishing company Elsevier.

I noticed only minor weaknesses in this book. I was surprised that the significant value of reference-management software for formatting a paper’s reference list (and reformating it, if necessary) was not emphasized to a greater extent, particularly given the authors’ frequent reminders to double-check the completeness of the final reference list. In addition, a few of the illustrative examples on how to improve one’s writing style struck me as obtuse.

Because of its comprehensive scope and because it provides guidelines for good practice in a readily accessible format, I plan to incorporate this book as a required text in my graduate course on scientific writing and oral presentation skills. These attributes also make Writing and Presenting Scientific Papers a highly valuable resource for science students, teachers, and researchers working in all disciplines.