

Health Science Writer

■ Job Description

One of the science writer's main tasks is to translate scientific reports, written or oral, into standard English so that the general public can understand them.

Developments in medicine, chemistry, and biology all need to be translated into a comprehensible form. Such translations can take the form of newspaper and magazine articles, press releases, newsletters, radio and television scripts, trade books, textbooks, information pamphlets, and encyclopedia entries.

Health science writers who work for the media are *journalists*. Science writers who work for other organizations (e.g., universities, public research agencies, or high-technology industries) work in *public information*. A third type of writer, the *technical writer*, writes for specialized professional audiences such as doctors or biologists, as well as the general public. Health science writers may work on staff or on a free-lance basis.

■ Job Settings

Employers include newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations, and other news organizations; local, state, and federal agencies; professional societies; health education organizations; large hospitals, universities, and research institutions; health science schools; and health-related industries. Most health science writers work in or near big cities that have major research institutions, industry, and news organizations.

■ Projected Need

Nationally, the number of jobs for technical writers is expected to increase faster than average through 2010. In Illinois, average employment growth is expected for this occupation. The continuing growth of scientific and technical information should increase the need for technical writers. Much of this information must be communicated to others, including those who do not have a technical background. In addition, openings will be created by workers who leave the field. Opportunities for individuals with knowledge in specialized areas of the health field, such as medical research, technology, environmental and public health should be best.

■ Salaries

According to a survey conducted by the Society for Technical Communication, beginning wage for technical writers is about \$36,210 per year. Average salary is around \$55,360 per year.

In Illinois, the median wage for technical writers is \$22.34 per hour. Nationally, the median wage is \$23.73 per hour.

■ Related Careers

Health educator, health sciences librarian

■ Differences in Training

Health science writing requires mastery of reporting, writing, and science; there are no hard and fast rules about how to acquire these skills.

Traditionally, science reporters have had a college degree in one of the humanities and have started out as general assignment reporters, working their way into a science beat. Increasing numbers of science writers have a science degree. These people typically master the other two skills, reporting and writing, by some combination of writing for a school or local paper and taking English courses.

Individuals who major in English or journalism should take science courses and work in a research laboratory to find out how science works.

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/login.asp>

[English Composition and Writing](#)
[Technical and Business Writing](#)

■ Credentials

None.

■ **Advanced Training**

Master's and doctoral degrees are available in journalism and technical communication.

■ **Resources**

National Association of Science Writers, Inc.
P.O. Box 890
Hedgesville, WV 25427
Phone: 304.754.5077
E-mail: diane@nasw.org
<http://www.nasw.org>

Society for Technical Communication
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
Phone: 703.522.4114
E-mail: stc@stc.org
<http://www.stc.org>

Two undergraduate and two graduate scholarships for \$1,000 are available to students preparing for a career in technical communications.

Health and Science Communications Association
39 Wedgewood Drive, Suite A
Jewett City, CT 06351
Phone: 860.376.5915
E-mail: hesca@hesca.org
<http://www.hesca.org>

American Medical Writers Association
40 West Gude Drive, Suite 101
Rockville, MD 20850
Phone: 301.294.5303
E-mail: amwa@amwa.org
<http://www.amwa.org>