



# Write and wrong

**Julia Kendrick** on the dos and don'ts of writing a professional biography and how to make yours stand-out from the crowd

**W**e live in a super-speed digital age: complex topics are condensed to just 140 characters and we often converse using just emojis. According to a recent study, our attention spans have shortened to just eight seconds – less than that of a goldfish! So no matter your audience – be they clinical congresses or publications, your patients or the media – now is not the time for a lengthy, self-indulgent resumé.

People simply will not take the time to read a multi-page novel of all your achievements. Even worse – when being listed as a speaker or author, editors may simply cut your bio after 50-100 words, which in some cases leaves you in mid-adolescence! Relevant background is key: this article will be your step-by-step guide to creating a succinct, high impact bio to introduce yourself in a variety of settings.

## **Micro, mini or long?**

No, we're not talking skirts here. Your professional bio is an essential tool that you'll use again and again in your career, so it's worth taking the time to get it right. What's more, you're going to need at least three versions: a micro, mini and long bio to use for different purposes. The micro bio is your elevator pitch or Twitter profile: one high-impact sentence (and usually the hardest to write!). The mini bio is about a paragraph long (150 words) and covers the headlines of your life and career, whilst the long bio can be up to one page and summarise things in more depth, along with some "nice to knows".

## **You talking to me?**

Before starting, consider why you are writing this bio and who will read it. Ensuring the content is relevant and

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So how snappy does it have to be? Having personally blitzed a plethora of lengthy biogs, here's my target word-count guide for various professional scenarios:

- Social media (e.g. Twitter): 140 characters (about 20 words)
- Blog author: 50 words
- Networking biog (e.g. LinkedIn): 60-100 words
- Article author: 100-150 words
- Congress speaker: 250-450 words

**Bear in mind these often have to include your contact information, place of business and website!**

tailored for your audience is the best way to hold their attention. Depending on the intended use, you may wish to use the third person perspective – so instead of writing “I studied medicine at Cambridge” try “Julia studied medicine at Cambridge”. This style works best for author and congress biogs, rather than social media or LinkedIn. Also, if responding to a biog request, it's a good idea to clarify the word count and adapt accordingly, rather than risk being chopped mid-career by an editor.

in the effort to stand out and make an impact, bios sometimes use “creative” self-titled terms such as king, queen or guru. My guidance here is use with caution: being named as something by the consumer press is one thing, but self-proclaiming is another and you could run the risk of appearing arrogant, less credible or less trustworthy

**Anatomy of a Good Biog**

A good biog should not just be the summary of your skills and expertise – it is also a valuable tool to build your personal brand. Standard contents include your education, work experience, professional affiliations, awards and honours – but by writing in an engaging manner and including information about what makes you different, you can connect more deeply with your reader and make them want to know more. For example, you could relay your personal and professional mission or message, or highlight key challenges or obstacles that you have overcome. Another good tip is that everyone loves a number crunch



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– it's a different way to illustrate your expertise, so include a few high-impact statistics about you and your career. For example: “During my career, I have performed over 5,000 aesthetic procedures, authored 25 clinical papers and spoken at seven international medical congresses.”

**Do:**

- Include a photo: audiences are now highly visual and a good headshot will help engage them
- Start with your name, occupation/job title and achievements. Your reader needs to be hooked early and interested to keep reading
- Provide a summary of your education, qualifications and clinical focus – no need to go back earlier than university, and even then keep it brief
- Use strong verbs and the active voice: “I achieved, I delivered” (or “Julia achieved, Julia delivered”)
- Vary the length of sentences: hold that attention span!
- Keep paragraphs short: five to seven sentences, focusing on a particular topic
- Use a conversational tone, where possible – still professional, but accessible
- Add one or two personal details – your family, or hobbies
- Finish with your contact details and/or links to your website and social media profiles
- Get a fresh pair of eyes to proof read it either a colleague, a friendly PR or journalist to make sure your biog packs the right punch

**Don't:**

- Make a one-size-fits-all biog – people will glaze over unless something is tailored to their needs
- Make a verbose autobiographical account of your life; we just want the key points!
- Use jargon – especially for public or media audiences
- Use hyperbole – see kings, queens and gurus
- Did I mention going on for too long? **AM**

**KINGS, QUEENS AND GURUS?**

**Watch out for hyperbole: in the effort to stand out and make an impact, bios sometimes use “creative” self-titled terms such as king, queen or guru. My guidance here is use with caution: being named as something by the consumer press is one thing, but self-proclaiming is another and you could run the risk of appearing arrogant, less credible or less trustworthy. When in doubt, keep your professional profile just that – professional.**