

EASE-Forum Digest: June to September 2013

You can join the forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Send in plain text, not HTML. Details at www.ease.org.uk/node/589.

It is nice to see forum participants being addressed as EASERs, hopefully forum discussions do ease the task of scientific editing.

Less formatting work for authors

Joan Marsh, our president, passed a discussion to the forum that had started on EASE's LinkedIn. Pippa Smart had asked for views about Elsevier's initiative to relax formatting requirements for manuscripts on submission. An article by Kelvin Davies, an editor who publishes with Elsevier, states the minimum requirements: manuscripts must be in the IMRAD format, the figures of sufficient quality, and the text legible. Provided all the usual information is included, the references do not have to comply with the journal style. Elsevier will format the references on acceptance. Davies points out that the increasing demands made of authors has led to style and formatting taking on a life of their own, and strict requirements imposed by some journals before they will review are only of little help to reviewers.

Elsevier has been piloting the scheme, giving journals the opportunity to take up the option, since mid-2012. Angela Turner, whose journal is published by Elsevier, had been told the company was planning to allow each journal to select its preference from a small panel of reference styles. The publisher will then convert the references in accepted manuscripts into that style. She hoped authors would realize that references still need to be complete and up to date for the peer review stage. Interestingly, she added that she could guess from the formatting where the manuscript had been submitted beforehand.

The discussion on LinkedIn stressed the amount of time authors have to spend formatting an article for the specific style of the journal, which could, as Karen Shashok also pointed out on the forum, be done as part of the revision once an article had been accepted. On the journal side, the LinkedIn discussants thought consistency in a paper made the reviewing process easier for the reviewers and editor, and enhanced the chances of acceptance and quicker publication. Davies on the other hand, indicated that publication would be quicker with the new scheme. One journal editor thought it might not be so attractive to small journals that lack the staff and financial resources for technical editing.

On the Forum, Karen had gained the impression editors felt entitled to make demands on authors, demands that might be illogical or contradict guidance provided elsewhere for authors. Her example was of a journal whose policy was not to print acknowledgements of authors' editors despite its Instructions to Authors' requirement that language help be obtained before the manuscript

is submitted and the common policy amongst Elsevier journals of acknowledging writing assistance.

Reformatting references was, in Andrew Davis's view, no longer time-consuming for authors. It can be done in seconds using bibliographic management software, which reduces mismatches between references cited in the text and the number of typos resulting from repeatedly typing references. He supported the reference-style demands of journals as ensuring that authors include all the relevant information in a standard order by preventing information's being omitted and relieving reviewers from having to search through bibliographies that are either inconsistent internally or inconsistent with others in the same journal. Finally, he added the specific format of the bibliography contributed to the branding of the journal in the market place.

Whole-journal plagiarism

Angela Turner reported that a journal called the *Himalayan Journal of Social and Natural Sciences* had reprinted several articles from her journal *Animal Behaviour* without any indication of their prior publication and had even claimed sole copyright. It amounted to plagiarism of practically her entire journal as all but one of the articles in the list of contents were from *Animal Behaviour*. *The Scientist* had also reported two other journals that had plagiarized on this scale (<http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/35662/title/Rampant-Plagiarism-in-Two-Journals/>). Pradeep Kumar from the University of Kerala, India identified the fraud as one that is taking hold in south- and southeastern Asian countries, a fraud not easy to detect. His department had received books that looked like textbooks but contained a collection of unrelated plagiarized chapters. Mary Ellen Kerans advised that the COPE flowcharts give guidance to journals on the appropriate action to take to deal with plagiarism. She also wondered what the offending journal gained from the scam, perhaps payment from potential authors or money from advertisers.

Save page numbers from oblivion

Will Hughes helps to collate a catalogue of abstracts for the American Society of Civil Engineers, which publishes several journals. This society is moving to a single-article publishing model without volumes or issues. His concern was that pages could not be identified. CIDs used as an alternative to page numbers were only a code for locating the whole article. This means a loss of ability to identify the location of a particular quote. He asked how a specific part of the text could be cited in future. On a slightly different tack, Joan knew that Wiley were working on a retrieval system tagging figures, tables, and fragments of text. E-books had already abandoned indexes because the content could be searched electronically but this still leaves the problem of how to cite specific text.

Whereas in medicine no need is evident beyond citation of entire articles, in other disciplines, as Mary Ellen

explained, more precision is vital where reference to parts of text is important, for example to find out how phrasing of a controversial issue changes over time and who influences whom. Quote marks are used in the text but they needed to be pinpointed in the citation to the original text. Liz Wager also wondered how – when all books are read on Kindle – different e-readers would give the same e-locations. Papers in Angela's discipline of ethnology and animal research often had quotes and she did not relish the disappearance of page numbers. She conceded that text on Kindle could be searched, readers tend to highlight text and she thought a search-based quote system would be required in future. Mary Ellen made a plea that a place-marking system be set up before publishers abandon page numbers entirely because we are in a stage of transition and not all readers can be expected to search yet.

Chris Sterken launched his e-journal in 1994. The journal has no page numbers but an article-numbering scheme of volume (year of publication) and article numbers (sequential paper 1, paper 2 etc.). Thus, paper 2 in (2013) volume 19 would be labelled 19_2. Each paper is searchable inside its own pdf. This system has been applied by other journals as well.

Will was disappointed by the “wistful” forum support for retaining page numbers and felt he had not been given any solutions. The importance of fine-grained citing had not been appreciated. In his field, researchers might cite a specific location as the source of an idea, rather than as a direct quotation of text. He still did not know how to reference such a citation. His only option would be to include a clearly identifiable sentence or phrase to avoid the reader's spending time trying to find the specific location where the idea is presented and possibly making an erroneous guess, which to him seemed clumsy and to be a retrograde step. Mary Ellen agreed that the importance probably eluded the “science” editor forum community, but she had a sinking feeling that the lack of interest was rooted in readers' accepting authors' contentions rather than checking the text in the reference works to make sure that it really supports the claims made.

Another adjective for naughty authors

Liz Wager, editing a handbook on systematic reviews, asked for suggestions for a non-judgemental adjective to describe scientists who intend to commit misconduct or commit it unintentionally. She had thought about ‘naughty’. Norman Grossblatt and Karen suggested that describing the action rather than the protagonist is less pejorative. Having considered the various suggestions, Liz plumped for ‘unscrupulous’ as suggested by Marian Everett Kent. Alternatively, to avoid using any adjective the behaviour could be described in a separate sentence as “not good”.

The fourth authorship criterion

Sylwia Ufnalska posted the text of the criterion for authorship which has recently been added to the ICMJE's requirements for authorship: “Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are

appropriately investigated and resolved”. She thought it hard for authors to be sure that their coauthors were not responsible for any misconduct and they should not be expected to do so. The third criterion that all authors approve the manuscript made it clear that they were responsible for the content. Another addition requiring authors to be able to identify which coauthors were responsible for each part of the work was, however, to be welcomed. Valerie Matarese considered the wording difficult to understand by people whose English proficiency is limited. Of more concern was its impracticality, as authors could not be expected to stand for the integrity of the whole work and accept accountability for all the authors, some of whom in large studies they might never have met. Junior researchers who do the bulk of the work could be excluded whereas the proposal for several guarantors once proffered by *Science* would place responsibility on senior scientists. She added that as medical writers could not vouch for the integrity of all researchers, the new criterion removed any doubt that they could be authors. Paola De Castro's view was that although unrealistic to expect authors to meet all four conditions, these conditions should all be considered by the research group when allocating authorship, and the criteria did make authors aware of their responsibilities.

Spacing before and after symbols

If searching the Internet fails, post your question on the EASE forum. Alice Lehtinen did this to find out the rules for spacing before/after symbols such as =, >, <, and *. Liz said there were no rules as different journals use different conventions. She recommended consulting the CSE Style Manual's section ‘mathematical operators and spacing’, adding that the AMA style manual recommends ‘thin spacing’ after these symbols, which may not be possible on regular word processing. Elisabeth Heseltine referred Alice to the SI (Système International) system, which stipulates use of a thin space on both sides of =, < and >. She thought the same applied to * representing a multiplication sign. Mary Ellen usually inserted such a space before the operator so that if the string comes at the end of a line the operator and variable stay together. She achieves this in Word by making a superscripted space (thinner).

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Erratum

In the August issue of ESE, names were incorrectly assigned in the Digest. In paragraph 3, for ‘Chris Sterken’ read Valerie Matarese, then for ‘him’ read Chris Sterken. In paragraph 4, for ‘Chris’ read Valerie Matarese then for ‘Valerie’ read Liz Wager.