

European Science Editing

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European Association of Science Editors



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From the editors' desks

Membership 2004

Thank you all for sending in your membership fees for 2004, and also for being patient during the past year through the changing of the guard from the previous secretary to the new. We hope to send an updated membership CD-ROM to you with the next issue. So, if you have had a change in your postal address, e-mail address, or anything else that might be of interest to others, let the secretary know (secretary@ease.org.uk).

Ninth general assembly and conference

As you all know, it was decided in Bath last June that the next general assembly and conference will be held in Kraków, Poland. The conference now has a theme and an official date: **The culture of science editing, 15–18 June 2006**. For more information, visit the new section that will appear regularly in the journal to provide updates on the conference.

Readers' survey

We want to thank all those who filled out and returned the readers' survey on EASE membership and promotion. Alison Clayson, who is in charge of the project, is currently analysing the results and you will hear more about the findings later. She says that, so far, most responses have come from the UK, Canada, Holland, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Australia and Japan. She added that nearly everyone seems to read "From the Editors' Desks" and that they read it first. For those of you who would still like to add your input, it is not too late. Just see our web page (www.ease.org.uk/), where you can still find and fill out the electronic version of the survey. We would certainly welcome more comments and we look forward to hearing from all of you.

First EASE seminar and next AGM

May 7th is the date for both these EASE events. Try to make it if you can (though this issue may reach you too late to be a reminder). The seminar, "Scientific publications in a digital age", starts at 8:30 a.m. at the Institut de Estudis Catalans in the heart of Barcelona (free to members). The Annual General Meeting will convene there at 18:30. We hope to see many of you there.

More efforts to extend training

EASE is finding more ways to extend its training endeavours. In April a science writing course was held at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, for the first time, organized by Elisabeth Heseltine and presented by Pehr Enckell and Linus Svensson.

New editor needed

Anyone interested in joining the staff of *European Science Editing*? Hervé Maisonneuve, the journal's chief editor and head of the Publication Committee, would be happy to hear from you. Currently, a new editor is needed to take over the "Reports of Meetings" section.

Suggestions and volunteers

The editors of the *Science editors' handbook* want to sustain its momentum. All ideas for new chapters are welcome, as are volunteers for writing chapters. Please, again, contact Hervé Maisonneuve (hervemaison@wanadoo.fr). In addition, Moira Vekony (DunaScript@editors.ca) is looking for contributors and ideas for the WebWatch section. Have you spotted an interesting web site lately? If you have, we would all be interested.

Contributions for the August issue

Please send contributions to the appropriate member of the Editorial Board (see right) by **15 June** (for instructions to authors see web site).

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Editorial

*To be in control of disorder is trivial,
A true master controls chaos.*
Anon.

Not just another form to fill in

The February issue of *ESE* contained an EASE membership and promotion survey, complete with information on where to locate it on the EASE web site (www.ease.org.uk/survey0402.html). No, this is not just another form to fill in. This particular survey is a very serious attempt on the part of Council to engage all our members in the work of Council, and to explore the true sense of “teamwork”. Hopefully, most of you who read this editorial will, by the time you read this, have completed the form and returned it to Alison Clayson, as requested. Alison will have analysed the information received and presented the findings to the meeting of Council in Barcelona in early May 2004. Remember, the legitimacy of EASE rests with its members and, therefore, it is incumbent on Council to handle incoming viewpoints efficiently and with a high degree of transparency. It is indeed our aim to do so, and members will be kept informed of the results and of the aims generated by input from the survey.

The survey originated in the discussions in Council in Barcelona, October 2003. Council was agreed that direct input from members is needed in order to rethink our general orientation and goals for the coming years and, especially, for the work ahead in the run-up to the EASE Conference in Kraków in 2006. (Read more about this from Tom van Loon in this issue.) The aim of this Council is to avoid initiating changes that could be seen as being based on passive acceptance by EASE members of the Council’s decisions and business-as-usual strategies.

We would like to see the active involvement of every paid-up member of EASE. Believe me, your knowledge, from whatever branch of the complex and sophisticated field of editing you are involved in, can support and guide Council in the prudent management of the organization. We need a continual flow of information/evaluations/achievements related to the progress, or lack of progress, Council is making in strengthening EASE according to the wishes of the members. It is crucial to our very existence that we maintain the momentum created by EASE. However, even an effective and dynamic organization needs to stand back now and again and take stock of any problems or disagreements encountered during the move forward. These need to be effectively dealt with, in the correct forum, and EASE members constitute the correct forum.

Pens to paper please: you know more than you think you do; don’t keep it to yourself — share it.

Role playing

Science editing has an important role to play in supporting the scientific community. EASE has an important role to play in supporting editors in all fields of science. Editors have an equally important role to play in guiding the development of their organizations. Thus, a major feature of our work as editors lies in ensuring interaction between all the different functions involved in delivering correct information that is well written and well presented, to those who need it. Yes, I know these are simple home truths that everyone has heard before, but they need to be reiterated before we forget to lift our “weary” heads from the depths of editing burdens. Science needs us, we need science; together we can play an active role in convincing governments and funding organizations of the importance and value of our work in the development of society. I am convinced that bringing to the fore the collective knowledge of EASE members will allow the organization to become a vehicle for change in this respect.

EASE AGM, Barcelona

By the time you read this issue of *ESE* the Annual General Meeting of EASE will probably have taken place in Barcelona. As you will undoubtedly know, in conjunction with this AGM EASE arranged a seminar on the subject of “Scientific Publications in a Digital Age”, which we hope many of you will attend or have attended. This seminar was arranged by our Spanish Council members, Remedios Melero and Ricardo Guerrero. They convinced some of the best international speakers on the subject to attend, so that EASE could attract the correct audience — an achievement in itself. For those of you who could not get to Barcelona, more information about the seminar will appear in the August issue of *ESE*. Watch out for this information.

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Editing in Spain

Spanish scientific journals are still alive

Reme Melero

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Background

In Spain the terms editing and publishing are often virtually interchangeable. It may indeed be difficult to separate them, especially when editors and publishers belong to the same organizations or institutions and the parties are closely related.

To understand the current state of Spanish scientific publications we must go back several decades. In 1950 Spanish science production was not very great because, after some years of recession as a consequence of the Spanish civil war and the ensuing political regime, the country was just beginning to reconstruct its scientific activities. However, this situation changed drastically during the next 20 years, during which the Spanish Research Council (CSIC) and the universities played an important role, since their scientists generated most of articles published in Spanish journals. At the beginning of that period the staff of research institutes published more than those of the universities — whose main aim at that time was teaching. However, this order was reversed in the 70s by the migration of CSIC researchers to international journals.

The opening up of Spanish science during the 60s provoked an incursion of Spanish research into international publications and a consequent decrease in articles in national journals. The rate of science production in Spain began to rise rapidly from 1974, with the development of research practices, followed by the growth of respect from foreign countries and the internationalization of Spanish researchers' papers. This process had undesirable consequences for the survival of Spanish journals, due to the lack of original submissions, and some of them collapsed for that reason. The general decline in articles published in Spanish journals, however, did not occur in biomedical or clinical journals, which because of their intrinsic character and their wide audience of specialists even increased their submissions.

Some authors have called the period from 1970 to the 1980s the "golden age" of Spanish journals because during that time ISI compiled the largest number of journals published in Spain in its databases. Late in the 80s Spanish government policies fostered publication in journals with high impact factors, provoking an intellectual migration that showed itself by an increase in global scientific production and changes in the preferences and habits of researchers, although the pattern in medicine was slightly different. During the 90s, as Spanish authors migrated to other publications (Spanish researchers published 20 000 articles in 1998 but only 2.5% were in national journals), there was an increase in scientific papers submitted from Latin

America because for those countries Spanish journals were a gateway to international dissemination.

Since 1993, 95 of the 356 existing Spanish scientific and technical journals have disappeared and 121 new titles have been launched. Therefore only 66% of Spanish journals are older than 10 years; at least 40% are abstracted in international databases. Those journals which maintained their status with respect to the *Science Citation Index* still have only a modest impact factor but they are active publications. Other journals have survived by adopting new strategies such as amalgamating titles to make a new version — *Anales de Física* from 2001 formed part of the *European Physical Journal* — or changing their imprints — *Anales de Química* is now *Anales de Química International Edition*.

Contradictions

The main objective of a journal is the dissemination of knowledge. The higher the quality of the articles published, the greater the journal's prestige and its dissemination. This relationship produces positive feedback: the progressive increase in a journal's prestige increases the submissions and this allows the journal to be more selective and publish the highest quality papers. The "natural selection process" leads to the improvement of scientific journals because they have to compete with each other. However, this process was destabilized by the impact factors published by ISI, which established a list of "prestige journals" that includes only a few Spanish journals.

Most Spanish scientific journals are published by scientific societies. Some were funded partially by the Spanish administration, and some that were fully supported by public funds have disappeared or are published irregularly because the support stopped. This fact frustrates the government objectives of boosting the Spanish language and reinvesting human resources. The way to overcome this contradiction would be a social, institutional and political agreement aimed at promoting Spanish journals internationally. Politicians should be aware of the absolute importance of supporting the nation's own publications. Scientists also play an important role in this process and should act as leaders in boosting journals and keeping open a channel of communication through the journals published by their societies and institutions. In general terms, Spanish journals should receive institutional support and recognition of the role they have played in knowledge dissemination.

Controversy

There has been controversy and discussion about what the terms “national journals”, “journals published in Spain” and “Spanish international journals” or “international journals published in Spain” mean. It seems a game of words but the ambiguity constituted a real barrier to the development of our own publications, because there was a time when Spanish journals, apart from the established and well-regarded ones, had a bad name among researchers. Most national journals were considered to be a kind of second-class serial and Spanish authors even avoided citing them. Fortunately, times have changed and the quality of national and international scientific journals published in Spain is clear and well acknowledged.

Current publications

According to the CINDOC directories (Centro de Información y Documentación, CSIC, an official information and documentation centre based in Madrid), scientific journals edited in Spain number 2223 titles. These include most of the relevant science and technology periodicals that publish mainly original articles. Of these 2223 journals, 1332 belong to social and humanities sciences, 526 to medicine and biomedicine, and 356 to basic sciences, life sciences and technology. Social science journals are mostly published by universities (about 39%), followed by royal academies and learned professional societies (21%), official institutions (17%) and private organizations (1%). Basic science and life science journals are mainly published by royal academies (36%), private companies (23%), universities (16%) and research institutes (16%). Medical journals are mostly produced by private publishers (62%), followed by royal academies (12%) and public institutions (11%). In recent years, the growth in life science journals has been approximately 3% and in social sciences 6%. The higher rate in social sciences is related to the greater instability in this area.

Visibility and quality criteria

The criteria for evaluating the research curricula of scientists are weighted in favour of publication in international journals, so reducing the flow of original articles in national publications and damaging the prestige of those publications. This situation could be improved by increasing the visibility of journals, facilitating access to them, ensuring regular publication, following international style standards and adopting restrictive quality criteria, but also by changing the criteria for the evaluation of scientists' work. The presence of Spanish journals in the big databases or specialized abstracting services and libraries could also constitute a quality indicator.

Improvement in Spanish publications depends partly on our researchers and on them changing their habits of publishing only in international journals with high impact factors. Two international projects include publications from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries: Latindex (www.latindex.org) and Scielo (www.scielo.org). These projects work to improve the quality, the impact and the presence on the web of journals from these countries. Latindex

includes journals from any subject and Scielo is devoted to health sciences.

Latindex is the result of cooperation among a network of official institutions for the reinforcement and dissemination of bibliographic information about scientific periodicals produced in Latin America, Caribbean countries, Portugal and Spain. The system aims to improve the dissemination, visibility, availability and quality of scientific periodicals from these regions through shared resources. So far, Latindex has coordinated the collection, processing, dissemination, use and production of scientific information. Its objectives are to establish policies and actions to coordinate efforts, from different regions and participant countries, related to the production, dissemination and systematic use of scientific information. Latindex restricts admission to its directory of publications to those journals that reach a level of quality judged according to a list of quality indicators that affect format and editorial policy. Its Directory contains 12 000 journal titles, 2368 of which are Spanish scientific journals. Its Catalogue — journals selected by Latindex quality indicators — contains 1000 journals of which 459 are edited in Spain and are mostly published by universities, research institutes and learned professional associations.

Scielo Spain is an electronic virtual library covering a selection of Spanish health science journals. The Scielo project is the result of cooperation between BIREME (the Latin American and Caribbean Centre on Health Sciences Information) and FAPESP (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo) and is administered in Spain by the Biblioteca Nacional de Ciencias de la Salud (BNCS) through an agreement established between OPS/OMS and the Instituto de Salud Carlos III. The principal aim of this project is to contribute to the development of research, wider dissemination of national scientific publications, widening and improving new editorial methodology, and evaluating results. Scielo Spain consists of a selection of health science journals and it gives access to the full text and contents of each issue.

Trends and the future

The increase and improvement in research conducted by our scientists reveals their high level of academic training. This is also applicable to the professionals who are involved in scientific editing. The occupation of editor is still obscure in Spanish society. The number of editors has increased in recent years, although most of them share their editorial duties with research activities. Editorial practices, quality guidelines, international standards and codes of ethics are similar to those followed in other developed countries. The current model of publication ranges from completely institutional journals (published and edited by public institutions) to “hybrid” publications (edited by non-profit institutions and published by commercial publishers) and private publications (edited and published by private companies). However, there is an increasing interest in open access, free access electronic journals and journals in the public domain that aim to make scientific information available and visible without obstacles.

Viewpoint

Nil by Latin

John Kirkman argues that to make our English texts accessible accurately, rapidly, and reliably to the maximum number of readers, we should not introduce words from Latin.

In her digest of contributions to the EASE Forum in *ESE* 29(4), Elise Langdon-Neuner reported the debate about use of Latin in scientific texts, including my recommendation that writers should avoid all Latin expressions, including the abbreviations *ie* and *eg*. She queried how I would translate *in vivo* and *in vitro*. I would not try. Why? Because I judge these to have become accepted English terms, just as *bazaar* (from Persian and Turkish) and *anarchy* (from Greek) have been assimilated into our day-to-day English vocabulary.

The debating point that arises is: "When does a word cease to be seen as a borrowing from another language, and become accepted as 'standard' English, either general or technical?" A pragmatic answer (is *pragmatic* still Greek or is it now English?) might be: "When editors cease presenting the word in italics"; but acceptance is usually gradual, as we can see from the varying handling of *in vivo* and *in vitro* in current journals. No one can say precisely when assimilation has been completed.

In the Forum debate, I advocated avoiding *ie* and *eg*. Aren't those abbreviations universally understood by well-educated native speakers of English? Twenty years ago, I would have said "yes", but I would not say so now, because I have learned from experience that the education systems of the UK and the USA are producing professionally qualified people who do not know which expression means "that is" and which means "for example". Many have no idea what Latin words are represented by the abbreviations, and so have no means of reassuring themselves which would express the meaning they intend.

This is not a cry for a return to the teaching of Latin throughout our secondary-school system: it is a warning that writers who are confident that *they* know the conventionally accepted meaning of expressions such as *ie*, *eg*, *viz*, *de novo*, *per se*, and *a priori* should nonetheless not use them because there is a high likelihood that many readers will not understand them at all, or will take from them a meaning other than the writer intended.

I would warn, too, that a simple count of instances of Latin words appearing in a database or concordance is not a reliable indicator of their comprehensibility to the generality of scientific readers, or even to the limited audiences who read highly specialized journals. The fact that other writers use a Latin word in texts aimed at a specialist audience is no guarantee that all readers will take from it the meaning you intend.

For some time, I have been asking participants in my seminars what meaning they take from *de novo* in the following statements:

- Dr X presented results from a double-blind study of 157 *de novo* patients . . .
- The replacement of subunits X and Y by *de novo* synthesised Z ...
- PCP may result from *de novo* infection ...
- A further characteristic of plant cytokinesis *sensu stricto* is that a new cell domain is formed *de novo* among the . . .

Interpretations have been: "new", "newly", "renewed", "from scratch", and "primary". Most groups consist of 15–20 professionals from medicine or life sciences. I have never had unanimous agreement on the intended meanings of these examples. And most readers have never seen *sensu stricto* before.

The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* reports that *de novo* is used to mean "afresh", "from new", "starting again from the beginning". These interpretations cluster around the idea of newness, but they are not identical. I do not know what was intended by the expression *de novo* patients, or by a new cell domain being formed *de novo*. Do they both mean simply "new" (and is *de novo* redundant in the cell domain example)? Is *de novo* infection a new infection or a renewed infection? Does *de novo* synthesised Z imply something different from newly synthesised Z? I could get no help from the contexts.

Ask ten colleagues to write down what they understand by *a priori* in the following extracts (ask them to write down their interpretations, not just to mumble "Well it means sort of . . ."):

- The change is plotted against the *a priori* chance of a recurrent tumour . . .
- . . . state clearly the *a priori* hypothesis . . .
- . . . implies no such *a priori* expectation . . .

I should be surprised if your colleagues gave unanimous interpretations of each example, and even more surprised if the same interpretation was offered for all three examples.

This discussion is not about the use of necessary special terms for which no adequate familiar English vocabulary is available. The use of *de novo* and *a priori* does not enable the writers of the examples above to make statements that are more accurate or that will be interpreted more reliably than statements using everyday English terms. Quite the opposite.

As a long-standing member of the English-teaching profession, I am saddened to see many able young scientists struggling to match their scientific expertise with expertise in handling English. We have let them down. But we are where we are, so I urge writers and editors to remove all borrowings from Latin from their texts. To do so is not to "dumb

down" the statements we make. There must be no loss of scientific information in the process of communication. If specialist or unfamiliar vocabulary is needed for accurate communication, it must be used, and explained immediately, if necessary; but if there is a choice between everyday vocabulary familiar to all, and vocabulary that may cause difficulty for some, we

should choose the words that will make our information most widely accessible. We should avoid the temptation to use the difficult vocabulary to show that we are among the group that does understand it.

John Kirkman

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See response below. The editors would be glad to receive further views on this point — and if you come across examples of inaccurate or unnecessary or incomprehensible Latin, John Kirkman would be pleased to hear from you.

Correspondence

Nil by Latin?

John Kirkman says that knowledge of Latin is now so poor among UK and USA scientists that editors of scientific papers should rigorously excise phrases and abbreviations borrowed from Latin. The examples he gives make a strong case, but I would suggest they make a case for more careful editing, not for an absolute ban on the use of these phrases and abbreviations. He rather gives the game away when he replies to the question of what he would do about *in vitro* and *in vivo* by admitting that these "have become accepted English terms". I would argue that e.g. and i.e. are even more widely accepted and that all the other examples he quotes are sufficiently accepted for their use to be allowed — provided they are used correctly and do not introduce ambiguities. All of them can be

found in any good English dictionary, and their misuse is no more a reason for forbidding their use than would be the case for many genuinely English words that are often misused. I would suggest that all such Latin terms should be acceptable in English texts if they are included in English dictionaries and if they are used correctly. This is no excuse for their misuse, and I feel John Kirkman has a good point in drawing the attention of editors to cases where their use is ambiguous or meaningless. I just feel he has gone too far in saying that they should never be allowed at all.

John Glen

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Eponyms and italics

I was interested to read the notes on "Use of possessive form of eponyms and italics" and "Searching for the 's'" in the EASE-Forum digest (*European Science Editing*, February 2004, vol. 30(1), pp. 18–19). Readers of *ESE* might find the following additional information of value.

In terms of the history of editing practice over the last 20–30 years, the use of the possessive in names of eponymic diseases has mainly been a British English style (*Oxford dictionary for science writers and editors*, Oxford, 1991, p. 118; cf. RM Ritter, ed., *Oxford style manual*, Oxford, 2003, p. 373). The omission of the possessive in names of eponymic diseases is an American English style (Edward Huth, *Medical style and format*, Philadelphia, 1987, pp. 132–133; *American Medical Association manual of style*, 9th ed., Baltimore, 1998, p. 470–471).

Showing the increasing influence of the American practice, the *Oxford style manual* (2003) adds a supplementary note that "in medical use, British technical practice increasingly is to use bare surnames, so as to avoid the possessive's proprietary effect".

A historical note by the great authority on eponyms, Stanley Jablonski of the US National Library of Medicine, is given in the introduction to his *Dictionary of syndromes and eponymic diseases* (2nd ed., 1991, Mala-

bar, Florida: Krieger, p. viii–ix — based on his article 'Syndrome: le mot de jour' [*sic*] in *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 1991;39:342–346). Also of interest in connection with the topic is: Alvin E Rodin and Jack D Key, *Medicine, literature & eponyms: an encyclopedia of medical eponyms derived from literary characters* (1989, Malabar, Florida: Krieger).

Jablonski stated in 1991, "The use of the possessive form in eponyms has been criticized and it has been suggested that the nominative form is more appropriate. The campaign against the use of eponyms has resulted in a significant drop in the number of new syndromes being named after physicians, but the effort has been more than counterbalanced by the creation of new classes of eponyms. Authors are using biblical, mythological, and literary characters; patients' names; geographic locations; institutions; and subjects of famous paintings."

Part of Jablonski's *Dictionary of syndromes & eponymic diseases* has been available online since 1999 from the National Library of Medicine, in the "Online Multiple Congenital Anomaly/Mental Retardation (MCA/MR) Syndromes" database: (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/jablonski/syndrome_title.html).

My article "Medical eponyms: a checklist of special cases" appeared in the *Society of Freelance Editors and*

Proofreaders Newsletter no. 15, June 1990, p. 10–11. Any editors interested in receiving an updated PDF version of it are welcome to contact me (mjr@edntrans.com).

In my own editing work I am happy to use either the non-possessive form for clients publishing in American English, or the possessive form for UK and European clients using British English.

However, I am mystified by the objection that the possessive form in eponymic diseases suggests a “proprietary” effect. Could anyone really believe that Parkinson’s disease is the property of Parkinson, Inc., or that Tourette’s syndrome is the property of Tourette, plc? The notion that the eponym in an eponymic dis-

ease term might be “proprietary” seems intrinsically incoherent.

On the analogy of the Southern blot technique, originally developed by a biologist named EM Southern and followed by similar techniques that received the appellations “Northern blot” and “Western blot”, one might look forward to “Down syndrome” being followed by new conditions that would be termed “up syndrome” and “sideways syndrome”. Is there not an argument here that the possessive form “Down’s syndrome” is clearer?

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EASE survey and name

At last EASE is actually becoming active. I was so happy that EASE sent a membership and promotional survey, which is long overdue. Whoever implemented this survey gets top marks from me. I hope this survey will be sent to all members on a yearly basis.

If EASE really wants to increase membership numbers, then training workshops leading to professional accreditation are a must.

As an EMWA member, one of the high points for me is the annual conference. The education programme offered at EMWA is excellent, improving from conference to conference.

I personally believe that EASE and EMWA have a lot in common and that the powers above at EASE should begin to be more active in solidifying this.

On another note — I disagree with changing the name of EASE. I think this name is very good and catchy; but then again perhaps the executive committee of EASE should begin to market the association a bit better.

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Reports of meetings

Annual meeting of the Association of Earth Science Editors

1–5 November 2003; Seattle, Washington, USA

Seattle may not be the best place in the USA (meteorologically speaking) to go to in November, but AESE had decided — for practical reasons — to hold the annual meeting simultaneously with the Annual Conference of the Geological Society of America (GSA), so that participants could profit from both meetings. This approach saved AESE much organizational effort (registration was through GSA), but the registration fee was, as a consequence, higher than usual; the pros and cons of such an approach should, in my opinion, be weighed carefully.

Seattle was a bit chilly, indeed, but the start — with an excursion to Mount Rainier (a dormant volcano) — was pleasant enough. No heavy rains like those in Halifax at the AESE/ESE meeting in 2002, no streams to be crossed by foot; only some snow fields that had to be crossed because the normal paths were not all accessible. An earlier excursion point, on our way to Mount Rainier, had, however, suffered much more severely from Nature’s indomitable character: one of the paths to an excursion point had been eroded by a recent river flood. Most enlightening, because the excursion was

devoted mainly to natural hazards: How can their possible occurrence be recognized? How can problems (for instance as a result of a new eruption of Mount Rainier) be predicted? What measures can be taken to minimize the effects? and, How can all this be communicated to the public?

The meeting paid much attention to this communication aspect, which is becoming increasingly important in all hard sciences. The Sunday morning session was devoted to “Geoscience information/communication: challenges in geoscience publishing: perspectives of communicating geoscience to scientists and to the general public”. The afternoon session was about “Geohazards: informing the public”. More than 20 presentations emphasized how important it is for both science and society that researchers leave their “ivory tower”, and that science editors become aware that scientific data are important not just for the scientific community. It is noteworthy in this respect that the Monday afternoon session was largely devoted to a meeting with representatives of the National Park Service (NPS),

to discuss how science-editor organizations such as AESE can help the well-staffed NPS to make communication, particularly written communication, with the public more effective.

Many other topics, such as digital publishing techniques, were handled at the meeting. Electronic techniques allow data from several sources to be combined in one form (e.g. a map), which can then be easily updated. This is very helpful in producing up-to-date material on a regular and cost-effective basis but also means that correct referencing of all original sources (metadata) becomes increasingly problematic, if only because it becomes necessary to

delete references to sources that have themselves been deleted (each time material has been deleted a check should be made that other material from the same original source is still available).

In combination with the pleasant social events and the characteristic small-scale, friendly AESE atmosphere, the conference programme was most instructive and gave us a lot to think about. The possibility provided for numerous young editors to make an oral presentation also made the conference educational.

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The 5th Drug Information Association European workshop on medical/technical writing

12–13 February 2004; Paris, France

The members of The Drug Information Association (www.diahome.org) mainly work in the pharmaceutical industry, clinical research organizations or medical communications companies. The association's regular medical and technical writing workshops are therefore directed towards medical writers who are chiefly concerned with drafting marketing manuscripts and writing documents in support of drug licence applications to the regulatory authorities.

Session topics at this meeting included the role of the medical writer (in dealing with regulatory submissions, career development, establishing a medical communications group and as a freelancer); how to deal with data generated from clinical trials that incorporate measurement of health-related quality of life; the clinical trial protocol; the Common Technical Document, and post-submission medical writing activities.

There were two sessions of more interest for scientific journal editors. One was devoted to manuscripts for scientific journals. The first presentation in this session was on practical aspects of manuscript preparation. John Cobby, founder of a communications company in Toronto, stressed that the desired theme of the manuscript should be identified early in discussions with the client. The conclusions, which should be few and clear, often drive the manuscript and may be varied appropriately but scientific accuracy should be maintained at all times. He recommended that the choice of journal should be based on the number of articles per year, content of the articles, whether manuscripts are peer reviewed, the rate of acceptance, and average time from review to publication. The journal should be contacted to confirm style, content and time required to publication. John suggested that jargon and abbreviations be avoided as much as possible.

The second presentation was by Keith Dawes, a senior medical writer with a medical communications company in Germany, on the value of communication agencies in scientific publishing. He introduced the topic by emphasizing that publication of clinical

research findings in respected peer-reviewed journals is the ultimate basis for most treatment decisions. Hundreds of company-sponsored publications appear every month. He discussed the roles played by medical communications agencies when commissioned by the pharmaceutical industry to write scientific manuscripts. A core marketing component for a product is credible publications in scientific journals and each publication should be viewed as a tool for future marketing activities. Agencies can aid in developing key messages and communications policies for individual products and offer the main benefits of speed, experience and an appreciation of the pitfalls of scientific publishing. He admitted that at present there is limited transparency of the pharmaceutical industry's involvement in publications of manuscripts in scientific journals but stressed that ethical standards and scientific truth must be maintained.

The third presentation in the session was by Elise Langdon-Neuner and was on authorship, ghost writing and conflict of interest, covering recent changes in the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Scientific Journals (www.icmje.org). The question of who the authors are was posed and discontent with the Uniform Requirements was discussed. The publication in December 2003 of an article in *The Observer* entitled "Revealed: how drug firms 'hoodwink' medical journals" (http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,6903,1101680,00.html) formed the basis for discussing ghost authorship. The extreme views of ghost writing's total unacceptability by some journal editors and its unreserved acceptability by some marketeers in the pharmaceutical industry were highlighted. Ghost authorship is a problem and it needs to be resolved. To some extent listing authors' contributions is a move in this direction, if such lists are adhered to. Other suggestions are guidelines for medical writers in the pharma industry (e.g. *Good publication practice*), but they don't catch cheats. The suggestion of control through a professional body of

scientific writers/copy editors found support amongst medical writers, who felt they needed a backup within the industry. Why there should be a lack of transparency, even for traditional ghost writers of biographies, continues to be a ghost story.

In the session on the EU Clinical Trials Directive 2001/20/EU, Virginia Watson explained that this Directive has been introduced to simplify and harmonize the administration of clinical trials. Its emphasis is directed towards the protection of the human rights and dignity (as per the Declaration of Helsinki) of patients taking part in clinical research. It sets out standards for the protection of children and subjects incapable of giving informed consent. Ethics committees are also being brought under statutory legislation. The Directive removes some of the different national requirements

that exist, without restricting the discovery of new medicines. There will still be differences in the way clinical trials are conducted in different member states because the Directive has to be transposed into national legislation in each country. It applies to the 15 countries currently in the EU, the 10 countries joining on 1 May this year, and to Norway and Iceland, which have been included in EU registration procedures since 2000. The Directive is scheduled to come into force on 1 May 2004 but Virginia had her doubts that all countries, especially those acceding to the EU, would be ready for it by this date.

The Drug Information Association's web site is <http://www.diahome.org/docs/index.cfm>

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The Cochrane Library, 1988–2003

An article based on a talk given at

Editing and scientific "truth"

Eighth General Assembly and Conference of the European Association of Science Editors
8–11 June 2003; Bath, UK

As many of the systematic reviews now appearing in *The Cochrane library* were first published electronically in 1988, this seems likely to be the longest running electronic publication in the field of health care. Here we look at the evolution of this library as an electronic publication, and some of the features that set it apart from more traditional publications.

A letter to *The Lancet* in August 1986 applauded the editor's decision to include a "lengthy tailpiece" putting in context the results of the very large ISIS-1 trial. The letter acknowledged that this was difficult to do in a print journal, and noted the advantages that electronic publication had to offer. Space is limited in printed journals; consequently the amount of detail that can be included in the background and methods sections, as well as in the presentation of results, is restricted. Recognition that the electronic world was not limited in this way allowed people to consider new approaches to presenting and summarizing of research evidence. One such approach was *The Oxford database of perinatal trials (ODPT)*. Published in 1988, this was the first electronic publication to present regularly updated systematic reviews of research on the effects of health care.

ODPT was one of a trio of complementary products to emerge from the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit. These products included the two-volume reference work *Effective care in pregnancy and childbirth*, and a paperback, reader-friendly version, *A guide to effective care in pregnancy and childbirth*. ODPT, conceptualized as a publication in its own right, was a valuable addition to the printed work. It had several advantages, not the least of which was that the systematic reviews could be maintained and updated after the books had gone to print.

By 1992, many policy makers, practitioners, and consumers had come to recognize the importance of systematic reviews for making decisions about health care. This time was also marked by the rapid emergence of computer technology, and access to desktop computers was becoming commonplace. At this point Update Software redesigned ODPT in an attempt to bring the systematic reviews to the forefront, and, in April 1993, released the revamped product as *The Cochrane pregnancy and childbirth database (CCPC)*.

The development of CCPC coincided with the opening of the UK Cochrane Centre and the emergence of the Cochrane Collaboration, and served as a pilot to show how Cochrane reviews in all areas of healthcare could be published electronically. The pilot proved successful, and within 2 years the database had evolved into a new CD-ROM publication, *The Cochrane database of systematic reviews (CDSR)*.

The Cochrane Collaboration was, and continues to be, a loose-knit organization. The CDSR provided a means of communication among those interested in the work of the Collaboration, as well as an outlet for that work. It facilitated the editorial processes used to promote quality in Cochrane reviews. The CD-ROM included the contact details for all groups in the Collaboration, the Reviewer's Handbook, titles of planned reviews, and protocols for reviews in preparation. CDSR continued the tradition where authors retained copyright and were encouraged to publish articles in print journals based on the reviews held in electronic form. In keeping with the spirit of Collaboration, and as an incentive to publish, each author was given a complimentary subscription to the CD-ROM.

It was clear from the start of the Cochrane Collaboration that it would be many years before the majority of reliable research studies assessing the effects of healthcare interventions could be placed in the context of a systematic review. It was also clear that the Cochrane Collaboration was not the only group producing high-quality reviews. In 1995, Update Software convened an advisory group that recommended creating a library of information sources to inform decision-making and to help in the production of systematic reviews. Thus it was that, in April 1996, Update Software presented the first issue of *The Cochrane library*, which included a hierarchy of evidence, ranging from regularly updated reviews to high-quality reviews published elsewhere and reports of individual controlled trials.

By 2003, Cochrane reviews were available from most major information providers, and open access over the internet was provided in several countries. *The Cochrane library* was also freely available throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and to all low- and low-middle income countries. Although no longer unique, Cochrane reviews remain distinctive because their electronic publication allows two key features that are difficult to achieve with traditional print media:

- (1) because there are no practical constraints on space, reviews published electronically can include more transparently details of background, materials and methods, data presentation and analysis.
- (2) reviews published electronically can be updated as new information becomes available and when mistakes or other ways of improving them are identified. This makes it possible to produce a reference work that is continually improving in content and quality.

The Cochrane library differs from traditional publications in that it was conceived as an electronic publication from the outset, and was designed to take

advantage of features unique to electronic publishing. It illustrates how electronic publication can help to improve the quality and relevance of published reports of scientific information. Quality and relevance of Cochrane reviews are promoted in ways that differ quite radically from more traditional arrangements for scientific publishing (see www.cochrane.de for details). Titles of proposed reviews are submitted for editorial approval to avoid duplication of effort within the Cochrane Collaboration, and to ensure that a clear question will be addressed. Bibliographic support for those preparing Cochrane reviews is provided by the editorial base with which the review title has been registered, and methodological support is available through the *Cochrane reviewers' handbook*, review management software, and training workshops. After editorial and external assessment, detailed protocols for Cochrane reviews are published, and are thus open to worldwide assessment; and when full versions of the reviews have been prepared, they undergo the same pre-publication and post-publication assessment. This whole process is informed by a programme of Cochrane reviews of empirical methodological research, including research on the effects of peer review and editing. In these ways, Cochrane reviews and *The Cochrane library* as a whole have helped and should continue to help ensure that healthcare interventions do more good than harm.

For a more complete account, see *The evolution of the Cochrane library, 1988–2003*, at www.update-software.com/history/clibhist.htm

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EASE-Forum digest: January–March 2004

Neglectable

The forum kicked off with a question I raised. My Austrian German-speaking authors have taken a great liking to the word “neglectable”. One even looked blankly at me when I mentioned “negligible” and told me at school he had learnt that the correct word was “neglectable”. I asked the forum whether the use of this word to mean “negligible” was an acceptable Europeanization of the English language. Alternatively it could be a reversion because “neglectable” is listed in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* as an old-fashioned word for “negligible”. Zayd Abdulla provided evidence of German-speakers' penchant for the word by putting it to the Google test: 79 entries were listed for neglectable on “site:uk” compared with 53 400 for negligible, but there were 682 on “site:de” compared with 24 800 for negligible. On the other hand Julian Phillips has been working in Germany for 11 years and had never come across it. Perhaps the Austrians are responsible for the hits on “site:de”. Hugh de Glanville couldn't help feeling that

any move to resurrect “neglectable” is highly neglectable today. Timothy DeVinney thought the word might do quite nicely if your objective was to startle and confuse your readers, who were likely to think that it referred to something that could be neglected rather than something that is insignificant. He added that the journal articles he should have been editing were neglectable for the moment because the deadline for submitting them was not near, but they were not negligible because they provided him with an important source of income.

Eutrophy and census: nouns turned verbs?

Terry Forster, who works with government publications and international reports at the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, wrote that one of her authors insisted that ornithologists use census as a verb. Until that point she had changed such sentences as “We censused the populations” to “counted” or “conducted a census”. She wondered whether use of census as a verb was acceptable in

scientific journals. A second noun she had found being turned into a verb was eutrophy or eutrophicate. She suspected this might be a problem of translation from Finnish and Swedish. She had also found the text, "In the case of the Baltic Sea these eutrophying nutrients are . . ." on a German web page. Angela Turner from *Animal Behaviour* confirmed that ornithologists census populations and that the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* lists eutrophicate as a verb. A useful contribution was made by Joy Burrough, who advised that Liverpool University's web concordance engine, Webcorp, can be used to check whether a term is being used by Anglophone scientists (www.webcorp.org.uk) but warned that it will turn up sites with non-native English or even incorrect native speakers. She would, though, have no hesitation in using "eutrophying" because she had found some reliable hits from US science sites.

US embargo on articles from the "axis of evil"

Reme Melero drew the forum's attention to a ban on scientific publications for authors from countries for which the USA has declared a trade embargo (see News Notes section). The embargo penalizes publishers who print scientific papers from authors residing in Libya, Iran, Iraq, Sudan or Cuba. Among others the American Chemical Society, which had received 195 manuscripts from the banned countries, had ignored this ruling, but with the current policy under President Bush moving towards enforcement a meeting of science publishers had been held to discuss how freedom of scientific publication can be guaranteed. A petition in support of the publishers could be signed at www.PetitionOnline.com/PWC/. An article published in *The Scientist* on 2 March 2004 summarized the OFAC and IEEE's process about the embargo (www.biomedcentral.com/news/20040302/04) and gave some interesting links, such as the letter sent by the Department of the Treasury in response to IEEE queries concerning publishing activities (www.ieee.org/portal/cms_docs/about/dept_treasury.pdf).

Dilemmas for authors and editors writing for their own journals

Margaret Cooter posed the following theoretical dilemma: "If freelancers working for a journal take on other work that leads them to rewrite a paper that has been rejected by that journal, (1) could they, if the paper were then resubmitted and accepted, be listed as contributors, and (2) if so would they have to declare a competing interest? Or would that be downright unethical?"

Marie-Lousie Desbarats-Schönbaum, who had experience of this problem, asked whether "resubmitted" implied that the paper was sent to the journal that had rejected it or a new one. She doubted that the mandates she received to make text more readable without adding or removing data fitted the definition of authorship. Margaret explained that the article would be submitted to the same journal for an appeal or resubmission and be reworked in line with the referees' suggestions. The authors might add new data but the freelance writer would be doing whatever authors'

editors do. She highlighted the fact that acknowledgement as a contributor was not the same as being an author. Contributorship is intended to cover those who contribute to the planning, carrying out and reporting of the work but do not necessarily fulfil all three criteria of authorship of the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (www.icmje.org). A person who did the literature search on which a systematic review was based could be included as a contributor; so could authors' editors in most cases when they have made a substantial contribution. She re-posed her question, asking: "Is it a conflict of interest if the freelance/author's editor works up the paper in a way that they know will help improve its chances of publication and their re-employment by these authors for the next paper? Or are they just rendering a service?"

Will Hughes asked whether Margaret's dilemma was different from an academic editor writing in his or her own journal. Margaret replied that at the *BMJ* when members of staff are involved, the assessment and peer review are carried out entirely by external advisers. Such a submission would be handled by a different scientific editor at the *Journal of Glaciology*, John Glen explained. Angela Turner's journal uses the normal peer review process in such instances. If the editor was widely published Angela did not think this was a problem, unless an editor published only in his or her journal. Will Hughes wrote that he and his co-editor had assessed each other's papers and they were nearly always rejected. He pointed out that anyone reviewing a curriculum vitae always assumed that the authors had taken advantage of their position and he advised against submitting papers to your own journal.

Timothy DeVinney saw Margaret's question as relating to something a little different, namely freelance copy editors who work on the same paper at different stages, first for the author before submission and then for the journal after the paper has been accepted. He saw no conflict of interest, as freelance copy editors, authors and the journal all had a common interest in the quality of the paper and moving it towards publication.

Seeing patients' photographs: an ethical problem?

Mary Ellen Kerans said she had been able to see a full-face photograph of a patient in a case report submitted on PDF because the rectangle across the eyes did not catch up when she scrolled fast down the document. She asked how much this mattered.

Requests to complete questionnaires and comment on draft codes of conduct

Sally Morris from the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers asked subscribers to make comments and suggestions on a Code of Practice for publishers' provision of pharmaceutical companies' use of e-content (www.alpsp.org/e-contentpharma.htm). In a separate mailing she asked subscribers to complete a survey on open

access, which has been causing concerns to societies (www.alpsp.org/2004pdfs/NFPsurvey190204.pdf).

Peter Chambers, a final year student at Loughborough University, UK, studying problems with the peer review system, asked subscribers to fill in a questionnaire. He received a total of 13 completed questionnaires from the EASE and other forums.

[I would be grateful if subscribers would let me know whether they have any objections to such requests being placed on the forum. E L-N.]

Joining the forum

You can join the Forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Do not include a subject line or signature or any text. To stop receiving messages from the forum, send the message "unsubscribe ease-forum" to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Once you have joined, you should send messages for the forum to ease.forum@helsinki.fi. Please keep messages short. If you reply to someone else's message, make sure to delete those parts of the original message

that are not essential for understanding your response. To keep other forum participants informed, check that your reply (or a copy of it) is sent to ease.forum@helsinki.fi. If your e-mail software has a "reply to all" possibility, this will probably do the job. Do not use the "reply to" or "reply to sender" facility unless your message is intended for the original sender only.

Anyone who loses contact with the forum, or is unable to establish a new subscription, will be able to find information on the EASE web site (www.ease.org.uk).

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From the literature

Unscientific biases in peer review

Last autumn *Nature* admitted that it had made a few mistakes in its time [1]. The urge to confess apparently became unbearable in the light of *Nature's* coverage of the 2003 Nobel Prizes and the evidence gathered by Spanish physicist and journalologist Juan Miguel Campanario [2]. What led this journal to an admission of "unarguable *faux pas*" in its past? It transpires that *Nature* had let slip several chances to publish research that was later to earn the Nobel Prize.

Nature showed good sense in admitting that its peer review process has not always successfully identified significant new work, but it is not the only journal to have made "historical misjudgements". Campanario has compiled an extensive list of rejections and criticisms of manuscripts reporting Nobel-quality breakthroughs. By rejecting manuscripts or requiring authors to enter protracted disputes with reviewers and editors, these journals may have delayed scientific progress.

These instances of inappropriate rejection, however, are an inevitable outcome of peer review, and may also reflect the resistance of the scientific community to change. (Apparently, Fleming's discovery of penicillin was ignored for some time despite publication.) Researchers with truly novel insights are likely to have few intellectual peers when they submit their ground-breaking manuscripts, so the number of experts able to comprehend and offer a constructive critique of such new or unorthodox ideas probably approaches zero. Most of the Nobel-related cases Campanario has analysed seem to reflect disbelief in the new information, either because the reviewers were unable to comprehend it or simply because of their resistance to anything new. His web site offers

illuminating quotes from editorial correspondence and reactions from unhappy authors.

Dissatisfaction with the peer review process might be mitigated if journals became more open about the criteria they use to decide what is publishable. The canonical cornerstone of quality control — the peer review process itself — remains a black box in many significant ways. What can journals do to make their criteria more transparent to potential Nobel Prize candidates and other authors?

1. Spell out the roles of reviewers and editors in deciding the manuscript's fate, as recommended in section II.C of the recently updated Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals [3]. It is important to make clear whether the reviews will weigh decisively in the final outcome, or whether the editor will use the reports as one among several factors to be considered in reaching a decision.
2. Don't allege "insufficient priority" as the reason for rejecting an otherwise acceptable manuscript if you aren't able to define "priority". The priority criterion seems to have become fashionable recently, but if editors don't explain how they judge it, alleging "lack of priority" might inspire unhelpful speculation about the editor's gate-keeping skills. If the "priority" criterion means that the final cut between equally worthy manuscripts is made on the basis of factors unrelated to scientific content, authors have the right to know what these factors are. For example, a recent analysis of the research assessment exercises in the United Kingdom [4] noted that editors of British journals may be pressured to give prior-

ity to submissions from UK authors as the census date for the exercise looms. This might lower the chances of acceptance for non-UK authors during research assessment years. *Nature* also, famously, missed the chance to publish the first report of the citric acid cycle because it had a backlog of letters and would only consider it after the congestion was cleared, so Krebs took his work elsewhere.

3. In these times of diminishing resources, not all journals can afford to provide copy-editing for manuscripts. As a result, quality of the writing or editing seems to be increasingly important in the final choice between manuscripts of equal scientific merit but requiring different investments in technical editing. Authors have a right to know whether their chances of publication will be influenced by their use or misuse of the English language.

The manuscript selection process will never be 100% error-free, although it may help keep redundant, inadequately documented, or overly specialised material from being added to the already massive (and mostly unread) literature. However, it could be freed of some of the criticisms it receives if it were taken out of its black box. Making explicit as many criteria and potential sources of bias as possible may help authors

to choose their first choice journal more appropriately. In the long run this may save authors, the journal's staff and external reviewers considerable wasted effort on rejected manuscripts—effort which now overburdens the journal publication system and makes prompt, constructive, competent reviews increasingly difficult to obtain.

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Book reviews

Lynne Truss. 2003. **Eats, shoots & leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation.** London: Profile Books Ltd. x + 209 p. Hardbound. £9.99. ISBN 1-86197-612-7.

Just before Christmas 2003 this book on punctuation appeared as the No. 1 best-seller on the Amazon.co.uk chart. This surely calls for some explanation. How has Lynne Truss managed to write a book which brings a subject dear to the hearts of many editors into such a position? One answer must be the catchy title. As she explains on the dust-jacket, a panda walks into a cafe. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air. "Why?" asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes for the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder. "I'm a panda," he says, "look it up." I don't think I need to complete the story here.

Truss reproduces many other examples of the unfortunate, and often hilarious, effects of bad punctuation. The book has had almost uniformly favourable reviews: "as much an argument for clear thinking as it is a pedantic defence of obsolete conventions of written language" wrote Nigel Williams in *The Observer*. In the *Sunday Times*, John Humphrys not only published a very favourable review but also, later, published an article ridiculing the negative column on Truss's book by Rod Liddle in *The Times* on behalf of the self-styled Anti Pedant League. Truss in fact denies she is writing a book that instructs about punctuation; instead she claims to "give you permission to love punctuation". "It's about how we got the punctuation we have today; how such a tiny but adaptable system of marks allows

us to notate most (but not all) types of verbal expression."

The book does indeed include a valuable account of the history of the development of the marks we use today, and of the slow evolution in how they are used, but beyond this it lays out in a useful and attractive fashion the principal rules for the use of current marks as well as discussing the effect of new modes of communication such as e-mail and text messaging. It may be comforting to copy editors to note that in her acknowledgements the author includes: "Learned copy-editors have attempted to sort out my commas and save me from embarrassment. I thank them very much." (Would that all authors gave such acknowledgement!)

To summarize, this is not only a very readable and amusing book (its back dust-jacket descriptor classes it as Reference/Humour), it also should result in its large readership being much better informed about how to use punctuation marks — and might just help improve the papers which editors receive from authors! It would certainly be a good book to recommend to an author who has serious failures in this department. When I wrote my first draft of my first paper, my research supervisor returned it to me unmarked but with a copy of Ernest Gowers's *Plain words* on top. It would be more fun than Gowers but could make its point just as well.

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George M Hall (ed.). 2003. **How to write a paper**, 3rd ed. London: BMJ Publishing Group. 176 + ix p. Paperback. GBP16.95. ISBN 0-7279-1728-5.

I have been praising and recommending this book widely ever since I saw the first edition. This extended, revised, third edition deserves just as much praise and recommendation. If only we could make purchase of a copy, and successful performance in a test on its contents, prerequisites for entry into every PhD programme! The writing of embryo scientists should then improve, and so should the advice given by their supervisors, who also would be obliged to read the book in order to be able to assess performance in the test on content.

The book is about writing: but we get added value from the contributors' implicit and explicit advice on how to be a competent professional scientist. Time and again they emphasize the importance of careful planning not only of writing but also of the design and conduct of a study.

Wisdom derived from experience rings out from every page. The first chapter is an overview by the book's editor, George Hall, of the key qualities of a scientific paper. I silently cheered his golden rule that only relevant, published references should be listed: "The citation of large numbers of references is an indicator of insecurity — not of scholarship".

Hall's overview is followed by separate chapters discussing tactics for each of the usual sections in an IMRAD structure — introduction, methods, results, and discussion — and valuable advice on titles, abstracts, and references. Richard Smith warns that there is no "one-fits-all" structure for reports, and gives useful references to guidelines for randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, economic evaluations, and tests on diagnostic methods.

Current concerns over who should be listed as an "author" and the ethics of publication are helpfully

summarized and evaluated, and there are separate chapters on tactics for case reports, reviews, letters, and the preparation of abstracts for meetings. Two chapters extend the information and advice given in previous editions on electronic publishing. Newcomers to scientific publishing will benefit from accounts of who does what behind the titles "editor", "manuscript assessor", and "publisher", and there is a succinct but well focused chapter on writing style and house style.

Any flaws? Well, I dislike BMJ Publishing Group's apparent fascination with boxes. The idea, according to the sales letter that came with the book, is that all major points are summarized in boxes. That may be helpful to readers skimming through large-format journals, but for readers trying to follow a narrative in a small-format book arrival at a bracket announcing that some information is provided elsewhere is confusing. Should I leave the text, read the box, and then hope to find my place in the narrative again easily (especially difficult when the box is not on the same page or the facing page, as is sometimes the case in this book) or should I continue, and read the box later? Am I expected to behave differently when I arrive at a bracket saying simply (Box *n*) from when I arrive at a box saying (see Box *n*)? Sometimes boxes contain material that is not mentioned in the text, and sometimes the text discusses material that is repeated in boxes. Sometimes boxes are not referred to in the text at all. When am I supposed to read them?

This criticism should not deter you from buying this book. At GBP16.95 it is expensive, but try to find the money, because it's worth it.

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Yateendra Joshi. 2003. **Communicating in style**. New Delhi: The Energy and Resources Institute. viii+250 pages. Paperback. INR300.00, GBP7.50, USD12.00. ISBN 81-7993-016-5.

Many books on "how to write" exist but this is a remarkable one — not only because the author is an EASE member, not only because it deals with written and other types of communication, and not only because it is aimed at both a professional and a non-professional readership. The book is also, as far as I am aware, the only one of its kind that devotes each left-hand page to practical examples (in the form of line drawings, photographs, and quotations) that illustrate the text on the right-hand page. The adage that one good picture can tell more than a page of text finds its definite proof here.

Books on "how to write" commonly show the author's personal preferences: do this and don't do that. Joshi avoids this in most cases, indicating what options are available, and informing the reader about the advantages and disadvantages, as he sees them, of each option. This approach has in itself advantages and disadvantages: it gives readers the chance to choose a style or format that suits them best, but it also may be confusing for unexperienced authors: how

does one choose between the alternatives? In this context, it should be kept in mind that the readers envisaged are scientists preparing a research paper, postgraduate students writing a thesis, officials putting together a report, managers planning a presentation, and publishers developing a volume of conference proceedings. Professional editors are not among the target group, but they will nevertheless find much information here. Obviously, much of this information is (or will become) available to EASE members in the form of the *Science editors' handbook*, but the book by Joshi has the advantage of a handsome size and a limited number of much-discussed topics.

These topics are grouped into 13 chapters (ranging from style for effective communication to effective letters, faxes and e-mails) and four annexes with practical information (from authority for spellings to e-mail addresses and telephone numbers). Much of the material is essential for EASE members; other material is much less so. In general, however, all

chapters contain information that is worth reading, if only because Joshi has an elegant and pleasant style of writing and pays attention to points that are not always considered by professional editors. Obviously, Joshi was forced to make choices every now and then when advising how to handle a specific problem. I do not always agree with his choices and they are sometimes contradictory to those in our Handbook; this is understandable since Joshi's book was written when the EASE Handbook still had only a few chapters available.

On the other hand, it is a pity that Joshi has overlooked some recent developments. Not only does he refer to *European Science Editing* as a bulletin instead of a journal, but he also refers to the *BMJ* (what a horrible name for a journal this is!) as the *British Medical Journal*. There are a few more such examples. Possibly this can be attributed to the fact that the book is strongly focused on India (as is obvious in many places in the book); it is, in fact, the result of the metamorphosis from a style guide for in-house use at The Energy and

Resources Institute (TERI) in New Delhi into a handbook for more general use.

There are few shortcomings in the book. The cover is the most obvious one: it does not show the author's name, the front contains some kind of "list" which is not consistent with Joshi's suggestions about its presentation, and it shows some kind of footman carrying in a couple of style guides, thus giving the impression that the present book is meant for communication between "elite" people. The title of the book does the same, which is unfortunate, misleading, and probably hampering the wide distribution that the book deserves. With respect to shortcomings in the contents of the book: the quality of photographs could (and should) have been much better. For the rest: find out for yourself. This remarkable book is worth its price, and should be considered a useful companion for EASE members.

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News from the Programme Committee

Refreshed from Bath — heading for Kraków culture

Why Kraków? Why Poland?

Starting with this issue of *European Science Editing*, the Programme Committee for the 9th EASE Conference, **The culture of science editing**, will keep you informed about what you can expect at the 2006 conference. Most EASE members already know that at the last General Assembly at our conference in Bath in June 2003, it was announced that the next conference will take place in Kraków, the previous administrative capital — and still cultural capital — of Poland.

Why Kraków, why Poland? It appears that few EASE members are aware of a tradition that has evolved over the years with respect to preparing for our triennial conferences, one that has proved to be very successful: the immediate past-president often becomes Chairman of the Programme Committee for the next triennial conference and, generally, the choice of venue is located in the "home" country of the new chairman. In my case, it was difficult to decide which country this should be: I'm Dutch, but I've just moved to Spain, and I have just become a professor of geology in Poland. EASE has already held a meeting in The Netherlands (Maastricht) and Barcelona is a wonderful venue for our Annual General Meetings (next on 7 May), so eastern Europe was left open for more exploration by EASE and Poland became a logical choice of venue. The most

appropriate location in Poland for such a purpose is, beyond any doubt, the historical city of Kraków, not only because of its rich cultural history, its high-ranking university (the Jagellonian University, founded by King Casimir the Great on 12 May 1364) and its beautifully restored old city centre, but also because of its easy access by air from many countries and its wonderful surroundings (with the High Tatra mountains not far away). Also, the Jagellonian University has a great reputation regarding the housing of international conferences.

The conference will start on the afternoon of Thursday, 15 June 2006, following the 9th General Assembly, and end on Sunday, 18 June 2006. **Note those dates (15–18 June 2006) in your diary.** Keep in mind, too, that optional courses will probably be given on the days before or after the conference and that a wide variety of optional pre- and post-conference trips are already under consideration. More details will follow in the next issue of *ESE*. So stay tuned — the conference promises to be exciting.

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