
The Write Stuff

The Journal of the European Medical Writers Association

Editing and Writing



EMWA 14th Annual Conference



17-21 May 2005, Malta

The Executive Committee would like to announce that the venue and dates for EMWA's 14th annual conference have been fixed. The venue will be The Westin Dragonara Resort in the St Julian's region of Malta and the conference will be held from 17 to 21 May 2005.

This conference will see the launch of our advanced curriculum, so it's definitely not one to miss.

Hope to see you there!

Michelle Derbyshire
EMWA Vice President and Conference Manager

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Perhaps you have never worked in the profession but would like to know how to join it. The tips in this article for aspiring medical writers are a help to the old chestnuts too and you can also read about the first graduate programme for medical writers, which is of particular interest in the continuing discussion of educating medical writers.

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More and more words have more and more meanings. Less and less words will make do. As editors and writers we are the beacons in a sea of impoverished vocabulary. Sometimes a compulsion overcomes us, we feel overwhelmed with sympathy for a mistreated word, angered whenever we see it belied and are moved to champion its cause. Read Stephen's passionate treatise of the word 'gender'.

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How many times have you read that jargon is to be avoided? This article takes a closer look at jargon and its evolution and presents arguments in its favour.

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If you were confused by Joy Burrough-Boenish's subparagraphing in 'A Bit of Culture' in the last issue of TWS it's because the typesetting failed to illustrate her explanation. This erratum sets the record straight and also debates the cultural of the subparagraph.

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The second part of the article 'The Art of Counting Infinity' by Rudolf Taschner published in Vol. 13, No. 2, 2004 will be published in the next issue of TWS.

[INT] - this symbol indicates that the article will be published on the EMWA internet site: www.emwa.org

Journal Insights

The Write Stuff is the official publication of the European Medical Writers Association. It is issued 3 times a year and aims to provide EMWA members with relevant, informative and interesting articles and news addressing issues relating to the broad arena of medical writing. We are open to contributions from anyone whose ideas can complement these aims.

Articles or ideas should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief (see back cover) or another member of the Editorial Board.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are included in EMWA membership fees. Non-members can subscribe at an annual rate of:

- €35 within Europe
- €50 outside Europe

Instructions for Contributors

- **The Write Stuff** typically publishes articles of 500 - 1500 words although longer pieces or those with tables or graphics will be considered.
- All articles are subject to editing and revision by the Editorial Board. Any changes will be discussed with the author before publication.
- Submissions should include the full address of the author, including the telephone and fax numbers and email address. Suitable quotes for side boxes can be indicated or they can be selected by the Editorial Board.
- Material should be submitted electronically on computer diskette or by email as an MS Word file using Arial font (or equivalent), 11 point size, and single spacing.
- Published articles generally include a recent photograph of the author (portrait picture, CV or passport style).

Back Issues

Subject to availability, previous issues of **The Write Stuff** can be obtained for the cost of mailing by contacting the EMWA Head Office (see back cover for address).

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From the Editor's Desk: Editing and Writing

by Elise Langdon-Neuner

Editing and writing are the common threads that hold EMWA together. Wherever in the world members work, from whichever of the diverse backgrounds of medical writers we come and whichever of the tasks that melt into medical writing we do, all of us write or edit in the course of our job.

The scene is set by Maeve O'Connor who is a well-known editor in European science editing. She began her career in the days when the typewriter pictured on the cover typified the profession and has stuck with the job to experience 50 years of change in the field. Stephen de Looze and Paul Woolley in their articles also let slip a bit of nostalgia with recollections- perhaps not so fond- of their school days. Meanwhile Susanna Dodgson brings us sharply up to date with tips on entering the present-day profession. She writes about a graduate programme for medical writers, which is of particular interest in the continuing discussion of educating medical writers. Diana Epstein also tackles the question of accreditation of medical writers in her regular opinion feature. Once we are in the profession what do we need to do to prove to the outside world that we are medical writers?

Ultimately words are the fundament of both writing and editing. Only recently did it dawned on me that thinking 'Alice in Wonderland' was a lot of nonsense has robbed me of some riches.

'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on. 'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'At least- at least I mean what I say- that's the same thing, you know.' 'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'Why, you might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see!"' (Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865, ch 7).

The essence of writing and editing is ensuring that words and sentences mean and are understood to mean what they are intended to convey. But just taking the words for starters, here we have one of our greatest problems. Opinions differ as to what words mean and it does not help to quote a dictionary or book on English usage. They are only written by humans with the same different opinions again. Not to mention that new words are constantly coming into use. The Oxford Dictionary Online adds at least 1,000 new words every 3 months. But I still find words in manuscripts that are not in any English dictionary online or off. If my wordrobe (a collection of new words on a site created by English students at Rice University <http://www.owl.net.rice.edu>) fails me my next step is to make a general search of the Internet. One search I made was of words I encountered in a manuscript sent from Spain. The words I did not know were *worsement*, *enviue*, *morbi-mortality*, *especulate* and *evolutionated*. Hurrah, I found some of these words in the Internet. Alas that turned out to be no verification when I noticed they only appeared in English text written by Spanish native speakers.

Random House Webster's College Dictionary has established a reputation for capturing new words faster than any other dictionary. One of its coups was 'genetic code' in the 1960s. But most new words are failures. Even in America the new words selected by the American Dialect Society as deserving of recognition sometimes fail the dictionary entry test, e.g. *bushlips* (for insincere political rhetoric- but perhaps this is in with a second chance) chosen as the word of the year in 1990, and millennium bug chosen in 1997.

From the Editor's Desk

Although in science new words are often created for a specific reason, Allan Metcalf in his book *Predicting New Words* debunks the myth that words generally come into being to fill gaps in our vocabulary. This book was reviewed by Michael Quinion whose website (<http://www.worldwidewords.org>) is another good source for clarifying words.

To me it seems that often people find it easier to hijack a familiar word and extend its meaning rather than look for a word with that precise meaning that is already in the dictionary. The word 'gender' is perhaps just such an example of wanton use of a word that has resulted in falsehoods and anguish as Stephen de Looze expounds upon in his article 'All Gendered Up'. Then there are the words of secret societies where only some are in the know. Who needs to understand what is written? Paul Woolley argues in his Jargonaut article that jargon has a valuable place in scientific writing.

The words are finally written, the print is set. One lifeline of the editor's work is routing out mistakes in proofs. Sometimes errors nevertheless crop up in print and need to be corrected and explained. A misunderstanding is an opportunity for clarification along the lines that mistakes are to be learned from. The mistake made in Joy Burrough-Boenish's article in the last issue has provided an opportunity to explain and discuss subparaphrasing in this issue.

As well as a salutary learning exercise mistakes can provide those precious windows of amusement and chuckles we all need during our working day. Every time I read the title 'President's Message' I think of a publishing production manager's tale of how he valiantly saved the day by correcting the president of a biomedical society journal from giving a 'Presidential Massage' in the inaugural issue of the society's journal. My own journal, *The Journal of Men's Health and Gender*, from Elsevier went on line with a picture of a mouse with the name of our editor-in-chief underneath it. The caption should have read 'Kaguya, mouse without a father' but this caption appeared under the photo of the editor-in-chief. If you regularly check the financial message board (<http://finance.messages.yahoo.com>) for the status of your favourite pharmaceutical company you might have read in March this year that 'Abbott was also in term oil'.

Gradually changes are being made to *The Write Stuff*. These need to be specifically mentioned lest they steal in unnoticed under the cover of darkness. The first change is not to be overseen. The paper the journal is printed on has been reduced in weight and thereby postage costs have been spared. The expenses saved are being used to introduce full colour on the cover and limited colour on the inside pages. A more subtle change is the omission of postal addresses. If anyone wishes to contact an author and is not able to do so by email I would be happy to set up the contact.

To help us keep up with the meanings of words, acceptable jargon and also as a venue for venting frustrations over the misuse of words a section is going to be added to the Write Stuff for short articles (up to 500 words) about words. Your ideas and contributions are welcome. And if you have any amusing mistakes to share it would be fun if you can send them to Write Stuff for inclusion in a filler box.

Some people have said that they would prefer not to have author's photographs in the journal. Up until now authors have been cajoled into providing a portrait photograph to be printed with their article. Please let me have your views about this and any other suggestions you might have. The journal is for you.

Elise Langdon-Neuner
Editor-in-Chief
langdoe@baxter.com



Message from the President

by Adam Jacobs

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the EMWA conference in May 2005, we will be asking members to vote for what sounds at first like a rather alarming motion. We will ask you to vote to wind up EMWA. If the motion is passed, EMWA will cease to exist.

Now don't panic. It's not what it sounds. I'm writing this article on the plane on the way back from EMWA's Head Office in Switzerland, where I spent the day finalising and signing the paperwork necessary to create a new organisation, based in Switzerland, which just happens to be known as the European Medical Writers Association. If all goes according to plan, all members of the existing (but soon to be defunct) EMWA will automatically become members of the new, Swiss-registered EMWA, and the net effect should be that no one really notices much difference. You'll still receive *The Write Stuff*, you'll still be able to come to two conferences each year, and you'll still be able to work towards the EMWA Professional Development Certificate. All that will have changed is the legal status of EMWA.

So why are we bothering with these seemingly drastic changes? Well, first of all, I'm sure you all know that since last year EMWA has been run from an office in Switzerland. Having EMWA registered as a Swiss company will simplify much of the administration that goes on behind the scenes. EMWA members will not see much difference, but the work of Head Office will become more streamlined: one example of this is that bank payments will be processed more quickly, but there are many others.

I believe that there are also other advantages to the new organisation. The new constitution is simpler than the existing one, which will make it easier for future EMWA Executive Committees to understand their obligations. More importantly, it makes it particularly clear that EMWA is run for the benefit of, and is ultimately accountable to, its members. EMWA members will be asked to vote on various matters of EMWA business at each AGM from next year onwards that you have not been used to voting on before. You may think that the Executive Committee runs EMWA (and, of course, in day to day matters, we do), but the new constitution makes it clear that you, the members, have the final say in how EMWA is run.

I know that many of you consider that attending the AGM is an optional extra, and that you would probably rather spend the morning seeing the sights of Malta. But please do make the effort to be there if you possibly can. We will be voting on some important decisions that will shape the future of EMWA. Remember that EMWA belongs to you, the members, and it is up to you to decide what you want EMWA to be.

Adam Jacobs

Dianthus Medical Limited
London, UK
ajacobs@dianthus.co.uk
Web: www.dianthus.co.uk



Copy-editing in Science: a Life?

by Maeve O'Connor

Copy-editing in science has been my livelihood for nearly 50 years now. For the first 30 I was a copy editor at the Ciba Foundation (now the Novartis Foundation) in London, editing symposia on a variety of life science topics - none of which had anything to do with the Ciba company's drugs. As an arts graduate, not a scientist, I was quite surprised to get this job, but perhaps my few years as a secretary at a London medical school helped by familiarising me with medical words and how to spell them, as well as by providing practice in (surreptitiously) making changes to any manuscripts I typed.

At the Foundation my new boss's advice was: "Make the symposia papers grammatical and as readable as possible, but there's no need to understand the science." His other piece of advice was more practical: "Ask Cecilia". Cecilia was my somewhat more experienced co-worker, who at least had a degree in chemistry. Her even more valuable counsel was usually:

"Make the papers grammatical and as readable as possible, but there's no need to understand the science."

"Look it up in the dictionary".

In those days the dictionary was the *British Medical Dictionary* – or maybe it was *Butterworths Medical Dictionary*. Whatever its name, it was one of the few appropriate reference books then available. Later, the Foundation's library provided the *World list of scientific periodicals*, *Index medicus* and much else related to biochemistry, chemistry, pharmacology and medicine. The editorial department also gradually collected its own supply of style manuals and suchlike.

As our bookshelves expanded, so did the technology. In 1957 photocopying was either non-existent or in a very primitive state and certainly hadn't reached the editorial office. Originally, the symposia discussion sessions, which became an important part of the eventual books, were recorded on a wire recorder, but reel-to-reel tape recorders were installed by the time I started editing, and there was a well-bugged conference room in which the microphones improved gradually over the years. Typewriters were heavy machines that used up lots of finger energy. Corrections had to be laboriously made on carbon copies as well as top copies. And until we pointed out that our letters to authors on points of grammar or dates for returning proofs weren't of much interest to the rest of the administration, copies of letters had to be provided on paper of various colours, for distribution to the appropriate people in the building or elsewhere. Typewriters with daisy wheels or golf balls and memories eventually arrived, and a dedicated word processor finally made an appearance before I retired in 1987.

Like the new technology, formal training in editing was still some way ahead in 1957. We picked up recognized practices wherever possible, probably mostly from the

Biochemical Journal's guide for authors, with its list of approved abbreviations and other conventions. Then an early edition of the Conference of Biology Editors' *Style manual for biological journals* [1] found its way to our desks from across the Atlantic. Editing gradually became more professional.

Professionalism advanced further when we learnt of the existence of the European Association of Editors of Biological Periodicals, which held its first major conference in London in 1970 and then became the European Life Science Editors association (ELSE). Editerra, the European Association of Earth Science Editors, had also come into being by then.

At ELSE's conference in Norway in 1973 the participants spent much time discussing the production of a European style manual along the lines of the CBE style manual, but then a new scheme was suggested by Professor Knut Fægri. As a result, Peter Woodford and I became the authors of *Writing scientific papers in English* [2], which wasn't a manual but a guide for authors. At least, it was supposed to be for authors but I think we hoped that editors' lives would become easier if authors took the book's messages on board. Anyway, it became a bestseller of its kind.

Writing that book led me also to produce advice for editors [3] (with Peter Woodford), advice for copy editors [4], and again advice for authors [5], though only the last book is still in print (just).

Writing had to take second place to editing, though, so those were busy times. Editors at the Ciba Foundation usually dealt with three three-day symposia each year, plus perhaps one or two one-day study groups, mostly held in London but occasionally, most enjoyable of all, abroad. Editors attended all symposia to take notes of who spoke at discussion sessions. Later we edited the transcripts and sent them to speakers to remould. Meantime the formal papers were edited and the papers with their revised discussions went to the printers, via the publishers. After that, there were of course proofs to deal with.

In 1982 ELSE and Editerra merged and became the European Association of Science Editors (EASE). When I retired from salaried work in 1987 I became Secretary of the association and continued producing its newsletter, as I'd been doing since about 1980, and chapters of the *Science Editors' Handbook* [6]. At an early stage of its existence I had also been Secretary-General of the International Federation of Science Editors' Associations (IFSEA, now IFSE) but left when this association changed direction.

The EASE newsletter became a bulletin entitled *European Science Editing* in 1986 and was styled a journal in 2002. I retired as Secretary of EASE in 1997 but I'm still production manager for the journal, and still the person who produces the association's web site, though these jobs should very soon pass to others. My other jobs in "retirement" at

Professionalism advanced further when we learnt of the existence of the European Association of Editors of Biological Periodicals.

In 1957 photocopying hadn't reached the editorial office and typewriters used up lots of finger energy.

Copy-editing: a Life

first included teaching courses on scientific writing but as EASE's membership grew there was no longer time for these.

All this arose from answering one job advertisement ...

Maeve O'Connor

London, UK

maeve.oc@blueyonder.co.uk

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Would you like to help with the EMWA website?

We have ideas for expanding the website to make it more useful to EMWA members. But to do so, we'll need volunteers to help. You don't need expertise in the technical side of websites - although if you have, we'll be pleased to hear from you! For example, we're looking for people to translate key pages into European languages and update them when necessary. At the moment there are pages on the site in French, German, Spanish and Italian. We could have other European languages if someone was willing to take responsibility. We also need volunteers to update the existing foreign language pages, keep these pages up to date, to act as reporters or photographers at the conference in Malta, or to take responsibility for a specific section of the site.

We'd also like to hear from you if you have ideas for developing the website.

If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Marian Hodges (Website Manager) and Shanida Nataraja (Editor, Members only section)

marian@medwrite.co.uk
snataraja@dianthus.co.uk



From Over the Pond: How to become a Medical Writer

by Susanna J Dodgson

Aspiring medical writers often e-mail me their resumé's, with requests for advice for launching medical writing careers. I don't have a single answer to all who write, because those aspiring to a career in medical writings come from all ends of the range of the scientifically and medically educated and also from all ends of the range of literacy. However, I do have a few general pieces of advice to anyone who values my advice enough to request my help.

Apprenticeship

One path to medical writing is the one that I followed, with a doctorate in a branch of science or medicine, with additional informal or formal training in writing medical documents for advertising agencies, medical and scientific literature, regulatory authorities, professional medical societies or educational institutions. The harder path is to "pick up" medicine and science after acquiring undergraduate and graduate degrees in journalism and English.

Most medical writers are trained on the job, by working as a medical writer. This apprenticeship works for aspiring medical writers if employers are willing to train them. This apprenticeship does not work for those who cannot write, cannot assess information, do not have a rudimentary grasp of statistics or do not have a basic grasp of scientific principles or medical science. Employers understand that few medical writers have formal qualifications in medical writing and so frequently assign tests taking as many as 10 hours.

Get educated

Medical writing is a profession and, like every profession, needs education and tools. I will not describe the tools in detail here: briefly, these are style guides, dictionaries, libraries and websites. Education is something I have cared about all my life; and my interest in education in medical writing started when I began working as a medical writer. More recently, my interest has increased because I now direct the only accredited Masters of Science program (USP) in Biomedical Writing, at the University of Sciences in Philadelphia. The USP program has been formally educating medical writers less than 5 years and so far we have 35 graduates.

Why does Philadelphia have the first graduate program for medical writers? The answer is that Philadelphia has frequently been first in things medical and is the geographical centre of the US pharmaceutical industry. Not coincidentally, it is also the home of the oldest US School of Medicine: 1790, University of Pennsylvania; and the oldest US School of Pharmacy: 1821, the University of Sciences in Philadelphia, which was originally known as the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. The Universities are right next to each other. In 1978, I came to Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley to work at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) School of Medicine as a post-doctoral fellow in

From Over the Pond

Physiology. I left Penn in 1996 as an Associate Professor and started my journey into a career as a medical writer.

Other formal programs are more for persons already working in medical writing. These include the European Medical Writers' Association (EMWA) certificate (which I am happily working my way through) and the American Medical Writers' Association (AMWA) certificate.

Learn to spell

In the first instance, spell correctly the name of the person from whom you are seeking sage advice, a job contract or a permanent fulltime job. To not be able to spell is a severe impediment to anyone seeking a career in manipulating words. Spelling my name incorrectly indicates that you have not learned how to cut and paste from web-sites, which is the first really important skill needed of a medical writer. This is not licence for plagiarism, which I will discuss in my next column.

Resumé

Your resumé should tell your potential employer what you have done, what you are capable of doing and your qualifications for doing this. Do not send it by surface of air-mail: this involves paper and no-one wants paper. Send your resumé to a potential employer by e-mail, and send it as an in-text document. Even better, send a link to your website as well as attaching it as a pdf or word document. I have a range of modern and ancient operating systems on my computers which occasionally cannot interpret documents prepared on Macintosh computers. And I will not be amused if you send me a virus or worm. In the US, spraying your resumé around can result in job offers, but it has to be read for such an outcome.

Label your files

The first rule I learned in the laboratory was to label any sample I threw in the freezer or refrigerator with my name or initials, the date and what the sample was. Every year or so the freezer became too jammed to add another single sample of purified mitochondria or isolated carbonic anhydrase, and all the vials tumbled onto the floor. When this happened, in the first pass, I tossed out any samples that lacked names, dates and descriptions of contents. In the second pass, I tossed out any samples that were correctly labelled but were now obsolete because of the inexorable progress of Science in my laboratory. When I moved from a life in experimental science to a life communicating medical science, I transferred my rule for samples to a rule for files. I toss out all files that not labelled with the date, the name of the author and a description of what is inside. My recommendation to anyone sending me an attached e-mail document, after I have invited you to, is to label the file correctly, do not label the file "resume.doc" or "test.doc". Label it "N.Name whatitis ddMMMyyyy.doc".

Read, read

Read everything and anything you can about science and medicine. Read voraciously the Health sections in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal. Get on the mailing list for any US National Institutes of Health mailing lists; subscribe to the Morbidity and Mortality Report. Why? Because you need to know what is going on. Rapid changes in disease handling and perception can sink drug applications and marketing campaigns.

An example of this is the field of pharmacogenomics, which is changing the look of clinical trials in cancer patients. Recently a cancer drug NDA was withdrawn after a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory board voted not to support it even though more than 10 patients taking the drug had complete remission of their cancer. Clinical trials of cancer drugs will most likely soon be required to include genetic profiles of each subject to determine whether they have the potential to respond favourably to the drug.

Network

Join AMWA and EMWA, go to their conferences and any dinners, workshops, everything they offer. I was asked to edit the newsletter of the AMWA Delaware Chapter in 2001. I had great fun, learning Quark and other elements of graphic design. The most fun was running a competition for medical haiku. I had some great entries by the time my 5th and last issue rolled off the press in summer 2002. This newsletter was sent to every member of AMWA in the Delaware Valley, between 720 and 760 members, some of whom have given me short-term or long-term contracts and some of whom have sent me resumés asking me for advice. Our numbers have now increased to 860, and I became a published poet, or at least, a published haikuist.

Be brief

Keep the number of words you down to a minimum. Documents are easier to understand if you use the least number of words. My hobby is trying to describe diseases in 17 syllables. Here is a pair of medical haiku I wrote that appeared in the AMWA-DVC newsletter:

He wakes "My ear hurts"
Fever, phone, "get in the car"
He holds Mommy's hand.

He drives up, "Morning!"
Computer on, phones lunch in.
"Diabetes? How? "

Susanna J Dodgson

Director of MS Program in Biomedical Writing,
University of the Sciences in Philadelphia,
s.dodgso@usip.edu

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All Gendered up

by Stephen de Looze

"Gender... Originally strictly a grammatical term, became in the nineteenth century a euphemism for the convenience of those who found "sex" too disturbing a word to utter. Its use today in that sense is disdained by most authorities as old-fashioned and over-delicate." Bill Bryson, *Troublesome Words*, 2001

Gender issues first confronted me, like many of my friends, at around 11 years old. In fact, it happened during my first French lesson, when to my amazement, I discovered that learning French meant learning that dining tables and forks were feminine yet beds and knives were masculine, all of which was rather baffling to a young English boy. It was however reassuring to learn that the sun was male and the moon female because like most schoolboys, I had devoured the old Greek legends and knew that the sun was a god and the moon a goddess. However, that reassurance was short lived because when German lessons began, we learned that the sun was in fact female, the moon (and dining tables) male, and that neuters—including beds and, mysteriously, girls—existed too. Gender confusion, at least grammatically, had raised its head early on.

Biology lessons, which started at the same time, were much clearer. Sex was everywhere: microbes, fungi, plants, and animals. As Cole Porter wrote, "birds do it, bees do it, even educated fleas do it". The general order of things was not seriously disturbed by learning that many creatures, from plants to tapeworms, had both male and female parts, some got by without sexes altogether, yet others switched sexes at their convenience. Sex hormones, sex chromosomes, sex-limited, sex-linked, sex-determined, were all the stuff of science, and the three-letter word was not a particular cause of embarrassment.

Why substitute an honest, respectable, three-letter word for a fancy coy six-letter one?

This early knowledge was assimilated along with much else, and many years later when the erstwhile 11-year-old found his place in the world as a medical writer, his interest in language and in science had merged into a single, rewarding occupation. Of course, on the way, the word "sex" had inevitably acquired new dimensions, but the bedrock of science was solid enough not to disqualify its sober use to describe the categories "male" and "female". In fact, it was a handy, short, unambiguous word that could head a narrow column of many a demographic results table, whose entries were either "M" or "F".

Long before I read Bill Bryson's book, I noticed the word "gender" creeping into medical writing, often it seemed from across the Atlantic. The word had clearly left the pages of my French and German grammar books far behind. It came to my attention while I was working with an international committee to standardize clinical report writing. Suddenly, study subjects were attributed with a gender rather than a sex for the purposes of demograph-

ic analysis. Late twentieth century sensibilities were evidently just as delicate as nineteenth century ones, at least in some parts of the world. To me, such apparent shyness seemed quite inappropriate to medical and scientific writing, and it didn't take long before some of my sensibilities, namely those relating to clarity and simplicity in scientific writing, were also being seriously disturbed. Why substitute an honest, respectable, three-letter word with a fancy, coy, two-syllable, six-letter one? Consequently, I was prompted to do a little etymological research in an attempt to stem the gender tide. Things began to fall into place: gender, engender, generate, genital, gonad, gene. Even the "gen" in words such as genius, oxygen and exogenous, could be traced back to the same root, meaning "to beget". It was especially satisfying to discover in the Oxford English Dictionary that the verb "to gender", now archaic, once meant "to copulate".

On the committee, my views prevailed and the resulting guideline still refers to "sex" rather than "gender". But the tide was not to be stemmed, and soon "gender" was everywhere: in newspapers, journals, magazines and the Internet. It appeared no longer to be a simple matter of prudishness but rather of increasing late twentieth century awareness that sexual behaviour, identity, orientation and expression defied simple categorization. The word "sex", so I read, was too fixed on female-male categories; the inherent fluidity of human (and, it now emerges, even animal [1]) sexuality was more correctly captured by the word "gender". Whilst I fully acknowledge the truth of this enlightened view of human (and animal) nature, the writer in me continued to question whether something useful was achieved by the change in word usage: after all, related to the word "gender" are also "genus" and "genre", which are all about categories. Indeed, the use of "gender" in describing language is due to the sorting of words into male and female (and, in some languages, a few other) categories. These considerations notwithstanding, I readily accepted that the new dimension of meaning acquired by "gender" served a purpose. After all, languages are living things and words do evolve to meet changing knowledge and perceptions. I even began to glimpse the sense of statements such as: "Analysis of the thinking of transsexuals is simultaneously used as a foil to bolster the ... argument that the study of gender benefits from insightful and detailed analysis of the thinking of individuals as they make significant gender-related decisions" [2].

'Sex and gender' are commonly used as a set phrase as if one can no longer stand without the other

I had come quite a long way, but in order to further explore word usage, I checked the Internet for the many mentions of the phrases "sex and gender" (74,000), "gender and sex" (11,700), "sex/gender" (91,800) and "gender/sex" (27,000). Needless to say, the overwhelming majority of contributors were not at all interested in word usage but in much deeper social and political issues. However, even though I hardly scratched the surface of this vast information resource, it was soon evident that the useful, recently acquired meaning of "gender" was largely being ignored. In fact, "sex and gender" (or "gender and sex") was commonly used as a set phrase as if one word could no longer stand without the other, as in the headline: "Sex and gender scientists explore a revolution in evolution" [3]. Frequently, the words were used interchangeably, even in articles where a distinction might have been expected. For example, I read about "employers complacent about the gender pay gap" and "gender imbalance in state bureaucracies" in an article that began: "Sexual differences have been used to justify male-dominated societies" [4].

All this was a far cry from the crisp definitions that declared: "'Sex' refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women whereas 'gender'

All Gendered up

refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women" [5]. It therefore comes as no surprise to me, back in the world of medical writing, that a regulatory assessment report I am currently studying discusses under the proud heading "gender analysis" nothing more than differences between men and women with regard to particular laboratory variables. A clinical study protocol that recently crossed my desk for a study on "age- and gender-related differences in biomarkers..." states "since the predictive value differs with sex ..., addressing gender differences ... will be an important objective". Transsexuals, lesbians and gays are not, however, specifically to be investigated in the study, simply men and women.

In an ironic twist, while the word "gender" is being re-branded to mean "sex", the word "sex" appears to be losing its original meaning altogether. "Campbell Denies He Sexed Up Dossier", "Blair Would Have Quit If Dossier Sexed Up", scream two of thousands of headlines referring to the report about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction that caused such a storm in Britain last year. And under a headline "Court Passes On 'Sexy' Domain Issue", we read that: "the case involves a novel and sexy issue", explained as follows: "The formulation of the special question is rather tricky for non-lawyers to follow. It takes two parts: firstly asking whether conversion can occur if intangible property is merged with a tangible medium (in other words, the certificate issue) and secondly, provided the answer to that question is yes, whether conversion applies to an Internet domain name (that is, is a domain name merged with any tangible medium)" [6]. Just how "sexed up" and "sexy" can you get?

'Gender' is being re-branded to mean 'Sex'

I was once momentarily alarmed when an elderly aunt of mine declared: "I'm just going to take the dog to the bathroom", when to my relief she led the animal into the garden. Clearly, the euphemistic use of the word "bathroom" in other, more human, contexts had so replaced the original expression that it had come to mean nothing other than what it was trying to conceal. Currently, the word "sex" unsurprisingly gives 218,000,000 hits after an Internet search, whereas the word "gender" a mere 17,500,000. I wonder how long it will take before those statistics are reversed, and a future edition of the Oxford English Dictionary can drop the little dagger signifying "archaic use" against the entry "to gender". Some other things remain from those far-away French lessons that I recall now, almost involuntarily: "Vive la différence" and "Plus ça change...". And who says that medical writing isn't sexy?

Stephen de Looze

Head of Medical Writing and Document Management
Covidence GmbH, Germany
stephen.delooze@covidence.com

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All Aboard the JARGONAUT - but keep half a foot on the brake

by Paul Woolley

Anyone who has survived secondary schooling in Britain – and other countries will hardly differ – will know the meaning of aversion therapy. Six years spent learning to loathe a generous selection of languages, sciences, history and culture cannot but leave their mark. In consequence, I can still hear the swish of the schoolmaster's gown – or another, meaner, pedagogical accoutrement likewise no longer in use – when I put everyday colloquialisms such as "get" or "nice" onto paper. A similar Pavlovian reflex kicks in when I write, or see, an expression that might in those days have come to be underscored with a squiggly red line, the dreaded epithet "jargon" written alongside it in the margin.

To be avoided?

After the passage of decades, I should like to take jargon out of the dunce's corner, brush off the chalk-dust, and give it a closer look. What is jargon exactly, when should a scientific writer use it – and when not? In fact the word has had a long past, and has accrued several different meanings on the way. Today, it most often means "language that is employed by a particular group, profession, or culture, especially when the words and phrases are not understood or used by other people".¹

It is not immediately clear what is wrong with members of a particular profession using language that outsiders do not understand; in fact, there are several reasons why that is precisely what they should do. First of all, every branch of science comes with its own technical terms, which often are only understood by those with the corresponding technical training, but which are genuinely needed by such people; if this were not the case, we could dispense with medical dictionaries. Secondly, the use of such terms within the community concerned often ensures precise definition, less ambiguity and better internal communication. Thirdly, they are shorter.

So should medical, clinical, technical scientific and regulatory writers use jargon or not? My reply is: "Yes, but." While the first half of that answer should not require much explanation, the second half needs unpacking.

In with the in-crowd

Every writer, as part of basic professional discipline, is used to asking the question: "Is the reader in a position to understand what I am writing?" When one is employing a term that might be classified as jargon, the corresponding question is: "Is the reader a member of the 'group, profession or culture' that uses this expression?" This will often be the case. Clinical protocols and reports are read only by experts, so there is no reason to avoid using medical jargon in this context, if it is jargon of the well-defined sort (*cf.* next section). Packing leaflets, patient information sheets and medical brochures have a read-

All Aboard the Jargonaut

ership that includes people who are not trained in medicine – some of whom may be scarcely literate – so technical expressions have to be kept to a minimum, and those used must be carefully explained. Sentences such as "Your vital signs will be assessed and clinico–chemical variables (haematology and haemostasis; electrolytes; hepatic and renal values) will be acquired" have no place in an information sheet for lay people, especially when there is a legally undergirded ethical requirement for comprehensibility.

Blurring the picture

The problem arises when jargon evolves, as language left to itself habitually does, in an *ad hoc* manner involving copying, misunderstanding, emulating the alpha animal and, in fact, all the processes in the Darwinian evolution of memes² by random mutation and survival–based selection. Such evolution may indeed occur as the consequence of a sociobiological law, but – as is the case for many other evolutionary laws – it need not run its course unchecked; its progress can be modified by conscious intervention, and I wish to argue here that it should be.

For this reason, the definition given at the beginning could well do with some refinement. Jargon is often regarded as *informal* language, in contrast to technical terms; the latter are defined in text–books, or recommendations for their usage are issued by international bodies such as the IUPAC or ICH³. Consequently, technical terms do not evolve as rapidly or as chaotically as even the most generally accepted jargon. Consider an example from clinical research, "adverse event". The ICH definition for this is applied – and cited – almost universally in clinical writing, and when the term is given a different meaning in a restricted context this is as a rule stated explicitly. Now consider, in contrast, the term "end–point". I have counted up to six meanings of this⁴ and now avoid using it at all, whenever possible.

Another interesting example of the applicability of Darwinian selection to jargon is the spontaneous generation of evolutionary niches. Any medical writer who works for various clients will sooner or later notice that some companies use certain words or expressions in a company–specific manner. When challenged on this point, long–term employees of these companies will express genuine incredulity, just as (one imagines) the short–beaked finches on one Galapagos island might have reacted to the news that their cousins on another had lengthier bills.

Hidden jargon

Agglutinative ("sticky") languages are those in which simple words are often compounded into longer ones with a new or altered meaning. Some languages are more agglutinative than others: while German is noted for its *Bandwürmer* ("tapeworms"), many other languages are no less adhesive. English, being of partly Germanic parentage, has retained the ability to generate tapeworms, but in English each segment of the tapeworm is typeset as a separate word, making the nematode invisible to the casual eye⁵. As a result, triple, quadruple and even quintuple nouns can sneak into circulation as *ad hoc* technical terms without getting noticed by the community that (often thoughtlessly) uses them. Examples of this malpractice might be "protein phosphorylation region sequence similarity", "ECG variables change difference" or "feeding period food consumption increase"⁶. Sometimes such terms become honoured with a textbook defini-

tion/explanation, and maybe an abbreviation; then, they can then safely be used. However, many remain completely incomprehensible for those outside the Inner Circle.

Criterion: clarity

Jargon presents an especial problem when one is writing clinical documents, because the ethical and regulatory elements that go into these call for a mixture of medical/scientific exactitude, formal legal correctness, and adherence to standard operating procedures (that sometimes are not really appropriate to the document under preparation). Further, less rational factors that sometimes complicate the writer's job – and his choice of language – are employers' or clients' taste, occasional outbreaks of consistency mania on the part of reviewers, and the need to keep in step with earlier documents in the same series. Together, these constraints sometimes make it difficult for a writer to see the way ahead. The guiding principle, however, is a very simple one: clarity! This will often help the writer to chart a course between conflicting requirements such as those mentioned above.

Thus, I should like to argue not against the use of jargon, but in favour of the controlled use of it. The perpetual question "Will the reader understand...?" should reside permanently somewhere in the upper layers of every writer's subconscious. It applies not only to sentences, arguments, tables, charts, legends, equations and abbreviations but (of course) to terminology: scientific expressions, target variables, excursions into the vernacular, and ... jargon. Like everything else in writing, the use of jargon should, where possible, be adapted to the background and the comprehension level of the anticipated readership.

Summary

Make sure you know when an expression is a standard technical term and when it is "merely" jargon. Be especially circumspect in using the latter – add a definition if you think it will help. As far as possible, avoid local jargon; if you must use this, then always define it. Finally, and most important of all, relate your use (and non-use) of technical language to the reader's level of knowledge.

Notes

1. Adapted from the definition in the Encarta® World English Dictionary (© 1999 Microsoft Corporation).
2. *Meme*: A unit of cultural information, such as a practice or a word, that is transmitted verbally or by imitation from one mind to another. (The term was invented by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as a cultural analogue of *gene*.)
3. The reader may care to ponder upon why I refrain from writing out these abbreviations.
4. i) A target variable in a clinical study as measured for a given patient; (ii) a target variable after statistical processing, e.g. its median value; (iii) the point of termination of a clinical study, (iv) a point in a clinical study when important data are acquired, (v) the goal of a clinical study (e.g. "to show the superiority of XY over placebo"), (vi) the point in a titration (chemical or pharmacological) where a process of addition, dose increase etc. is stopped because a certain desired response has been achieved.
5. Compare for example *Alkoholentzugerscheinungen* with "alcohol withdrawal symptoms"; *Lungenfunktionsprüfung* with "lung function test".
6. For which I would respectfully submit, as possible improvements: "sequence similarity in the protein-phosphorylation region", "difference between changes in the ECG variables" and "increase in food consumption during the feeding period".

Paul Woolley

Freelance scientific and medical writer
Berlin, Germany
paul.woolley@p-soft.de



Erratum: Subparagraphing in 'A Bit of Culture'

by Joy Burrough-Boenisch

In my "A Bit of Culture" piece (TWS 2004;31(2):41-42), my attempt to show what "subparagraphing" looks like misfired because a line space was inserted at the typesetting stage. This underlines my contention that "subparagraphing" is overlooked or misunderstood by those from non-subparagraphing cultures! To set the matter straight, here is an authentic example of Dutch subparagraphing. The blank lines separate the true paragraphs. Can you spot where the two subparagraphs start?

Half-natuurlijke typen kunnen op een klein oppervlak worden gerealiseerd, soms zelfs op enkele tientallen vierkante meters. Inrichting en beheer dienen te worden afgestemd op de gemeenschappelijke eisen van de nagestreefde doelsoorten. Natuurlijke vestiging van planten en dieren is daarbij het uitgangspunt. (Her)introductie is slechts te overwegen als de betreffende soorten het gebied niet op eigen kracht kunnen bereiken terwijl de potentie voor een duurzame populatie wel aanwezig is.

[45

Voor het duurzame behoud van doelsoorten en voor een effectieve buffering tegen negatieve externe invloeden is het wenselijk om complete half-natuurlijke landschappen te realiseren die landschapsecologisch gezien een duurzame samenhang vertonen. Voor veel doelsoorten geldt dat ze afhankelijk zijn van een bepaalde combinatie van half-natuurlijke typen. De configuratie van half-natuurlijke typen op landschapsschaal is in dit opzicht erg belangrijk. De benodigde afwisseling kan worden afgestemd op oude landgebruiksvormen en historische landschapspatronen. Vaak is het dan ook goed mogelijk om het natuurbeheer te combineren met het behoud of de ontwikkeling van landschappelijke waarden (van aardkundige, archeologische, cultuurhistorische of esthetische aard).

Voor de meeste half-natuurlijke typen is een actief beheer nodig. Relevante maatregelen zijn enerzijds gericht op het beïnvloeden van de abiotische omstandigheden (zoals waterpeil en nutriëntengehalte) en anderzijds op het direct ingrijpen in de levensgemeenschap (met name de vegetatie). Concrete maatregelen zijn onder andere waterpeilbeheer, baggeren, plaggen, maaien, kappen en reguleren van de populatieomvang van dieren. De frequentie van deze maatregelen kan variëren van enkele keren per jaar tot eens in de circa dertig jaar. Het effect van het beheer hangt sterk af van de schaal, de frequentie en het moment waarop de maatregelen worden uitgevoerd. Bij de afzonderlijke natuurdoeltypen wordt daarop in detail ingegaan, maar enkele algemene vuistregels kunnen wel genoemd worden. Het moment waarop beweid, gemaaid of gebaggerd wordt, moet worden afgestemd op de eisen van de beoogde planten (zaadzetting) en dieren (broeden, overwinteren). Ten aanzien van de schaal en de frequentie

Comment by Alistair Reeves

Joy Burrough-Boenisch in her article "A Bit of Culture" mentions that the 'subparagraph' in Dutch writing is a 'very handy convention'. Her attempt to illustrate this in her article unfortunately failed due to incorrect typesetting. Even if it had been correctly illustrated, it would still not have convinced me that it is a useful device - even in Dutch writing. I can see no need for it in the illustration provided. It has clearly been used 16 lines from the top between '...aanwezig is' and 'Voor het...', but one wonders why. But has this device been used between '... dertig jaar' and 'Het effect...' 7 lines from the bottom of the example? The effect is to confuse readers rather than help them, especially if the end of the sentence is near to the end of a line. We write for readers, so their ease of understanding must always be our prime concern. The subparagraph is also a feature of German writing, and I have yet to find one instance in more than 25 years of editing texts written in English by the Germans, the Dutch and other nationals to justify its existence!

Joy's point that 'readers in the know infer the logical link ... without the need for linking words' also fails to convince me. In the second example above, they are more likely to wonder if a new subparagraph has been started and wonder why, rather than infer the logical link. In our field of writing, I find that authors whose native language is not English (and indeed many native speakers) overuse linking words when constructing paragraphs in English, even those who use 'subparagraphs' (how often do we delete 'moreover, nevertheless, notwithstanding, additionally, furthermore, besides, likewise, nonetheless, on the one hand, on the other hand, above and beyond, what is more, above all, equally, similarly, correspondingly, on the contrary ...).

So I agree with Joy: this is indeed a cultural difference - readers of German and Dutch and other languages may be comfortable with this device and it may, like any aspect of layout or punctuation, send out messages to 'readers in the know'. The message doesn't get across to me, and I think this device certainly should not be used in English.

I suspect that this device is not formally taught in The Netherlands or Germany, or wherever else it is used. I have not conducted a survey, but have asked people over the years if they were actually taught to do this. Most people have said something like: 'No, but I use it when I don't want to make such an important point or have such an abrupt break'. It has probably crept in because of poor writing style. Deciding where to begin and end a paragraph is hard enough, even for experienced writers in any language, so 'subparagraphing' (even if it ends up in print) most likely reflects a less confident style of writing, and therefore a further complication for the reader.

Alistair Reeves
a.reeves@ascribe.de

Reply by Joy Burrough-Boenisch

Far from advocating the 'subparagraph' in English, I have long campaigned against its application in English text by Dutch authors and publishers [1, 2]. I am sorry that I didn't make this clearer in my article. My failed attempt to incorporate 'subparagraphing' in my original article was intended to show how confusing and ineffective the convention can be. Alistair's reaction to the sample page of 'subparagraphing' included in this issue

Erratum Subparagraphing

underscores the point I was trying to make: that readers unfamiliar with the convention find 'subparagraphing' puzzling and typographically messy. I am grateful to him for articulating how a native speaker of English other than myself reacts when confronted with the convention.

Despite what Alistair suggests, the 'subparagraph' is received knowledge in Netherlands writing culture, being present in the writing of school pupils and teachers and advocated in books on writing and style. The latest edition of the Dutch bestseller on writing style and layout now cautions authors and printers to ensure that a full line of type does not precede the 'subparagraph' ([3], p. 390). On that page, too, Renkema the author states that 'subparagraphs' indicate there are strong links between chunks of text. From my enquiries I know that Dutch authors and readers do use 'subparagraphs' (in Dutch, called *alinea's*) as visual cues of topic coherence.

To say that 'subparagraphing' has crept in 'because of poor writing style' is to forget that the device of typographically distinguishing paragraph breaks by starting on a new line (usually indented) but then distinguishing a bigger break in the flow of text by inserting a blank line also occurs in good English writing. You'll find it in scientific journals, as well as in non-scientific genres like novels and newspapers. The Dutch versus English cultural difference is in the frequency of use within a text. The interpretation of the convention is the same in both cultures: new-line paragraphs hang together, but when a white space precedes a paragraph, it's a signal that the new paragraph introduces a major new line of thought or abrupt change in argument. Lewis [4] (1894 - yes, a 19th century reference) calls it a spaced paragraph. Look at the latest (2002) edition of *The Oxford Guide to Style* [5]. You'll find what looks like 'subparagraphing' (e.g. on p. 19) and spaced paragraphs. Wondering whether 'subparagraphing' was going mainstream, I emailed the author, explained the 'subparagraphing' convention in Dutch and asked him why there were 'subparagraphs' in the style manual. He blamed the designer! Perhaps the OUP designer will set a new trend, in which indentation and spacing come to be as important in visually signaling short-range text cohesion in English texts as they are in Dutch texts. Or maybe the fashion won't catch on, like unindented paragraphs in early 20th century English publishing (which did, however, catch on and are still the preferred style in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands: [6]).

As for Alistair's comment on the overuse of linking words: linguistic researchers have shown that contemporary Dutch writers use few linking words when constructing paragraphs. This is another reason why, when English native speakers fluent in Dutch read Dutch text, they find it choppy. When Dutch writers use as few linking words in their English texts, the choppiness is experienced by a wider audience.

Joy Burrough-Boenisch

burrough@bos.nl

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A Poisoned Chalice? A Research Ethics View of the Clinical Trials Directive

by Geoff Hall

This year throughout the European Union governments have been bringing into force legislation to implement the requirements of the Clinical Trials Directive. The people behind this Directive seem to have had the best of intentions. They wrote in the document that it is concerned with: "the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to the implementation of Good Clinical Practice in the conduct of clinical trials on medicinal products for human use."

Sounds OK, doesn't it? So why is the ink on so many study protocols being smudged by the tears of scientists, physicians, research directors in medical research institutions and charities quietly sobbing in despair?

The answer is simple. The Directive has had an overall negative impact on research that no-one concerned in its drafting had foreseen. And the bureaucratic burden is the primary problem; a raft of provisions and rules that have been created to fill a perceived void that was never causing much of a problem anyway. The UK's most conservative broadsheet newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reported on the issue on 4th October 2004 under the headline: "Idiotic' EU directive accused of threat to medical research".

How did this come about? To understand this it helps to look back a few years to discover where the Directive came from and what it tries to achieve.

It gives me no pleasure at all to point the finger of accusation at the country of my birth and the industry that has kept me fed for all of my adult life. Nevertheless, it has to be said that, in my opinion, the ideas behind all this originated in the pharmaceutical industry - and especially in the UK. To be fair, they meant well. There was a need for something to be done. Variation in standards across Europe hindered research and I acknowledge that this was certainly the case in the area where the Directive affects me, ethical review.

***Why are scientists,
physicians, research
directors and charities
sobbing in despair?***

The pharmaceutical industry is important to the British economy and a few years ago a body known as the Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force (PICTIF) was set up during a meeting at No10 Downing Street between Tony Blair (the UK prime minister), Sir Richard Sykes (then chairman of Glaxo Wellcome) and Sir Tom McKillop of AstraZeneca. I know that this group was concerned by the problems caused by having to get approval of multi-centre clinical trials in every institution taking part in the study. If two ethics committees made different modifications, it could result in the study being invalidated because the protocol was not consistent in every site. I can't be sure that this meeting really was the moment of conception - a most apposite simile bearing in mind what the Directive has done to non-commercial research - but I think it likely.

A Poisoned Chalice?

The Directive itself is not a law, but an agreed instruction to member states to create laws mainly concerned with harmonisation, although individual states apply directives in different ways. Classically, the French ignore them, while the Brits gold plate them - adding masses of bureaucracy. The Directive itself actually applies only to trials of medicinal products. The UK has taken the opportunity to apply the same rules to all studies. The majority of applications that my own committee considers concern basic

"Vital medical research is faltering across the EU as the result of a poorly drafted law"

science, physiology and pathogenesis, but these are, nevertheless, caught up in regulations designed principally for simple "man-takes-pill" studies.

These areas of research are important, for this is where totally new concepts and opportunities for drug development are originated. For instance, research on such things as the mediators of allergic reaction could lead to

new treatments for asthma. New drugs will reduce the risk of unnecessary death and transform disrupted lives while - at the same time - making valuable profits for the drug companies who will, in turn, provide essential tax revenues to governments. This sort of research is now under threat.

In the UK, the implementation of the Directive has had one beneficial effect. It has speeded up the process of ethical review and everyone agrees that this is a good thing. Committees must deliver a decision on a valid application within 60 days, or 35 days for an amendment. Committees can send a study back if they have problems and the 60-day clock stops while the investigator prepares a response. After this, the committee is not allowed to raise fresh issues. Furthermore, one local committee's decision is valid for the whole UK.

Now the downside. A common electronic application form has been in use since 1st March 2004. It is more than 40 pages long and is based on unreliable software. It is a major chore. The form that it replaces at the units covered by my committee was about eight pages and had evolved over 35 years. It did the job. "Everyone agrees that we need a common application," said the bureaucrat in charge of all this in the UK at a meeting I chaired. I, for one, don't.

Another potential problem is that the rules allow a researcher to apply elsewhere than his or her own local committee, through a central allocation system. One of the strengths of local committees is that they know the strengths and weaknesses of their local researchers. The local committee may also have specialist knowledge about the work of the hospital and this element is lost by allocating studies elsewhere.

This actually can be to the benefit of the researcher making the application. Nevertheless, it is now clear that the Directive has had a deadly impact on new research projects. For example, in a typical month, the number of applications to the committee of which I am a member, covering research in the Royal Brompton & Harefield Hospitals and the National Heart & Lung Institute, has dropped from 25 to 5.

However, before I am accused (quite rightly, probably) of taking too parochial a view, let me stress that the problems with the Directive spread further than the Royal Brompton Hospital or the United Kingdom. Back to that Telegraph article by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard and Roger Highfield, who wrote, "Vital medical research is faltering across the European Union as the result of a poorly drafted law that has infuriated scientists."

These two highly regarded journalists based their story on the views of concerned individuals who feel that, although the Directive is designed to encourage research on medicinal products, it is stifling research. As Evans-Pritchard and Highfield put it, "The Clinical Trials Directive imposes a heavy burden of extra costs, complexity and paper-work on universities and hospitals carrying out low-budget studies of medical products."

They quote Prof Richard Gray, head of the Birmingham Clinical Trials Unit. "We have not undertaken any new projects for a year because of this," Prof Gray said. "It's the most complete nonsense. Everybody is running around like headless chickens trying to work out how to cope." He added that the situation was "Bureaucracy run mad".

And Prof Gray is not alone. More than 2,000 scientists have signed a petition calling for repeal of the Directive. Their view is that the Directive was intended for big drug firms which conduct high-cost trials with small numbers of people. It was made more draconian by Euro-MPs and ministers hoping to protect patients from abuse. Good intentions, but according to Dr Richard Sullivan, the head of Cancer Research UK

"It (the Directive) would raise the cost of academic and non-commercial studies by up to four times." Dr Sullivan went on, "The idiots who designed this had no understanding of the vast amount of other research going on. It's not going to make the slightest difference to the big firms but it's awful for the little guys."

The Daily Telegraph journalists report that, privately, EU officials admit the Directive was badly handled. They are preparing "flexible" guidelines that in effect urge governments to violate the law they have just introduced. This, however, is not good enough for Save European Research, a pressure group formed to destroy the new rules. "The law should be scrapped immediately. Common sense will have to prevail somehow because you can't just let European research close down overnight - can you?" asks Dr Brian Moulton, its head. It's a good question, Dr Moulton. Let's hope the bureaucrats are able to find the answer and are prepared to back down.

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One way to find that answer is for the drug companies to realise that the goose of fundamental medical research that lays the golden eggs of new therapeutic concepts is, if not killed, looking decidedly peaky. A concerted effort from researchers, ethics committees and the industry might just save European drug research.

Geoff Hall

Geoffreyhall@aol.com

This article is based on a presentation at the EMWA autumn meeting, Munich, November 2004.

The author is a medical writer and journalist. He is vice-chairman of the research ethics committee of the Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Trust and the National Heart & Lung Institute, London, UK. He is a former elected council member of the Association of Research Ethics Committees, a past-president of EMWA and a recipient of the EMWA Nick Thompson Award.



The Webscout: Discovering the World behind TWS

by Joeyn Flauaus

One distinctive feature of human beings is curiosity, leading to development and progress, positive or negative. For humans, curiosity was always the reason to discover the world outside as seen in science, in geography, in architecture, etc. For example, no one would know anything about all the different species of birds around the world without curiosity. Thus, curiosity is a requirement to broaden your horizon. What is true for the real world also applies to the World Wide Web.

What is hiding behind an expression you commonly use? How do other people use the term? To google certain expressions or names can reveal unexpected insights into other peoples' lives and world views.

Hasn't everyone already had the experience of discovering new interesting web pages by putting in a typo in the search field of a search engine? A quick search for your family name can also uncover unusual pages. And sometimes the wanted result leads to even more interesting web pages as you discover the interesting and remarkable organisations behind it (see the Egyptian page below). That way you might discover new fields of interest that could possibly influence your life.

The term "The Write Stuff" is, of course, often used as a headline for articles about writing, and as a name for galleries, book shops, etc. If you google "The Write Stuff", pages with all kinds of training programs for writing a decent document, scripts, and books show up containing tons of tips for better writing.

For this article, I explored the TWS world and I'm providing you with some exceptional TWS links. Here is a small selection out of about 124,000 results.

www.econedlink.org/lessons/index.cfm?lesson=EM397

This page of the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) provides an online economic lesson about "The Write Stuff" aka pencils. Here you can learn all about the history of manufacturing of pencils, the anatomy of a pencil etc. You will find out everything about the 3 basic questions that must be answered in a market economy: What is produced? How it is produced? For whom is it produced?

www.interdys.org/pdf/persp-write-stuff.pdf

The web page of the International Dyslexia Association® concentrates on written language disabilities and presents a program for preventing and treating disabilities. The program focuses on handwriting and spelling as both are the most important tools to express yourself. Due to the difficulty in identifying, diagnosing and treating writing disabilities, it is important to increase the awareness of this kind of disability.

www.worldtrek.org/odyssey/africa/111099/111099teamhieroglyph.html

This page about "The Write Stuff" (Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics) is issued by "The Odyssey", an internet-based non-profit organisation. Background information about the Egyptian system of writing using hieroglyphics is provided. The organisation "Odyssey" (www.worldtrek.org/odyssey) wants to promote global awareness among youth and involve them in activities to create positive change in the world. Their current project is World Trek, a Trek around the world exploring 10 different countries to document their histories and cultures. Via the "Odyssey" website you are able to join the "Odyssey" team on their real 2-year World Trek.

www.the-write-stuff.com.au/

This is an online journal miscellany of literary content from down under. If you happen to be a Tasmanian poet you can submit your poetry. For all others it is a good chance to get to know authors from Australia, especially Tasmania. The website contains many book reviews, interviews, and articles about writing from Australia.

www.iofilm.co.uk/fm/w/write_stuff_2004.shtml

There's even a obscure movie from 2004 called "The Write Stuff". This very artistic movie has the incredible length of one minute. You should check out the quaint review.

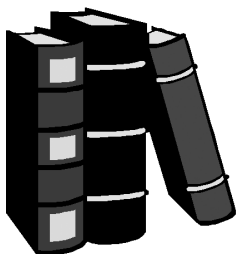
If you find an outstanding TWS page that I missed and should be mentioned in the next issue of "The Webscout", or if you have any other comments or suggestions, please email me at: joeyn@trilogywriting.com

Joeyn Flauaus

Trilogy Writing & Consulting GmbH
Frankfurt, Germany
joeyn@trilogywriting.com

Call for Articles

Themes for upcoming issues of the Write Stuff include biomedical journalism and copyright. If anyone would like to submit an article on these themes please write to me at langdoe@baxter.com with your proposed title. Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words.



In the Bookstores: A Style Book with Style

by Elise Langdon-Neuner

Yateendra Joshi. Communicating in Style, The Energy and Resources Institute, New Delhi, Pauls Press, 2003. ISBN 81-7993-016-5 (paper). 242 pages, USD 12, GBP 7.50.

Is there anything more we can learn about style? Surely we have all read enough about style now not to need a new book on the subject—but perhaps not. The best recommendation for this book is that I read it from cover to cover on a plane without falling asleep by the end of the flight.

The first chapter is titled 'Style for effective communication', which really sums up the theme behind the book in relation to the written word, whether the communication be by PowerPoint presentation, email, manuscript or letter. The chapter topics range from effective emails and poster design, presenting information in tables and figures, notation for units of measurement, and formatting sources of information, to submitting manuscripts to journals. Abbreviations, spelling and punctuation are also covered. The two chapters on making lists and using headings are particularly good, with tips like, "Never suspend a heading exactly midway between two blocks of text so that it fails to show its affinity".

Suggestions are reasoned and explained. Refreshingly, Joshi is also prepared to sail against convention. For example he suggests that an abbreviation should be explained in parenthesis rather than the long-hand version being followed by the abbreviation in parenthesis on first mention as is usual practice. "Parenthesis signal that the matter they enclose is incidental or secondary—readers may skip it if they wish" when the explanation is known to them. He points out that although

Refreshingly, Joshi is prepared to sail against convention in style

some people maintain that when the definition comes first, the association with the abbreviation sinks in and is carried forward, an unfamiliar sequence of letters primes the brain to look for an explanation and thus facilitates learning when the explanation is presented. The example given is, "dpu (dots per inch) is a measure of how

finely a laser printer will print an image or text". The warning that abbreviations can mean different things to different people is nicely illustrated with a recollection of an American visitor to Delhi who wanted to know what services were available at the STD booths. He was curious because he recognized this abbreviation as meaning "sexually transmitted disease" rather than "subscriber trunk dialling".

The text is sprinkled with word processing tips given at every opportunity. The advice on the varying merits of different fonts—I learned that I knew less than I thought about this—and the best type of bullet point is of particular value and difficult to find elsewhere. Joshi explains, for example, that square bullet points print more crisply than round bullet points, especially on dot-matrix printers or low-resolution laser printers. There is even an annex devoted to observing, choosing and using fonts.

Sound advice is given for writing emails: Joshi reminds the reader that writers can get into trouble when they assume that readers can hear the inflection in their voices. To guard against this type of misunderstanding, include a goodwill message in every email you send. The chapter also imparts fascinating information about how to avoid using words in emails that will be picked up by SPAM filters (backed up by sources to which you can refer for more information, of course). And the reader is also reminded that an email is recorded, and unlike conversation, can be extracted from your computer at a later date even if you think you have erased it.

One of the weaker chapters is the one dealing with submitting manuscripts to journals. Electronic submission is not adequately covered. The statement that most journals prefer to receive hard copies in the first instance has been superseded. There are also better sources for punctuation than the chapter in this book, although all books pale into significance on this score in the wake of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* [1]. Spelling receives better treatment, and the chapter is supplemented with an annex of authorities for spelling. Unfortunately the *Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* [2], one of the dictionaries I find most useful, is not included.

The book is a compilation of what the editors working at The Energy and Resource Institute in Delhi have learned over the years from editing report projects, research papers, newsletters, presentations, manuals, posters and web pages on a range of scientific topics. It was interesting for me to find myself reviewing this book after writing up a summary of the EASE Internet forum for the *European Science Editing journal*. This had included a debate about the threat to freelance editors in Europe posed by the decision of Springer-Verlag in Germany to outsource their STM journal copyediting to a low-cost service provider in India. Some comments were interpreted to imply that people who live in India are incapable of providing a professional service. This book is written by an Indian non-native English speaker and its quality speaks for itself.

It is an easy read. Yateendra Joshi clearly gave a lot of thought to setting out the book for visual as well as written readability. The result is a pleasing layout of text on the right-hand pages and illustrations on the corresponding left-hand pages. Just about every point he makes is clearly illustrated. Sources are also given and pictures of book covers are added for book sources, giving the reassuring comfort for the reader of meeting old friends from the bookshelf. Screen shots from websites are also printed.

All in all I can recommend the book for an interesting read and source of useful new information that you might not pick up so easily elsewhere.

Elise Langdon-Neuner
Vienna, Austria
langdoe@baxter.com

References

1. Lynne Truss. *Eats, Shots & Leaves*. 2003. London. Profile Books Ltd.
2. *Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*. 1997. Oxford, New York, Tokyo: Oxford University Press.

Sound advice is given for writing emails to avoid getting into trouble when readers cannot hear the inflection in the writer's voice.

The Write Stuff welcomes contributions to the In the Bookstores section. Please contact **Karen Shashok** at kshashok@auna.com if you'd like to submit a review of a book, journal or website.



Hey, it's Only My Opinion: Stability

by Diana Epstein

Biomedical writers originate from various disciplines and backgrounds. I myself come from an education in social sciences, others from linguistic studies, life sciences, medicine, statistics, law, the list is endless. We work in the pharmaceutical industry, publishing, medical communications and as freelancers. This menagerie makes it important that a degree or accreditation is implemented to distinguish our profession.

EMWA has made admirable efforts to educate medical writers and keep them abreast of current regulations and trends through its EPDP programme but this is something different from an examination qualification acceptable to employers and clients as an accreditation of the profession of biomedical writing and editing as a whole.

The Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) have implemented an examination known as the Editor in the Life Science (ELS) certification. The ELS is however not so accessible for us Europeans. Unless we happen to be travelling to the States, when the Council of Scientific Editors (CSE), American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) or the Canadian Medical Writers Association conference is taking place, our only option is to wait until the exam travels to a European city. This happens only every 3 years to coincide with the time and place of the triennial European Association of Scientific Editors (EASE) conference.

Why then is there no European accreditation for biomedical writing and journal editing? This task cannot be tackled by EMWA alone because its representation is firmly rooted in the pharmaceutical world. The obvious partner in such a venture would be EASE, which has a complementary base in the scientific journal editing world with expertise in peer-review and publishing. Together I am sure these organizations would be able to establish a good academic certification.

The certification could be a mix between oral presentation and a written paper, and of course the written papers of successful candidates should be published in either the TWS or *European Science Editing* (ESE). The first prerequisite for such a certification would be a stronger cooperation between EASE and EMWA. Although the organizations complement each other they should each keep their own identity and under no circumstance be merged. Even though many EMWA members are also members of EASE both associations must retain their own strong points and fields of speciality.

Next we would need to decide on a suitable acronym for the qualification, which we could each place after our name. This would naturally have to be decided by a joint EMWA-EASE education/executive committee. Tom Loon's controversial editorial in the November 2003 issue of ESE entitled, "It's all in the name!" is worth reading. On no account must we get mixed up with other names or meanings.

Take ELS for example. In preparing this issue's column, I sent a short questionnaire to some international and national colleagues asking what they understood the ELS acronym to stand for. The responses were

- Ernie Els (golfer) with almost 95% of the doctors surveyed wanting to know why anyone would want a golfer's name appearing after his or her own name.
- Eaton-Lambert syndrome (an immune mediated disease of the neuromuscular junction), with which most doctors interestingly identified the ELS acronym.

Most surveyed thought that I meant either of these or ahem.. the European Laughter Society.

Being realistic, I believe it will take quite a few years before we see the birth of a European degree programme. In the meantime I for one intend to continue with the EPDP and also to sit the BELS exam in 2006 in Krakow, the venue of the next EASE conference. If I pass I will be sure to spell out 'Editor in the Life Science' after my name rather than relying on universal knowledge of the meaning of its acronym!

But, hey, its only my opinion!

So you think you know English?

- 'Typewriter' is the longest word that can be made using the letters on one row of the keyboard (not mine!).
- 'Dreamt' is the only English word that ends in the letters 'mt'.
- No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver, or purple.
- 'Stewardesses' is the longest word typed with only the left hand and 'lollipop' with the right.
- The sentence: 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' uses every letter of the alphabet.
- The words 'racecar', 'kayak' and 'level' are the same whether they are read left to right or right to left (palindromes).
- There are only four words in the English language that end in 'dous': tremendous, horrendous, stupendous and hazardous.
- There are two words in the English language that have all five vowels in order: 'abstemious' and 'facetious'.

EMWA Executive Committee

President:

Adam Jacobs
Dianthus Medical Ltd
Lombard Business Park
8 Lombard Road
London, SW19 3TZ, UK
Tel: (+44) 20 8543 9229
Fax: (+44) 20 8543 9885
ajacobs@dianthus.co.uk

Vice-President & Programme Manager:

Michelle Derbyshire
Safety and Quality of Food Unit
Institute for Reference Materials
and Measurements
Joint Research Centre,
European Commission
Retieseweg, 2440 Geel, Belgium
Tel: (+32) 14 571827
Fax: (+32) 14 571343
michelle.derbyshire@cec.eu.int

Immediate Past President & Secretary:

Julia Cooper
Parexel International Ltd
River Court, 50 Oxford Road
Denham, Uxbridge, UB9 4DN, UK
Tel: (+44) 1895 614 403
Fax: (+44) 1895 614 323
julia.cooper@parexel.com

Treasurer:

Barbara Grossman
Covance
7 Roxborough Way
Maidenhead
Berks, SL6 3UD, UK
Tel: (+44) 1628 548 182
Fax: (+44) 1628 547 333
barbara.grossman@covance.com

University Liaison Officer:

John Carpenter
John Carpenter Medical Comm.
18 Nightingale Shott
Egham, Surrey, TW20 9SX, UK
Tel: (+44) 1784 470 203
Mobile: (+44) 7764 183 314
johnncarpenter21@aol.com

Membership Officer:

Judi Proctor
Freelance Medical Writer
144 Sheldon Rd, Chippenham
Wiltshire, SN14 0BZ, UK
Tel/Fax: (+44) 1249 461174
Mobile: (+44) 7890 350908
judi@jinx66.fsnet.co.uk

Public Relations Officer:

Ian C. Metcalfe
Berna Biotech Ltd.
79 Rehaggstrasse
CH-3013 Berne, Switzerland
Tel.: (+41) 31 980 63 59
Fax.: (+41) 31 980 67 85

Website Manager:

Marian Hodges
Nat. Institute for Clinical Excellence
Address for correspondence:
6 Highfields, Ashted
Surrey, KT21 2NL, UK
Tel: (+44) 1372 279036
Fax: (+44) 1372 275272
marian@medwrite.co.uk

Education Officer:

Wendy Kingdom
1 Red House Road
East Brent, Highbridge
Somerset, TA9 4RX, UK
Tel: (+44) 1278 769 214
Fax: (+44) 1278 769 214
info@wendykingdom.com

Journal Editor:

Elise Langdon-Neuner
Baxter BioScience
Wagramer Strasse 17-19
A-1220 Vienna, Austria
Tel.: (+43) 1 20100 2067
Fax.: (+43) 1 20100 525
langdoe@baxter.com

EMWA Head Office

Baarerstrasse 112, 7th Floor, P.O. Box 2246, 6302 Zug Switzerland
Tel: (+41) 41 766 05 81 Fax: (+41) 41 766 05 86
info@emwa.org

EMWA website: www.emwa.org