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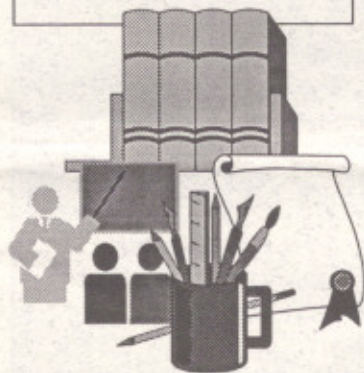
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*The most valuable  
quotation will be the one for  
which you cannot determine  
the source.*

Duggan's Law of  
Scholarly Research

## Substantive Editing

by Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D)

When Lewis Thomas agreed to write his weekly "Notes of a Biology Watcher" for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, he made a deal with the journal editor: he would submit a column every week—on time—if the journal would publish his manuscript unchanged. The deal held; that his readers had no cause to complain about a lack of editing makes him highly unusual, if not unique, in the ranks of scientific writers. A few authors in the sciences and elsewhere write so well that their writing needs no more editorial attention than making it fit various conventions imposed by a publisher—changing the reference citations from superscript numbers to on-the-line numbers in parentheses and the like. But most authors need more editorial attention than that. They need what is often called "substantive editing."

My own work involves substantive editing. I work as though I am a rather stupid reader standing behind me and looking over my shoulder, puzzling over every word and stumbling over every word of more than three syllables, misunderstanding every sentence, doubting every percentage and checking it if it is derived from numbers that appear in the manuscript, suspecting error in every reference to another portion of the text, raising an eyebrow every time the word *therefore* is used, challenging every summarizing statement, and generally questioning whether each part of the manuscript will convey to the reader exactly what the author intended it to. In editing, I make changes and ask questions that will benefit the stupid reader so as to try to make the author defer to that reader. Although substantive editing is often referred to as "author's editing," I see it more as what could be called "reader's editing," in that its main purpose is to serve the reader.

Substantive editing includes attention to publishers' conventions and the rights and wrongs of the "grammar" and mechanics of writing—the punctuation, the capitalization, the spelling, etc. But it also includes attention to the what-if's: What if the reader takes this word in its ordinary sense, instead of the special sense that the author seems to have intended, and thereby misunderstands the sentence? Or what if the author didn't know that the word *had* another sense? What if the author didn't add this column of numbers correctly? What if this figure, which takes a whole page, were replaced with a sentence of text; would the idea come through better? What if this paragraph, which appears out of place at the end of the section, were at the beginning of the section; would that make it easier to understand the message of the section? What if this paragraph were divided into two paragraphs; would it be easier to understand? Substantive editing, in short, requires attention to the intent of a piece of writing as well as to its substance.

*continued on page 2*

*SUBSTANTIVE EDITING, from page 1*

The substantive editor tries to ensure that a manuscript is consistent, correct, concise, and above all clear. Lack of consistency is not just bad in itself, it's also distracting. A reader who suddenly becomes aware that what was expressed in one way before is now expressed in a different way (milliliters and cubic centimeters for liquid volume, for instance) is a reader who is no longer thinking about the author's message. A reader who is misled by an obviously incorrect way of expressing something or by the miscalculated average of a group of stated numbers is a reader who is being mistreated and cannot trust the author's message. A reader who is forced to slog through a lot of redundancy and repetition is a reader who is bored or has lost patience and is no longer interested in the content of the piece. If the writing is clear and the reader is not distracted, bored, or misled, then the author's message will be better received and understood.

Substantive editing has several limits; the editor cannot ride roughshod over the author. The editor must accept that the substance of the writing—the premises, the methods of research, the inclusion or exclusion of ideas—is the author's prerogative. Most important, the editor must accept that the author has the final say about anything in the writing, even to the point of insisting on retaining frank mistakes in substance or expression. The limits of substantive editing can be summed up in this idealistic distinction: *What* the author says is the author's business; *how* the author says it is the editor's business.

.....

*... his clarity was a great liability, for he had nothing to say.*

Arthur James Balfour



**WELCOME**

Since the preceding issue of this newsletter, BELS has garnered 25 new members, bringing our total membership to 93. The following people successfully completed the BELS exams given last October and again in March; congratulations and welcome!

- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Victoria Axiaq    | Sharon Naron           |
| Lorelei Bosserman | Julliana Newman        |
| Stephen M. Brooks | Richard A. Noegel      |
| Roberta Childers  | David T. Orr           |
| Eric Curtis       | Ann S. Packer          |
| Karen Dame        | Polyxeni Potter        |
| Karen W. D'Arezzo | Karen Overstreet Price |
| Heatherbell Fong  | Nancy D. Taylor        |
| Maggie George     | Norma Taylor           |
| Ellen Karen Kurek | Janet L. Tremaine      |
| Hope E. Meckley   | Florence M. Witte      |
| Phyllis Moir      | Letha Woods            |
| Valerie E. Moore  |                        |

**1994 BELS EXAMINATION SCHEDULE**

May 14	Quebec City, Canada
June 3	Mount Sterling, Ohio
June 11	New York, NY
June 11	New Orleans, LA
June 11	Chicago, IL
November 2	Phoenix, AZ
November 2	London, England

Tests will be held 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM except for the one in London, which begins at 10:00 AM. Registration deadline is 2 weeks before the scheduled date of the examination. For more information, please write to BELS at P.O. Box 824, Highlands, NC 28741.

*Gender has to do only with words, and sex has to do with biology and anatomy.*

Edith Schwager,  
AMWA Journal 8(4), 1993

## Reminders

### Re *That* and *Which*

#### From Theodore Bernstein's *Watch Your Language*

"*That* is better used to introduce a limiting or defining clause; *which* to introduce a nondefining or parenthetical clause. . . . If the clause could be omitted without leaving the noun it modifies incomplete, or without materially altering the sense of what is being said—or if it could be reasonably enclosed in parentheses—it should be introduced by *which*; otherwise, by *that*."

#### From Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*

"It would be a convenience to all if these two pronouns were used with precision. The careful writer, watchful for small conveniences, goes *which*-hunting, removes the defining *whiches* and by so doing improves his work."

Thoroughly confused about what is and isn't a restrictive clause? Try this simple expedient: if you can place a comma before the pronoun, it's okay to use *which*, otherwise it should be *that*. And when referring to people, *who* is preferable.

### Re Subject-Verb Agreement

#### From *Words Into Type*

"The number of the subject and verb is not affected by intervening words introduced by *with*, *together with*, *including*, *as well as*, *no less than*, *plus*, and similar expressions." These are parenthetical phrases that embellish, but do not redefine, the subject of the sentence. For example,

All living things, and therefore protoplasm, are composed of carbon, nitrogen, and water.

The medical community as well as its dependents is wary of health care reform.

The number of the subject is sometimes obscure, particularly when "the writer has used these phrases where, because the thought is plural, a simple *and* would be better."

*Poor:* In the examples above, Bernstein plus Strunk and White discusses the appropriate use of *that* and *which*.

*Better:* In the examples above, Bernstein and Strunk and White discuss the appropriate use of *that* and *which*.

*Poor:* Heart disease, together with cancer, kidney diseases, and apoplexy, is almost entirely a disease of middle life and older periods.

*Still Poor:* Heart disease together with cancer, kidney diseases and apoplexy are almost entirely diseases of middle life and older periods.

*Better:* Heart disease, cancer, kidney diseases, and apoplexy are almost entirely diseases of middle life and older periods.

## NEWS ABOUT MEMBERS

Karen Overstreet Price, MS, RPh, ELS, was a featured speaker at the 28th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists in Atlanta, which drew more than 14,000 attendees. She presented "Overview of Professional Publishing" and moderated a 3-hour session on "Principles of Publishing: How to Write for Publication."

This past January, Grace Darling, MS, ELS, received an Award of Excellence from the Society for Technical Communication for her journal entry, *Selected Readings in Plastic Surgery*.

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*The cure for anything is salt  
water—sweat, tears, or the sea.*

Isak Dinesen

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## Books

by Shirley M. Peterson, ELS

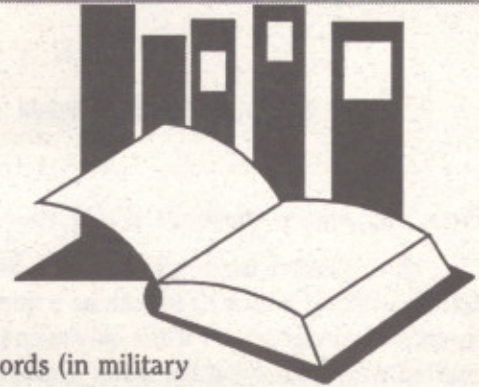
**The Gregg Reference Manual**, 7th ed., by William A. Sabin. Glencoe, N.Y.: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1992. Spiral-bound, \$15.00.

As a language reference, the 7th edition of *The Gregg Reference Manual* is a thing of beauty. At the outset, one notices that it is easy to find anything in this book—and when the page is found, the book stays open by itself. Inside the front cover is a guide to topics by their paragraph numbers. The contents are listed by page number at three levels of specificity. Major divisions are Grammar, Usage, and Style (yes, with a comma before the “and”); Techniques and Formats; and References. The sections of each major division are numbered, and each page bears at its outer edge a colored square with a section number. When the book is closed, the sections are indicated by diagonally arranged patches of sea-green. The numbered paragraphs of the text are commonly cross-referenced and the numbers appear in green ink, as do some headings. The second ink color allows additional emphases and is pleasing to the eye.

I rummaged through Part 1 until I found a topic, Compound Words, that is not usually addressed at length in How-To-Write-Science books. Compound nouns ending with a “direction” caught my attention. Compound nouns ending with *up* may be hyphenated or not (pasteup, start-up); *down*-ending words are usually solid (meltdown); *in* words are typically hyphenated; and *out* words are unpredictable but usually solid (blackout), as are *over*, *back*, *away*, *around*, *about*, and *by* words. *Between*, *through*, and *together* words are almost always hyphenated.

Compound adjectives are covered at even greater length than nouns. Seventeen numbered paragraphs address as many variations of compound adjectives, and each paragraph is cross-referenced.

Although a knowledge of the general rules of compound words is helpful in managing the runaway vocabulary of science, the array of rules and examples presented in this manual is staggering.



Perhaps appropriately, Section 8 is the one devoted to compound words (in military parlance, “Section 8” refers to mental aberration) [and technically means discharge from the armed forces because of psychological unfitness—*Ed.*]. Ignore the flippancy. Details are precisely what are needed to solve tough problems.

Part 2 of *The Gregg Reference Manual*, Techniques and Formats, while of minimal interest to BELS specialists, is a good review of basics. Because the intended audience for the book is the business community, the section on mathematics deals mainly with dollars and cents, and the instructions about tables are similarly constrained.

Part 3, References, contains a section on forms of address, a glossary of grammatical terms (a boon to those who know what they are doing but have trouble talking about it), a glossary of computer terms (not bad, but already dated), and lastly a fine, thorough index organized by both page and paragraph numbers. Paragraph numbers are boldface, page numbers are not. The index contains not only topics but also troublesome words and phrases like “a number, the number, 1023.” [Number preceded by *the* is singular, preceded by *a*, plural—*Ed.*]

*The Gregg Reference Manual* is an excellent reference for American English structure, constructions, and usage. The book is useful, affordable, and readily available. I recommend it.

### CORRECTION

My apologies to Janice Andersen, ELS, for misspelling her name in a previous issue of this newsletter. The correct spelling is Andersen, with an *e* in the last syllable.

## Musings

In his most recent book, a collection of short stories titled "Strange Pilgrims," Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez recounts the creative process that led him to publish his first compilation of stories with a common theme, in this case the strange experiences of Latin Americans in Europe. The twelve stories in the book began as sixty-four ideas with many detailed notes. He attempted to write them "all in a single stroke, with an internal unity of tone and style," but found the effort involved in writing a short story "as intense as beginning a novel, where everything must be defined in the first paragraph: structure, tone, style, rhythm, length, and sometimes even the personality of a character." Over the next 18 years, Garcia Marquez ruthlessly culled and pared his stories until only the final twelve remained. In this pruning he was comforted by someone's comment that "good writers are appreciated more for what they tear up than for what they publish." The author finds that "the same iron rigor needed to begin the book is required to end it," and maybe ending it is harder, because he also believes that "each version of a story is better than the one before. How does one know, then, which is the final version? . . . This is a trade secret that does not obey the laws of reason but the magic of instinct."

In other words, don't berate yourself for failing to achieve perfection, but try to make your manuscript only as good as possible before deadline. As Norman Grossblatt likes to say, "nothing is ever finished; it's just due."

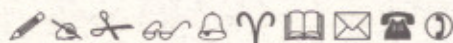
## Factoids

- In the U.S. today, the cost of prenatal care for a pregnant woman for 9 months is \$600. The cost of medical care for a premature baby for 1 day is \$2,500.
- On January 24, 1866, Dr. Mary Walker became the only woman ever to receive a Congressional Medal of Honor, for her bravery in providing medical care during the Civil War. When she later became a suffrage activist, the medal was rescinded and never again given to a woman.

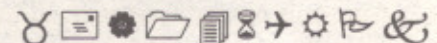
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*Nouns have gender and people have sex.*

Mark Randall,  
The Philadelphia Inquirer,  
July 27, 1993



## Odds and Ends



Dr. Lester Breslow, a public-health specialist from California, has identified seven factors likely to predict an early death or disability: obesity, physical inactivity, smoking, excessive drinking of alcohol, too much or too little sleep, eating between meals, and skipping breakfast. Dr. Breslow based his judgments on epidemiologic studies of nearly 7,000 adults who were followed for three decades. The analysis was published in the April 1993 issue of *Preventive Medicine*.

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Software piracy is illegal, unethical, and just plain bad. The Software Publishers Association (SPA) has started taking action to protect the interests of software publishers. In October 1992, Congress elevated the crime of *willful copying* of computer software from a misdemeanor to a felony. Corporations are required to have a license for each and every copy of a program found on their computers. Stealing occurs not only when a program is borrowed and copied, but also when a legitimate copy is purchased and then used on more than the number of licensed machines. When you buy one copy of a program and use it on ten machines, you have stolen nine copies. Failure to monitor and control this software use makes [one] subject to litigation for copyright

infringement.—Excerpted from R. L. Creighton in *NADTP Journal*, February 1994.

.....

Dr. Farish A. Jenkins, Jr. and two other colleagues took x-ray movies of birds in wind tunnels to crack the riddle of the wishbone. From these data, the Harvard researchers concluded the wishbone was a spring that helps birds breathe while they fly. "This is well known to everybody in the world," said Dr. Jenkins. "It's only scientists who discover the obvious."

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A few days before being awarded the Nobel Prize in literature last December, Toni Morrison spoke before the Swedish Academy and warned against the dark uses of language. "Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek—it must be rejected, altered and exposed," she said. On the plus side, "language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names."

**Announcements**

Judith Dickson, ELS, has been kind enough to look into alternative accommodations in Quebec City for those attending the forthcoming Council of Biology Editors annual meeting. Judith came up with the following: Chateau Grand Allée, (800) 263-1471, three buildings from the Loew's Le Concorde, Can\$69 for a single room; Chateau Laurier, (800) 463-4453, on the same block as Le Concorde and "just a minute's walk," Can\$74 for a single; and Manoir Lafayette, (800) 363-8203, two to three blocks from Le Concorde, Can\$69 for a single or Can\$62 if you are traveling on business. Travel agents are sometimes able to obtain "corporate" rates that are better than the convention rates offered to the professional organization by the hotel; e.g., Can\$99 at LeConcorde through a travel agent versus Can\$145 quoted in the CBE registration material. The currency exchange rate is now approximately Can\$1 to US\$0.75.

Grace Darling will be driving into Quebec City from Montreal on Saturday, May 14, departing from the airport around 5 PM. If you would like to ride with her, please call Grace at (214) 824-0154 or fax (214) 824-0463.

This just in: The Third Annual Meeting of BELS will be held on Monday, May 16, 1994, at Le Bonaparte restaurant, 680 Grand Allée, just down the street from Le Concorde. All BELS members are encouraged to attend. The formal meeting will be preceded by an optional dinner at 7:00 P.M. that will include French paté, sirloin steak with pepper sauce *or* fresh salmon with giant shrimp, baked Alaska, and tea, coffee, or milk. The cost of the dinner is US\$22 per person, and you can reserve a place by sending a check payable to BELS to Judy Dickson, 14213 Briarwood Terrace, Rockville, MD 20853, by May 1, or call her at (301) 460-4441.

**1994 Calendar**

**May 14 - 16** Council of Biology Editors 38th Annual Meeting. Loew's Le Concorde, Quebec City, Canada.

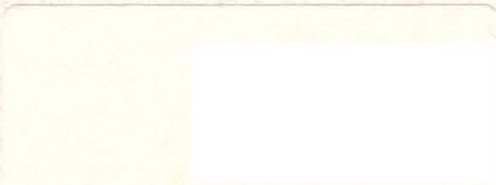
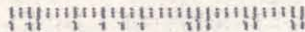
**May 15 - 18** Society for Technical Communication 41st Annual Conference. Minneapolis, MN.

**May 23 - 30** African Association of Science Editors 6th Conference and Assembly. Nairobi, Kenya.

**June 8 - 10** Society for Scholarly Publishing 16th Annual Meeting. San Francisco, CA.

**August 7 - 11** American Institute of Biological Sciences Annual Meeting. Knoxville, TN.

**November 2 - 5** American Medical Writers Association 54th Annual Conference. The Pointe at Squaw Peak, Phoenix, AZ.



Selected Readings in Plastic Surgery  
411 North Washington, Ste. 6900, LB15  
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**BELS** LETTER

