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Issue No. 11
Winter 1997

1997 Calendar of Events

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| Feb 11, 12 | "How to Make Your Net Presence Pay Off . . . In Reach & Revenues." Preconference seminar of the Association of American Publishers, Washington DC. |
| March 9-13 | "Technology and Creativity: Can They Coexist in Biomedical Communications?" AMWA Asilomar Conference, Pacific Grove CA. |
| March 15 | BELS certification examination, New Orleans LA. |
| April 19 | BELS certification examination, Burbank CA. |
| May 2-6 | CBE 40th annual meeting, Philadelphia PA. |
| May 3 | BELS certification examination, Philadelphia PA. |
| May 10-15 | "From Scholar to Scholar. Books and Journals in the Scholarly Communication Process." International Association of Scholarly Publishers, Vancouver BC. |
| May 24 | BELS certification examination, Helsinki, Finland. |
| May 25-28 | "Quality in Communication: The Editor's Role." EASE 6th general assembly, Helsinki, Finland. |
| June 4-6 | SSP 19th annual meeting, Washington DC. |
| July 12 | BELS certification examination. |
| Sept 17-21 | International Congress on Biomedical Peer Review and Global Communications, Prague, Czech Republic. |
| Nov 11 | BELS certification examination. |
| Nov 12-15 | AMWA annual conference, Boston MA. |



How to Handle the Angry Author

Elizabeth Whalen, ELS

Anyone who has edited for a while has faced the problem of the screaming author. The author may be angry about something the editor did or failed to do—or even angry about something unrelated to the editor—but the anger is real. To prevent the automatic defensive reaction that will only prolong the agony of the situation, try the following:

Stay calm. Magic happens as you stay calm. The author vents much frustration, and by the time the screaming stops, you will have gathered your wits and be ready to talk rationally about solving the problem. If despite this resolve you start panicking, concentrate on your breathing. (I know this sounds like some strange incantation from Southern California, but I'm originally from Missouri—you can trust me.) Intentionally slow your breathing and loosen the tight muscles. Calming the physiologic symptoms helps cool the emotions. Another way to achieve emotional equilibrium is to stay physically balanced: make sure that both your feet are flat on the floor and that your weight is evenly distributed between them. So you're controlling your breathing rate and staying balanced, and suddenly you realize you missed something the author said (or screamed). Don't worry.

Continued on page 2

Sticks and stones may break our bones,
but words will break our hearts.

Robert Fulghum

From page 1

The angry author repeats important complaints several times. If you missed it once, you'll catch it the next time around.

Pretend you are not the one being yelled at. Listen carefully to the criticism but pretend that the author is complaining about another person, not you. This small mental subterfuge allows you to hear the criticism without taking it personally.

Identify the real problem. Before you can resolve anything with a screaming person, you must root out the source of the anger. Because angry people often cast their wrath widely and indiscriminately ("Why are all you editors so stupid?"), it may take a few minutes of concentrated listening to uncover the specific reason for the outburst. After the author has thoroughly vented, you may have a better idea of the problem. When you get the chance, restate the problem to make sure you understand it. Ask questions to further clarify the situation ("Which changes did you most object to?").

Empathize sincerely. Nothing is more annoying than a patronizing "there, there." Listen to what the author has to say and, if you think the author has a valid concern, state that feeling ("I can understand why you are so upset about that."). If you disagree with the author's position and know that a compromise may be needed, simply express your regret of the misunderstanding ("I'm sorry this problem has arisen."). Either way, the angry author may start to realize that you are not the enemy.

Explore possible solutions. Take the problem seriously and outline different options for dealing with it. Don't assume that a "quick and dirty fix" will satisfy the author. This is the brainstorming phase in which the author may make some impossible demand; don't dismiss it out of hand, but instead acknowledge it and reply with your own suggestions. If all goes well, you will be ready to proceed to the next step.

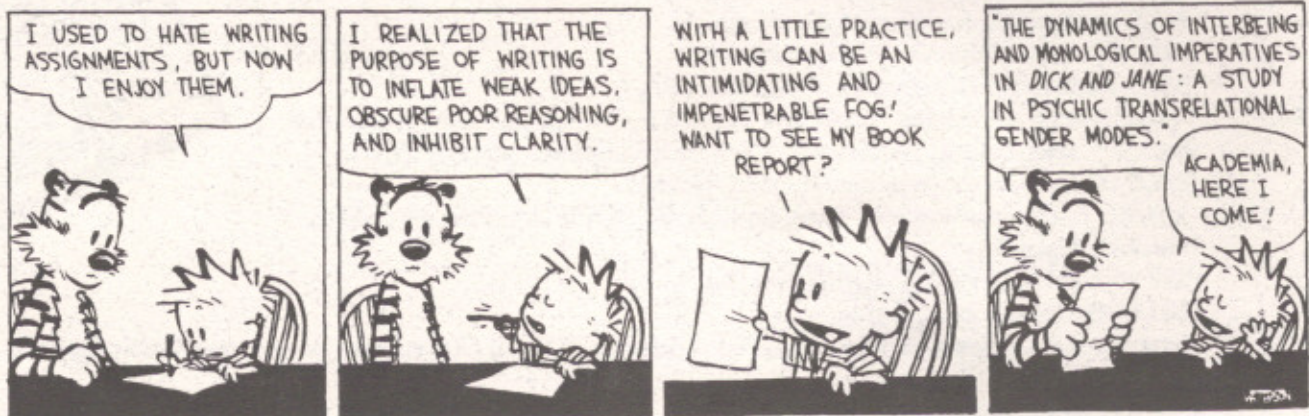
Decide on a course of action and see it through. The solution to the current crisis will likely be a compromise for both of you, but it must be reached jointly and clearly expressed. Then, it is your responsibility as an editor to make sure that the agreed-upon solution is implemented—your credibility hinges on it. For instance, if it involves a change in proofs, you need to see a copy of the final version to confirm that the correction was accurately made. After the manuscript is printed, check to see whether the author is satisfied with the results. If the author is still unhappy, suggest a plan for managing similar situations

**Speak when you are angry
and you will make the best
speech you will ever regret.**

Ambrose Bierce

in the future. Be positive and try to project an optimistic attitude, as if you believe that there will be other opportunities to edit this author's work.

It takes two to tangle. If you can keep your head while all about you are losing theirs, you will be doing a favor to yourself, the author, and ultimately the readers. A screaming author faced with a calm, understanding, and reasonable editor often becomes a calm, understanding, and reasonable author.



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Welcome

Congratulations and a heartfelt welcome to our newest inductees:

- Leslie Battis
- Paula Card-Higginson
- Laurie Haynes
- John C Keogh
- Jane C Lantz
- Candace B Levy
- L Reginald MacIntyre
- Janice E Metcalf
- Kathryn Nelson
- Mary Beth Nierengarten
- Peggy Robinson
- Barbara Solsky
- P Lynne Stockton

News From the Road

Last October I spent a delightful couple of days at Airlie House for the CBE retreat. A most stimulating experience; I recommend it highly. The theme of the 1996 session was "The Fate of the Scientific Paper in a Paperless Age," and Ron LaPorte set the tone of the meeting with his assertion that print journals are dead. According to LaPorte, science publishing as we know it is a dinosaur that deserves to be extinct. Because of lengthy delays caused by manuscript preparation and revision, a cumbersome peer-review process, and constraints placed upon authors by publishers, the public is denied valuable scientific information in a timely fashion. His solution: electronic articles that link the author directly and immediately with the reader and that bypass the obstacles posed by traditional sources. Naturally, LaPorte's comments sparked a spirited discussion among retreat participants, one that continues by e-mail today (write to me if you want in on it). Considering that his audience consisted largely of publishers and editors whose livelihoods would be endangered should this notion come to pass, LaPorte's statements were met with polite interest if not wholehearted support. A full report on the retreat will appear in *CBE Views* in the next few months.

BELS members made a strong showing at the AMWA meeting in Chicago. BELSites presented papers, chaired committees, led workshops, headed round-table discussions, and otherwise contributed to the success of the educational program. We are indeed fortunate to have such talented people in our ranks. On behalf of the entire membership, I thank them for giving so generously of their time and effort. The rewards of active participation in professional organizations are not always tangible, but they are considerable. Thanks also to Miriam Bloom, ELS, and Patti Wolf, ELS, for organizing the informal get-togethers at breakfast and dinner. News of job triumphs and frustrations was exchanged, friendships were forged or cemented, and the sense of camaraderie was everywhere. Let's do it again.

If you are a freelance editor or looking for employment, make sure that Miriam Bloom has a current e-mail address for you, so you can join the BELS job bank. Many potential employers go to BELS when they have a position to fill, and those openings as well as freelance opportunities are posted often. Miriam keeps the BELS e-list and will forward all inquiries she receives to interested members. Because of time and fiscal constraints, only electronic notices can be processed. You can reach Miriam at sciwrite@fiona.umsmmed.edu. And remember: this valuable service is available only to active BELS members, so be sure to pay your dues for 1997.

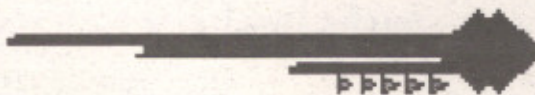
*Grace Darling, ELS
Editor*



"I MAJORED IN ETHICS. SEVERAL RECRUITERS TALKED TO ME. THEY'D LIKE ME TO DO VOLUNTEER WORK."

The Jury Is Out

by Judith H Dickson, ELS(D)



From time to time, an editing question will be posted to the BELS e-list and a sample of the responses will be published in the *Letter*. How did this come about? I was faced with an issue that I thought was straightforward, and much to my surprise (amazement, actually) I found that it wasn't. In fact, everyone I polled about it had a different take, and I found the answers fascinating.

Q: Do you think that the following list contains parallel items?

Courses included

- identification of organic contaminants,
- the microbial world of our environment,
- radioactive decay,
- use of macroinvertebrates in assessing stream quality,
- use of microorganisms to clean the environment,
- ecology of botanical habitats,
- environmental assessment and urban planning, and
- the gypsy moth.

A: The simple answer is no. Although most (maybe all) of the items are noun-like, the forms change. Are these actual titles of courses? Because if they are, you're in trouble. If not, and you have the power to change them, you should. How about getting rid of the prepositional phrases? The list head is a problem because it is in the past tense and so we might have to reconcile memory, reality, style, and who knows what else.

Jonathan Briggs, ELS

A: If they are all courses, then they are parallel items for administrative purposes and would be treated as such in appropriate contexts, eg, a list of project topics or a university prospectus. They are syntactically parallel in that each of them is a noun or noun phrase, but if the items were presented out of context, I would think they made a rather odd list.

Kathleen Lyle, ELS

A: Yes if a list of course titles; no if merely topics included in various courses. If course titles, this could be made clear by using quotation marks and capitalization. I'd redo the lead-in to clarify whether the list is titles or topics.

Nancy Taylor, ELS

A: Strictly speaking, they're parallel. They're all nouns, they fit grammatically, and so on. But in a more general sense, they are not parallel, in that some are actions (identification, use, etc), some are subjects of study (the microbial world, ecology, etc), and a couple are procedures (use and use). I guess the short answer is, yes, they're parallel.

Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D)

A: If the items in the list are actual course titles, then I suppose they are parallel. Even so, the sentence might work better if the lead was changed to "Courses covered topics including." I would also add "the" to items 1, 4, 5 and 6, but not 3 and 7. Items 4 and 5 are not parallel and one should be changed to match the other. With these changes, I would be more comfortable in considering the items to be of parallel construction.

Peggy Robinson, ELS

A: Grammatically speaking, they're all nouns or noun phrases, so by one definition, it's parallel. That said, I would still revise it to be more parallel.

Elena Westbrook, ELS

A: I consider the items in your list to be parallel in the sense that they all could be viewed as noun phrases. I can also see why others might argue that the items are not parallel because they are not constructed exactly the same way (some use "the," some contain prepositional phrases, etc). Another way in which the items could be considered parallel is that they are, in fact, course titles, so "if it happened, it was."

Diana Mathis, ELS

A: Yes. This list contains parallel items. Although the construction of each is a bit different, I assume that each refers to a course name. As such, it should be left as is.

Bill Carman, ELS

A: These items would be considered all right in a list only if they were proper names, of classes, for instance, in which case they should be at least initial-capped. They definitely are not in parallel format!

Carolinda Hales, ELS

A: In a strict sense, I don't think the items are parallel as listed. Joann Nash, ELS

A: NO! The list is not parallel! You have both flat subjects (nouns) and activities (gerunds), but I don't see any way around using both inasmuch as they are proposed course titles. But you can at least drop the articles. Shirley Peterson, ELS

A: Technically the items are not exactly parallel grammatically. To be entirely parallel, each would begin with "the" followed by a noun and a prepositional phrase. However, as a working editor, I would not be that stodgy. The items are parallel in the sense that they are all course titles, so if the writer is reporting exact titles, why should an editor change them? Retta Whinnery, ELS

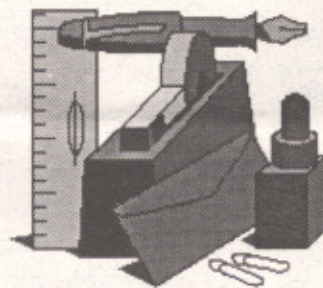


New Word Alert

- charette - a last-minute, intense effort to meet a deadline
- functionality - to mean usefulness
- sexual preference - to mean sexual orientation
- historicity - of historical importance
- malnourished - dietarily challenged

.....
 • Just remember that if editors were so damn smart they •
 • would know how to dress. •

 Dave Barry



The Editor's View
 At least let it be said
 of me when I am dead:
 "Our pencils were scarlet
 but your papers were read."

I'm convinced that a controlled disrespect for authority is essential to a scientist. All the good experimental physicists I have known have had an intense curiosity that no Keep Out sign could mute. Physicists do, of course, show a healthy respect for High Voltage, Radiation, and Liquid Hydrogen signs. They are not reckless. I can think of only six who have been killed on the job.
Luis Alvarez, in Adventures of a Physicist

What's In A Name

A sampling of newsletter names, past and present:

<i>The Squealer</i>	Bob Evans Farms Inc, a pork sausage producer
<i>Expressions</i>	American Greetings Corp
<i>TreadLines</i>	Yokohama Tire Corp
<i>Kodakery</i>	Eastman Kodak Co
<i>On Q</i>	Quaker State Corp
<i>Technically Write</i>	Lone Star chapter, Society for Technical Communication
<i>Knead to Know</i>	Fleischmann's Yeast

Odds & Ends


Increasing stress from work and personal pressures, natural aging with its slowly diminishing blood supply to the brain, certain drugs, lack of sleep, poor eating habits, and depression can all contribute to memory deficits. Scientists estimate that beginning at age 30, approximately 100,000 brain cells die each day. Apparently this is no great loss, since we have billions more than we are ever likely to use. By age 65, 20% of our brain capacity supposedly is gone, but Einstein once said that none of us operates at more than 20% of capacity anyway, so it's OK.

Psychologists recognize five types of memory: *working*—to temporarily store facts we need on a daily basis, eg, phone numbers; *implicit*—to remember functions for a long time, eg, how to ride a bicycle; *remote*—to store facts for a long time, eg, movie trivia; *episodic*—to bridge the gap between remote and implicit; and *semantic*—to remember the meanings of words, including the names of things. It is the working memory that we most depend on to keep us from sounding stupid and that causes us the most frustration. Working memory is highly susceptible to the effects of medications such as beta blockers, sedatives, and antihistamines. As a rule of thumb, any drug that makes you drowsy may affect your memory.

To combat memory loss, researchers recommend that we learn new things every day. They liken memory to a spider web that can be built up and strengthened by making new memories to overlay the old. If we keep learning new things, we protect our memories, build self-esteem, and avoid embarrassing lapses.

A report in JAMA suggests that surgeons perform better if they operate to music. In a study from Buffalo, surgeons who listened to a soundtrack of their choice while operating reduced their heart rate and increased their performance on intellectual tasks. The therapeutic effects of music were manifested as decreased blood pressure and pulse rate and improved concentration and mental acuteness. The surgeons in the study all preferred instrumentals, but the selections varied from Count Basie to Bach to Celtic harp music.

Government funding of scientific research had its ups and downs in 1996, says *BioScience*. The 104th Congress showed a continued commitment to biomedical research, but other biological programs were not so lucky. Life sciences did better than any other fields because of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which has enjoyed a 10% increase in research funds over the last 3 years. For FY 1997, NIH's budget stands at \$12.2 billion. In contrast, funding for research and development (R&D) by the Interior Department was cut 23.7% for FY 1997, and the Environmental Protection Agency saw a 5% drop in its budget. Hardest hit was the National Biological Survey (NBS), which last October was placed under the aegis of the US Geological Survey, itself a threatened agency, and renamed the Biological Resources Division. Funding for the former NBS was reduced from a previous high of \$167 million to \$137.5 million for FY 1997.

Speaking of NIH, you might be surprised to read that it has no overall system for monitoring clinical trials. According to *Science*, clinical trials are particularly vulnerable to slipshod practices and even scientific fraud because they involve many centers and investigators. Yet at NIH there is no uniform policy regulating oversight of large, multisite clinical trials, and some NIH-sponsored trials may not include on-site audit of data. On-site auditing—comparing the trial's case report forms with original patient records—is considered to be the best safeguard against fraud and sloppiness in clinical trials. Unlike the system at NIH, frequent on-site auditing of multisite clinical trials is the norm at pharmaceutical companies, which are eager for FDA approval of their products. Many experts believe that NIH should move toward the industry model. 

URLs 4U

<http://sunsite.unc.edu/~una/bioguide/>
A Biologist's Guide to Internet Resources.

<http://h2o.usgs.gov/public/biblio.html>
Environmental bibliographic collections from the US Geological Survey.

http://ice.ucdavis.edu/Cyberspace_Jump_Station/bibliographies/biology.html
Links to 90 bibliographies compiled by the Information Center for the Environment, University of California, Davis.

<http://lternet.edu/biblio/files/>
Access to ecological research data on 18 sites in the US, Antarctica, and Puerto Rico; this network is part of the US Long-Term Ecological Research Program (LTER).

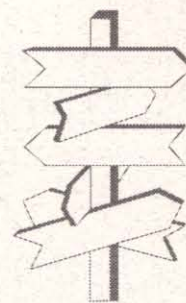
<http://www-csag.cs.uiuc.edu/individual/pakin/complaint>
Generates delightful tirades for indignant lovers of words.

<http://www.bluemarble.net/~amyloo/wno.html>
Lets you reach the World Nap Organization.

http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/cochrane/handbook/cchb_06b.html
Uniform requirements.

<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/>
An excellent tutorial on what works and what doesn't on Web pages.

<http://www.bucknell.edu/~rbeard/diction.html>
On-line dictionaries of all sorts (many languages, synonyms, etc.).



**As to the Adjective:
when in doubt, strike it out.**

Mark Twain

