

BELS Letter

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Editor

Ann Morcos, MA, ELS

Contributors

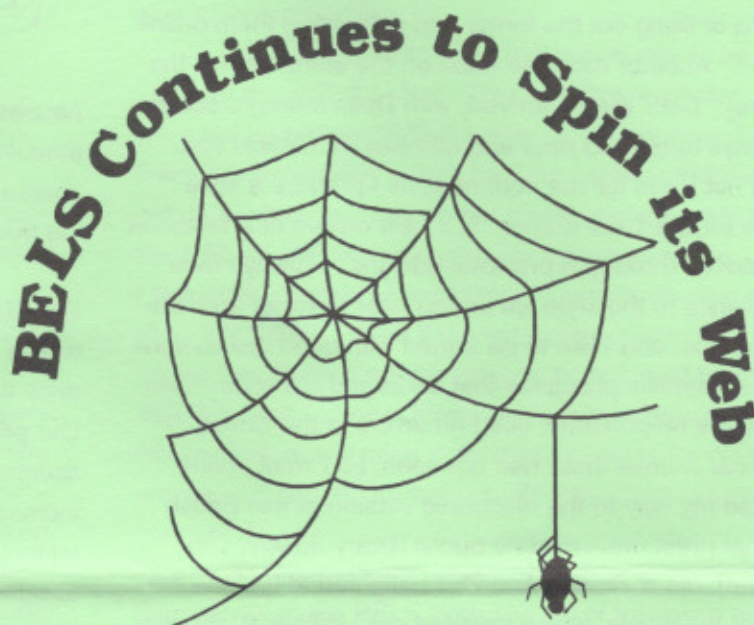
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Issue 19

Winter 2000



My third revolution

Bobbie Reitt

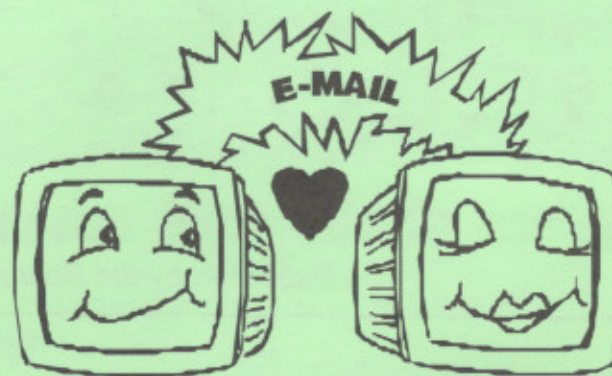
If your experience is like mine, the Internet is changing the way you work. It's the third revolution of my career (here's where you can figure out how old I am!) The first was the switch from hot type to photo-offset printing, a change that affected my work only in minor ways. The second was the emergence of computerized word processing. I'll never forget the workshop on this new technology I attended in Washington in 1978; we were taken to the American Chemical Society to see how its editors used computers, and I came away knowing that I'd be buying a computer as soon as I got home. For a while, it was a bit lonely—only a few other colleagues then were even aware of what word processing could do.

Now, I'm in the midst of my third revolution, the one driven by the Internet. For years, every morning before starting the "commute" from the breakfast table to my desk, I've gone to the office to boot up the computer and get my word processor running. But these days, my first move after booting is to go online and fetch any e-mail that's arrived since the day before. I'm always running two programs—my word processor and my browser. I don't stay online, but I'm always poised and ready to go online. Almost every week I learn something new that I can do better or faster or more conveniently by using the Internet. I'm repeatedly astonished at how much this new resource is changing the way I work.

For example, just the other day a client suddenly changed her mind and asked me to formally register her book for copyright, not just declare its copyrighted status. Last time I did this chore for a client, I had to write to the Copyright Office in Washington and ask for instructions and forms, and then wait weeks for them to arrive. This time, these were available with 5 clicks (I counted). I downloaded and printed out what I needed, and if I really want to speed things up, I even have the option of filling out the forms and submitting them online.

Another example (also on the same day as the above): *CBE Views* arrived, with Della Mundy's column on ways to refer to race and ethnicity in medical text. It's a hot issue for me right now, as I prepare a style guide for the 100+ authors in a new edition of a textbook I've edited through 3 previous editions. I always face resistance to the style we use to refer to racial and ethnic groups, and I like to be armed with good discussions of the scientific principles that undergird our style. Two of Della's respondents cited an article in the *British Medical Journal* that I had not seen, so I went online, clicked my way to the electronic version of this British journal (trust me—my tiny public library doesn't subscribe!), did a search, and was delighted to find the full text of the article, which I printed out. Within 10 minutes and without bothering anyone else, I had my article in hand.

Quick, easy, cheap access to specialist information and resources is wonderful, of course, but I haven't mentioned yet the other change that's occurring. Not only is the Internet changing the way we work individually, it's changing the ways we work together. E-mail, to our occasional annoyance, makes communication almost instantaneous. It can be too much of a good thing, for who doesn't groan when faced with the news that there are 43 messages in your inbox? But, oh my, the advantages! Remember that textbook with 100+ authors? The managing editor used to send me each chapter by FedEx. More than 100 disks with printouts posed no trivial filing and archiving challenge. (I don't even want to talk about the management of all the interim versions of all those chapters!) Now she sends me each chapter as an e-mail attachment, which I file away on a Zip disk that will also hold all future versions of each chapter. We've cut our mailing and shipping costs, reduced the use of paper, and eliminated the annoying



pauses while we waited for the drafts to wend their way from her house to mine. (Our computers, of course, play a large part in the fact that we're both working from our homes.)

The implications of the Internet for organizations like BELS are huge, of course. Think about it: we're a widely scattered, relatively small group that meets only once a year, and even then only some of us can attend. Our primary function is to administer examinations; our secondary one, to promote the cause of certification and increase the awareness of its importance among fellow editors and other colleagues in science publishing. Tough assignment, but one made easier by the Internet. Or so I believe.

I began to grasp the implications last year when I was faced with putting the text of the revised bylaws before the membership and asking for a vote of approval. The text is 14 pages long, and we had more than 175 members. You do the math—that's an awful lot of paper, photocopying, collating, stapling, folding, and envelope addressing, stamping, and mailing. The fact that we had a Web site saved us a lot of money and me a lot of time. I e-mailed the bylaws to Patti Wolf (then, our Web site manager), and she posted the text in the Members Only section of the site, along with a ballot that, when submitted, would come to me directly as an e-mail message. We had to mail paper copies to the fewer than 25 members who do not have e-mail addresses and who presumably are not Web-active. I was astonished and delighted with the results: the overwhelming majority of votes were in my hands within 24 hours, and our rate of response was much higher than one usually sees with such polls. The bylaws still reside on the site, available for ready access, downloading, and printing out by anyone in the organization. The next committee to work on

bylaws revision needn't even be provided with paper copy and disks!

We're finding that recruiting among members for volunteers to do BELS tasks works well. When we send out appeals for help via the list-serve function of our Web site, response typically comes from 3 to 5 people within 24 hours! We simply had no such access to members before.

We've agreed from the beginning that we want potential clients and employers of life-science editors to know about BELS certification. We've talked about press kits and packets for this purpose, but nothing very elaborate has ever emerged, largely because creation of such materials is so expensive and time-consuming. Meantime, however, we've posted the full texts of our brochures about the certification and diplomate examination programs on the Web site. Now, all we have to do is direct interested people to our URL. It's a "living" press kit.

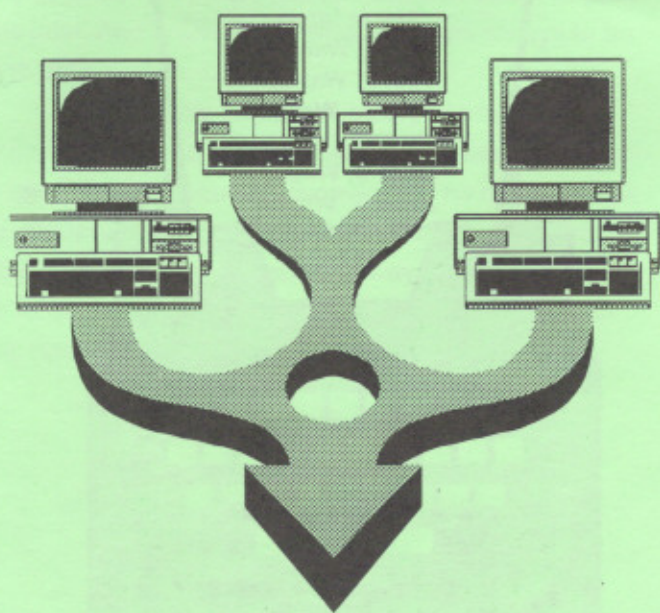
Candidates for the exams are downloading our application blank from the Web site to fill out and mail in. The burden of mailing out the introductory packets to candidates is getting less heavy every year, as more and more interested colleagues find our information on the Web.

Incoming e-mails from BELS members who have questions to ask colleagues clearly indicate that the BELS list-serve is proving to be genuinely helpful. In fact, it's only beginning to dawn on me how powerful such access can be. I can ask all of you a question and expect help within hours, even within minutes. It's as if we were all working just down the hall from one another. Fantastic!

To be honest, not all our experiences with our Web site have been positive. Just a month or so ago Jan Jerrells (now our Web site manager), Norman Grossblatt, and I struggled with finding ways to protect our bulletin board from being spammed by outsiders who cluttered our discussion with unwanted ads and even some pornography. In the process, we learned more from our hosting service than we ever wanted to know about how this stuff works. We're still on the steep side of the learning curve—but then so is everyone else.

We need to continue exploring ways to exploit the BELS Web site to make our work easier to do, extend our reach and increase our visibility, and better serve our members. I'd like to hear from you: What would you like us to add to the site? What ideas do you have for new and creative ways we can use the site? Call or write—but why not just e-mail Jan or me. ☞

☞ ☞ ☞ *Barbara (Bobbie) Reitt* ☞ ☞ ☞



Don't forget to visit the BELS Web site Often



<http://www.bels.org>

The Web site WORKS!

**Shirley
Peterson,
BELS Registrar**



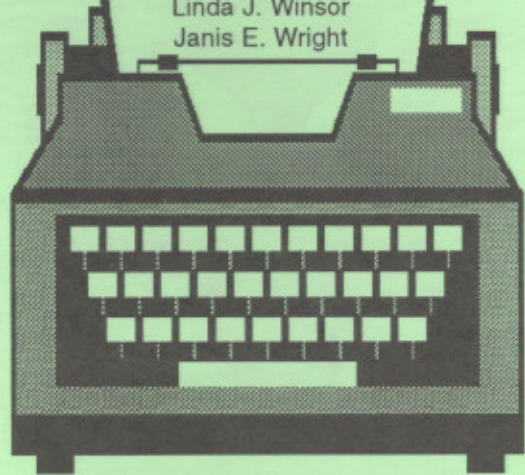
Of the more than 40 people who registered for the recent certification examination in Philadelphia, 25 downloaded applications from the Web site. Several other applicants e-mailed the registrar, possibly finding the address on the Web site, to request introductory information in the hardcopy format. I find that about half the people in the "eligible" database, 49 of 94, applied from the Web, and that the requests for snail-mail application materials fell off sharply after June. Not surprisingly, almost all new applicants have e-mail addresses, a great leap forward from 1997.

BELS saves a dollar every time an applicant uses the Web site for information and the application form instead of requesting material by snail mail. (Money is also saved by using e-mail to ask and answer questions, instead of running up BELS bills by phoning or faxing.) Our saving money is a good thing, but I suspect that an even greater advantage of Web site use is that the eventual applicants invest effort and concentration in order to acquire information about BELS and the certification process. That investment may stimulate action.

A less obvious advantage of Web site use by applicants is that the registrar doesn't have as much work to do. An applicant's name goes directly into the "eligible" database without pausing in the "query" database. The copier needs to churn out fewer copies of the single-sheet material sent with brochures (all of which are available on the Web site). Time spent gathering material, then stuffing, addressing, stamping, and mailing envelopes is much reduced. I'm beginning to love the BELS Web site. ☺

New BELS Members, Welcome Aboard!

Nathalie Bacon
Peggy Chen
Elizabeth Davis
Maria G. Essig
Thomas P. Gegeny
Elizabeth L. Hess
Beverly Entwistle Isman
Linda W. Jackim
Mary L. Jerrell
Julia Cay Jones
Janice Kaspersen
Rebecca A. Krumm
Deanna Laing
Patrick Lowery
Sandra J. Masse
Judith A. McKay
Jeanne M. Mettner
Laura J. Ninger
Flory Nye-Clement
Judith M. Orvos
Katherine Ott
Angelina Piccoli
Roseanne Price
Katie Racette
Rebecca M. Robinson
Barbara J. Rutledge
Donna R. Savage
Debra Share
Terrance Smith
Karen G. Stanwood
Martha H. Tulloch
John A. Tumas
Susan Virgili
Wendy Wagner
Ann L. Walker
Kristine Welsh
Cheryl L. Wilder
Linda J. Winsor
Janis E. Wright



My Favorite BELS Link

If you haven't tried the Related Sites on the BELS Web site yet, you've been missing a great way to discover new resources to use in your work. My favorite is Martindale's The Reference Desk. The URL (<http://www-sci.lib.uci.edu/~martindale/Ref.html>) suggests only faintly what it is. I think of this as my own personal science reference library. I've pointed a number of friends who are not in BELS to Martindale's, and several of them are still thanking me every time we talk.

The author is Jim Martindale, and the base is the University of California, Irvine. This is probably one of the most useful points from which to start almost any search for information on the Web. It's a huge cluster of links to other sites, organized very neatly into "centers" of knowledge: bioscience and biotechnology, health science, chemistry, physics, mathematics, materials science, weather, arts and letters, earth science, business, language, sports and recreation, and on and on and on. Looking for obscure science tables, calculators, current weather conditions in Burma? You'll find it here. Grant sources or a journal? Look here. Travel information? It's here, too. Information about lugging or prospecting or cartography? Yup. The site's easy on the eye: elegantly simple, with a deep blue background and yellow or pale blue print. And unlike many sites, it seems always to be up to date.

There's only one problem: if you scroll to the bottom and explore the information Martindale has posted about himself, you will discover that he doesn't know the difference between the possessive and the plural. What a shame! But look at it this way: the scientists of the world, bless their hearts, really do need good editors, don't they? ☞

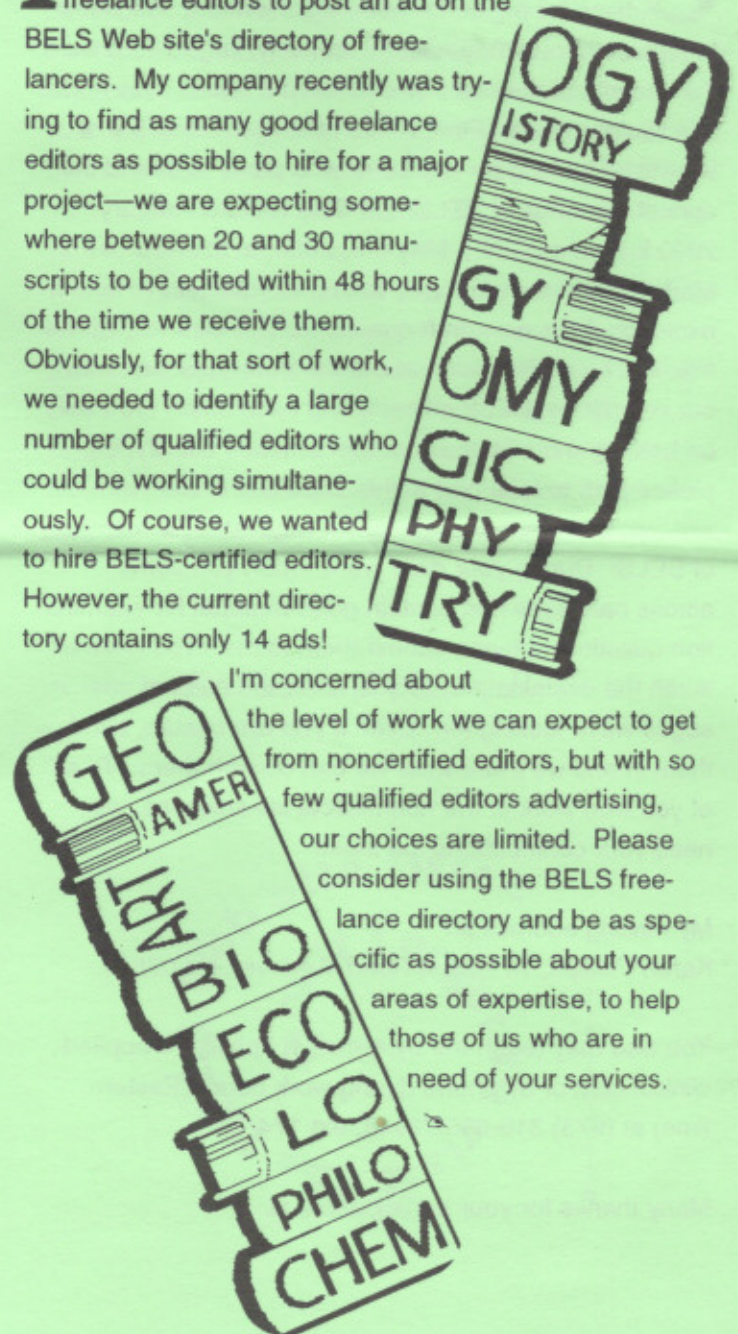
☞ ☞ ☞ *Bobbie Reitt* ☞ ☞ ☞

As a Prospective Employer

Karen Phillips

I encourage all members who offer their services as freelance editors to post an ad on the BELS Web site's directory of freelancers. My company recently was trying to find as many good freelance editors as possible to hire for a major project—we are expecting somewhere between 20 and 30 manuscripts to be edited within 48 hours of the time we receive them. Obviously, for that sort of work, we needed to identify a large number of qualified editors who could be working simultaneously. Of course, we wanted to hire BELS-certified editors. However, the current directory contains only 14 ads!

I'm concerned about the level of work we can expect to get from noncertified editors, but with so few qualified editors advertising, our choices are limited. Please consider using the BELS freelance directory and be as specific as possible about your areas of expertise, to help those of us who are in need of your services.



Back to Business

A Heads-up From the Certification Examination Development Committee

Our committee is responsible for writing new questions for the certification examination. We need to replace about 20 questions annually, largely to ensure the security of the exam and to keep it fresh. This notice has two purposes: First, to alert the membership that we will be looking for everyone who plans to attend the annual meetings of BELS and CSE (before January 2000 known as CBE), May 6-9, 2000, at the Adams Mark Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, to volunteer to take a mini-test of the new draft questions. The mini-test will be followed by a discussion about the new questions with our committee, BELS officers, and each other. You will be hearing more later about this as plans solidify, but please plan to take part in this important endeavor!!

The second purpose is a request to all members of BELS: During your daily work, when you come across passages that contain good material for examination questions, please submit them to me. You have all taken the examination, so you know the sorts of passages we're looking for. Even if you are unsure, send them in and we'll see what we can do with them. To all of you who work in the nonmedical life sciences, we need your contributions the most!

My mailing address is:
Karen Phillips, 13 Forest Road, Andover, NJ 07821.

You also may reach me by e-mail at kphillips@applied-clinical.com or by phone during work hours (Eastern time) at (973) 316-8952/8948, ext 174.

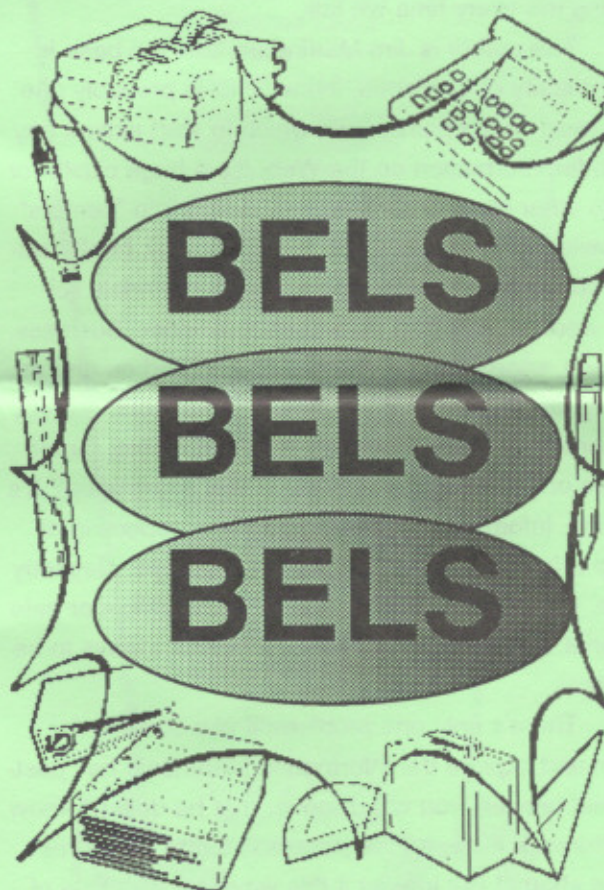
Many thanks for your participation. ☺

☞ ☞ ☞ **Karen Phillips** ☞ ☞ ☞

CSE President Blaire Mossman Appoints Liaison

Susan Eastwood, one of the founding BELS members and former CSE (CBE) president, has agreed to serve as the CSE liaison with BELS. She's got some good ideas for ways that the two organizations can cooperate, and we can rest assured that our interests will be well represented in CSE deliberations.

Thanks, Susan ☺



Plan to attend the BELS
annual meeting and banquet

Saturday evening, 6 May

after the opening reception of the
CSE annual meeting in
San Antonio.

From the President

January 2000

Dear Friends:

The past year has been a time of great change for BELS. The "old guard" has moved aside and new bylaws and leadership have emerged. I have yet another change to announce, and once again I do so with mixed feelings.

I am very sorry to report that Grace Darling is retiring as the editor of the *BELS Letter*. We will miss her inimitable touch, but she has certainly earned the respite: she has ushered 18 issues into print! Not only has she kept us in touch with one another, she's also seen to it that we've been amused and informed.

Grace actually invented the *BELS Letter*. She saw the need for a newsletter when no one on the Executive Council had thought of it, and she volunteered to make it a reality. She and her husband, John Darling (who has done the layout and camera-ready copy for every issue), created the look, recruited the contributors and copyeditors, planned and assembled the contents, maintained the mailing list, and produced our newsletter for us faithfully, starting back in the spring of 1993. She warned herself (and us) back then with a quotation: "Before you start writing a newsletter, figure out what you want it to accomplish, or you may travel reluctantly down the road of new baby announcements." That, thanks to Grace, was one road not taken!

At the same time, I am pleased to announce that Ann Morcos has agreed to take the helm and to serve as newsletter editor for the remainder of the current term (ending in May 2000) and for the following term. Ann served as guest editor for Issue 18, and she brings to the *BELS Letter* extensive experience with newsletters for clients. Thank you, Ann, for assuming this very important task for us.

With gratitude to all the volunteers who make BELS work,

Bobbie Reitt
President

Speaking of the editor

If the *BELS Letter* looks different, that is because it is. I tried to stay true to the format established by John Darling 18 issues ago, but because of different equipment and software, it was inevitable that the look would be somewhat different. I hope no one finds this altered look disturbing.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to be the Editor of the *BELS Letter*. This was Grace's baby. If it were not for her, the *BELS Letter* would not exist. I thank her for making a path for future editors to follow. I will do my best to continue her tradition and to nurture the *BELS Letter* along during my tenure as editor. I welcome comments, criticisms, suggestions, and most of all **writers**. Were it not for writers, there would be no articles. Were it not for articles, there would be no *BELS Letter*. I hope those of you who have not contributed before will send in your article ideas for consideration. Of course, former contributors' ideas are welcome too!

Karen Phillips's urging for members to add themselves to the BELS Web site list of freelance editors is a point well taken. I added my name to the list 3 months ago and last week a person who found my name there contacted me about work. I now have a new client thanks to the BELS Web site.

We all need to get the word out about BELS. Has putting ELS after your name become standard practice? It has for me. Clients ask me what it means. And I am proud to tell other professionals about being board-certified. This professional credential has enhanced my credibility as an editor with the result that more work has come my way. Thanks, BELS! ☺

☺ ☺ ☺ *Ann Morcos* ☺ ☺ ☺



Contact Ann at:
3723 Lilac Lane, Metairie, LA 70001-1727
(504) 780-0083
aheart@linknet.idt.net

LET IT NEVER BE SAID THAT BELS WAS INTIMIDATED BY Y2K!
ON THE CONTRARY, BELS HAS FORGED AHEAD RIGHT INTO THE NEXT
CENTURY WITH EXAMS SCHEDULED INTO THE YEAR 2002.

BELS Examination Schedule

2000

Date	City & Association	Registration Deadline
19 March 2000	Asilomar, CA, AMWA Asilomar	5 March
25 March 2000	Princeton, NJ, Princeton Public Library	11 March
6 May 2000	San Antonio, CSE	22 April
20 May 2000	Tours, France, EASE	6 May
7 November 2000	Miami, AMWA	23 October

2001

February 2001	San Francisco, CA, AAAS/NASW	TBA
4 May 2001	Washington, DC, CSE	20 April
September 20001	Chicago, IL	TBA
23 October 2001	Norfolk, VA, AMWA	9 October

2002

March 2002	Memphis, TN	TBA
May 2002	TBA, CSE	TBA
29 October 2002	San Diego, AMWA	15 October

For more information, write Registrar, BELS, PO Box 8133, Radnor, PA 19087-8133

BELS Letter

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Metairie, LA 70001-1727

