

BELS *Letter*

Published by the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

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Issue 20

Spring 2000

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th

7th

The good editor convinces authors that without revision their genius will be obscured.

⇐⇐⇐ Arthur Plotnik

Second Edition or Second Hand?

One thing about publishing in the sciences: your news is old almost before you've got it printed, bound, and shipped out. Editors in science book publishing face the daily frustration of knowing that production cannot always keep pace with scientific progress. No sooner have you got the chapter on (say) the diagnosis and management of Alzheimer's disease ready for printing than you learn that researchers have developed a new diagnostic screen to detect early dementia or a new drug to slow its progression. Do you risk delaying the publication date for a 52-chapter, 110-author book to incorporate the new information? Or do you put it aside in a folder marked "for next edition"?

Having worked on successive editions of two basic references in geriatric medicine, I've learned to take the long view. No book, given the pace of book publication, will ever be fully up-to-date. There comes a point of diminishing returns when it's time, already, to shut up, sit down, and go to press. Deadlines and money, of course, are the two factors driving this decision. The managing editor gets to tell eager authors that no further revising can be permitted. If a next edition is planned, at least an even-

tual home does exist for orphaned news.

Learning how to shut the door on the current edition without alienating careful authors is only one of the many issues involved in editing successive editions of any science book. Here is a brief review of others I've encountered.

Changing the Cast

Most multiauthor books have two casts of characters, the volume editors and the chapter authors. From one edition to the next, turnover will occur in both groups. Turnover means change, and change can create problems for volume and managing editors.

With a new edition, senior (or burned out) volume editors may move on and newcomers take their place. The way the group works together is forced to change, and even with small changes, people may have difficulty adjusting. And yet, newcomers see the book and its procedures with outsiders' eyes, and their fresh insights can mean that both the book and the editorial process improve.

An early decision facing volume editors of a new edition is which chapter authors to invite back. A closely related problem is finding ways to entice reluctant authors into accepting an invitation. The rewards of chapter authorship are meager: a small honorarium, a free copy of the book once it's published, and a modest boost to one's professional reputation. Naturally, one wants the leaders in a field to write the chapters, but will the leaders be interested? Possibly. If they accept, but reluctantly, will we ultimately be sorry? Possibly. Or, having accepted once, will they consider their duty done and refuse a second go and disappoint us?

Possibly. In that case, do we want the relatively unknown but eager tyro instead? Possibly.

The managing editor's experience with the authors of the previous edition directs many of these decisions by the volume editors: No one wants to invite back anyone who was impossible to work with on a previous edition—unless the chapter was terrific. In which case, the question is whether we can stand it one more time, all those phone calls to wrench late copy from reluctant hands? As for the very best, most cooperative, and prompt authors—we can only hope to attract back as many of them as possible.

In fact, a lot depends on the art of the possible. You invite the best people you can think of, and you hope that they have found working with you to be rewarding enough to accept. (Yes, harbor the thought: you, the editor, may be hard to take!) Inevitably, some top choices will turn you down; some chapters will be written by second or even third choices. Whoever turns up to write the chapters, you will have to cope.

Tweak or Rewrite?

Chapters that get wholly new authorship in a new edition are most likely to be wholly rewritten, right? Well, almost. A new author is sometimes asked to modify an existing chapter (by someone else) in specified ways but not to rewrite it. On occasion, a new author asks if she can retain parts of the old chapter. In both cases, the reason is probably that the quality of the existing chapter is good, and all agree that it makes sense to keep all or some of it as is. This seems sensible, but it raises other issues: How much of an old chapter incor-

porated into a new one written by a new author justifies listing the old author as a coauthor? What if the writing styles of the two authors are noticeably different? What to do if subtle conflicts or contradictions in the content emerge later, in the editing?

And it's not as if the problems go away when an old author is asked back. Oh, my, no. The worst problem with this scenario is that you'll get a disk with the revised chapter for the new edition, and you'll be well into editing it before you discover that the author started with the original file submitted to you for the previous edition and added three new paragraphs, scattered here and there. You're appalled when you realize that you're editing sentences you've already edited—but 2 years ago—for the previous edition! The second-worst problem is that you'll get a chapter that's merely been tweaked without having been truly updated. Your author's in a rut—but should the book stay there, too?

Overall, the most important question for editors of a second edition to consider is this: How much of a rewrite does the reader deserve? How new must a new edition be?

Totally Reorganize?

When the new editorial team first looks at the old table of contents, fur can really start to fly. Someone remarks, "Let's jettison the first chapter. I always hated it. Why does this thing always have to start with _____?" A veteran responds testily, "I wrote that chapter for the first edition. We've always begun with _____." Or someone protests that a topic is covered fully but is scattered among four chapters; she suggests that it be pulled out and assembled in one place, as a new chapter.

Everyone agrees, and an author for the new chapter is found. But the authors of the chapters where the topic used to be covered eventually protest—they find that they can't do their subjects justice if they have to skip over the problem topic. Now what?

Reorganization of a book that sees successive editions is inevitable, as new scientific information emerges and the relative importance of topics shifts. But each such change brings editorial complications that sometimes don't appear until well into a project. For the managing editor, especially, the challenges can seem as overwhelming as resolving conflict in the Balkans.

What To Throw Out?

With every new edition, the old one should be searched diligently for outdated or erroneous material. Of course, any science editor with more than a few years of experience knows that what's out of date and what's wrong is a matter of definition, and experts will disagree. Deciding what not to keep in the new edition can be an arduous process; it certainly should be painstaking. The readers who faithfully buy successive editions deserve that much. Publish the wrong dosage for a medication once, and we'll nod in sympathy with you about the pitfalls of proofreading; publish the same wrong dosage twice, shame on you!

Listening to Readers

Publishers of books that appear regularly in new editions should establish a method for keeping track of corrections and comments from readers. Someone in the editorial group (volume editors, associate editors, managing editor) should be

responsible for following up on incoming comments. Authors should be given copies of comments relating to their chapters. There's certainly no excuse for recycling errors that readers have already caught and warned you about. The task can be annoying, because some comments will, of course, be trivial, but others may be fundamentally important, so the effort and care are worth while.

Permissions

Sadly, few authors understand copyright. Many assume that permission granted to reprint a table or figure in one edition applies to subsequent editions as well. Of course, it rarely does. A chapter only lightly revised from a previous edition may present editors with even tougher permissions mysteries to solve than it did the first time around, as holders of the copyrights are likely to have moved on, and old addresses and telephone numbers no longer apply. Institutions where authors once served on faculty may be reluctant or unable to say where their former employee has gone.

Is It Classic or Old Hat?

You've included the normogram in every edition. Your main editor tells you he uses it in his teaching with each year's new batch of students. Clearly, it's a fixture in his life. But does it really need to stay in your book, edition after edition? When does "standard" scientific information become old, too old to be repeated? Does it go without saying? Well then, maybe we shouldn't be saying it at all!

It's a Little Like an Old Marriage

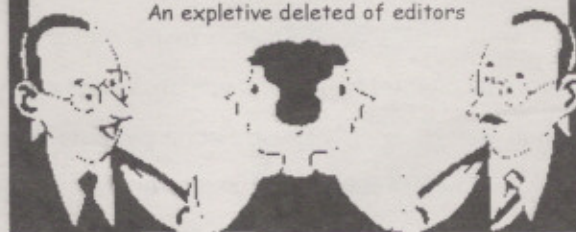
Editing a book through several editions brings its own joys. One is watching the book improve as a result of your editorial efforts. Another is the grow-

ing confidence in your own knowledge of the subject, its literature, and its leading scientists. A third is the increasing efficiency in your editing that results from your familiarity with the subject. Yet another is the opportunity to form lasting friendships with others who work on successive editions with you. All of which can carry you through the dull parts when you think (yawn), "Oh, no, not *that* again!"

◆◆◆ Bobbie Reitt, ELS(D) ◆◆◆

What do you call a group of editors?

A bicker of editors
 A blot of editors
 A bobbitt of editors
 A coterie of editors
 A critical mass of editors
 A delendo of editors
 A deletion of editors
 A drivell of editors
 A haggle of editors
 A mob of editors
 A murder of editors
 A picayune of editors
 A plight of editors
 A pod of editors
 A query of editors
 A quibble of editors
 A spat of editors
 A squabble of editors
 A stet of editors
 A trivia of editors
 A whiteout of editors
 An erudition of editors
 An expletive deleted of editors



Second Editorial Thoughts

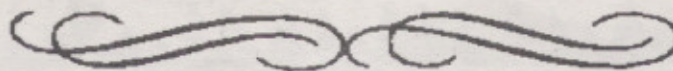
I am just in the middle of editing the third edition of a large book on high altitude medicine and physiology and am only too aware of the difficulties. It's a multiauthor book, so inconsistencies of the usual kind flourish anyway, as well as those that I guess are caused by carrying over directly from earlier editions. The messiest thing so far is that the authors use a variety of units for atmospheric barometric pressure: mmHg, Torr, millibars, atmospheres--all on one page!--and only rarely use the SI unit (kPa) that is now recommended.


One of the other problems is that medical terminology changes quite quickly, so that usages that were acceptable at the time of the first edition in 1989 (using the word man rather than the word human in the

definition of "Caucasian") are no longer so--and I suspect problems may arise in explaining this to the authors.

Some of the messiest editing jobs I have ever had to do have been second editions. It was worse in the old days of physical cut and paste, especially when you had authors who went to great lengths to save paper by the use of complicated instructions. At least when editing electronically it is easier to find and deal with the inconsistencies.

☎ ☎ ☎ Kathleen Lyle, ELS ☎ ☎ ☎





idea
with a focus
people
on the future

What makes Gore so special?

Our people – Gore associates operate under the guiding principles of self-commitment, fairness, waterline and freedom to grow. Headquartered in Newark, Delaware, we number nearly 8,000 associates worldwide.

Innovative Technologies – As global leaders in fluoropolymer technology, we hold more than 650 patents in the U.S. alone. We've developed hundreds of solutions for demanding medical, electronic, industrial and fabric applications for markets around the world.

Our future – Continued success with our established products and a wealth of new products and technologies in the pipeline.


Career Opportunity -

The selected candidate for this opportunity at our Flagstaff location will edit and co-author articles and abstracts for submission to medical journals and professional medical associations; coordinate statistical reviews and production of graphic elements of manuscripts describing research; and provide input into the design of internal and external research projects. Additionally, this individual will edit and write technical brochures describing medical products; edit advertisements; edit and proofread a variety of corporate documents, including the employee newsletter and customer correspondence; and give presentations on medical writing.

Qualified candidates will possess a BELS certification, as well as superior writing and editing skills. Advanced knowledge of standard style manuals and other reference sources in biomedical writing, as well as advanced knowledge of the process of developing articles and submitting them to biomedical journals required. Ideal candidates will have the ability to conduct advanced medical literature searches and strong research skills. At least five years of substantial experience with editing and writing of professional biomedical manuscripts and working knowledge of statistics and graphics principles are preferred. A background as an author's editor at a hospital, medical school, pharmaceutical company or medical device company is also preferred. Experience as a manuscript editor at a peer reviewed medical journal would also be a plus. A Master's degree in English, journalism, technical writing, scientific writing, medical writing or medical communications preferred. Some travel will be required.

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THE BELS AT SAN ANTONIO

SATURDAY, MAY 6

BELS Certification Examination

Sheraton Four Points Hotel, "Brazos A" Room, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

BELS Executive Council Meeting

The President's suite, Room 902, Sheraton Four Points Hotel, 4:30 p.m. This is an informal 1-hour meeting.

BELS Annual Meeting and Dinner

Sheraton Four Points Hotel, "Brazos A" Room, 9 p.m., \$35.00 paid in advance. The Mexican buffet will include a wide selection of your South-of-the-Border favorites, including tortillas, enchiladas, fajitas, refried beans, chile con queso, and plenty of salsa! Dinner includes a choice of red or white wine.

Special attraction: The Ready-for-World-Tour Players.

SUNDAY, MAY 7

BELS Hospitality Room

Adam's Mark Hotel (see the hotel directory for the room location), 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Sponsored by SLACK, Inc. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, and snacks will be available. Come and meet with your fellow BELSers, answer questions from new members, and network about potential job opportunities!

BELS Test Validation Session

Sheraton Four Points Hotel, "Brazos A" Room, 7:00 p.m. until . . . Here's your chance to help develop new questions for the BELS exam. Keep your editorial skills sharp by taking potential new questions and critiquing them with your BELS colleagues. If you can, please register ahead of time so that we can anticipate the room set-up. Walk-ins at the door will also be welcome!

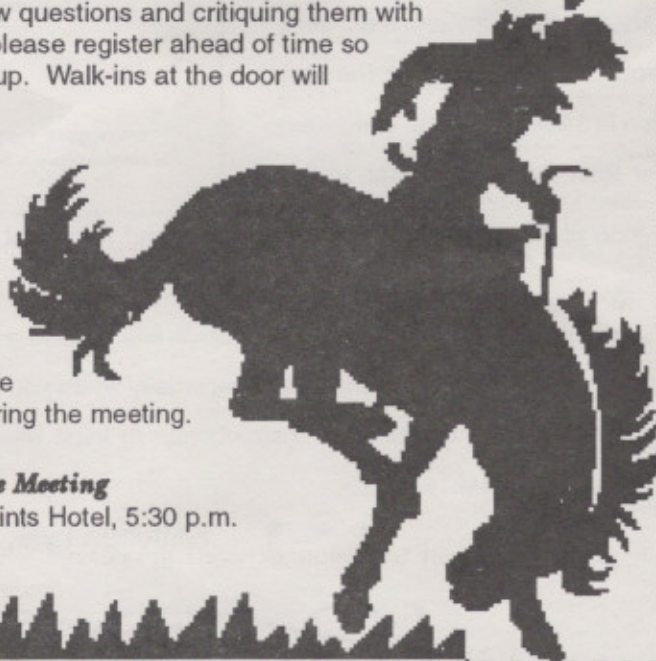
TUESDAY, MAY 9

Annual Executive Council Meeting

"Brazos A" Room, Sheraton Four Points Hotel, 5:30 p.m. The room will be open starting at 5:00 p.m. for early arrivals. Order of business to be determined at the beginning of the meeting. Dinner will be provided during the meeting.

Certification Development Committee Meeting

"Brazos B" Room, Sheraton Four Points Hotel, 5:30 p.m.
Dinner will be provided.



Book Review

The First Five Pages
A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the
Rejection Pile

Noah Lukeman
 (Fireside, Simon & Schuster, \$11)

Noah Lukeman gives readers the benefit of his experience as an editor, a literary agent, and a speaker on the topics of writing and publishing. The title of the book, *The First Five Pages*, is a reminder that editors, publishers, and agents can make a yea or nay decision on a manuscript by reading, at most, the first five pages. Lukeman coaches authors through the steps necessary to produce an early good impression—and on how to implement the techniques throughout one's entire manuscript. Although he focuses on fiction writers, urging them to look hard at their work and rewrite to improve it, many of the lessons and techniques Lukeman discusses can be used to brighten science manuscripts.

Examples, most of them odious, drive home the lessons of each chapter. For example, from the chapter on "adjectives and adverbs": "The squad car went fast down the bumpy, rocky road, quickly swerving to avoid the large, fat bugs smashing squarely against the slimy windshield." (Pretty bad, wouldn't you say!)

Each end-of-chapter exercise offers an opportunity for writers to improve their own work, which, when compared with the examples given, will seem pretty good but worth the effort of even greater improvement.

Continued on Page 8



This Just In

✓ Janice Jerrells is now the managing editor of the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* in addition to being, since January 1999, the managing editor of *Alcohol*.

✓ Paula Card-Higginson and Karen D'Arezzo have co-authored a book.

✓ Thanks to Gil Croome for contributing the fillers used in this issue. More to come!

✓ Since Karen Phillips' article appeared in the Winter 2000 issue, 5 members have contacted Jan Jerrells about placing an ad on the Web site. Three other members have had their usernames and passwords for a while but just haven't posted their ads yet. So the total continues to grow.

Way to go!

✓ The Berzelius Symposium 54, "Medicine and the Media", will be held August 31-September 1, 2000, in Stockholm, Sweden. Leading health and media professionals and mass communications researchers will discuss how medicine and the media, comprising two distinct cultures with respective societal roles, ethical guidelines, and working conditions, interact and what the significance is for the patient. For more information, contact the Swedish Society of Medicine, P. O. Box 738, SE-101 35 Stockholm, Sweden. Ph +46 (0) 8 440 88 78, fax +46 (0) 8 440 88 84. e-mail: annie.melin@svls.se. <http://www.svls.se/media.html>

Continued from Page 7

Lukeman's advice on "sound" is excellent. Avoid alliteration and echoes. Read aloud. Listen to rhythm, a matter of sentence construction. Be aware of the "resonance" of a series of sentences, and fix any that clang. Read poetry aloud; listen to the flow of language.

The example of academic writing in the chapter on "style" is dreadful but not much worse than most of us have seen. Lukeman lists the impediments to reading academic language: a plethora of qualifiers and references, reluctance to get to the point, long and convoluted sentences, tangential remarks that derail the train of thought. Yes! Our meat and potatoes.

Dialogue, treated in five chapters, isn't directly applicable to most of our work, but should one want to write fiction someday, the examples illustrate pitfalls, and the end-of-chapter exercises stress the correct approach for writing effective dialogue.

In the chapters that follow the section on dialogue, Lukeman discusses subtlety, tone, voice, focus, and other needful topics before winding up with "Pacing and Progression," an area where master editors prove themselves. To smooth a hiccuping pace or mark progression, an editor must carry the whole work in his or her head and be able to sense what a change in one part of the manuscript will do to other portions. Progression, from point A to B to C, is especially important in science writing so that a reader can follow the building and logic of the author's thesis.

The First Five Pages is an inspirational work. Authors are inspired to rework and improve their

writing. Science editors are inspired to view a manuscript more broadly—as a piece of writing that can be improved by literary techniques, rather than just a report that needs clarity.

On pages 16 and 17, Lukeman characterizes editors, better editors, truly great editors, and master editors. Master editors retain minutiae within the big picture. They even can recall the authors' previous works to benefit the piece at hand. Lukeman gives editors good press. To authors he gives techniques that can make their hope of publication a reality.

◀◀◀ Shirley Peterson, ELS ▶▶▶





INTRODUCING...

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March 2000

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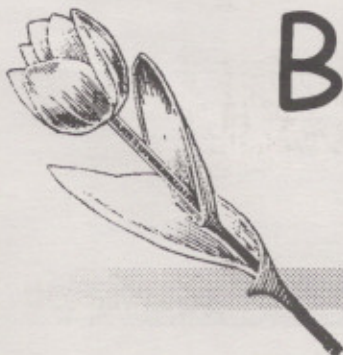
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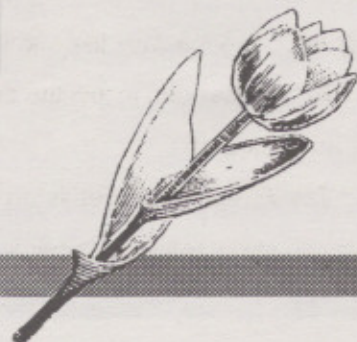
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*D=day; E=evening; F=fax



Bravissimi!



BELS Examination Schedule

2000

Date	City & Association	Registration Deadline
6 May 2000	San Antonio, TX, CSE	22 April
20 May 2000	Tours, France, EASE	6 May
7 November 2000	Miami, FL, AMWA	23 October

2001

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

2002

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

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



BELS Letter

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