ISMTE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MANAGING AND TECHNICAL EDITORS

NEWSLETTER

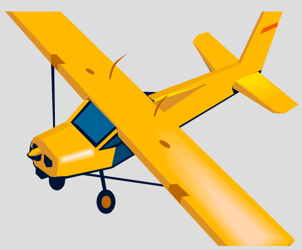
March 2008

Soaring

From the President - Jason Roberts, PhD

I'm hurriedly writing this issue's President's Column at 39,000 feet (11,887 metres), fearing the wrath of Kristie if I miss her deadline for the ISMTE newsletter. Why the altitude? I'm flying back from London following the European launch meeting of the society; and what a tremendous success it was.

Not so much a membership gathering per se, the meeting functioned particularly well as a forum of practitioners, publishers and vendors to get together and look at the issues/problems/ ongoing debates most pertinent to our daily grind. We'll have a full write-up of the London and Baltimore meetings in the next issue of the newsletter. I can report that all in attendance welcomed the opportunity to learn from each other and hear different perspectives and concerns.



Participants offered lots of potential solutions to problems great and small, sometimes by simply sharing their experiences or work practices. What was clear is that many of us had come to the same solutions independent of each other (Would less isolation from peers have perhaps saved us time?). Judging by the note-taking, wise looks and head-nodding, the debates seemed to resonate with the audience. Initial feedback appears to suggest the opportunity to get together was welcomed or indeed craved by many. It was suggested we should look into holding a similar meeting in the future. We will examine the feasibility of doing that both in a physical location and online.

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ISMTE London Inaugural Conference

27th February 2008

Alice Ellingham; Stephen Hancocks, Keynote Speaker; and Jason Roberts, ISMTE President

A bright, crisp winter's morning in London saw 30 delegates meeting at the British Dental Association for the first ISMTE Conference titled "Sharing, Learning and Benchmarking Best Practices in Today's Journal Editorial Office". The delegates' backgrounds varied from publishers and vendors, to society managing editors and freelance editorial assistants. All of those attending had hands-on experience of journal peer review management and many were now responsible for managing their own list of journals. The journals were mainly in the science and medical fields, but we also crossed into the humanities and social sciences fields with titles in areas such as criminology.

Stephen Hancocks, OBE, delivers the keynote address.

Following a quick introduction to start the day, I was pleased to hand over to Jason Roberts, President of ISMTE, who had traveled from the United States to welcome the delegates and tell us all a little about how the idea for the society had grown during the 15 months it's taken to get to this point. He also explained a little about where he sees the society going in the near future and what we would like to achieve in the long term.

We were then treated to a keynote address from Dr. Stephen Hancocks, OBE. It is hard to explain the hour that followed as Stephen took us on a dental, editorial, and theatrical journey through his career as a dental practitioner, editor, writer, and performer. His talk encouraged all the attendees to look within and make the use of all their life's experiences in the work, with one of the underlying messages being that work should be fun! We certainly enjoyed the hour we spent with Stephen and would like to extend our

London Inaugural Conference

continued

thanks for the time he spent with us throughout the day.

The breakout sessions followed, with two highly enthusiastic groups discussing all aspects of the life of a journal paper. The group moderators, Jason Roberts and Lindsay Haddon, encouraged the interactive participation of the groups, leading to the hot topics of ethics, communication and education being taken forward to the afternoon sessions for more in-depth discussions.

The afternoon sessions allowed greater depth of discussions with many ideas and examples being shared, providing takeaway messages for all participants. There were moments of "I hadn't thought of that" from all around the table - even from the most experienced members of the discussion group - proving that peer-to-peer discussion is still one of the top ways to learn your subject.

We wrapped up the day with an open offer for anyone to come on board and help to develop this fledgling society into an influential and professional body that aims to enhance professional development and empower editorial office staff.

Thanks must go to Talley Management for faultless organisation of the day, which meant that we all could concentrate on and enjoy the speakers and discussion groups. Thanks also goes to Jason Roberts, Taylor Bowen, and the rest of the ISMTE team for all the hard work that went into the day.

Delegates network during a break at the London conference.

Breakout sessions allowed delegates to engage in valuable peer-to-peer discussions.

Alice Ellingham
Editorial Office Ltd.
Conference Chair
ISMTE
London 2008

In the May Newsletter, *look for an article on the various discussions from the breakout sessions at the London and Baltimore meetings.*

Article

The Role of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is an important resource for those working in editorial offices. Dr. Harvey Marcovitch, Chair of COPE and Syndication Editor for the BMJ (British Medical Journal) Publishing Group and Associate Editor for BMJ, describes COPE and how it can benefit us.

COPE was founded 10 years ago by a group of medical journal editors concerned about problems they were experiencing with what might broadly be called publication misconduct. Examples included plagiarism, attempted or actual duplicate (redundant) publication, attempts to pass off fraudulent data, unethical behaviour with regard to patients or trial subjects, breaches of confidentiality, and so on. Initially COPE was a loose gathering of individuals, but with the increasing complexity of cases being brought forward and concerns about possible litigation by disgruntled researchers, it has now become a limited company ('incorporated') and registered charity ('not-for-profit organisation'). Its role is to serve the public interest by assisting editors, publishers, and others in maintaining the integrity of scientific publications.

Regular gatherings take place every two months, involving two distinct meetings. One of these is the business meeting of COPE Council, some dozen elected individuals, who deal with policy and strategy. COPE Forum meets separately, later the same day. COPE Forum is open to any member of COPE (and appropriate guests) and lasts 2-3 hours. Members are invited to present cases, which have been previously notified and circulated anonymously.

What we provide – and what members appreciate – is the assistance we can offer, especially to less experienced editors faced with unexpected dilemmas.

Discussion ensues in the hope of achieving a consensus (or sometimes a dispute) about how the member should best deal with the problem. Those who cannot attend in person are encouraged to present through a telephone link. Members are encouraged to provide feedback, which is reported at subsequent meetings. Cases are summarized and a minute circulated to all members after the Forum meeting. [See the "Cases" folder in the menu on the home page www.publicationethics.org.uk.]

Last year we published on our website a series of flowcharts designed to offer clear algorithmic advice on how to deal with the more straightforward problems, so these do not need to be raised at Forum [Click on the "Flowcharts" folder in the menu on the home page www.publicationethics.org.uk.]. Nonetheless many members still raise such matters because they state being able to quote COPE's opinion offers them added authority when dealing with authors, institutions, and funders – especially in the developing world. The flowcharts have been translated into several languages including: Japanese, Farsi, Spanish, and Turkish; and they are about to be translated into Chinese. Between formal meetings, COPE also offers an informal service to enquirers who are not members – usually

COPE *continued*

readers or disgruntled authors. The chairman or another officer will offer advice 'off the cuff'.

COPE is not an investigative body – it simply provides an informed opinion to its members, leaving any action to them. One exception is that COPE has published a Code of Conduct for editors who are members. Indeed membership requires editors to adhere to the Code. One result is that authors and others, not satisfied with how an individual journal has dealt with their complaint, can invoke the Code – thereby provoking a formal investigation by a COPE panel.

What we provide – and what members appreciate – is the assistance we can offer, especially to less experienced editors faced with unexpected dilemmas. One example: an editor in a small country was under enormous pressure to accept papers from a very senior and politically powerful – but perhaps intellectually frail – scientist. Her objections on scientific grounds were perceived by some in authority, including members of her editorial board, as prejudiced and ill-founded. She was able to resist this pressure by bringing the issue to COPE's attention and circulating to her board the resulting opinion from a peer group of fellow editors.

COPE officers are frequently invited to make presentations at academic or organizational meetings. They also contribute to a number of other bodies including the Council of Science Editors (editorial policy committee) and the UK Research Integrity Office amongst others. An annual seminar sets the agenda for the following year's work. Next year a quarterly newsletter will keep members informed of developments throughout the field of research and publication ethics.

Many journals are looking to implement ethics policies. What issues should journals focus on as priorities?

Authors are human, which means a minority will be dishonest or careless. Editors have a responsibility to protect the veracity of the scientific record but also the safety of patients and subjects.

Over and over again COPE has found problems could have been avoided or misconduct discovered at an early stage if the entire editorial and peer-review process had been fully open and transparent. Therefore, we advise journals to make sure their instructions to authors (advice to contributors) are regularly scrutinized and updated to make sure miscreants cannot claim ignorance. This will not, of course, prevent fraud, but it has the potential to reduce other areas of misconduct, such as failure to declare competing financial interests, incomplete reporting of data to favour the research sponsor, inappropriate authorship, plagiarism and redundant publication, and manipulation of images.

Large high-impact journals are at much greater risk because of the often major economic consequences of material they publish, for example major pharmaceutical trials. On the other hand, they are more likely to employ professional editorial staff attuned to detecting misconduct. However, COPE's experience is that small journals are not immune – partly because they are often edited by distinguished clinicians or researchers inexperienced in publishing practices and who have little time available to attend to such matters; and partly because dishonest authors will often target smaller journals because they believe they are less likely to be found out.

Article

COPE *continued*

In the end, editors are responsible for everything published in their journals, and so they have a duty to ensure procedures are in place to try to detect and prevent misconduct.

Do you think limited resources hamper the efforts of some journals to implement transparency procedures and/or monitor and assess the data they receive at submission from authors?

There are specific areas where this is certainly the case. For example there are cost and personnel implications in monitoring images for manipulation – given the universality of software such as Photoshop, which offers opportunities to the unscrupulous. The same can be said about the routine use of plagiarism detection software. Also, part-time editors of specialty journals often tell COPE that dealing with a single case of alleged misconduct can take up more time than handling several issues' worth of straightforward papers.

COPE can help such editors. When a paper has become suspect, rather than spending precious time trying to work out from scratch how to handle the matter, a discussion at COPE can provide a template for action, which will relieve the editors of much time and effort they would otherwise spend.

Elsevier Journals Join COPE

In mid February, COPE announced that all Elsevier Health Sciences and Science & Technology journals had become COPE members. COPE's partnership with this large publisher brings more than 2000 new Journals to the organization, allowing these editors to access the resources COPE has to offer and offering the organization the support of the increased membership.

President's Message *continued*

First 2 months

The first two months of ISMTE's existence have been exceedingly busy, and I still have trouble believing the impressive fact that we already have held one meeting with a second meeting days away as I type. We also have two newsletters published and the discussion forum is now live. If you are a member, I urge you to make use of this feature and start posting topics right away. The job bank should be ready in a month or so, which will enable members to post resumes/CVs in the hope of attracting more work.

Following the Baltimore meeting we will begin in earnest to develop our online resources – a truly monumental task. Resources will initially range from links through to templates and checklists on various issues. In time we will add podcasts of presentations and debates and white papers on best practices. If you wish to get involved and have a say in the way your job might be performed, or defined, please do contact me at journal@ahsnet.org

Presently most of our resources are open access to showcase the society, but during the year we will begin to restrict access to members only for certain features. Our intention, though, is to retain an open archive of materials such as past newsletters and closed debates from the discussion forums.

Volunteerism

A lot of labor-intensive work lies ahead. It has become apparent quickly that the publishing industry has recognized ISMTE fills an important niche. To enable the society to fulfill its mission we do need an active membership and a willingness of volunteers to help out. Our intention is to create committees to watch over several areas and formalize our organizational structure. Please do make yourself known if you would like to get involved. There are opportunities to be part of a committee, to write or present or collaborate in the development of resources. Equally, if you have experience in marketing or promotions we would love to hear from you.

...and finally...

I hope you enjoy this latest installment of the newsletter. We are delighted Dr. Harvey Marcovitch has taken the time to provide an insight into the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Their website provides some excellent flow charts to help guide you through some sticky issues and is worth checking out if you are not familiar with this organization.

I hope to see you in Baltimore for the US launch meeting and thanks again for your support in these early days of ISMTE.

Jason

Jason Roberts, PhD
President, *International Society of Managing and Technical Editors*
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A note on English

ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca but we would like to stress that in materials published in this newsletter or online variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

Article

Data Lore

by Nicki Harris Salcedo, Assistant Managing Editor
Cancer *and* Cancer Cytopathology, *American Cancer Society*
***You may reach her at* nicki.salcedo@cancer.org**

Data: factual information (as measurements or statistics) used as a basis for reasoning. [1]

Lore: knowledge gained through study or experience. [2]

We often get so bogged down in the day-to-day aspects of managing the journal office it is hard to see anything else. Every day new manuscripts come in. The peer review process requires constant communication with authors, reviewers, and editors. Even after a manuscript is accepted, our work is not done. It can sometimes feel as though we are stuck in an endless cycle of being on the phone or answering emails. But every day isn't the same, and if you want to know how things are changing, you have to look at your data.

It is not often one thinks of data analysis as a luxury, but it is both a luxury as well as a necessity. Once processes are in place to keep your office running smoothly, there should be time allotted for creating reports. Data analysis helps you track trends, measure successes, and plan for future improvements to your journal. What types of reports you will use varies widely based on your journal needs, but there are some suggested types of reports and some questions you should ask yourself if you want to get the most out of your analysis.

It is not often one thinks of data analysis as a luxury, but it is both a luxury as well as a necessity.

Submission data. The number of manuscripts submitted can be broken down in several ways. You may want to consider tracking submission trends from month to month and year to year. Look for times with fewer submissions or more submissions. Does your journal publish manuscripts in subcategories? Do you solicit your content? If so, how far in advance do you need to solicit to keep submissions predictable? Is demographic information important to you? Where are your submissions coming from? Specific universities or institutions? Specific countries?

Peer review data. How many reviewers do you use? How often? Are there reviewers you aren't using enough? What is the average turn around time for each reviewer?

How long does it take for your editors to make decisions? How long does it take for a paper to be accepted?

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1 http://m-w.com/dictionary/data last accessed January 25, 2008.

2 http://m-w.com/dictionary/lore last accessed January 25, 2008.

Article

Hiring a Skill Set: a Case Study of the First 100 Days Managing an Editorial Office

by Patrick Dillon, Editorial Assistant
Journal of Nursing Scholarship
You may reach him at patrick_dillon@fastmail.fm

When I entered the job market about two years ago, I encountered a problem common to many recent college graduates with degrees like English or Classical Studies. It was at this time I started hearing the term "skill set" bandied about in career seminars and resume workshops. What, exactly, were the marketable skills I had learned in four years of classes on novels and poems? As it happened, the first job I took aligned very closely with my interests: I became an editorial assistant at an academic publishing company, where I worked on the Greek and Roman Studies lists. This new position felt very natural to me. But when I began my first 100 days as an editorial assistant at the *Journal of Nursing Scholarship,* a topic about which I am largely unfamiliar, I began to realize how my qualifications, my skill set, would set me apart from somebody with a thorough background in nursing, but with no publishing experience.

My exposure to nursing is extremely limited: in college I took German classes in the nursing building while the usual classrooms were renovated; and I had visited some friends and family in the hospital. That was the extent of it. I did not even have much of a scientific background. So when I was offered this new position, I had questions about the expectations of my new role.

My new position was part of an overall change in editorship for the journal. The job was offered to me by Dr. Susan Gennaro a couple of months before she would take over as editor for the *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. Early on when she was looking to fill the position, her applicant pool was limited to the nursing students she works with as a professor. But soon she expanded her search, and considered me, who had no background in nursing but had experience in publishing and was quick to learn computer interfaces. When she selected me for the job, she explained her choice: we have to hit the ground running.

Before the editorship shifted hands from the old editor to the new, there were a lot of questions up in the air, and few of us knew what to expect. Dr. Gennaro, the editorial board, and I would all be entering new roles. Every moment spent learning on the job would be a moment when manuscripts were piling up. Dr. Gennaro and her editorial board knew enough about nursing themselves. They needed someone to keep the reviews moving at a steady rate. When I was selected, I realized publishing experience, organization, and computer proficiency had blossomed into a skill set.

Not to take all the credit, but it seems she made the right choice. Our editorial team has effectively halved the amount of time each manuscript spends under review. We have more manuscripts coming in, and we are turning them around quicker than the previous

Hiring a Skill Set . . . *continued*

administration. We owe this auspicious beginning to two main factors: assembling the right team of people and the excellent software, Manuscript Central, used by our publisher. Manuscript Central made our transition virtually seamless. As all of our organization is done through Manuscript Central, our success depended on being able to learn the system quickly.

Of course there were slip-ups early on, but also many innovations. At the beginning, I probably made every mistake possible in terms of inviting reviewers. I invited reviewers who already had an open invitation. I invited the same reviewers too frequently in a month or too quickly after they had completed their last review. I also had a tendency to send out revised manuscripts too quickly, without waiting for my colleague to blind the manuscript. These are relatively harmless errors and they are bound to happen, but they also led to useful solutions.

We were constantly fine tuning the work flow within the first 100 days. Keeping track of reviewer invitations was a major hassle, but little did we know the answer was right in Manuscript Central. The previous editorial team had kept track of all the reviewer invitations in a massive spreadsheet. Taking their advice, I tried to follow suit and build such a spreadsheet from scratch. The whole time I wondered: *Why isn't there a better way*? Finally, I clicked on the magnifying glass next to the reviewer's name in Manuscript Central, and there was all the information I needed. I felt like it had taken me over a month to realize the obvious, but the previous editorial team had never utilized that option. With a little exploration, and a simple click, I had eliminated the

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Thank you!

The ISMTE would like to thank the following companies for sponsoring memberships: Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford University Press, and the American Chemical Society. We also offer our gratitude to Sage and Aries Systems for their support.

Components of a Successful Skill Set

Trait	**Importance**
Strong verbal and written communication skills	Communication with authors, reviewers, and editors is a standard part of managing an editorial office. Having the skills to placate angry authors, cajole tardy reviewers, speak on behalf of the editors, etc., are vital for this job.
Excellent customer service skills	As the main point of contact for the various roles in the process, this position represents the journal and can impact whether authors or reviewers will continue to contribute to the journal.
Detail oriented	Editorial Assistants are often responsible for the minutiae of the process. It is important to be able to identify and attend to these details in order to keep the process running smoothly.
Organizational skills	Being organized is a must because the job often requires juggling a number of tasks related to disparate parts of the peer review/publishing process at once.
Quick and inquisitive learner	Being able to learn new software programs, manuscript formats, office policies, etc. quickly is a critical skill. Inquisitiveness plays an important role as motivation to access opportunities for continuing education and to seek ways to improve and streamline the process.
Self-starter/ initiative	Editorial Assistants are often the only staff or are part of a very small team; they must be able to work with little or no supervision.
Technical writing skills	This position is often called upon to craft verbiage for policies and procedures, as well as instructions for authors and copyeditors.
Time management skills	Must be able to adhere to deadlines, return communications promptly, and anticipate critical path lapses to prevent unacceptable delays. Multi-tasking is often essential.
Work well under pressure	Most important early in the position as many transitions are fraught with pressure with little help available. Important for dealing with disgruntled authors or reviewers and working under constant deadlines.

Article

Data Lore

continued

How many papers get rejected or accepted? Do you accept more papers from one country when compared to another?

Publication and production data. How long does it take from acceptance to publication? Do you publish in print or online? Is there a time difference between those publication times? You can also compare your publication data to your submission data and see if there are any interesting trends or differences.

Readership data. You should be able to get data on subscriptions and circulation, but don't forget the importance of online usage. You can also poll your authors, reviewers, and users for feedback. You can pick your top competitors and do your own competition analysis. Are you publishing what your readers are interested in? Can you identify hot topics and anticipate the future content of your journal?

Remember, data analysis helps you track trends, measure successes, and plan for future improvements to your journal. So make sure to incorporate data collection and analysis into your schedule to gather the information you need to stay on top of the changes taking place while you are busy attending to the everyday tasks of running the journal office.

Article

Hiring a Skill Set . . .

continued

most tedious and time-consuming part of my job.

My lack of nursing experience can sometimes expose itself when it comes to specific manuscripts, but these are cases where I often learn the most. On the most basic level, my role is limited to keywords. I try to match the manuscript's keywords to the reviewer's. At the beginning, I knew so little about nursing and scientific research methods in general that I did not even know what all of the keywords meant. After 100 days, I have become much more comfortable with triangulation and regression analysis. Now, whenever somebody ignores the list of keywords to type in their own, choosing "happiness" instead of "Mental/Psychiatric" and "Qualitative," I can come up with the keywords quickly by browsing through the abstract. While learning more about nursing will make my job easier, the quality of the job has never depended on it.

It is difficult to speculate how someone else would have performed in my role. *It would have been a disaster*, the editor tells me, referring to choosing a PhD student as an editorial assistant. That is definitely an exaggeration, but I encourage those hiring at technical or society journals to consider the merits of publishing professionals, and not just those with a background in the related field of study. The same goes for those in the job market: do not confine yourself to your range of interests. The fact that I can make it at a journal of nursing says a lot about the importance of identifying skill sets.

Column: *Tips & Tricks for Best Practice in the Editorial Office*

How to improve the quality of reviews: Matching manuscripts and reviewers

by Jason Roberts, Managing Editor
Headache: the journal of head and face pain & The Journal of Sexual Medicine
You may reach him at journal@ahsnet.org

In the last ISMTE newsletter I looked at some process-oriented techniques to deliver better service to authors in the hope of turning them into repeat submitters. In my next few columns I will explore some of the ways that can lead to an improvement in the quality of reviews. We know authors rank the quality and speed of peer review as important elements of their journal experiences.[1] Consequently, improving the quality of the reviews represents an important area to address.

Some practices are more systems-oriented and others are more qualitative in approach. Because readers work on a broad spectrum of titles, some points below may be more pertinent than others.

*What exactly is peer review? Why do journals bother? Why should **we** care?*

Standard definitions are hard to come by, but peer review typically involves the evaluation of a manuscript by recognized experts on the subject (the 'peers') who have no connection to the manuscript under review. More formally, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors defines peer review as "…the critical assessment of manuscripts submitted to journals by experts who are not part of the editorial staff".[2]

In addition to allowing, or restricting, publication, peer review is also used to nurture manuscripts (Irene Hames, author of *Peer review and manuscript management in scientific journals: Guidelines for good practice,* suggests this often results in editors acting as 'midwives'), refine presentation of data, and offer a mechanism to detect errors or potential bias.[3]

In our roles we may leave it to the Editorial Board to worry about such issues, but some may find themselves front and center in efforts to improve the quality of peer review. For example, perhaps you have been asked by your editor to investigate other journals' peer-review processes. Alternatively, you may read this article and determine that it's time to raise some of these issues in your editorial office because the editors and publishers do not appear to have concerned themselves. I would not interpret prior lack of interest as representing a dismissal of the importance of addressing these issues because it could equally be blissful ignorance of the options available.

Before I get going I should note a subtle idiomatic difference. *Reviewers* is a term I see used globally and is employed in this article,

[1] Publishing Research Consortium. Peer Review: Benefits, Perceptions and Alternatives. 2008. www.publishingresearch.net/documents/PRCsummary4Warefinal.pdf (Accessed 7th February 2008).

[2] International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: writing and editing for biomedical Publication. www.icmje.org. (Updated October 2007, Accessed 7th February 2008).

[3] Hames I. Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals: guidelines for good practice. 2007. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford. p: xi.

How to improve the quality of reviews . . . *continued*

but, equally, the term *referee* is used by many journals.

System-based Efforts to Improve Peer Review

A lot of efforts to improve the quality of reviews received revolve around providing the appropriate tools and instructions to guide reviewers, but you can also influence the quality of review by matching the best reviewers with the appropriate manuscripts. I subscribe to a very simplistic belief that if you better-target who you invite, you are more likely to secure the efforts of someone with an interest (let alone possessing the requisite experience) in the subject matter who is perhaps more motivated to compile a timely and in-depth evaluation. Any concerted effort to 'zero-in' on reviewers that best fit specific selection criteria is not foolproof, however; some people are just lousy reviewers.

Some journals have established reviewer lists and may have **keywords** or **search terms** associated with reviewer names to help match manuscripts with reviewers. I want to focus on using *search terms* as a simple, systematic step to match manuscripts with reviewers.

Understanding the difference between a *keyword* and a *search term* would be helpful at this point. Some editors search for reviewers by keywords authors supply that summarize their manuscript (these keywords are likely intended to help locate the manuscript in subject databases such as Medline for biomedical journals). The overwhelming majority of journals use keywords and these are typically published near the title or abstract. Authors are usually allowed to choose any words they wish as keywords. A *search term*, on the other hand, is a predefined descriptor. Indeed many biomedical journals use MeSH terms for searching (MeSH is the National Library of Medicine's controlled vocabulary thesaurus).[4] *Search terms* are a more restrictive approach to defining a manuscript or reviewer. *Search terms* are not usually published and are merely an aid for more efficient searching of a database. Both my journals *Headache* and *The Journal of Sexual Medicine (JSM)* ask authors to supply up to 6 keywords (which we publish) and up to 3 search terms, which we use to locate reviewers in our peer-review management system.

To keep the search-term list manageable, you might want to come up with 30-50 terms. Write to individuals in your reviewer database or individuals that have supplied reviews in the past and ask them to pick a handful of terms from the list that best define their areas of expertise; then record their responses in a database. You might want to limit the number of terms they can select because some consider themselves experts in everything, which then leaves it open to interpretation as to what they define as 'expertise'.

Using this same list of *search terms*, compel authors to choose a number of terms that best describe the subject matter of their article by making this a mandatory requirement of your submission process. *Voilà*! You now have an ability, albeit simplistic, to match articles with appropriate reviewers. I have found that the best approach is to request as many as 3 search terms from authors, making one choice mandatory. If you use an online peer-review management system, most offer this process as a customizable feature.

[4] www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/mesh.html

How to improve the quality of reviews . . . *continued*

How is this different from a keyword database?

Matching articles and reviewers through *search terms* supplements any searching editors might do by looking at a manuscript's keywords. As an automated feature, systems can search quicker through a list of names than a human can, but systems are not necessarily more sophisticated in searching. For example, common problems searching a database with keywords are that the keywords can be misspelled, feature a variant of spelling (e.g. behavior/behaviour), or perhaps be abbreviated, all of which can ruin a search.

My own experiences with employing this functionality have been quite successful. *JSM* is a new title launched 4 years ago. Though our associate editors (who perform the reviewer selection) offered an extensive network of contacts to the experts in the field, the subject search-term function proved immensely useful in ensuring we did not ask the same experts repeatedly for reviews (with the fear that over-extended reviewers would let standards slip) by identifying less well-known subject authorities. Less well-known need not mean less qualified – all editors carry an inherent geographic bias in their network of contacts. Through search terms, the *JSM* American-based editors were able to call upon reviewers in Europe and Asia.

Using Search Terms with a Pool of Reviewers

Choosing reviewers that you have little or no familiarity with can be risky because you simply don't know if they are truly qualified as experts. This is the main reason why editors are naturally conservative in their selections. To overcome this you may consider setting up a pool of reviewers that have been 'pre-screened' or suggested by members of the editorial team, rather than inviting individuals with abandon. This step might not be necessary if the field you work in is very small.

In my experience, the subject search-term function definitely works better if you have a closed group of individuals to call upon. Assuming someone has vetted each member of that reviewer group beforehand, those selecting reviewers can perform the task with increased confidence. I implemented the search-term functionality simultaneously at *Headache* and *JSM*. Take-up was much greater at *JSM* because we operated a closed pool. Feedback from the *Headache* editorial board proved they felt uncomfortable in choosing an unfamiliar expert.

If you use an online peer-review system, the creation of a closed pool might require a set-up whereby new users are not given reviewer status automatically. *JSM* does this; every new account created solely has Author status. As the administrator, only I can add reviewer status to a profile.

An additional strategy to ensure the best reviewers are selected using the search-term approach involves having the editorial board review the search terms chosen by the reviewers to describe their expertise. Some might have inflated opinions on the depth of their subject knowledge. My first experiences of setting up this functionality saw some reviewers respond with 15-20 areas of expertise or stating 'put me down for everything', hence my suggestion earlier that the number of terms that can be selected be limited.

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COLUMN: *Portrait Of An Editorial Office*

From Medical Secretary to Managing Editor: Journey of a Fledgling Recruit

by Alison Alsmeyer

It's an ordinary Friday afternoon in March 2006 and I'm sitting at my desk at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London. Things are winding down for the weekend when Simon, the Consultant Neurologist I'm secretary to, calls me into his office saying there's something he'd like to speak to me about: how did I fancy becoming Managing Editor for the journal *Epilepsia?*

Now I'd been aware he had become co-Editor-in-Chief of *Epilepsia* a couple of months previously, and I'd been aware of opening the journal when it arrived with his post once a month and adding it to his in-tray. But beyond that I knew nothing about the journal at all. I knew nothing about journals full stop. In fact, I knew so little about them I didn't even know it wasn't the done-thing to refer to it as a 'magazine'!

Over the course of the next couple of weeks I found out more about what the job would entail and I had to think about whether or not to accept Simon's offer. The job certainly had appeal and glamour, but it was very much stepping out into the unknown. It would be such a big change: to go from being an employee in a secure job with the National Health Service and having all the benefits that come with being an employee, to being self-employed; to go from having the financial side of things taken care of (tax, National Insurance, pension), to having to submit my own tax returns (and getting into the habit of book-keeping – gulp!); to go from working in an environment where I was surrounded by lots of colleagues – some of whom were very good friends, to the potential isolation of working from home.... There certainly was a lot to think about. However, all in all it seemed too good an opportunity to pass up and I accepted the post.

My first task was to attend a ScholarOne User Conference in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the April. At that point I hadn't actually begun my new job yet, so I was still exceedingly clueless about things. Thank goodness my colleague, Liz, was able to join me. She had been Simon's Editorial Assistant since he had become Editor-in-Chief so she at least knew more-or-less how things worked in the editorial office.

In a job like this, I learnt early on making contacts is invaluable, particularly in terms of providing the opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

I felt particularly lost at the conference as everything was new to me. Whilst there was a buzz in the air of enthusiastic journal staff debating various journal issues (impact factors, reviewers, authors, editors, etc.) I felt I could contribute nothing to the discussions. I remember someone asking me what size our journal was and I'd no idea: I didn't know how many Associate Editors we had, how many Editorial Board members we had (what was the difference between the editors and the editorial board again?), how many submissions we had a year... nothing. Although in some ways I may not have got all that much out of the conference due to my lack of experience, it was nevertheless invaluable in terms of providing the perfect opportunity to meet other people and to make my first contacts in the field.

From Medical Secretary to Managing Editor *continued*

In fact it was at the conference I first met Jason Roberts, founder of the ISMTE. In a job like this, I learnt early on making contacts is invaluable, particularly in terms of providing the opportunity to share ideas and experiences.

It was at the conference where I also met my predecessor for the first (and only) time. She lives in California, you see, and so we had to make the most of the short hour we had together to go over how to do the job. The rest of the handover had to be done remotely, via email, with me in London and my predecessor in California – looking back it's a minor miracle the handover went as smoothly as it did! There would have been plenty of scope for an editorial office disaster had my predecessor not done such a wonderful job of training me remotely in all aspects of how to manage the editorial office.

I had a month's handover before I took over the running of the office all on my own. In that month I had to learn a vast array of new things. The thing I worried about most in the early days was how to respond to emails: it concerned me greatly I was the first point of contact for so many different categories of people (authors, reviewers, editors...) and I wondered how I would manage to deal with all these enquiries and problems when I didn't know the answers myself.

Of course the other main thing to get to grips with was Manuscript Central. I remember being so scared of clicking buttons in case I did something horribly wrong. As it turns out, learning how to use Manuscript Central was one of the easier parts of the handover. Learning the processes was the harder part.

All in all though, the handover went surprisingly without hitch. A couple of months into the job and I was feeling pretty confident about things. I was enjoying it and as it happens, I had chosen a good time to start with *Epilepsia*; turns out 2006 was the year of the business trips.

I'd never been on a business trip before. The most I'd done in my previous job was attending a few training sessions round the corner from my workplace. So you can imagine my excitement when in June I had to attend a conference in Helsinki, in July a conference in Boston, and in December a conference in San Diego. I know people who have to travel for business really often say it gets wearing, but for me the novelty definitely hasn't yet worn off. For me it's definitely one of the perks of the job. Apart from anything else, it's good for the morale to be recognised: it's encouraging to feel the Editors-in-Chief obviously value my input as they want me to attend all these meetings. Indeed feeling my input is valued is one of the main differences between my previous job and my job at *Epilepsia*. In my previous job, if something didn't work right (and it often didn't!) I didn't have much power to change it; however at *Epilepsia* if something isn't working right, more often than not I have the power to change it.

I have now been doing the job for over a year and a half and I'm still enjoying it. It's an exciting environment to work in, I feel part of something important, I get a buzz from helping people, and although it's often very hard work I see the fruits of my labour when the journal comes out once a month. (Although, to be honest, you might be more likely to catch me sitting down with a glossy magazine....)

The Importance of Citation Accuracy

by Kristen Overstreet

As a new Society, we are beginning the process of identifying who our members are and what their needs are, as well as looking at what we, as a group, can contribute to the advancement of our profession. The discussion forum, surveys, and feedback from the annual meetings will provide us with some of the data we need, and looking at existing literature can help us identify gaps in the research that we can highlight and bring attention to and perhaps even fill through our own future research endeavors.

One such area of interest to me is research on citation accuracy. Doing a quick search on "references accuracy," "citation accuracy," and "citation error," I found roughly 35 links to articles on this topic. A large majority of them were related to errors in health sciences journals. Does this majority reflect that other disciplines do not have this problem or that it has not been researched or reported?

A review titled "Technical editing of research reports in biomedical journals" published online in April 2007 states the authors found a median citation error rate of 39% in the studies they reviewed [1]. Although this study represents a very small number of journals and citations, I feel a reported median error rate of more than 1 in 3 citations is worthy of attention.

After recent analysis, Marsha Handel, MLS, who is Director, Informatics and Online Education, Center for Health and Healing, Beth Israel Medical Center, and a colleague, feel this problem warrants an effective solution and are researching whether biomedical editors would be willing to engage an outside agency to verify references in accepted manuscripts prior to publication.

Through e-mail correspondence Handel told me, "Citation errors reflect poorly on the author, the peer review and editorial process, and the reputation of the journal." This negative effect also was mentioned in some of the articles I found [2] [3] [4]. Handel also mentioned citation errors can prevent readers from retrieving the cited information and thus diminish the usefulness of the read article.

Citation errors not only reflect negatively on a journal's reputation, but some journals also can feel the negative effect of citation errors on their impact factors, however small. An error that prevents the match from a citation to the target article in the ISI database can result in a "lost" citation [5].

[1]. Wager, E., & Middleton, P. (2007). Technical editing of research reports in biomedical journals. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 2, Art. No.: MR000002. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.MR000002.pub2.

[2] Anup, M., & Medha, M. (2003). Accuracy of references in Indian Journal of Surgery. *Indian Journal of Surgery, 65,* 156-158.

[3] De Jong, M.J., (2006). Spotting reference errors. *Nurse Author & Editor, 16*(4). Available online at: http://www.nurseauthoreditor.com/article.asp?id=61.

[4] Raja, U.Y., & Cooper, J.G. (2006). How accurate are the references in Emergency Medical Journal? *Emergency Medical Journal, 23,* 625-626.

[5] Craig, I. (2006, January/February). Editorial Best Practice: Make Every Citation Count. "Blackwell Publishing Journal News," No. 13. Accessed February 15, 2008, from http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journalnews/newsitem.asp?release=588.

Citation Accuracy *continued*

Given the importance of accurate citations, whose responsibility is it to ensure accuracy?

Authors should take the responsibility to ensure citation accuracy in their manuscripts as a means for gaining credibility for themselves professionally and for their manuscripts. "Poor reference accuracy raises concern that authors are not careful with all areas of their research," says Handel. As we are aware, however, all authors are not careful when it comes to submitting accurate references and they may not be knowledgeable about the importance of doing so.

Therefore, reviewers should take responsibility for accurate references as part of their role in the peer-review process. Some online review systems attempt to make this easier for reviewers by offering them links to scholarly search engines; but this is still a time-consuming process, and reviewers, especially good ones, are busy.

Editors, then, should take responsibility for accurate references. It is important to protect the reputations of their journals for publishing well-written, scientifically accurate articles, and to further the research base in their disciplines through dissemination of quality information. Editors, however, are often overwhelmed with their other duties and have little time to spend verifying the accuracy of each citation in every accepted article.

Should publishers take responsibility for citation accuracy? Many do by providing technical editors and/or proofreaders who look for inaccuracies as part of the production process. However, based on the 2007 Cochrane review and other reviews on citation accuracy from my quick search, a real problem with accuracy still exists.

Would an outside 3rd party agency, staffed with librarians whose "work depends on accuracy" (Handel) provide the solution for this problem? Theoretically, it would probably help a lot. Realistically, however, only the larger, profitable journals could afford this type of service. Smaller, less profitable journals would need to rely on their publishers and societies to pay the cost of this service.

Correcting this issue relies greatly on the industry's acknowledgment that reference accuracy 1) is a problem issue, 2) is a problem editors and publishers should take responsibility for, and 3) is worth the time and/or money to correct. Without identification and acknowledgment of the problem, the multiple parties involved – authors, reviewers, editors, publishers – will not allocate the resources – time, expertise, and possibly money – to be accountable for it and solve it.

In the short term, I believe the more eyes the better when it comes to finding errors in a manuscript before publication. The article "Spotting Reference Errors" by De Jong[3] provides tips for spotting errors, and the Managing Editor can use these tips and make a habit of at least scanning each accepted manuscript's reference list before it is sent into production.

Managing Editors also can play a role in improving reference accuracy by knowing the problem exists, discussing the issue with their journal editors and publishers, and helping write and post journal policies alerting authors and reviewers about the importance of reference accuracy.

ISMTE Biographies

Wendy Krank is the Membership Coordinator for the ISMTE.

You may reach her at headachecurrents@qwest.net

After graduating with honors from high school, I worked in a variety of fields including photography and banking. I then entered the field of medicine by accepting a position with Mayo Clinic Arizona as medical secretarial assistant in the Department of Neurology for doctors David W. Dodick and Charles H. Adler.

After approximately five years as secretarial and administrative support to the neurologists, my career with Mayo Clinic Arizona continued for another five years with a promotional change to Credentialist for Medical Staff Services. Mayo Clinic Arizona currently employs me as the General Surgery Residency Coordinator in the Department of Medical Education.

I am currently the managing editor for the scientific publication *Headache Currents*. The journal shares with the national and international medical community current medical treatments for migraine and chronic daily headache.

I volunteer as membership coordinator for the ISMTE and also compete in amateur level American smooth ballroom dance.

Susan Scalia is the Associate Editor for the ISMTE Newsletter.

You may reach her at susan@awra.org

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Policy and Management, I diligently set about finding work in my field. I found a wonderful position I loved with a local county's re-use program. This Shangri La promptly ended when the state's new governor canceled the grant used to fund the position! So six months into my professional life I was back out on the streets looking for gainful employment.

After several positions both in and out of my field of training and a move to another state, I stumbled across an opening with the Journal of the American Water Resources Association and became their journal administrator. I have held this position for almost two years, and all my knowledge about being a journal administrator was learned on the job.

It is in this capacity I became affiliated with ISMTE. I attended Manuscript Central University with the newsletter editor, Kristen Overstreet, who invited me to participate in the new ISMTE. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this new society.

ISMTE Biographies continued

Jennifer Deyton is a **Training Coordinator** for the ISMTE.

You may contact her at jennifer.deyton@earthlink.net

I graduated from the University of Utah with a BA in English and Latin and then went on to earn my MA in Liberal Studies at Duke University.

In between degrees, I taught English in Asia. After coming back to the United States, I took a job in Public Affairs at the North Carolina Medical Board (NCMB), where I developed the quarterly publication The Forum. I left the NCMB to take my first Managing Editor position at Duke University.

I am currently a founding partner of J&J Editorial, an LLC dedicated to the management of editorial offices world-wide. J&J Editorial currently manages six titles for publishers such as Wiley-Blackwell and the American Chemical Society. We also serve as consultants for editorial offices just getting started or taking on new projects.

I am very excited to lead the training program for ISMTE with my business partner, Julie Nash.

Julie Nash is a **Training Coordinator** for the ISMTE.

You may contact her at kj5001@earthlink.net

I graduated from the Pennsylvania State University with a Bachelors of Arts degree in journalism and then earned my Masters of Arts degree in Liberal Studies at Duke University.

After working as a reporter for newspapers and wire services in Washington, DC; Pennsylvania; and Durham, North Carolina, I started as an assistant editor for *Arthritis & Rheumatism (A&R)* with my business partner, Jennifer Deyton. When we started at *A&R*, the fax machine was a primary tool of communication. Together we moved *A&R* from the paper world into the electronic age.

Today I am senior partner of J&J Editorial, LLC. J&J Editorial manages journal offices for publishers and societies, including Wiley-Blackwell and the American Chemical Society. Jennifer and I also consult with staff at new journal offices and train journal administrators in best editorial office practices.

I think ISMTE will provide journal editors with a much needed professional outlet. I look forward to exchanging ideas with other managing editors at the March ISMTE meeting in Baltimore.

Join ISMTE Today! www.ismte.org

Benefits of Membership:

- Continuing education and training through regional meetings, Webcasts, mentoring and online discussion forums based on journal subject matter, location of editorial offices and electronic editorial office systems used
- Sharing of ideas, concerns and best practices
- Consultancy services for publishers/journals/ members upon request from a pool of recognized thought leaders
- Newsletter with original articles on trends, best practice procedures and performance data
- Participation in a pro-active community that enables members to influence professional development for themselves and others
- Ability to post your resume and positions wanted for free

Inaugural ISMTE Meeting in Baltimore, MD, USA

The inaugural U.S. ISMTE conference will be held in Baltimore, Maryland, beginning on the evening of March 18 and concluding on March 19, 2008.

Who should attend?

- Managing editors
- Editorial administrators
- Editors-in-chief who perform administrative duties
- Publishers
- Journal owners

Linda J. Miller, PhD, U.S. Executive Editor for *Nature,* the Nature research journals and the Nature Reviews, will be the keynote speaker.

Baltimore, Maryland, USA,
18-19 March 2008
The Peabody Court Hotel
612 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, MD, USA

Please see the ISMTE Website for conference details, conference registration, and information on hotel reservations

Surveys

ISMTE will be conducting a number of surveys in the coming months. Please see the link on the Website. A survey on how your journal's reviewers are performing will be posted soon.

How to improve the quality of reviews . . . *continued*

Other Systematic Approaches to Improving Reviews

Unfortunately not every journal has the luxury of a clearly delineated reviewer base and finding reviewers becomes a scramble. Faced with this reality means straying into the unknown to pick reviewers. Editors of such journals often consult the reference section of a manuscript to find appropriate reviewers. Additionally, they may ask authors to suggest the names of reviewers upon submission. Some electronic systems allow authors to provide potential reviewer names and contact details, allowing the editor to easily add them to the list of invited reviewers.

Anecdotally, some consider this option risky, potentially inviting bias into the peer-review process. Others consider it a necessity, especially when an editor is either drawing a blank on who to invite or is facing a burgeoning list of declined invitations. Of course, if you use the authors' suggestions, it does behoove you to check out the credentials of the proposed reviewers.

Another simple approach is to provide data to those who pick reviewers regarding the number of on-going or completed reviews assigned to a reviewer in the past 12 months. If a reviewer's workload is already sizeable this will certainly lead to a greater likelihood they will refuse further invitations to review, or if they accept the invitation, quality might decline as they struggle to keep on top of the workload imposed on them.

Summary

Editors-in-chief and associate editors are inherently conservative in their choices of reviewers. There are ways to guide them in their selections that might better direct manuscripts to the most appropriate reviewers and away from the lesser-qualified or overloaded. Regardless of whether you use an excel spreadsheet or an online peer-review system, *search term* associations with manuscripts and reviewers are relatively straightforward techniques to set up and can be highly effective if those making reviewer selections actively use the data and have faith in the search results.

Discussion Forum

ISMTE provides opportunities to pull together as a community to share ideas with and offer support to peers. The centerpiece of our efforts to create a professional network, and a key member-benefit, is the provision of a discussion forum.

The forum is moderated, but members are encouraged to post on all topics related to professional development. You may wish to ask very specific questions in the hope you receive a solution. Alternatively, you may wish to consider posting open-ended discussion starting-points. Some debates may be quite exclusive, perhaps related to regional issues, or issues concerning particular types of journals (size, subject matter). There is no limit on how broad, or specific, the forum should be.

The discussion forum will initially be offered at www.ismte.org as a free service to showcase the Society, but eventually we will limit access to members only. For it to be a success, we urge you to participate. Rules of use are posted, as is typical with such sites, and we remind you all discussion must be conducted professionally and with respect to differences of opinion.

Calendar of Events

ISMTE Inaugural Meeting in Baltimore
March 18-19, 2008
Peabody Court Hotel
Baltimore, Maryland, USA
Website: www.ismte.org

COPE Seminar 2008
April 4, 2008
Woburn House
London, United Kingdom
Website:
www.publicationethics.org.uk

ScholarOne, Manuscript Central™ User Conference
May 4-6, 2008
Boar's Head Inn
Charlottesville, Virginia, USA
Website: www.scholarone.com

Council of Science Editors Annual Meeting
May 16-20, 2008
Hyatt Hotel, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Website:
www.councilscienceeditors.org

Editorial Manager User Group Meeting
June 12-13, 2008
Hyatt Regency Cambridge
Boston, Massachusetts, USA
Website:
www.editorialmanager.com

EQUATOR Network
Official Launch Meeting and Lecture
June 26, 2008
The Royal Society of Medicine
London, United Kingdom
Website: http://www.equator-network.org/index.aspx?o=1113

International Academy of Nursing Editors
27th Annual Meeting
August 4-6, 2008
Held at the Hotel Ritz in Abano, Italy
Website:
www.nursingeditors.org

Mediterranean Editors & Translators Meeting
September 11-13, 2008
University of Split, School of Medicine, Split, Croatia
Website:
www.metmeetings.org/?section=metm08_call

6th International Congress on Peer Review & Biomedical Publication
September 10-12, 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Website: www.ama-assn.org/public/peer/peerhome.htm

Please send your suggestions for inclusion in the calendar to kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

Call for Articles

Please submit articles and ideas for articles to the *Newsletter* Editor, Kristen Overstreet, at kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

Kristen Overstreet
Editor
Susan Scalia
Associate Editor

Thank you!

contributers to this issue of the ISMTE *Newsletter:*

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