

ISMTE: Our Purpose

From the President - Jason Roberts

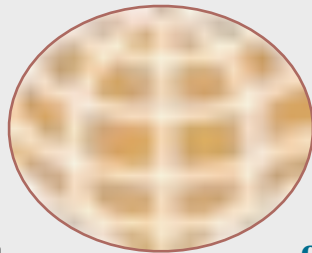
The ISMTE Executive Director, Meridyth Senes, recently charged the ISMTE Board with the task of developing a *mission statement*, a brief declaration of the purpose of the Society.

I must confess, the term *mission statement* sounds like corporate jargon to me and typically provokes, personally, reactions from indifference to outright scorn . . . until I sat down and contributed to the development of ours.

I found the exercise very illuminating, forcing all of us on the Board to think deeply about what ISMTE means to each of us, encapsulating what are probably the motivating factors for why we joined in the first place. In addition, we needed to develop a phrase that we could reference when promoting the Society, something to explain what members are looking for when they join and, most importantly, something to provide a keystone

upon which all future activities of and strategic decisions for ISMTE will be based.

Before I go overboard in my buildup to the ISMTE mission statement, here it is:



The mission of the ISMTE is to connect the community of professionals committed to the peer review and publication of academic and professional journals. ISMTE provides peer-to-peer networking, education and training, research, and resources for best practices and development of journal policy.

We tried to develop something clear, succinct, and transferable to several different methods by which we promote the Society, such as the website and marketing, and how we define ourselves to the publishing industry.

Our intention was to create a

In this issue . . .

Articles

- *Board Plans the Future of the Society* **2**
- *Editors' Access to Public Access* **3**
- *Docu Drama: Assembling a Procedures Manual for the Editorial Office* **9**

Columns

- *President's Message* **1**
- *Editorial* **8**
- *Tips & Tricks* **12**
- *Portrait of an Editorial Office* **16**

Miscellaneous

- *Stories Query* **11**
- *Calendar* **11**

ISMTE Board Plans the Future of the Society

***Submitted by Elizabeth
Blalock, Director***

ISMTE's Board of Directors convened in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, August 25-28, for a strategic planning session.

We discussed ways to serve and grow the membership; adopted bylaws, policies and procedures for governing the society's business; and drew up a 3-year master plan to guide the Society's activities in the near future, based on your suggestions from the inaugural meetings in London and Baltimore.

Short-term projects include developing a job bank, setting up a weekly blog and creating a resources page on the website, preparing for the 2009 annual meetings (look for more information soon), and implementing a member-to-member recruitment campaign. To accomplish these goals, we need and encourage your active participation. To volunteer, contact us at donna.schena@yahoo.com. We look forward to working with you -- and getting to know you.

Column: *President's Message*

Our Purpose

continued

phrase that was inclusive: ISMTE members are drawn from the ranks of editors-in-chief, managing editors, editorial assistants, technical editors, executive editors and from a variety of backgrounds such as the self-employed, and those employed by publishers, societies, and vendors.

After much parsing of words, we believe this mission statement, for the first time, defines clearly what ISMTE represents. This statement of purpose clarifies the objectives of our young organization and will hopefully guide us as we find our voice and develop our identity in the publishing world.

OK -- I hope that wasn't too overblown. Placing nine editors in a room to come up with a single statement provided a fascinating insight into the power of words and their possible interpretations. On top of that, with three Brits, one Canadian, and five Americans we became aware of subtle idiomatic differences in the English language.

On that point, check out the request on page 8 from Kristie for readers to send in colloquialisms, local phrases, and unique words that we have sometimes come across

in the manuscripts we edit.

It sounds like a fun, non-judgmental exercise with a useful angle. Perhaps we will publish these in a bid to eradicate them from academic and professional writing -- as we will see they lack clarity across different cultures and therefore thwart comprehensible communication.

I can speak to this personally as an exiled Brit. I regularly confuse people with phrases like 'hit for six' (which means receiving sudden, 'impactful' news; it is derived from cricket -- a hit that clears the boundary without touching the ground is worth six runs). Equally, when I moved to the United States, I was utterly confused by an oft-heard phrase 'from the get-go'. This confusion was not helped by the fact that what I was hearing was 'from the gecko'. (I believe 'from the get-go' means from the outset for those who have never come across this phrase before.)

Jason

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Editors' Access to Public Access

by Ira F. Salkin, PhD

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On January 11, 2008, in response to an Act of the US Congress, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced a revision to its Public Access Policy.¹ The law, which went into effect as of April 7, 2008, stipulates:

The Director of the National Institutes of Health shall require that all investigators funded by the NIH **submit or have submitted** for them to the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central an electronic version of their **final, peer-reviewed manuscripts upon acceptance for publication**, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication: Provided, that the NIH shall implement the public

access policy in a **manner consistent with copyright law.***

In clarifying this new US congressional mandate, the NIH noted the following:

1. The NIH Public Access Policy applies to all peer-reviewed articles that arise, in whole or in part, from direct costs funded by NIH or from NIH staff, that are accepted for publication on or after April 7, 2008;
2. Institutions and investigators are responsible for ensuring that any publishing or copyright agreements concerning submitted articles fully comply with this Policy;
3. PubMed Central (PMC) is the NIH digital archive of full-text, peer-reviewed journal articles. Its content is publicly accessible and integrated with other databases;
4. The final, peer-reviewed manuscript includes all graphics and supplemental materials that are associated with the article; and
5. Beginning May 25, 2008, anyone submitting an application, proposal or progress report to the NIH must include the PMC or NIH Manuscript Submission reference number when citing applicable articles that arise from their

* Bold = author's emphasis

¹ <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-033.html>.

NIH funded research.¹

The Wellcome Trust in the UK introduced similar requirements in February of this year with the following statements:

The Wellcome Trust believes that maximising the distribution of these papers - by providing free, online access - is the most effective way of ensuring that the research we fund can be accessed, read and built upon. In turn, this will foster a richer research culture.²

The Wellcome Trust therefore supports unrestricted access to the published output of research as a fundamental part of its charitable mission and a public benefit to be encouraged wherever possible.²

Specifically, the Wellcome Trust:

- expects authors of research papers to maximise the opportunities to

make their results available for free

- requires electronic copies of any research papers that have been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, and are supported in whole or in part by Wellcome Trust funding, to be made available through PubMed Central (PMC) and UK PubMed Central (UK PMC) as soon as possible and in any event within six months [Author's note: the NIH policy is within one year of publication] of the journal publisher's official date of final publication
- will provide grant holders with additional funding, through their institutions, to cover open

access charges, where appropriate, in order to meet the Trust's requirements

- encourages - and where it pays an open access fee, requires - authors and publishers to license research papers such that they may be freely copied and re-used (for example for text and data-mining purposes), provided that such uses are fully attributed
- affirms the principle that it is the intrinsic merit of the work, and not the title of the journal in which an author's work is published, that should be considered in making funding decisions.²

¹ <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-033.html>.

² <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Spotlight-issues/Open-access/Policy/index.htm>.

While the NIH and the Wellcome Trust are two of the world's largest funding agencies, others such as the Howard Hughes Medical Institute have similar policies and have designated PubMed Central as the repository for papers.

Prior to discussing the impact of these new policies on your activities and those of your journal, it is important to differentiate between *public access* and *open access*.

The NIH policy is designed to ensure public access, at no cost, to peer-reviewed and published papers arising from its funding much like a library, under the restrictions of the legal principal of Fair Use.

In contrast, open access provides for broader use of copyrighted documents than those permitted under Fair Use through specific license-type agreements. Only a very limited number of papers in PubMed Central fall under open access.

The Wellcome Trust's policy includes both public and open access and the Trust will compensate investigators for payment of any fees required

by publishers or others to allow for open access distribution of their works.

What direct or indirect affects will the public access policy have in the real world of managing and technical editors? First the NIH and the Wellcome Trust provide small and large grants in a number of ways to support investigations across all areas of biomedical and health sciences. Therefore,

Public access - provides public access to publications protected by copyright laws.³

Open access - provides public access and the right to reuse published works subject to proper attribution.⁴

if your journal receives manuscripts that deal with basic or applied investigations in these two very broad categories, you might have thought your safest option would be to assume these new policies apply to your publication. However, the NIH policy, and by extension that of

the Wellcome Trust, applies only to papers arising from their funding. If not, PubMed Central will only accept for deposit those papers from journals with which it has formal arrangements. Put another way, if funding for the research described in papers is not provided by organizations with public access policies and which have agreements with PubMed Central for the deposition of papers or if your publisher has no arrangements with PubMed Central to accept papers appearing in your journal, then public access does not apply.

Second, does this mean that as a managing or technical editor you will have to submit to PubMed Central papers based on NIH-funded studies, but not those based on funding received from other sources? Do the public access policies require you, the journal owner, or your publisher to become involved in submitting any papers to PubMed Central? The answer is a big NO! The NIH, the Wellcome Trust and similar organizations squarely place the ultimate responsibility on the principal investigators (PI) and their

³ NIH Public Access. Public Access Frequently Asked Questions, Section F., Question 2. Available at: <http://>

publicaccess.nih.gov/FAQ.htm.

⁴ PubMed Central. Open Access Publishing. Definition of Open Access Publication.

Available at: <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/about/openaccess.html>.

Editors' Access

continued

institutions to ensure all terms and conditions of the awards are met and this is one of those conditions. Even if the PI is not an author on the paper (a highly unlikely situation), the fact that the manuscript resulted from an award to the PI means that he or she and the institution must still fulfill the public access terms of the grant.

Third, it should be noted some publishers have agreed to provide papers to PubMed Central on behalf of PIs or institutions. In some cases, publishers have instituted formal arrangements with PubMed Central to deposit all papers, while others will submit only those articles reporting research supported by NIH, the Wellcome Trust, or similar organizations. For example, the American Chemical Society publications indicate on their website (<http://pubs.acs.org/copyright/nih/index.html>) that 'ACS deposits on behalf of the author the final, peer-reviewed manuscript...for open availability 12 months after publication. This service is provided at no charge to ACS members in good standing and invoiced at a fee of \$100 for non-members'. Similarly, Wiley-Blackwell's website (<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDS/Section/>

[id-321171.htm](http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDS/Section/id-321171.htm)) also informs authors that 'Wiley-Blackwell will support our authors by posting the accepted version of articles by NIH-grant-holders to PubMed Central upon acceptance by the journal. The accepted version is the version that incorporates all amendments made during peer review, but prior to the publisher's copy-editing and typesetting'. Other publishers, such as Sage and Informa Healthcare, rely upon the author or the institution to meet the terms of the granting agency.

The publishers I contacted in an informal, non-scientific survey will provide to PubMed Central on behalf of the authors the final published version of papers, which includes copy-editing and typesetting. However, publishers assess a fee ranging from \$2,500 (USD) to \$3,500 (USD) to provide the published version. For example, the Sage Open Program (<http://www.sagepub.com/sageopen.sp>) available for a number of their biomedical journals will 'allow the deposition of the final paper (post refereeing, copy-editing and proof-reading), to PubMed Central... for a fee of \$3,000 (USD) per article'. As just discussed and described in greater detail below,

submission of copies of the published versions of papers is not required under the NIH Public Access policy.

Fourth, if the papers in your journal fall within the NIH policy or those of other funding agencies, you will probably have to revise your copyright transfer or agreement forms. Specifically, the forms will have to assign certain rights to the authors to permit them to submit their papers to PubMed Central. For example, Informa Healthcare has the following statement for all journals it publishes:

NIH Public Access Policy:

In consideration of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Public Access Policy, Informa Healthcare acknowledges that the broad and open dissemination of NIH-funded-research results may benefit future scientific and medical research. Because we value the current and future contributions our journals make to the scientific body of knowledge, we have made certain that our policies accommodate those authors who

wish to submit to PubMed Central.

Informa Healthcare's position with respect to public access to NIH-funded work published in Informa Healthcare journals is as follows:

- Informa Healthcare authors may voluntarily submit their funded work to PubMed Central after a 12-month embargo period;
- 'Funded work' shall be defined as the final, peer-reviewed manuscript that is accepted by the Editor-in-Chief of the journal. This manuscript must not be altered by Publisher's copyediting and typesetting services; and

- This embargo period begins the day the work is published online at www.informaworld.com.⁵

Fifth, what must be provided to PubMed Central by PIs, institutions, or publishers? As noted earlier, it's the final peer-reviewed manuscript that must be deposited within one year (or six months for the Wellcome Trust) of its acceptance for publication. The NIH provides the following guidance:

- Final peer-reviewed manuscript: The Investigator's final manuscript of a peer-reviewed paper accepted for journal publication, including all modifications from the peer-review process [Public Access – added by author];

- Final published article: The journal's authoritative copy of the paper, including all modifications from the publishing peer-review process, copyediting, and stylistic edits, and formatting changes [Open Access – added by author].⁶

Similarly, Informa's copyright position statement stipulates the manuscript must not be altered by its copyediting and typesetting services. In addition, Wiley-Blackwell would assist authors with the accepted version of manuscripts 'that incorporate all amendments made during peer review, but prior to the publisher's copy-editing and typesetting'.

Sixth, don't be confused by the similarity in the terms PubMed Central and PubMed. Just because the articles appearing in your journal are cited in PubMed does not relieve the PI, institutions, and/or your publisher (if it has an

⁵ Personal communication with Carolyn Honour, Informa USA, September, 2,

2008.

⁶ <http://publicaccess.nih.gov/FAQ.htm>.

Editors' Access

continued

agreement with PubMed Central and provides the service for authors) from submitting the work to PubMed Central. PubMed Central carries the full texts of papers, while PubMed includes only citations and abstracts of articles. In short, the two are not the same; and even if papers from your journal are cited by PubMed, they still may have to be provided to

PubMed Central depending on funding sources and agreements with your publisher.

What was instituted to allow biomedical and related research to be freely available to scientists and the public has become a 'mine field' for those involved in the publication of these scholarly works. I would recommend you obtain more information on this new NIH

policy by reviewing the agency's list of frequently asked questions, which can be found at <http://publicaccess.nih.gov/FAQ.htm> and then discuss public and open access with your journal's owner and/or publisher to establish the policy for which you will be responsible as the journal's managing or technical editor.



Column: *Editorial*

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms, local phrases, and unique words provide color to our dialogue with one another. However, in academic and professional writing, these colorful bits can cause confusion and thwart the purpose of writing, which is communication between author and reader.

ISMTE would like to collect a list of 'casual' words and phrases our readers have found in manuscript submissions, both for fun and to raise awareness, for us as editors, of words and phrases that may cause confusion.

Jason started the list with 'from the get-go', explaining in his 'President's Message' column how he did not know the definition of this American colloquialism and did not recognize the words in conversation.

I'll add 'spot on' to the list. The Editor-in-Chief of one of my journals and I came across that phrase in an article from a British author a year or so ago. Not having

heard or seen it before, it took us a while to determine it must mean 'exactly right.'

Elizabeth Blalock, ISMTE Director and website coordinator, has volunteered to post our list on the ISMTE website (www.ismte.org). Elizabeth offered 'punted' and 'numpty' as additions to the list. Punted means to 'delay in answering or taking action' and numpty means 'idiot'.

If you have an example you would like to submit or come across one in a future manuscript you are editing, please send it to Elizabeth at blalock@sidnet.org or me at kristen.overstreet@mac.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Kristie

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Article

Docu Drama: Assembling a Procedures Manual for the Editorial Office

by *Nicki Salcedo*

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There are so many activities that go on in an editorial office it is hard to keep track of what you've done, what needs to be done, and what should have been done. Consider creating a *process and procedure manual* for your office. While this is a time-consuming exercise, it is very important toward keeping you organized, legitimizing your standard activities, and providing a guide for tracking and improving your current processes.

Start by dividing your work into a few main categories. I would suggest these areas: *Journal Information, Manuscript Submission, Review Information, Production, and Resources.*

Under Journal Information you should catalog

- contact information for
 - editors
 - editorial office staff
 - reviewers
 - advisory members
 - board members

- publisher/production staff
- journal guidelines
 - types of manuscripts recruited/accepted
 - manuscript submission guidelines
 - table guidelines
 - figure/image/artwork guidelines
 - submission costs
 - subscription rates
 - advertising policies
- forms
 - sample review/score sheets
 - author instructions
 - copyright assignment
 - financial disclosure
 - conflict of interest
- peer-review system information
 - workflow diagrams
 - author/reviewer/editor guides
 - system update notifications
 - system notes

- journal workflow
 - editors
 - * roles
 - * responsibilities
- basic training information for new editors.

The Manuscript Submission section includes:

- workflow diagram
- soliciting manuscripts
- how-to guide for authors
- triage process for new manuscripts
- triage process for revised manuscripts
- statement of how long it will take a manuscript to move through the review process
- records of actual time from submission to first decision, and acceptance to publication.

Review Information includes:

Docu Drama

continued

- 🌐 peer-review guidelines
- 🌐 minimum number of reviewers
- 🌐 requested time to complete reviews
- 🌐 assigning reviewers
- 🌐 sending decision letters
- 🌐 thanking reviewers.

The Production process covers everything about manuscripts post review:

- 🌐 documenting the journal’s decision criteria
- 🌐 documenting how rejected manuscripts, appeals, and accepted manuscripts are handled

- 🌐 creating a manuscript checklist and process for page proof and approving the table of contents.

There may be other useful resources you need to refer to from time to time. These might include:

- 🌐 production schedules
- 🌐 page budgets
- 🌐 annual reports
- 🌐 style guides and
- 🌐 an emergency/ contingency plan.

I had thought about calling this article ‘Creating a Process Guide,’ but in most cases you should already have the processes established and the documents created. However,

if something is missing, now is the time to create those documents, and if you haven’t already, now is the time to create a procedure manual.

Having everything documented and accessible in one location will provide stability and continuity to your editorial office. In a large editorial office this will be helpful for cross-training staff. In a small editorial office, the procedure manual is a good reference in case there are unexpected staff transitions or new staff members are hired.

A complete process guide will help you improve your response time to queries, make it easier to review and update processes, and allow you to stay organized no matter how hectic your daily schedule is.



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Calendar of Events

Society of Editors Conference

9-11 November 2008

Bristol, UK

www.societyofeditors.co.uk

ALPSP - How To Be a Successful Editor

29-30 January 2009

Oxford, UK

www.alpsp.org

Council of Science Editors

1-5 May 2009

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

www.councilscienceeditors.org/events/annualmeeting09/index.cfm

International Academy of Nursing Editors

26-28 July 2009

Chicago, Illinois, USA

www.nursingeditors.org

World Association of Medical Editors

in conjunction with the 6th International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication)

11 September 2009

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

www.jama-peer.org

6th International Congress on Peer Review & Biomedical Publication

10-12 September 2009

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

www.ama-assn.org/public/peer/peerhome.htm

European Association of Science Editors

10th EASE General Assembly and Conference

16-19 September 2009

Pisa, Italy

<http://www.ease.org.uk/easeconfdocs/1stCircular-2009.pdf>

Bizarre!

Do you have a story relating to your work you would like to share with EON readers? We are looking for 'bizarre,' 'unbelievable,' or 'amusing' stories to publish in a new column. Send your stories to kristen.overstreet@mac.com. (Please don't share any details that might be considered libelous or defamatory.)

Thank you! ISMTE would like to thank the following companies for sponsoring memberships:



American Chemical Society



To Report or To Search . . . That Is the Question

by **Jennifer Fleet**,
Director of Customer Services
and **Tony Alves**
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Before you head into the vast array of Editorial Manager reports, ask yourself, “What am I trying to accomplish?” The *Search Submission* interface is extremely powerful, and it just might be the perfect place to extract what you need.

Do you need to find all manuscripts in the same status, received within a specific time frame, or given a specific *final disposition*? Do you need to find all manuscripts that fit all three of those criteria? You may want to simply search. With the search function, you can add an infinite number of search criteria and join the search statements with “And” or “Or”. For the stout-hearted, nested Boolean parentheses can be used to build even more precise searches (see Figures 1 and 2). When your search is complete, you’ll have access to all of the relevant *action links* for each manuscript in your results list.

Another benefit of using the Search tool is that you have the ability to save any search strategy that you’ve constructed and can run the search

over and over again. This means that you can build the search strategy once and execute it as needed in the future. This saves time and provides quick access to often-needed information.

After collapsing your action links, search results can also be copied from the browser window and pasted into an Excel spreadsheet (or similar program). This means that you can take multiple result sets and combine them in various ways for extra reporting power. Familiarizing editors and other staff members with the search submission tool also helps a busy administrator curtail queries, such as ‘what is the status of manuscript X’. The search submission function can be set up so that individual editors can only see the data that pertains to them, or only those submissions on which they are working. Getting editors used to doing their own investigative work will improve your turnaround time because editors will see what work is in the queue and will be able to take action on those manuscripts immediately.

Call for Articles

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

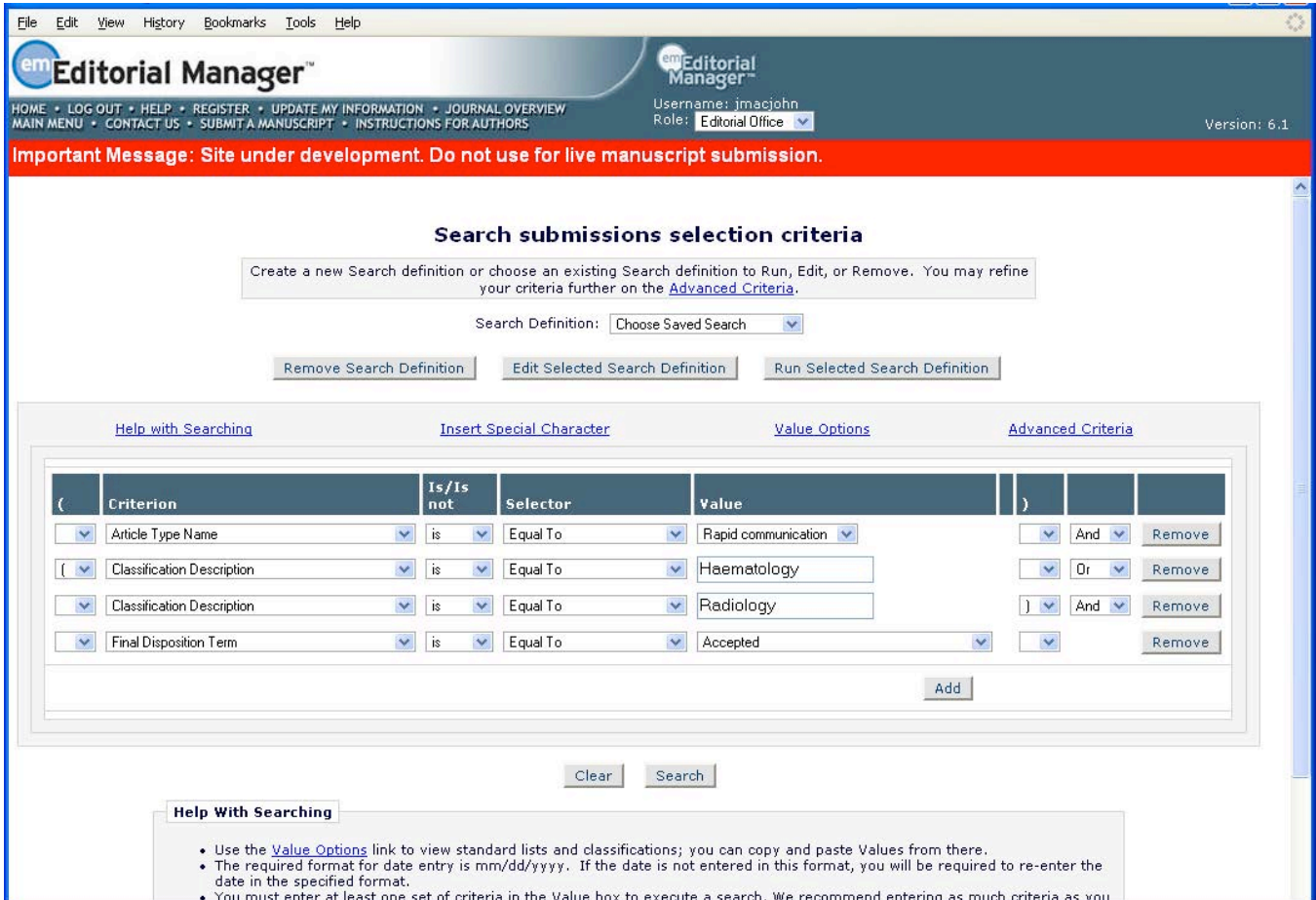


Figure 1. A user is looking for a submission: Of a particular article type, in a particular subject area, with a particular status. Because all three of these are true, these are linked by *ANDs*.

We offer our gratitude to Sage and Aries Systems for their support of ISMTE!



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

To Report or To Search . . .

continued

The screenshot shows the Editorial Manager search interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with options like File, Edit, View, History, Bookmarks, Tools, and Help. Below this is the Editorial Manager logo and a navigation bar with links for HOME, LOG OUT, HELP, REGISTER, UPDATE MY INFORMATION, JOURNAL OVERVIEW, MAIN MENU, CONTACT US, SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT, and INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS. The user's role is set to 'Editorial Office' and the version is 6.1. A red banner at the top of the main content area reads: 'Important Message: Site under development. Do not use for live manuscript submission.'

The main section is titled 'Search submissions selection criteria'. It contains a text box with instructions: 'Create a new Search definition or choose an existing Search definition to Run, Edit, or Remove. You may refine your criteria further on the [Advanced Criteria](#).' Below this is a dropdown menu for 'Search Definition' set to 'Choose Saved Search'. There are three buttons: 'Remove Search Definition', 'Edit Selected Search Definition', and 'Run Selected Search Definition'.

Below the buttons is a table with columns: 'Criterion', 'Is/Is not', 'Selector', 'Value', and 'And/Or'. The table contains the following rows:

(	Criterion	Is/Is not	Selector	Value	)	And/Or	Remove
	Article Type Name	is	Equal To	Rapid communication		And	Remove
(	Classification Description	is	Equal To	Haematology		Or	Remove
	Classification Description	is	Equal To	Radiology	)	And	Remove
	Final Disposition Term	is	Equal To	Accepted			Remove

There are 'Add' and 'Remove' buttons for each row. At the bottom of the table is an 'Add' button. Below the table are 'Clear' and 'Search' buttons. A 'Help With Searching' section at the bottom contains the following text:

Help With Searching

- Use the [Value Options](#) link to view standard lists and classifications; you can copy and paste Values from there.
- The required format for date entry is mm/dd/yyyy. If the date is not entered in this format, you will be required to re-enter the date in the specified format.
- You must enter at least one set of criteria in the Value box to execute a search. We recommend entering as much criteria as you

Figure 2. A user is looking for a submission: Of a particular article type, in a particular subject area, with a particular status. Because all three of these are true, these are linked by *ANDs*. But the 'In a particular subject area' is actually not defined by a single classification; therefore a series of classifications are used, all linked with *OR* statements. These have to be wrapped in brackets so that they are evaluated together, first.

So instead of:

Type=X AND Subject=Y AND Status=Z

we get

Type=X AND (Subject=A OR Subject=B OR ...) AND Status=Z

Because all three of these are true, these are linked by *ANDs*.

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 *EON* or online variations, idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

It is important to remember that your old desktop tracking system simply kept track of who got what when, and who returned what when. Access to that information was limited to the few who had access to a particular database or file. Running reports and distributing them to editors and others was necessary to keep everyone up-to-speed and informed of deadlines. Online tracking systems like Editorial Manager are real-time reporting systems. The system itself provides a constant snapshot of the status of all manuscripts, and the many views (such as folders containing manuscripts at specific milestones) as well as the search submissions feature have replaced

formal status reports as a way to keep all of the players synchronized and on time. At every Editorial Manager User Group meeting we hear testimonials to this fact.

The point of this article is “Don’t underestimate the power of your *search*”. Search submission is a great tool for looking up a single manuscript as well as for digging down into the depths of manuscript status and editor workload. It may not be the answer to all of your reporting needs, but it is extremely flexible and convenient and it will go a long way to giving you the necessary information to run your publication day to day. 🌐

How to be a successful journal editor - short course

ALPSP (<http://www.alpsp.org>, the Association of Learned, Professional and Society Publishers) is running a course for Editors-in-Chief, Editorial Board members, and managing editors on the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to run a successful publication.

Most editors edit a journal on a part-time basis, out of dedication to their discipline rather than as a career – and there is little support or training to help them. This course is one of very few that provides an opportunity to review the overall editorial operation in an increasingly difficult environment.

Based on an existing course which has run successfully for 12 years, this course will be run in **Oxford, UK, 29-30 January 2009.**

The highly participatory programme includes how to attract the best authors, how to deliver what readers want, and how to make a journal successful. The course gives editors the opportunity to discuss best practice with peers, and by the end of the 1.5 days, all participants will have an action plan to take back to the office.

The course is being trained by Pippa Smart (PSP Consulting), and Mike Jackson (Annals of Botany). For more information, see the course website: <http://www.pspconsulting.org/journals.shtml>, or http://www.alpsp.org/ngen_public/article.asp?aid=7669 or contact Pippa Smart directly: pippa.smart@gmail.com.

Swapping Squirrel Stories

by Jan McColm, *Managing Editor, Genetics in Medicine*

Since joining ISMTE, and finally meeting some other managing editors (MEs), I've discovered everyone has a unique background. My own journey started about four years ago, when I realized my career path as a research scientist was no longer right for me. I'd had a fairly classical academic education — bachelor's to PhD to postdoc to research associate — and found myself wondering this: what were my 'transferable skills'? The career counselor at my university and I soon narrowed my personal preferences to science writing and editing, and on her advice I set about speaking to people in science writing/editing jobs; a journalist, a *Nature* editor, and an information officer at a university news department, to name a few. I also took some advice to get writing experience and 'clips,' and I volunteered for a magazine and a news office: writing articles, book reviews, and press releases.

After two years of moonlighting as a science writer — while still holding down the day job as a research scientist — I heard from the career counselor a managing editor position was becoming available at my university and they were looking for someone with a science background. I have to say I had no idea what a managing editor did, but I introduced myself to the new editor-in-chief (EIC). I discovered he was looking for someone independent, able to write and edit, who knew the process of peer review, and who could learn the managing bit. I was instantly struck that this was my kind of job and, after a formal interview, was offered the position.

My training was a visit to the outgoing ME (in Minnesota), the publisher (in Baltimore), and an interactive online tutorial on the peer-review software. These were adequate enough to establish the basics. But the most valuable piece of 'training' I received was a two-month overlap between my starting the job and the outgoing ME finishing. She shepherded her manuscripts out as I started taking new manuscripts in, and that gradual increase in workload allowed me to learn one of the critical skills we MEs must have — juggling. Being able to learn the manuscript flow process one bit at a time was fantastic.

It has now been two years since I became an ME, and I can't say I have a typical day. My journal is *Genetics in Medicine*, a society journal for the American College of Medical Genetics: circulation ~1,400; submissions 250/year; acceptance rate ~45%. I am the editorial office with no staff to supervise, which I like for the most part, but it means there is no one to cover vacation time and no one to take coffee breaks with (see squirrels below). I do everything from checking new manuscripts for style compliance to rewriting those manuscripts when English isn't the author's native tongue. I pick the cover art (I can go to local art galleries during the day and know that it is part of my job!) and read every article we publish. With my background I can comment on the science and English, and to borrow an old cliché, I learn something new every day. I write the editor reports for our society and the highlights for each issue, and I was involved in surveying our readership for their interest in our latest venture — podcasting.

Squirrel Stories

continued

My EIC had wanted a local managing editor and was quite firm it would not be a telecommuting position. I was allotted 2 square feet in the cube farm among computer programmers and support personnel, who spent a lot of time on the phone. The constant chatter made it difficult to concentrate, so I found myself spending more and more of the day at home where it was quiet enough to read and write. I saw my busy EIC about one hour a week, with regular e-mail contact to deal with day-to-day issues. After my first year, I approached my EIC about working from home full-time and he agreed as long as we kept our face-to-face meeting for one hour a week. If I'm honest, I really enjoy our weekly meeting and going into the office, but I'm pretty sure we could achieve everything via telephone and e-mail. This position is tailor made for telecommuting.

I wanted to meet people in my new field and was aware it wasn't very easy. I didn't know if there were any other MEs at my university and had no clue how to go about finding them if there were. The career counselor introduced me to Elizabeth Blalock who had been an ME for several years, and she quickly became a mentor with all the questions I had about the 'right' way to do things. As we all know, the 'right' way depends on whom you ask, but Elizabeth was, and still is, a wealth of information. Elizabeth was also part of the ISMTE founding group, and when she told me of the society I was immediately on board.

The inaugural ISMTE meeting in Baltimore was a revelation to me in so many ways. First, it was so nice to speak to people who understood and could relate to what I was

talking about as a ME. I told the story of my brick-licking squirrels that I watch every day from my window during my coffee break — and when you hear other people's squirrel stories, you realize there's a whole army of us working from home, looking for a network of peers. I also realized we are a well-educated and professional group looking for the recognition that our position is more than it used to be - when paper-based offices were the norm and filing was a major part of the position. Not only are we manuscript editors, proof readers, and computer-savvy persons, we are also alert to fraud and constantly asking ethical questions for which there is often not yet a consensus answer.

The most useful thing I learned, however, was you don't have to leave your journal when the EIC term is finished and the new EIC is appointed thousands of miles away. Ever since I took this job I have been bracing myself for what I was going to do when my EIC's five-year term was up. Thanks to ISMTE, I now know I can pitch to the publisher the idea of being retained as a freelance ME, convincing him that the skills and experience I spent five years building are best kept at the journal and the incoming EIC's job will be ten times easier if the ME isn't also new. By setting up a remote office now, I've already demonstrated this model works, but am so glad to have found other MEs who are happy to share their experiences of how they did and are doing it.

I know ISMTE will be a place for my ongoing education, a virtual meeting place for building a network of peers, and once or twice a year an actual meeting place to swap squirrel stories. 🌐