

Editorial

Do we have tools for quality assurance in science editing and publishing?

The essence of science writing is an adequate supervision. A large proportion of current scholarly publications are redundant, flawed, plagiarized, and hinder scientific progress.¹ Even the most prestigious peer-reviewed journals are not immune to pointless, erroneous, and potentially harmful reports and reviews.² Too often scholarly articles fail to reflect the essence and novelty of the covered topics because of inappropriate and superficial analysis of related primary sources.

A large number of scholarly articles are driven by the urge to publish something rather than to contribute to the communication of science. Not surprisingly, in such environment mishandled limited financial and human resources produce enormous 'scientific' waste: researchers, authors and editors invest lots of time and effort in poorly designed, irreproducible research studies and 'vanity' publications.³

The model of blind peer review, which is still widely practised worldwide, is hampered by the lack of referees' expertise and sometimes by non-disclosure of the evaluators' competing interests.⁴ Skilled referees are not widely available, and they preferentially contribute to a handful of top-ranking journals. Their comments and suggested revisions can alter the main points, and often deserve to be credited by openly informing the readership about contributions throughout the manuscript processing. In a worst case scenario blinded referee comments can dilute genuine points of the journal submissions, delay their publication, and even conceal their innovative potential. The persistence of the flawed and tangential reviewing practice can create a fertile ground for occult plagiarism and recycling of rational ideas.⁵

In small scientific communities, where infrastructure and international collaborations are not established, pressures to publish more may force the authors to commit plagiarism or other misconducts.⁶ The lack of proper mentorship, poor understanding of research impact metrics, and unawareness of international standards of authorship worsen the situation further.

Scholarly publishing now confronts the dilemma of fast dissemination of well-structured innovative research reports, which is no longer possible on the basis of the traditional review models.⁷ Again, this issue is especially important in small scientific communities and developing disciplines such as nursing and science editing, where ethical research, publishing, and establishing an evidence base are building blocks of growth. Pushing to publish articles at any cost can damage growth at grassroots level.

In our times, only a few periodicals cover problems of ethical reviewing, publishing, and educating target audiences. One of these periodicals is *European Science Editing*, which is the oldest authoritative reference for researchers and editors across Europe. It is the official organ of the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), and this year the journal turns its 40th volume! It is a remarkable achievement for all stakeholders of scientific communications striving to

develop quality tools for ethical writing, reviewing, editing, and publishing. And it is encouraging to see a variety of essays on scientific misconduct, emerging models of peer review, and quality editing in the latest issues of the journal. Although answers to the problems in editing are not readily available in these essays, it is hoped that solutions can be found by extending the discussion and by inviting editors across the world to share their experience.

Those who follow publications in *European Science Editing* over a long time might have noticed that the scope of topics covered by the journal have widened in the recent years. Overall, more attention is now paid to proper use of journal impact metrics, indexing, elements of ethical publishing, functions of editors in the changing digital environment, and expanding cooperation between editors of learned editorial associations. Such changes reflect the growing diversity of problems encountered by editors in our times.

European Science Editing improved its profile in Scopus by increasing its annual citation rates from 13 in 2009 to 81 in 2013 (as of 5 September 2014). Over the same period the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), which reflects scientific prestige of citations, increased from 0.169 to 0.246. The journal's latest *h* index reached 6. Some of the highly-cited papers over the past five years are presented in Table 1. Of course, there are a few more influential periodicals in communication and informatics, where the journal is currently categorized, but that does not undermine its role in disseminating information for the global editorial community. Not many editors across the world are currently involved in editorial research, and abundant citations are not common for any journal in editing.

Table 1. Most cited articles of European Science Editing in 2009-2012 (Scopus data as of 5 September 2014)

Years	References	Times cited
2009	Kozak M. Text-table: An underused and undervalued tool for communicating information. <i>European Science Editing</i> 2009;35(4):103–105.	6
2010	Kerans ME, de Jager M. Handling plagiarism at the manuscript editor's desk. <i>European Science Editing</i> 2010;36(3):62–66.	7
2011	Habibzadeh F, Marcovitch H. Plagiarism: The emperor's new clothes. <i>European Science Editing</i> 2011;37(3):67–69.	15
2012	Habibzadeh F, Marcovitch H. Authorship dispute among the league of extraordinary gentlemen. <i>European Science Editing</i> 2012;38(2):40–41.	7

Not least important is that numerous references to these journal articles can be found in the *EASE Science Editors' Handbook* and the *EASE Guidelines for Authors and Translators of Scientific Articles to be Published in English*, two other educational tools for novice and seasoned editors. Altogether, these tools can help improve the quality and ethics of scientific publishing across Europe and elsewhere. By educating editors and upgrading standards of publishing the editorial community can have far-reaching achievements in academic and social life.

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- 6 Abdollahi M, Gasparyan AY, Saeidnia S. The urge to publish more and its consequences. *Daru Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* 2014;22:53. doi: 10.1186/2008-2231-22-53
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Medicine and politics

Science and medicine are inextricably entwined with politics in our modern world: climate change, transgenic crops, research funding, drug and medical device regulation are all affected by governmental decisions and public opinion. Governments can harm their own image with poor management of scientific crises, such as foot-and-mouth disease in the UK, severe acute respiratory syndrome in China or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes governmental decisions directly affect science editors: In February 2004, the US Department of the Treasury ruled that editing or publishing scientific manuscripts from Iran violated its trade embargo, leaving US publishers and scientific societies divided over how to respond.

There are other instances where more general global politics may also affect journals. A recent example has occurred at *The Lancet*, which has created an opportunity to consider how the editorial community should respond in such circumstances. On August 2nd 2014, *The Lancet* published 'An open letter for the people in Gaza' in its Correspondence section, written by a group of doctors and scientists who had all worked in Gaza. This prompted a huge response from people both in support and against the sentiments expressed in the letter, many of which were published in the journal and online over subsequent weeks.

In *The Lancet*, 10th October, Richard Horton discussed the outcome of this correspondence, including an invitation for him to visit the Rambam Health Care Campus in Israel where he saw "an inspiring model of partnerships between Jews and Arabs in a part of Israel where 40% of the population is Arab". Richard reflected on lessons to be learned from the overall experience, including ensuring that all possible conflicts of interest are declared at an early stage. (*The Lancet* does ask all authors for such a declaration but how to police what is not declared?)

Richard then floated a proposal for guidance to help editors on those rare occasions when politics intrudes into medical publishing.

"Editors will, from time to time, be faced with submissions that lie at the difficult intersection of medicine and politics. Health and health care do have political determinants and editors should not shy away from those. But politics, by its very nature, can be disruptive and divisive, with many different points-of-view held. While taking strong editorial positions on issues of relevance to health is sometimes necessary, editors should always pause, reflect, and consult before publishing any manuscript that might unnecessarily polarise, or foster or worsen political division."

EASE welcomes this proposal and would be pleased to hear the thoughts of our members on this.

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