

## EASE-Forum Digest: December 2010 to March 2011

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### Can editors' editing entitle them to authorship?

Is there a rationale whereby editors-in-chief who make substantial editorial contributions to the manuscript before publication might be joined as an author of a paper submitted to their journal? Marcin Kozak posed a scenario of an editor-in-chief who reworked a manuscript, giving it a new shape, following which the editor was invited to become a co-author by the authors.

Members of the forum were firm in their view that suggesting changes and additions to a manuscript is merely part of an editor's job, and most felt that acknowledgement of the editor's contribution was also inappropriate. Lawrence Osborn thought a paper should be submitted to another journal if the authors insisted on the editor being joined as an author. Irene Hames cautioned about using diplomacy when answering such a request from the authors because they may genuinely be trying to be fair. Experienced editors should know how to tailor their correspondence if they suspected the authors' motives were to add a prestigious name to the paper so as to increase its visibility and citability.

As a postscript to this discussion, participants might be interested in the stance that the journal *Neurology* takes on authorship. In their fight against covert pharmaceutical industry bias in the papers they publish, the journal has abandoned the authorship criteria suggested by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) that focus on who deserves to be an author. It has adopted the approach that an author is a person who has influenced the content of the paper. This could include a medical writer employed by the pharmaceutical industry but, as suggested by Elizabeth Loder, the *BMJ*'s US-based clinical epidemiology editor, adopting this definition could produce an argument for an editor being included as an author.<sup>1</sup> For instance, an editor who requires the authors to change their conclusions which originally had not been supported by the data to conclusions supported by the data, thus changing the paper's message, could be said to have had a substantial influence on the content of the paper.

The EASE Forum discussion digressed to acknowledgement of author's editors. Elisabeth Heseltine felt that although the ICMJE guidelines recommend that

editors should ask authors if they received assistance with the preparation of the manuscript, there was no need to acknowledge the person who had given assistance in the paper (ICMJE gives a person who provided writing assistance as an example of one who might be included in the acknowledgements [http://www.icmje.org/ethical\\_1author.html](http://www.icmje.org/ethical_1author.html)). Elisabeth, who is an author's editor, would prefer not to be acknowledged when she does not see the final version, which might have grammatical errors. Sylwia Ufnalska explained that this was the reason why the EASE Guidelines (<http://www.ease.org.uk/pdfguidelines/AuthorGuidelinesHighRes.pdf>) recommend that acknowledgements should state that a language professional who had assisted with the manuscript was not responsible for the final version. This solution allows the all-important transparency while protecting the professional reputation of the author's editor. Attention was also drawn to ICMJE's requirement for written permission from any person whose name is included in the acknowledgements.

Finally, James Hartley alerted the forum to a survey of 180 Croatian journals which sought to establish the prevalence of editors publishing in their own journals. While the study found that editors in the sample did not usually publish in their own journals, the researchers concluded that there was a need for greater transparency when they did (*Scientometrics* 2011;86:227-233). In Will Hughes' view, the practice of editors publishing in their own journals should not generally be condoned but the practice was understandable in highly specialized journals with insufficient copy flow.

### "In Vitro" or "in vitro" in headings?

Aleksandra Golebiowska asked if the "in" where "in vitro" was used in a heading should have a capital "I" when, according to the respective style guide, prepositions longer than four letters should begin with a capital letter. Paul Neate quoted the *Chicago Manual of Style* (8.167: *Headline style*): "prepositions [that] are part of a Latin expression used adjectivally or adverbially (De Facto, In Vitro, etc.)" should be capitalized. He would therefore write both "In" and "Vitro" with an initial capital letter. This was contrary to the style guide at one of his former employers, which prescribed that "in vitro" (and "in vivo" etc) should never be capitalized in headings, even when capitalizing all significant words, which he thought looked awful. Marge Berer, who was against the capitals, was also driven crazy (which makes two of us) by authors who use capitals when explaining acronyms – for example, we interviewed 20 People Living with HIV (PLHIV). It would be interesting to know how this can be justified by its proponents.

### "Due to" language moving on are "owing to" and "because of" outdated?

Has "due to" taken over from "owing to" and "because of" in the English language? Angela Turner's authors at *Animal Behaviour* seem puzzled when she edits "due to" out of their papers. Alan Singleton assured her that he still

stuck to “due to” as equivalent to “caused by”, and “owing to” as equivalent to “because of”, but he feared he was in a minority. John Taylor pointed out that “due to” is given the meaning “because of” in Chambers, Collins, and Concise Oxford Dictionaries as well as in the American dictionary Websters, but not in the American Heritage dictionary. (I’ve noticed that the American journal *Blood* also changes “due to” to “because of”). As for how usage can change, John drew authority from Humpty Dumpty’s pronouncement in *Alice in Wonderland*, ““When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”” Rounding off the discussion, Norman Grossblatt noted that there is no solid reason to avoid using “due to”, according to *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*.

### How to deal with national (non-English) language abbreviations in English

Institutions in countries where English is not the official language commonly adopt an official English translation in addition to the name in the language of the country. The abbreviation for the name, however, continues to reflect the name in the country language. John Taylor gave an example: the Norwegian Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (LO) is translated as the Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions (LO). The organization always uses the abbreviation LO, even on its English-language webpage. John’s problem was presenting the abbreviation in English text: should the accepted abbreviation be used or should the official English title be abbreviated and used (here, NFTU) even though this never appears in any of the organization’s documents? All the replies he received urged using the acronym from the original language. David Mason suggested the abbreviation should be explained by giving the English translation followed by the country language name: “He belonged to the Federation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [DGB]). Another famous member of the DGB was Hans Dichter”. Stuart Handysides extended the proposal to writing the original name first, for example, the Sociedad Española de Microbiología (SEM; Spanish Society for Microbiology), pointing out that naming an organization in its own language was necessary not only for clarity but also to show respect. Angela Turner argued that using the official name and abbreviation rather than the translation made it easier for readers to search the organization on the internet. However, Mary Ellen Kerans maintained that the Spanish journals in her group used the English translation followed by the Spanish acronym and omitted the original Spanish name because associations in Spain are best known by their abbreviated names. She felt searches would be successful if the English translation or the acronym were used.

### How long does it take to publish an article?

How long a journal takes to publish an article is of great interest to authors and, in the case of biomedical journals, also to sponsors of new drug products. Many journals give the date an article is accepted for publication and the date of publication in the individual article; some give average



times between submission or acceptance and publication. Helle Goldman was looking for statistics based on a large number of lag times because a contributor to his journal, *Polar Research*, which is published three times a year, was annoyed by a wait of six months between acceptance and publication of an article. Although he had found an article in *Nature* (2002;420:15) which showed a graph of median time from submission to publication of 14 journals, he was interested in the time from the date of acceptance, and in journals other than biology journals.

John Glen reported that from his records the average longest time between acceptance and publication in his *Journal of Glaciology* over the past two years (six issues a year) had been seven months, and the average shortest time three months. The quarterly *Journal of the History of Philosophy* gives detailed submission statistics on its website (<http://philosophy.wisc.edu/jhp/submissions.html>), which Dale Richardson had found while searching the internet. The average time between acceptance and publication had been one year for the past three years. Grace Townsend, who works for a medical communications agency, said that from their experience of medical journals, the lag time between acceptance and publication in print was 8-24 weeks, and 24 weeks was not unusual. She also pointed out that putting articles online before print had of course shortened lag times. Reme Melero referred to an editorial on the influence of online posting on publication delay of papers submitted to 14 selected food research journals (available at [http://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/3640/3/Manuscrito\\_Scientometrics.pdf](http://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/3640/3/Manuscrito_Scientometrics.pdf)). Helle added in reply to Grace that there must also be a close correlation between lag times and publication frequency.

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### Discussion initiators

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