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Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (www.bels.org)

BELS for Editors

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) came into existence in 1991 to award credentials to professional editors in the field of life sciences. After years of research and planning, the first certification examination was held in May 1991 for a total of 23 candidates. Today BELS is an entirely volunteer-driven organisation with a 25-year history of tremendous accomplishments.

Until 1991 manuscript editors had no idea about how to showcase their proficiency in an objective way. The authors and clients also had absolutely no way to assess the expertise of an editor. Personal references and ad hoc tests were not proving sufficient when it came to gauging the standard of an editor's capabilities. It was being realised that the professional requirement of an editor in the subject was increasing with every passing year. A lot of new people were stepping in to cater for this increasing need but the quality of the editorial services offered by these new editors was a serious concern. There was a strong need to devise a system that would establish and maintain a standard of quality for this fast growing profession.

The BELS website provides useful information and documents for anyone who is either interested in becoming a board-certified editor or who is looking for a board-certified editor.

Interested in becoming a Board-Certified Editor?

BELS offers three credentials aimed at recognising professional excellence.

The first level credential, Editor in the Life Sciences, or ELS, is referred to as "certification", and is awarded based on a multiple-choice test used by other professions. This three hour test, about 100 questions, evaluates an editor's editorial proficiency, language skills, and copy editing skills. The copy of the study guide is available for download on the website.

Alternatively, editors living outside the US can contact the Registrar for instructions via email. The website also lists dates and places of upcoming exams.

A manuscript editor who has been certified for two years and able to document six years of editorial experience, can then apply to become a Diplomate Editor in the Life Sciences. Applicants are required to submit their portfolio of work and two short essays on topics provided by BELS, which are then evaluated and reviewed independently by three board-certified editors. The application form can be found on the website. So far, only about 30 editors have been awarded the diplomate status.

Finally, Honored Editor in the Life Sciences is the designation conferred on editors who have done distinguished work in the field of editing. This is in recognition of an editor's hard work and excellence and a great honour. To date, only four people have achieved this status.

Looking for a Board-Certified Editor?

BELS website is also useful for authors or journal managers who are looking for a qualified editor. The organisation maintains "BELS Roster" which lists all the certified editors and their details. A direct link available on the website allows authors or clients access to more information about the editors they might want to employ. In addition, you can search the BELS database to find information about members of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences who have chosen to advertise their freelance editorial services. A search can be done by area of expertise, by the type of service required (eg copy editing or substantive editing), or by the media format (eg journals, books, or web pages).

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