

China Medical Board

Biomedical Writing Course

**Lessons on Writing and Publishing Scientific Papers,
Part 4**

- The Title
- The Abstract
- The Editorial Process
- Submitting the Article
- Course Review and Evaluation

Source:

BIOMEDICAL WRITING COURSE

Program Director:

Zhe Dong, PhD

Associate Professor and Dean of Foreign Language Studies

Beijing Medical University

Principal Consultant:

Barbara Gastel, MD

Associate Professor of Journalism and Medical Humanities

Texas A&M University

Principal Course Instructor

Elizabeth Whalen, MA, ELS

Biomedical Writer/Editor

Instructor, University of California at San Diego

Teaching Assistant

Tu Yun-e

Beijing Medical University

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Lesson Fifteen Creating the Title

OBJECTIVES OF LESSON FIFTEEN

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to compose concise, appropriate titles for your research papers.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR LESSON FIFTEEN

1. Read Chapter 4 ("How to Prepare the Title") in Day's book.
2. Write 3 possible titles for your research article and submit them to your local instructor. This assignment will be more fully explained at the end of this lesson.

THE RESEARCH PAPER TITLE

Authorities (Huth 1990, O'Connor 1991, Zeiger 1991) agree on certain qualities that characterize a good title:

1. **Accuracy:** The title must express the main topic of your paper. Make sure that the main words that describe your research are prominent in your title, and make sure that your title does not mislead your readers about the strength of your conclusions. Some experts, as you will see in Day's chapter on titles, discourage the use of sentences for titles because they may give the conclusions more weight than they deserve. Also, sentence titles often include verbs like "is" or "are" that are not needed to express the main point.
2. **Brevity:** A title should be no longer than 10-12 words or 100 English letters, spaces, and punctuation marks. In general, the shorter your title is, the more powerful it will be.

Include everything in the title that is needed, but no more. We suggest that, as you draft your title, you carefully look at every word and phrase and see what happens if you remove it. If no meaning is lost, leave that word or phrase out of the title. Unnecessary phrases include such word groups as "Observations on," "A Review of," or "The Nature of."

3. **Effectiveness:** The purpose of the title is to interest the appropriate readers and to help them locate the paper in standard indexes and databases. Therefore, your title will be effective if it is interesting and if it concisely indicates the main topic of your article.

An effective title is powerful and clear. One way to strengthen your title is to begin it with a key word related to your research question. To make a title clear, avoid using abbreviations (with some exceptions, as explained by Day) and jargon. Finally, choose the word order that will make your title the clearest (for example, for greatest clarity, an adjective should come immediately before or after the noun it modifies).

Huth (1990) summarized these 3 points nicely when he pointed out that the best title "carries the irreducible number of terms needed to accurately describe the content of your paper."

PREVIEW OF DAY'S CHAPTER 4 ("HOW TO PREPARE THE TITLE")

Day begins his chapter with a very good quote that explains concisely why the title is so important ("first impressions are strong impressions") and how the title can be written effectively ("give . . . a definite and concise indication of what is to come").

The first 3 sections of the chapter cover several important topics. First comes a clear definition of a good title ("the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the paper") and an explanation the importance of a good title (more people will read the title than any other part of your paper). Second, Day discusses the appropriate length of titles and suggests ways to shorten them. Third, some good examples are provided to show the importance of a specific title.

On pages 17 and 18, the topic is "syntax" of the title. Most of this discussion concerns misplaced modifiers. You don't need to understand every joke in this section in order to understand its main point: adjectives (including "-ing" participles) should be near to the words they modify. The paragraph about the misuse of "using" is particularly good--remember that you always need to have a person doing the "using."

In the section entitled, "The Title as a Label," Day warns against using "assertive sentence titles." Both to save space and to avoid a title that is too assertive, concentrate on writing titles that are phrases rather than sentences. In this same section, key words and indexing services are discussed. Also, you are encouraged to provide a "running title" (or a "running head") for your paper. The running title is the short form of the paper's title that you find at the top of every page or every other page of a journal article. The purpose of the running title is to help the reader find a specific article or to catch the reader's attention when the reader is just browsing through the journal pages. As a managing editor of a radiology journal, Elizabeth was always glad when an author suggested a running head. We believe that an author knows best which words of the title should be included in a running head. If you do not suggest a running head, the journal copyeditors will try to create one--but it may not be as appropriate as one that you have written yourself.

The last 2 sections of this chapter recommend that you avoid abbreviations and jargon in the title and that you be very careful in the use of series titles and "hanging titles" (subtitles). The best way for you to approach this advice is to look in 2 or 3 issues of the journal to which you are submitting your paper (your "target journal"). See what abbreviations are used in titles, and see whether the journal allows either series heads or subtitles. Then use that information to guide you in creating your own title.

TITLES OF SAMPLE ARTICLES

Let's look briefly at the titles of the sample articles (reprinted in full in Appendix B). Note that none of the 5 have a subtitle.

1. Gu et al. **Intussusception reduction in children by rectal insufflation of air** (*AJR* 1988;150:1345-1348). In 9 words, the authors have made clear the main topic ("intussusception reduction"), the method ("rectal insufflation of air"), and the population studied ("in children"). The first word of the title is a key word of the paper. No subtitle is needed.
2. Nichol et al. **The effectiveness of vaccination against influenza in healthy, working adults** (*N Engl J Med* 1995;333:889-893). Although "The" could have been deleted, this is still a title of appropriate length (10 words). If the authors had started the title with the key word "Vaccination," the readers might be misled into thinking that this is a methods paper--how to vaccinate this population. Instead, "effectiveness" as the first major word in the title indicates the key question of this study: "Is vaccination in this population effective?"
3. Chen et al. **Prolonged infection with hepatitis B virus and association between low blood cholesterol concentration and liver cancer** (*BMJ* 1993;306:890-894). This title is longer than recommended (16 words), partly because there are three important variables considered (infection, cholesterol level, and liver cancer). "Prolonged" is an important first word because it describes specifically the nature of the infection studied.
4. Yao et al. **Combined ADP and thromboxane A-2 antagonism prevents cyclic flow variations in stenosed and endothelium-injured arteries in nonhuman primates** (*Circulation* 1993;88:2888-2893). This is the type of assertive-sentence title to which Day objects. Huth (1990), however, calls it an "informative title" that relates the message of the paper. If the journal editors did not want such informative titles, they might have changed the title to this shorter form: "Prevention of cyclic flow variations by combined ADP and thromboxane A-2 antagonism in stenosed and endothelium-injured arteries of nonhuman primates." This title would lack the power of having the key words "ADP and thromboxane A-2 antagonism" at the beginning of the title. These are the choices that the author and the journal editors make.
5. Koehler et al. **Kinetics of pyrimidine(6-4)pyrimidone photoproduct repair in *Escherichia coli*** (*J Bacteriol* 1996;178(5):1347-1350). This is a very clean, direct title for a somewhat complex paper. In only 9 words, it covers the key words for the article: "pyrimidine(6-4)pyrimidone photoproduct" and *Escherichia coli*.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

A famous author once wrote, "I would have written you a shorter letter, but I didn't have the time." It is not always easy to condense the main topic of a research article into a phrase containing no more than 12 words. Read Chapter 4 in Day's book, look at the titles in a few issues of your target journal, and then compose several possible titles for your paper. Be sure that your key words are in the title and that the title expresses your main topic clearly and concisely. Choose 3 of your possible titles and give them to the local instructor for feedback. Because the local instructors have read the other sections of your paper, they will be in a good position to help you decide on the most appropriate title.

AN ENDING NOTE: Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about

Lesson Sixteen

Writing the Abstract

OBJECTIVE OF LESSON SIXTEEN

By the end of this lesson, you will be familiar enough with the principles of writing a good Abstract that you can draft an Abstract for your research paper.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON SIXTEEN

Write a draft of your Abstract and submit it to your local instructor for feedback. With your Abstract, give the instructor a copy of at least 1 other abstract from your target journal. This assignment will be further explained at the end of this lesson.

Suggested Steps for Starting the Draft of Your Abstract

For some researchers, the Abstract is difficult to write because they must find a way to condense the most important information of their papers. We suggest you follow these steps:

1. Read this lesson, and study the sample abstract at the end of this lesson.
2. Read Chapter 6 ("How to Prepare the Abstract") in Day's book.
3. Look at the paragraph you wrote about your research for our first class. Look at the abstracts in the journal you've chosen. Answer the following questions, and use your answers to begin your draft.
 - A. What specific differences do you see between your paragraph and the abstracts in the journal you have chosen? Check for content and format changes you need to make to revise the paragraph for your target journal. (See the section below entitled "Specific Tips for Writing an Abstract for Your Target Journal.")
 - B. Do you find any sentences or phrases in your original paragraph that you could rewrite in better English now?

The Structured Abstract

In the past, most scientific journals requested abstracts formatted like this paragraph, in which one sentence follows another without headings or extra space. However, many journals now ask their authors to provide "structured abstracts," in which the sentences (or phrases) that describe each section of the paper are on separate lines and are preceded by headings. The headings vary among journals, but they generally follow the IMRAD formula. A typical structured abstract does not look like a single paragraph but like a series of sentence or phrase summaries. The abstracts for sample articles 2, 3, and 4, at the end of this lesson are structured abstracts. You can determine whether your target journal prefers a structured abstract by looking at the Instructions to Authors and published abstracts.

Chapter 6 in Day's a Book ("How to Prepare the Abstract")

Day calls the Abstract a "miniversion of the paper." The Abstract must summarize important ideas of the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Conclusions. As discussed on page 34 of Day's book, you should not surprise or mislead your audience by stating a major conclusion in the Discussion section that was not included in the Abstract.

Moreover, never give information in the Abstract that is not given also somewhere in the main text of the paper. (you need to check your Abstract every time you make a revision and revise it as necessary to accurately reflect the revised content of your paper.)

Day says that your Abstract should not exceed 250 words. However, some journals require abstracts that are shorter than this, and others allow longer abstracts. The 250-words limit is based on the limit for abstracts included on the MEDLINE database. Consult the Instructions to Authors of your target journal to ensure that you have written an Abstract of appropriate length for that journal.

At the top of page 30, Day notes the 4 functions of the Abstract:

1. To state the main objectives and scope of the investigation
2. To describe the methods used
3. To summarize the results
4. To state the major conclusions

Notice that these 4 functions correlate precisely with the 4 major parts of the article (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, respectively)

In this course, we are concentrating on research papers, so most of you will be writing "informative" abstracts, which Day defines on page 30. On the same page, he discusses how important it is that the Abstract can "stand on its own" (that is, it can be understood without any figures, tables, or references). Because the Abstract will appear alone in indexes and databases, the readers must be able to understand it without reading the full paper. Don't cite any references, figures, or tables in the Abstract; also, avoid using abbreviations or jargon (specialized language that nonspecialists may not understand).

Day emphasizes on page 312 the importance of writing the Abstract clearly and simply. (His story about Einstein and " $E= mc^2$ " is a joke to emphasize this point.) Not only does it help the reader if you write an Abstract that is easy to understand, but also it may help get your paper published sooner. The journal reviewers and editor will probably read your Abstract first, and a well-written Abstract will make a good first impression on them. Perhaps Day's best advice about abstracts is on page 32: "examine every word carefully." Even if the journal's maximum number of words for an Abstract is 250 or more, you should write the most concise, clear Abstract for your paper that you can within that limit. For example, your best Abstract may be only 100-150 words or even shorter (as in our last sample abstract in this lesson.)

The final 2 paragraphs on page 32 tell a joke that is based on English word play. It is difficult to translate, and it is not necessary for you to understand it in order to understand Day's main point: A good Abstract will condense the main points of the paper to as few words as possible, but no fewer.

General Tips for Writing an Abstract

As you prepare your Abstract, remember that it must contain the main points of your paper and some necessary details. The details needed are those that will help the reader understand the basic elements of your research, even when the Abstract appears separately from the paper itself.

More people will read your Abstract than will read the whole paper. Some of those readers will not be specialists in your research field. To make the Abstract clear to them,

follow these guidelines:

1. Use short, simple sentences.
2. Avoid abbreviations and specialized language (jargon).
3. Write clearly and concisely
4. Especially if the Abstract is not a "structured abstract," use signals to indicate which part of the research paper you are summarizing. For example, "we found that" indicates you are discussing results, and "we suggest that" indicates that you are summarizing the implications of those results.
5. Use past tense for most of the Abstract. (However, present tense is permitted for the statement of the question and for your conclusion)
6. As Day wrote, "Examine each word"--make sure that each word is necessary in order to summarize your research question, methods, results, and conclusions.
7. As the "Uniform Requirements" (Appendix A) recommends, "emphasize the new and important aspects of the study" in the Abstract.

Specific Tips for Writing an Abstract for Your Target Journal

You already know which journal you plan to submit your article to. In order to write a paper that will be reviewed and accepted more quickly, you need to use papers published in recent issues of that journal as your models. This is particularly true when you are writing the Abstract. Consider the following points as you begin to prepare your draft:

1. Look in the Instructions to Authors for your target journal. Usually, those instructions give a word limit for abstracts. Make sure not to exceed that number of words. (If you are writing on a word processor, the software will count words for you.)
2. Follow any specific guidelines given by the Instructions to Authors concerning the content and format of abstracts.
3. As a last step in investigating your target journal's policy on abstracts, look at 3 or 4 abstracts of research papers in a recent issue of the journal. Consider the following questions:
 - A. Are these abstracts structured or nonstructured? How many paragraphs are present? What headings (and therefore what topics) are used?
 - B. Are data included? If so, in how much detail? (This can range from no data at all [just general statements of results noted] to only percentages to P values.)
 - C. What tense or tenses are used (are the abstracts all in past tense, or is present tense used for the statement of the question and its answer)?
 - D. What abbreviations or acronyms, if any, are used? If the authors use a long phrase more than 3-5 times, did they use an acronym after its first definition in the abstract?

Considering Your Own Abstract

After you have drafted an Abstract for your paper, review it, keeping in your mind this question suggested by Huth (1990): "Does the abstract represent the content of all the main sections of the paper, within the length allowed by the journal?" (page 104).

ABSTRACTS FROM SAMPLE ARTICLES

In the Comments sections for these sample abstracts, we shall note how well they conform to the Instructions for Authors for the publishing journal. These samples

illustrate well how the content and format of abstracts vary among journals. If you wish to review these Instructions for Authors, see Lesson 2 of this Course Packet. Notice that each of these abstracts is within the word limit stated by the journal's Instructions to Authors. If the abstracts submitted by these authors were too long, the copyeditors probably shortened them to the required length.

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The Writing Assignment

1. Look again at the sections of your paper you have already written, note the most important points of each section.
2. Write a draft of your Abstract, basing the form and content on Day's chapter, these two lessons, and (perhaps most importantly) the instructions and samples from your target journal.
3. Because you are usually restricted to a certain number of words, the Abstract can be one of the most difficult sections of the paper to write. If you cannot quite summarize your main points within the allowed number of words, write a note to your local instructor, who may be able to suggest ways to shorten the Abstract without deleting any necessary content.
4. Give a draft of your Abstract to your local instructor for feedback. Be sure to provide your local instructor with a copy of at least 1 abstract from your target journal to aid in making your Abstract appropriate for submission to that journal.

AN ENDING NOTE: Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about this lesson or assignment.

Lesson Twenty

Revising Articles and Submitting Them to U.S. Expert Editors

OBJECTIVES OF LESSON TWENTY:

By the end of this lesson, you will

1. have applied the constructive feedback from your local instructor
2. have prepared your article for submission to an American expert editor

ASSIGNMENTS FOR LESSON TWENTY

1. Finish reading Chapters 28 and 29 in the book by Day ("Avoiding Jargon" and "How and When to Use Abbreviations").
Also review Appendixes 2 through 6 in Day's book. Make a list of anything in this material that might specifically apply to the paper you are writing.
2. Read the course materials in this lesson. If you have questions, ask your local instructor.
3. Read Chapter 15 ("How to Keyboard the Manuscript") in Day's book.
4. When you receive your edited article from your local instructor, look through it carefully. If you have any questions, ask the local instructor first. If you are uncertain about how to proceed, send questions to the principal teacher, who will answer them, or to someone else working with us in this program.
5. Make the agreed-upon revisions. Also use your list from Item 1 above to make other needed revisions.
6. Either proofread the article yourself, have someone else proofread it, or both.
7. Follow the suggestions in Chapter 15 ("How to Keyboard the Manuscript") and in this week's course material to prepare the manuscript for review by an American expert editor.
8. By the end of this week, submit your complete article (along with a cover letter and a copy of your target journal's "Instructions to Author") to Dr. Dong, who will send the articles to Dr. Barbara Gastel, the U.S. Principal Consultant. Dr. Gastel will send your article to an American expert editor. You will receive feedback and suggestions from that editor in several weeks. (If you cannot submit a paper by the end of the week, please submit an explanation and planned schedule to your local instructor.) This task is explained in more detail under the heading THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT near the end of this lesson.

NOTES ON ASSIGNMENTS

Responding to the Feedback from Your Local Instructor

By now, you probably have worked with editorial revisions suggested by your local instructor on individual sections of your article. So we hope you now realize that the local instructor is here to help you get your paper published in an English-language journal. All questions and suggested changes are provided respectfully. Therefore, you should also respect the work of the local instructor and look at the editing as a way to improve your paper.

Here are some things to remember as you look through the editing marks on your article:

1. Answer all questions from the local instructor. Some of the questions may help you find a better way to express a thought in English. For other questions, the answer may help your local instructor understand the paper better.
2. Consider each suggested change carefully. If the change seems to improve the paper, make the change. If you do not understand the change or disagree with it, discuss it with your local instructor. Such communication between author and editor is very important--both of you can learn from it.
3. If you think your local instructor has made a mistake in English spelling or grammar, point this out, either with a note or in a discussion. Although the local instructors are trained editors, no editor is perfect, and all good editors want to learn from their mistakes. Perhaps, however, what you think is a mistake is really a misunderstanding. If that is true, the editor can inform you about the spelling or grammar rules being used.

Lesson 4 provided some advice about working with editors. To review the reasons that editors suggest changes, look again at Elizabeth Whalen's article in the Supplementary Reading Packet. The editor's job is to help you submit a paper that clearly explains your research in an appropriate format and in good English. If you develop a good working relationship with your local instructor, you will submit better papers that will be more likely to be accepted for publication in English-language journals.

Editors and Confidentiality

One of the students in this course has expressed concern about submitting a manuscript to an unknown editor in the U.S. This is a good chance for us to assure all of you that part of the agreement between any editor and author is that the editor keeps confidential all aspects of an unpublished paper. Proper editorial ethics requires that the editor tell no one about the content of your paper or of any other paper that he or she is editing. You can be sure that neither your local instructor nor the American expert editor will break this confidentiality.

Chapter 15 in Day's Book ("How to Keyboard the Manuscript")

As we go through this chapter, keep in mind that you are now preparing your paper for submission to an American editor. However, it should look as good as it will when you send it to the journal. If you are careful with the preparation now, you will need less time to revise it before submission to a journal. Also, if the article looks professional, it will make a good first impression. If the expert editors do not have to explain such items as margins, paper size, or proper submission format, they can spend more time and effort looking at the scientific content and idiomatic or scientific English.

Chapter 15 is one of the most useful chapters in Day's book. Day writes from his experience as a managing editor. We agree with his suggestions. The title is somewhat misleading, because the chapter contains much more than simple advice about typing a manuscript. Here, we will preview the chapter for you, but we urge you to read the whole chapter carefully and follow the suggestions given there.

Submitting Manuscripts

Day starts out bluntly and correctly by stating that a manuscript may be rejected because of the way it looks. In a later lesson, we shall explain more about how an editorial office operates. Right now, you should understand that editors receive many more manuscripts each year than they can publish. Thus, they don't even want to spend time on a paper that looks "sloppy."

How can you be sure that your paper has the right appearance?

1. Check your target journal's "Instructions to Authors," and follow the submission guidelines exactly.
2. As mentioned to you in the general online feedback on your writing, take care to make the spacing around the punctuation marks correct. We shall repeat those rules below as a review. Although it may seem like a small thing, odd spacing around punctuation does not make your paper look well-prepared to an American editor.
3. Follow these tips from Day's Chapter 15:
 - >Double-space all the text in the paper (including references, figure legends, and tables). [In addition, we recommend using an 11-point or 12-point font so that the editors and reviewers can read your manuscript very easily.]
 - >Print your article's text on only one side of each page.
 - >Submit the requested number of copies (see the "Instructions to the Authors" for journal submission) for review by the American expert editor; submit 1 copy of all text, figures, and tables.
 - >Format your headings in the journal style, as much as possible.
 - >If possible, format your reference citations in the text and in the reference list according to the style of the journal. If permitted by your target journal, format the references according to "The Uniform Requirements" (Appendix A of this Course Packet).
 - >If possible, submit your paper on 8.5" x 11" paper. [Although the ISO A4 size noted by Day on page 84 is acceptable to some journals, the 8.5" x 11" is much easier for American editorial offices to handle and makes your paper look more readable.]
 - >Number all pages of the manuscript. [However, we disagree with Day's suggestion on page 85 to "use paper with numbered lines." Do this only if it is requested in the "Instructions to Authors."]
 - >Label clearly all tables and figures.
 - >Use at least 1-inch (2.5-cm) margins for all four sides (right, left, top, bottom). [We recommend margins of 1.25 inches for the copy to be submitted to the American expert editor this week. This will allow room for the editor to make clear comments and suggestions in the margins.]
 - >For American journals, use American spellings if you have access to a dictionary or if your computer spell checker helps you do this. [However, American copy editors are used to dealing with British spellings, and it is not a problem for most reviewers.]

Following these simple guidelines adds a professional appearance indicating that you have been careful in preparing the manuscript (and thus that you are probably a careful researcher). We realize that some of the suggestions might be difficult to follow because paper is sometimes in short supply--especially the size and type of paper typically used by American researchers who submit research papers to journals. If you cannot follow these guidelines for such reasons, explain this in your cover letter accompanying your manuscript being submitted this week.

Using Computers to Prepare Manuscripts

On pages 86 through 88, Day covers the preparation of a manuscript on a computer. Most of you will be writing your manuscript this way, and we wish to add some thoughts to Day's section.

1. We can all be thankful that computers have made the preparation of papers so much easier. More revisions can be made much more quickly and easily. Thus, better papers are submitted and published. Overall, the change to computer writing and publication helps researchers.
2. When writing on a computer, remember to SAVE regularly. We have known writers who have written on a computer for several hours without saving. When the computer system failed before they finished their work, they lost everything. This won't happen to you if you remember to save every few minutes. (Many word processors have an "auto save" option that can be very helpful in preventing the loss of your work.)
3. As mentioned several times before, using a spell checker can improve manuscripts considerably. You can ignore the joke "poem" on the bottom of page 87. Its message is one you probably already know: a computerized spell checker is wonderful; it can help any writer catch typographical mistakes. However, it is not a substitute for careful proofreading (see next section). Also, it is a good idea to have an English dictionary and a medical dictionary beside the computer as you are doing the spell check. These references can help you make sure that you are choosing the correct spelling from all the choices that the computer gives you. For example, if you types "froee" instead of "from," your spell checker asks you what you mean: "free, from, floe, foe, fore, fro, frog, froze, or roe." That's a lot of choices for one simple typing error.
4. Although Day recommends computerized grammar checkers for some uses, we suggest that you avoid using them. we have looked carefully at many grammar checkers; most of them give some incorrect advice, and all of them take more time than they are worth. For example, when you checked one of your papers with a computerized grammar checker, it pointed out 80 possible errors, but only 2 or 3 of the suggestions helped to improve the paper. Thus, we think computerized grammar checkers can be a waste of time and money. It is much better for you to ask a human editor (like your local instructor) to check your English grammar.

Proofreading

Careful proofreading is essential in providing an acceptable manuscript to a journal. When you proofread, you read your paper very carefully (word-by-word, letter-by-letter, space-by-space). You are not reading to evaluate content. Rather, you are reading to catch the careless errors (that we all make) before you submit your paper. If you think a word may not be spelled correctly, look it up before you go on. If you're not sure that the spacing around a punctuation mark is correct, check the next section for the rules--or look in your target journal to see how it does the spacing.

Also have someone else proofread your article. Because you have spent so much time writing it, you may read it the way you THINK it is rather than the way it appears. All of us have this problem with our writing. For example, when Elizabeth Whalen prepared these lessons, Dr. Barbara Gastel read them before we sent them to you. She suggested some editorial changes, but she also caught some typographical mistakes that Elizabeth had missed. Perhaps you can work with another researcher and proofread each other's papers. It's ALWAYS easier to catch mistakes in a paper that you have never seen than in one you have written yourself.

you can improve your paper greatly by having 3 people proofread it and review it for clarity: a scientist in your field, a scientist outside your field, and a person skilled in English.

Review: Spacing Around Punctuation Marks

As mentioned above, it is important to make sure that the spacing in your paper conforms to conventional spacing in written English. Here are the rules and examples that we provided in an online lesson during the first semester of this course. Before submitting your paper, please check that you have followed these guidelines:

1. At the end of a sentence or in a numbered list, there is no space before the period and one space after. Note the following examples:

WRONG: We looked at the results .They indicated cancer.

RIGHT: We looked at the results. They indicated cancer.

WRONG: 1.Put the patient in the prone position.

RIGHT: 1. Put the patient in the prone position.

2. There is no space before a comma and one space after. Note the following example:

WRONG: If we used this method ,we obtained better results.

RIGHT: If we used this method, we obtained better results.

3. There is a space before an open parenthesis, but there is no space after it. There is no space before a close parenthesis, but there is one space after. However, if the close parenthesis is followed by another punctuation mark, there is no space after the close parenthesis.

WRONG: We used a ventilator(Servo 900C, Siemens, Solna, Sweden) and other equipment(to be described later) .

RIGHT: We used a ventilator (Servo 900C, Siemens, Solna, Sweden) and other equipment (to be described later).

4. When a unit of measure is an abbreviation (not a symbol), there is a space between the numeral and the unit of measure. When the unit of measure is a symbol (for example, % or degree sign), there is no space between the numeral and the symbol.

WRONG: 40mL

RIGHT: 40 mL

WRONG: 40 %

RIGHT: 40%

If these examples are not clear to you, look at the spacing around the punctuation in a few articles in your target journal. As usual, you can use those examples as models. Then you can use SEARCH (or FIND) in your word processor to find the commas, periods, and parentheses in your document. Check for and correct any spacing problems.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

This is an important week for you. You need to work with your local instructor to revise your manuscript according to his or her suggestions. You need to proofread the final version and make sure that it is complete and looks professional. Throughout this process, you can ask

questions of your local instructor or e-mail Dr. Dong, who can clarify the requirements for this submission to the American expert editor. Give your submission to your local instructor, who will send them to Dr. Dong for mailing to the editors in the United States. These are the items that must be included for the American expert editor:

1. Double-space title page, text, references, figure legends
2. Double-spaced copies of every table
3. Copies of every illustration (glossy prints of half-tones and good photocopies of line drawings)
4. A photocopy of the "Instructions to Authors" for the journal
5. Copies of permission requests, if any, that you have sent to obtain permission to reproduce a table or figure from another source. (Keep the original signed permission to send to the journal when you submit the paper.)
6. A cover letter stating at least the following:
 - >the title of your paper
 - >the reason(s) you are submitting it to your target journal
 - >an explanation of any differences between the presentation of your article and the guidelines in the "Instructions to Authors"
 - >any other information that you think will help the expert editor evaluate your paper more thoroughly

We know this is a lot of work. If you provide the material this way, the American editor can help you find ways to improve your paper before submission to the journal. Your paper is thus more likely to be considered favorably by that journal.

AN ENDING NOTE: At this important point in this course, we congratulate you on your accomplishments in this course! Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about this lesson or assignment.



Discussion

- _____ Have you addressed limitations of the study?
- _____ Have you discussed conclusions for each hypothesis?

AN ENDING NOTE: Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about this lesson or assignment.

LESSON Twenty-Six **Understanding the Editorial Process**

OBJECTIVE FOR LESSON TWENTY-SIX

By the end of this lesson, you will understand better

1. how a journal editorial office operates
2. why journal copyeditors edit manuscripts

ASSIGNMENTS FOR LESSON TWENTY-SIX

1. Read Chapter 17 ("The Review Process [How to Deal with Editors]") in Day's book.
2. Review pages 17-24 in Iles's book ("Journal Styles" and "Some Insights into How Journals Operate").
3. At the end of this lesson (under the heading "THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT"), you will find 3 scenarios that might occur after you have submitted an article to an American journal. Choose 1 of these, and, on the basis of this section, write a brief paragraph about what you think is the best way for you to respond to the situation. Give your answer to your local instructor for feedback.

PICTURE OF AN EDITORIAL OFFICE

Not all journal editorial offices are alike. The following description, however, is somewhat typical of the situation in a larger journal. It is based on our work at and with journal editorial offices since 1980.

At any one time in a journal editorial office, these phases of the journal are proceeding simultaneously:

- Acknowledging new manuscripts
- Assigning and sending new manuscripts to reviewers
- Making decisions about manuscripts on the basis of the reviewers' comments and the editor's own judgment
- Writing and mailing decision letters to authors
- Reviewing revisions submitted by authors
- Assigning accepted articles to future issues

- Editing accepted articles
- Checking proofs of articles for the next issue
- Designing and planning special issues
- Answering questions from authors
- Keeping track of all manuscripts submitted
- Assuring that the next issue is sent to the subscribers on time and in good shape

Additional activities in some editorial offices include selling subscriptions, selling and planning advertisements, dealing with copyrights and permissions, and/or designing journal pages.

All these tasks have 1 goal: providing correct, clear, concise, and useful information for the readers. Achieving this goal also provides publications in which the authors can take pride.

NOTES ON ASSIGNMENTS

Day's Chapter 17: "The Review Process (How to Deal with Editors)"

This chapter is very important to read and understand. Knowing how to deal with editors can make publishing your articles easier and more successful.

On page 98, you can ignore the first quote right after the title; it's a joke that's hard to translate.

Functions of Editors and Managing Editors: Read the first sentence of this section, which make a very important point. Then, you can skip the rest of this page and go to the start of the first full paragraph on page 99 (start at "Going back to").

When Day talks about "editor" in this chapter, he means the scientist or physician who evaluates manuscripts submitted to the journal. This person is sometimes called the "editor-in-chief." Often, however, the word "editor" means "copyeditor" -- someone who does the same type of editing that your local instructor and we have been doing. A copyeditor changes the wording, grammar, and punctuation in an article to make it more clear, concise, and correct. A copyeditor specializes in correct language and may or may not be an expert in biomedical science. Also, in some editorial offices, a copyeditor may do a quick "editorial screening" of manuscripts that will be returned to the author for revision. The copyeditor then gives the author suggestions for revising the format or language of the article to make it more acceptable when it is resubmitted. For this lesson, we shall use "copyeditor" to identify these workers and "editor" to identify the journal's editor-in-chief.

You can skip the one-sentence paragraph beginning "It has been said . . ." This is a joke and is not necessary for your understanding of this chapter.

Depending on the size of the journal, the managing editor may do the administrative tasks or supervise those who do them. Day's description of a managing editor is a good one. Another possible job of the managing editor is to determine and maintain the journal's budget and schedule. Often, managing editors are in different locations than editors-in-chief. The addresses of both offices are usually listed either in the Instructions for Authors or on the general information page of the journal.

Two important points on this page are worth repeating, because they will help you receive

answers to your questions more quickly, especially when the editorial office is split into 2 different locations:

1. Write to the editor if you have a question or comment about the suggestions from peer reviewers or about the decision made concerning your paper.
2. Write to the managing editor if you have a question or comment about anything that occurs after your paper is accepted. (These include changes made by the copyeditor; the size, cropping, or orientation of your illustrations; and the scheduling of your paper for publication.)

The last sentence on page 99 is a joke and can be ignored. The cartoon on the top of page 100 is the start of a series of cartoons in this chapter. A popular American cartoon character, the dog Snoopy, tries to write but gets many rejection letters. The point of these cartoons is clear: If authors don't submit appropriate, well-prepared manuscripts, the editor will not be interested in publishing them--no matter how many times they try.

The Review Process

The material on pages 100-103 is important. As Day says, if you understand the review process, you can write papers that are more likely to be accepted.

What happens when your manuscript arrives at the editorial office? First, it is given a tracking number and logged in (that means that the title, authors' names, and other information about it is entered into the journal's tracking system, which is probably on computer). Second, as Day says, the editor looks at the manuscript quickly to see if it meets 2 essential criteria:

1. Is its topic appropriate for the journal?
2. Is it ready to be reviewed (is it complete, and has the author followed the guidelines for submission)?

If your manuscript meets both of these criteria, it will be considered for publication. If it does not meet these criteria, it may be sent back to you without being reviewed.

We have been working together to ensure that your manuscript will meet both those criteria, so let's see what comes next in the process. As Day says, the editor takes care to choose reviewers who will provide quick, unbiased, helpful reviews of your manuscript. There has been debate in the United States and elsewhere about the advantages and disadvantages of the peer review system (CBE Peer Review Retreat Consensus Group 1995, Lock and Smith 1990, Reiman 1990). However, most good journals use the system because it is the best way known to help authors improve their papers and to ensure that good articles are published. Journals that use peer reviews are more highly respected than those that do not.

Confidentiality is an important part of the peer review process. Reviewers are chosen not only because of their knowledge of the subject matter but because of their honesty. If you send your article to a legitimate biomedical journal in the United States, you can be sure that the reviewers have promised not to reveal or use anything that they read as a peer reviewer until the articles they review have been published.

The Editor's Decision: On the bottom of page 103, Day says, "Unfortunately, there are many instances in which the opinions of the two reviewers are contradictory." We don't think that is "unfortunate"; we believe that is the advantage of having 2 or 3 reviewers! Often, reviewers provide different perspectives. For example, an epidemiologist will evaluate an epidemiologic study of an infectious diseases differently than will an expert on infectious diseases. If the reviewers differ, the editor may look at the article closely and make the

decision. Sometimes, the editor sends the article out for another review.

On pages 104 and 105, Day discusses the editor's decision and the length of time that it may take for the author to receive that decision. Specifically, on the top of page 105, Day suggests that the author should call or write the editor if no decision has been received in within 8 weeks of submission. Because of delays for mail between China and the United States, it may be advisable to wait 10 or 12 weeks before contacting the editorial office. But we agree that you should check on the status of your manuscript if you haven't heard from the editorial office within 3 months of your submission. You can write, fax, or e-mail the editor.

For example, such an inquiry could have avoided a problem Elizabeth encountered in her first job at a medical journal. She was in charge of tracking manuscripts and filing them. After more than 1 year on the job, she was going through the files, and was horrified to find that one slim file folder that had slipped underneath the others and was lying on the bottom of the drawer. The paper in the folder had been submitted almost a year before, but it had never been sent for review. Of course, she called the author to explain and apologize. She was surprised that he hadn't contacted the office earlier to ask what was happening to his article.

The meaning of the last sentence above the heading THE ACCEPT LETTER on page 105 may not be immediately clear. Day means that editors and reviewers want to help you. Whether your article is accepted or rejected, you are receiving advice that can help you improve your chances of future success in publishing articles.

The Accept, Modify, and Reject Letters: Day reviews these types of letters very well. As he notes, if your research is good and appropriate for the journal, and if your paper is well organized and clear, you will usually receive a "modify" letter. The changes are requested respectfully, and the author must respond to them respectfully. You won't always agree with a reviewer's comments, but you need to consider them seriously.

We recommend that you always submit with the revision a cover letter that answers each of the reviewers' comments. Be sure to number the comments, and indicate in your letter which comment you are addressing. If you have made changes in response to the comments, explain what you have done and where the editor can find the change (page number, paragraph number). If you disagree with a comment and thus have not made a change in response to it, explain your reasoning and justify leaving that part of your article as it is. If the comment indicates that you have not explained something clearly (for example, if a reviewer or editor misinterprets part of your paper), change that part so that your meaning is clearer, and explain in your cover letter that you have modified your wording in response to the reviewer's comment.

In the 4th full paragraph on page 106, the last sentence (which starts "As King Arthur used to say") is a joke that you can ignore.

We agree strongly with almost all of Day's advice on the rest of this page and the next. However, as we mentioned above, we recommend that you always send a cover letter detailing your responses to the reviewers' comments, regardless of the circumstances of the resubmission. Also, on page 107, we must disagree with Day's statement that "if you dispassionately point out to the editor exactly why you are right and the reviewer is wrong, . . . the editor is very likely to accept your manuscript." Instead, the editor probably will take another look at your manuscript. If the editor does agree with you, he or she will change the

decision or send the manuscript to another reviewer for reconsideration.

At the start of line 14 on page 107, Day cites "Murphy's Law." This is a pessimistic, humorous saying in America. Murphy's law says, "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." We hope that will not be true for your publishing endeavors!

On line 5 of the 2nd paragraph on page 107, Day talks about journal's records being "cleared of dead wood." In this case, the "dead wood" that needs to be cleared consists of old files, particularly files for papers that have never been revised by the author. (Sometimes, an author is unwilling to make the revisions requested and submits the paper to another journal for review.) To make sure that the editor knows you are planning to submit a revision, revise your papers promptly and let the editor know when you plan to send the revisions to the journal. You can e-mail messages to some journal offices; otherwise, you might try to call or fax the journal office at the least expensive time for you. A 1-page fax or a 1-minute call saying that your revision is in the mail may cost a little money, but it may save a lot of confusion and trouble.

Day's section on THE REJECT LETTER is very accurate. If your article is rejected by a good journal, do not take the rejection personally. Instead, look carefully at the comments, and decide whether you can revise the paper to be more acceptable for another journal. Many papers that are rejected by one journal are later accepted by another journal. However, if the research is too flawed to generate an acceptable paper, either redo some of the research and rewrite the paper, or copy what you have learned to your future research.

On the bottom of page 109 and the top of page 110, Day quotes what is "reputedly a rejection slip from a Chinese economics journal." We think this might be a joke, which emphasizes how polite the Chinese are. What do you think?

The Editor as Gatekeeper: We like this section of the chapter very much. In the first 2 paragraphs under this heading, Day explains clearly and concisely the importance of the editorial role. Read these paragraphs, and you will better appreciate the efforts and motives of the editors. You may skip the last paragraph of this chapter, which contains a joke that is hard to translate.

Material from Iles's Booklet ("Journal Styles" and "Some Insights into How Journals Operate," pages 17-24)

Now is a good time to review the material on pages 17 through 24 of Iles's booklet "How to Write & Publish More Journal Articles."

In the 2nd paragraph on page 17, Iles talks about the "Uniform Requirements." Remember that you have a copy of the 1994 version of that document in Appendix A of this Course Packet. (In January 1997, a slightly revised version was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* [1997:336:309-315]). As for the two style manuals mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 4 on this page, your local instructor has a copy of the 8th edition of the *American Medical Association Manual of Style* and of the 6th edition of the CBE manual (now entitled *Scientific Style and Format: The CBE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*).

On page 18, you are reminded to look at your target journal's "Information for Authors." Note that almost all journals ask for double-spaced (or triple-spaced) manuscripts--both for ease

of reading by reviewers and ease of editing. If this is not specified in the instructions, always send double-spaced copies. Occasionally, if the journal's process is entirely electronic, the instructions may specify a single-spaced copy plus a disk containing the manuscript's file.

We agree with most of the information on page 19. However, we disagree with 2 points in the 2nd paragraph.

1. Journal copyeditors will make changes in punctuation and spelling--sometimes because the particular style of the journal differs from the style you are using. For example, some journals hyphenate "anti-inflammatory," and some use "antiinflammatory" with no hyphen. Copyeditors are glad to take time to make such changes. However, Iles, we believe, is trying to say that you should make every effort to ensure that your punctuation and spelling are correct. Those efforts will be rewarded by quicker acceptance and by fewer changes during editing.

2. We don't think that editors automatically reject papers that reflect good, important science even if they have "a large number of language errors." Most editors send the manuscript back to the author and ask the author to fix the language problems and resubmit the paper for review.

On pages 20 and 21, you can see samples of guidelines that editors send to reviewers to guide them in their review. By looking at these guidelines, you can understand better what reviewers look for in manuscripts. Moreover, you can use some of the lists on page 21 as part of your own submission checklist. Specifically, we recommend that you include Item 1 under "When the manuscript arrives, DO-" and Items 1-3 under "In preparing the reviews: DO BE CONSTRUCTIVE."

The description of a typical journal office on page 22 is good. However, as mentioned earlier in this lesson, sometimes the editor-in-chief and assistants are not in the same location as the managing editor and copyeditors. As Day discussed in Chapter 17, there are some typical names given to the people described by Iles:

- The 1st bullet point describes the editor-in-chief and assistant editors (sometimes the people performing these tasks are called editors or associate editors).
- The 2nd bullet point describes copyeditors (also called manuscript editors).
- The 3rd bullet point describes administrative assistants (also called secretaries, administrative assistants, editorial assistants, or production editors or coordinators). Often the managing editor supervises these people.
- The 4th bullet point describes printers (who can be very nice--they are not always "autocrats"--but often set strict deadlines).
- The 5th bullet point describes either the duties of the journal accounting office or a duty of the managing editor.

Sample Time Line: Sometimes authors cannot understand why it takes 1 or 2 years to publish a manuscript. Let's look at a typical time line to clarify this schedule.

July 1, 1997: You submit your paper to the journal.

July 15, 1997: The journal office receives your paper; it is entered into the manuscript-tracking system. A card or letter may be sent to you acknowledging the submission.

July 17, 1997: The editor finishes the first review of your manuscript (to make sure that it is appropriate for the journal and ready for review); if it passes this first review, the editor assigns it to 2 peer reviewers.

July 18, 1997: Your manuscript is mailed to the 2 reviewers.

August 18, 1997: One review has been received. The office calls the 2nd reviewer, who promises to mail the review within 1 week.

August 25, 1997: Both reviews have arrived.

August 26, 1997: The editor reads both reviews and decides to ask for a revision.

August 28, 1997: The decision letter asking for a revision is mailed to you.

September 11, 1997 (2.5 months after submission): You receive a letter asking for several changes; you must submit a revision within 90 days.

November 25, 1997: You submit the revision with a cover letter detailing the changes made.

December 9, 1997: Your revision is received in the journal office.

December 11, 1997: The editor makes 1 of 4 possible decisions about the revision.

1. If the decision is to **ACCEPT THE REVISION**, your article will probably be published within the next 6 to 8 months. This is the time needed for editing, typesetting (if needed), page design, approval of proofs by you and the editor, and printing. It will take more than 8 months for your article to appear in this journal if there is a "backlog" of articles--several or many accepted articles that have not yet been scheduled for publication. This means that the publication date will range from June 1998 to August or September 1998 (or later, depending on the size of the journal's backlog [the number of accepted papers that are waiting to be published]).

2. If the decision is to **SEND THE REVISION BACK TO YOU** for further revision, you get another chance to respond satisfactorily to the original reviewer comments. If your second revision is accepted without need for re-review, your paper may be published between August 1998 and November 1998.

3. If the decision is to **SEND THE REVISION TO 1 OR MORE REVIEWERS**, the paper will go through the entire revision cycle again. So--if the paper is accepted after this round of review and revision--it may be published between September 1998 and December 1998.

4. If you must revise the paper several times before it is accepted, the time between first submission and publication can easily extend to 2 years, with your paper being published by July 1999!

If your paper is good enough to be published in your target journal, the editor wants to see it published as quickly as possible, just as you do. Thus, make the revisions requested quickly and accurately, and keep in touch with the editorial office so that delays on both sides can be minimized.

On page 24, Iles notes the types of papers that can be published quickly. The last sentence on page 24 is a joke, but it does have an important message: Journal editors try hard not to have biases that favor relatives, co-workers, friends, prominent researchers, or anyone else. If your research is good, and your paper is readable and meets the criteria in the journal's "Instructions to Authors," your article has as good a chance as anyone else's article to be published in a well-run biomedical journal.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Below are 3 events that may happen when authors submit articles to biomedical journals. Choose ONE, and write a brief paragraph about what you would do if you were the author.

Give your paragraph to your local instructor for feedback. In next week's on-line lesson, we will provide the answers that we think are appropriate.

1. You sent your manuscript to the journal on July 1. You received a card acknowledging the submission on July 15. It is now December 15, and you have not received any decision letter. What would you do?

OR

2. You received a letter from an editor asking for a revision. Because it is winter break at your university, you can't complete the revision for several weeks. Therefore, you cannot make the deadline that the editor has set. You are willing to make the revisions, and you want this journal to publish your paper. What would you do?

OR

3. You received a letter that indicates that the editor will accept your paper only if you make the revisions necessary to answer the reviewers' comments and questions. Most of the suggestions are clear and appropriate, and you can make and explain those changes quite easily. You agree with all the comments from Reviewer 2 and revise the paper accordingly. Reviewer 1 gave you 6 numbered comments, 5 of which you agree with. However, he or she misunderstood one of the technical points of your paper. What would you do?

AN ENDING NOTE: Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about this lesson or assignment.



Lesson Twenty-Eight

Submitting the Article and Follow-up; Course Review and Evaluation

OBJECTIVES OF LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT

By the end of this lesson, you will

1. know more about writing an effective cover letter for submitting articles to English-language journals
2. know more what about to expect after your article or its revision has been accepted
3. have reviewed and evaluated the second semester of the course and the entire course
4. be ready to begin writing your next research article

ASSIGNMENTS FOR LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT

1. Write a cover letter to accompany your article.
2. Before you submit your article, double-check that you have followed the "Instructions for Authors" and that all the corrections from proofreading have been made accurately.
3. Read Chapters 18 and 19 ("The Publishing Process [How to Deal with Proofs]" and "How to Order and Use Reprints") in Day's book. If you have any questions, ask your local instructor.
4. Submit your research article to your target journal, and send a copy of the final article and cover letter to your program director.
5. Please fill out the evaluation sheet and submit it to your program director.
6. Think now about your next research paper. Look at the course summary and start thinking out the process that you will go through to write your next paper.

NOTES ON ASSIGNMENTS

Writing a Cover Letter

When you submit a manuscript to an English-language biomedical journal, you should include a cover letter (sometimes called a "covering letter"). In the United States, a good cover letter has specific format and content requirements. Sometimes the "Instructions for Authors" contain specific guidelines for cover letters. Figure 1 shows an imaginary cover letter that meets the standard criteria.

The "Uniform Requirements" give the following recommendations regarding the submission package, including the cover letter (see Supplementary Reading Packet, page 20):

Manuscripts must be accompanied by a covering letter signed by all coauthors. This must include a) information on prior or duplicate publication or submission elsewhere of any part of the work . . . b) a statement of financial or other relationships that might lead to conflict of interest; c) a statement that the manuscript has been read and approved by all authors, that the requirements for authorship . . . have been met, and, furthermore, that each coauthor believes that the manuscript represents honest work; and d) the name, address, and telephone number of the corresponding author, who is responsible for communicating with

the other authors about revisions and final approval of proofs. The letter should give any additional information that may be helpful to the editor, such as the type of article in the particular journal the manuscript represents and whether the author(s) will be willing to meet the cost of reproducing color illustrations.

The manuscript must be accompanied by copies of any permissions to reproduce published material, to use illustrations or report sensitive personal information about identifiable persons, or to name persons for their contributions.

Chapter 18 in Day's Book: "The Publishing Process (How to Deal with Proofs)"

For the rest of this lesson, we will be discussing the processes that follow the happy occasion when your paper has been accepted for publication.

You submitted the paper, and you received the reviewers' and editor's comments. You revised your manuscript once or more, and it has been accepted. Now the editorial office takes the final revision--on paper or on disk--and prepares it for publication. As Day explains in Chapter 18, you play an important part in this process, because you must review the "proofs" of your article. "Proofs" are a test copy of your article, and you need to look at them carefully to make sure that they are a clear and correct representation of your research and your message.

THE PROOFING PROCESS

Day's description of the proofing process will, in general, apply to most articles. However, because of some technological developments in publishing, your experience may be a bit different than that described here. In any case, it is important that you read the proofs of your article very carefully to make sure no errors have been introduced since its acceptance.

On page 111, the last sentence of the second paragraph mentions "galleys" and "page proofs." "Galleys" are long pages (about 8.5 x 14 inches [21.6 x 35.6 cm]) with narrow columns of type for you to check, whereas "page proofs" are journal-size pages (8.5 x 11.5 inches [21.6 x 29.2 cm]) that look much like the pages will look when they are printed in the journal (2 or 3 columns beside each other, with figures and tables placed where they will probably be in the published journal).

WHY PROOF IS SENT TO AUTHORS

Perhaps the most important thing Day says in this chapter is near the center of page 112: **"[Y]ou should examine proofs carefully for typographical errors. No matter how perfect your manuscript might be, it is only the printed version in the journal that counts."**

Just above the heading MISPELLED WORDS on page 112, Day makes a comment that is a parody of an old American saying that there are only 2 sure things in life: death and taxes. Chinese-language publications, like English-language publications, are also rarely, if ever, absolutely perfect. Of course, biomedical journals strive to be as close to perfect as possible, but some errors are inevitable because the people who work on journals are only human. Only you can help ensure that the error in that issue of the journal will NOT be in your article. You can do that by reading the proof carefully and by marking the

corrections very clearly. Sometimes you may not be sure whether your correction marks will be understood. In those cases, it is perfectly acceptable to attach a letter to the proofs explaining what corrections are necessary. This letter can specify each change, along with the page, paragraph, and line number of that change.

MISSPELLED WORDS

You can skip the first 5 paragraphs under **MISSPELLED WORDS**. Although the content is amusing, it's difficult to translate and not necessary for understanding the main points of this chapter.

A very important idea occurs in the middle of page 113, in the paragraph that starts "If you read proof." We agree that you must read proof in a different way than you read other material. You need to look at it word-by-word, even letter-by-letter, to catch typographical errors. Day offers good, practical advice about how to proofread.

We agree also that it is essential to proofread numbers most carefully. Even in journals that are published by electronic methods, the tables of data are often rekeyed, which means that mistakes can be made in the numbers. Proofreaders do not always just "eyeball" numbers, as Day suggests; often, proofreaders check the proofs against the original manuscript and catch mistakes that way. However, no one is better qualified than the author to check the numbers or more likely to see major mistakes (like "16" for "61").

MARKING THE CORRECTIONS

If you feel comfortable using the proofreading marks that Day has provided on pages 115 and 116, that's fine. However, it is not necessary to use those exact symbols. Just be sure that your changes are clear. As we mentioned before, attach a letter if you think that it will help the typist make your changes correctly.

ADDITIONS TO PROOFS and ADDITION OF REFERENCES

Day's discussion on pages 114-117 about adding text or references is quite accurate for most journals. An editor we know sent this note to a frequent author in his journal: "If you continue to request so many additions and changes in the proof stages of your articles, we will not accept your articles any more." That motivated the author to request far fewer changes at proof stage!

Even though electronic publishing has made making changes easier and faster, it still has not reduced the risk of errors. Every time you request a change, you increase the risk of introducing an error into your paper.

PROOFING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

In regard to proofing illustrations, our experience differs from that of Day. Some journals send you the proofs of your figures but keep the originals in case changes are needed. If this occurs, you should look at the proofs very closely and compare them with your own copy of the originals. As Day says, you must be sure that the important features are clear and that the cropping and orientation of the illustration are correct. When you send back the proofs, always let the editorial office know if the illustrations need some changes before printing.

WHEN TO COMPLAIN

The last section of this chapter is important and accurate. Remember, the editorial office is sending you the proofs so that you can check them. In general, the editor will be pleased rather than upset if you point out problems that no one else found. The important thing is to find those problems and correct them before the article is published!

If you do find a serious error in the published version, you can contact the editorial office and ask for an "erratum" to be published in the next possible issue. An erratum identifies an error in a specified previous article. It also gives the corrected version of the section in which the mistake occurred. In addition, you can ask for reprints that contain the corrected material, so that those people who request reprints and file your article for reference will not be misled by the mistake.

In the last paragraph in this chapter, Day provides this slogan: "PRICE, QUALITY, SERVICE (pick any two of the above)." We have heard the same slogan, but with 1 difference: "time" instead of "service." That change makes the message a little clearer. If you think about it, this saying can apply not only to printing a journal, but also to many other types of work. The following 3 sentences indicate the options that people face every day when they decide how to approach a task:

- > You can save money and time, but the quality won't be very good.
- > You can save money and have good quality, but you can't have it ready quickly on a tight-deadline schedule.
- > You can save time and have good quality, but this usually means it is a "rush job" and it will cost more money.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: AUTHOR QUERIES

One other important aspect of checking proofs is responding to questions. On proofs, copyeditors often write (or type) questions to the author about problems in consistency, correctness, or clarity. These questions are known as "author queries," and they may be introduced by one of the following signals:

AUTHOR:

AU:

QA:

RC: (which stands for "reader carry," a printing term)

To ensure that readers understand your article, you must answer these questions so that the copyeditor can make the changes necessary to make your paper consistent, correct, and clear.

Chapter 19 in Day's Book: "How to Order and Use Reprints"

Before photocopying, reprints were necessary--they were the only way to provide additional copies of an article to others who were interested. Now, reprints are not quite as essential, and each author can decide if reprints are worth the cost for his or her uses.

You will find this chapter useful if you plan to order reprints of your published articles. Below is a summary of the important points from this chapter, with some additional comments from our own experience:

1. Usually a reprint order form is sent to you with the proofs. This form is the best way to order reprints.
2. If the journal offers you a chance to order "offprints," you can usually save money by doing so.
3. Consider carefully how many reprints you wish to order. Some considerations that might determine the number are as follows: >how much money is available for this (as Day remarks, the 1st 100 are always the most expensive, additional 100s are much less expensive)
 - > how much space you have to store reprints
 - > how many you may want to send to your colleagues
 - > how many readers read the journal publishing your article and how many of those may request reprints
4. Despite Day's (probably humorous) suggestion at the top of page 122, we do not recommend that you necessarily send a reprint of every article to your mother. Reprints should be reserved for those who want them for their own research or education. Also, you should keep a few copies of your reprints for possible use in applications.
5. Send a reprint whenever you can to a colleague or student who requests one. This is the real purpose of reprints, and it benefits you as well as the one receiving the reprint. Such contact can result in later collaborations.
6. If storage space for reprints is limited and you haven't already started a departmental reprint collection, consider that as an alternative to a personal reprint collection.
7. Day's point about not collecting everything is well-taken. However, even if you don't have room in your office to store all the journals you read, you may have room to file reprints most pertinent to your research.
8. A final note on reprints: You may not be able to order reprints of every article you publish; sometimes they are just too expensive. If reprints will not be available, be sure to indicate that on your proof. Otherwise, you are sure to receive requests that you cannot fulfill.

COURSE REVIEW

The following pages present a course review. First, you can look again at the objectives of the course as they were stated in Lesson 1. Second, a list of principles reviews some of the major concepts covered in this course. Look through these objectives and principles to help evaluate this year's course and your own progress in the course.

Objectives of the Course

By the end of the course or shortly thereafter, you will have

1. Written 1 research paper. The paper will have been edited by a Chinese biomedical editor and an American editor. You will have revised the paper according to the editors' suggestions and then submitted it to a specific English-language journal.

2. Gained an increased knowledge of the requirements for successfully writing and submitting future articles to English-language journals, including an understanding of how local editors can facilitate this process.

3. Become more familiar with the main principles of some other types of scientific writing, including proposals and grant applications, conference reports and poster sessions, review articles, letters to the editor, and case reports and/or dissertations.

Major Principles of Publishing in English-Language Biomedical Journals

Principle 1: A publishable research report has these characteristics:

- A. It describes original, important research.
- B. Its organization is based on the IMRAD approach (introduction, method, results, and discussion). Each section consists of material appropriate to its purpose (See Lesson 14, Review of Semester 1).
- C. It is submitted in accordance with the "Instructions for Authors" published in the target journal.
- D. It is written according to the rules of clear writing:
 - 1. Use the simplest, shortest word possible that conveys the meaning.
 - 2. Use a minimum number of abbreviations, and define those used at their first use.
 - 3. Use a table or figure when it is the clearest way to display the data.
- E. It is written concisely. It includes neither extraneous ideas nor unnecessary words.
- F. It is internally consistent and correct.
 - 1. The tables, figures, and text all agree with each other.
 - 2. References are cited correctly.
 - 3. All math is correct.
- G. It is revised by the author in accordance with reasonable comments by the reviewers and editor.

Principle 2: Types of scientific writing other than research reports may have different organization and content, but they still must follow the basic rules of clear, correct, concise writing.

Principle 3: Providing their readers with high-quality, well-written reports on research is the main goal of journal editors, reviewers, and copyeditors. These people will give advice and help to those who submit good research. Their comments and questions should be taken not as criticism, but as suggestions to improve the quality of the paper.

Principle 4: Writing is difficult for anyone. Biomedical English presents its own set of challenges, especially for those whose 1st language is not English. These challenges can be overcome with time; we suggest that you continue to ask for advice and suggestions and to learn the subtleties of the language. It is a process of many years, not 1 year. But there are many who are willing to help, and the rewards are worth the effort.

We have enjoyed working with you this year, and, as this course closes, we send you our sincere wishes for success in publishing articles in English-language journals.

THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

After you have written a cover letter to accompany your manuscript, give it to your local

instructor for feedback. The MOST IMPORTANT part of the cover letter is the clear identification of the corresponding author and provision of his or her address and contact numbers. Your local instructor can check this and other aspects of the letter.

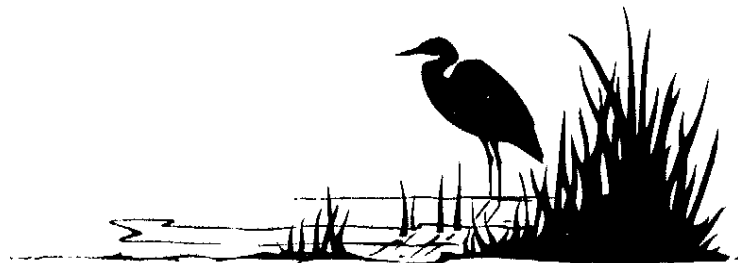
After the final proof of your manuscript, prepare a package to submit it to your target journal and check once again that you have prepared everything in the package in accordance with the guidelines given in that journal's "Instructions for Authors." When you are sure that all is ready, mail the package to your target journal.

So this program can keep track of its success, please mail a copy of your cover letter and article to Dr. Dong. This material will be kept completely confidential until your article has been published. We are very interested in the progress of your article. We will be contacting you to find out what happened, and we will request to see the editors' and reviewers' comments.

We will send periodic updates to all students to let you know what articles other students in the course have published.

Please fill out the evaluation form below and send it to your program director. This is the best way for us to find out what has worked best and what needs improvement in this course. We value your comments and will consider them carefully in planning next year's course.

AN ENDING NOTE: Please feel free to contact your local instructor with questions about this lesson or assignment.



BIOMEDICAL WRITING COURSE: FIRST-YEAR EVALUATION

Part A. Please indicate (by circling the appropriate number) the extent to which you agree with the statement below. We would appreciate any comments you can provide to explain your answer.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. The Course Packet was helpful. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
2. The textbook by Day was helpful. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
3. The online information was helpful. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
4. The local instructor communicated well. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
5. The local instructor answered my questions. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
6. The Internet section worked well. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prepared a better submission for my target journal than I could have without taking this course. COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5
8. For me, the level of this course was about right. (If you disagree with this, please indicate why in the Comments section. Was the level too high or too low?) COMMENTS	1	2	3	4	5

Part B. What do you think were the 2 best things about the 2nd semester of this course?

1.

2.

Part C. If you were to make 2 changes to the 2nd semester of this course, what would they be?

1.

2.

Part D. What do you think were the 2 best things about this course in general?

1.

2.

Part E. If you were to make 2 changes to this course in general, what would they be?

1.

2.

Part F: Please list 5 specific new ideas that you learned from this course.

Part G: Additional comments and suggestions

Figure 1: Imaginary Cover Letter to *New England Journal of Medicine*

Dr. Zhe Dong
Beijing Medical University
38 Xueyuan Road
Beijing 100083
People's Republic of China
June 30, 1997

Editor
New England Journal of Medicine
10 Shattuck St
Boston, MA 02115-6091 USA

Dear Editor:

Please find enclosed for your review an original research article, "The Education of Medical Editors in China," by Z. Dong, B. Gastel, T. Lang, R. Bartow, and E. Whalen. Per your "Information for Authors," we have included an original manuscript and one set of original figures, as well as two copies of the complete manuscript.

Dr. Zhe Dong is the corresponding author, who can be reached at the address above. You may also contact Dr. Dong by phone (01)-2017620; fax (10)62092264; or e-mail (dongzhe@mail.bjmu.ed.cn).

All authors have read and approved this version of the article, and due care has been taken to ensure the integrity of the work. No part of this paper has been published or submitted elsewhere. No conflict of interest exists in the submission of this manuscript, and we have attached to this letter the signed letter granting us permission to use Figure 1 from another source.

We appreciate your consideration of our manuscript, and we look forward to receiving comments from the reviewers. Please acknowledge receipt of this manuscript at your earliest convenience, and let us know if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

Zhe Dong

Thomas Lang

Elizabeth Whalen

Barbara Gastel

Rebecca Bartow