

have a reasonable argument? They may have pointed out where the reviewer was incorrect or misunderstood. They should have appealed quite quickly too, not leaving it six months after they have been rejected three times elsewhere. Appeals are an author service, save prolonged phone conversations, and are a good safety net for inexperienced editors. On the other hand they are time consuming for the editors and reviewers, and may lead to a prolonged process and still end in tears. Sabine's final note was perfect: "Editors are human after all" – but she would say that ... she is an editor.

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Resources

<http://www.alpsp.org>
<http://www.equator-network.org>
<http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm>
<http://publicationethics.org>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_Burt

From principles to practice: implementing research integrity guidelines

A workshop of the European Science Foundation Member Forum on Research Integrity, Madrid, 17-18 November 2008

This workshop aimed to provide a forum for discussion of the practicalities of implementation of research integrity guidelines and codes of conduct, and to present recent initiatives in international, collaborative promotion of research integrity. The closing session gathered feedback on the actions and activities needed for a coordinated approach on research integrity in Europe (and beyond). Working groups of the European Science Foundation (ESF) Member Forum on Research Integrity will take forward four actions that were developed as an outcome of the workshop:

- Develop and implement activities to continue raising awareness and sharing information on good practices to promote research integrity;
- Develop a code of conduct that can be used as a template for national codes;
- Develop a checklist for setting up national (and institutional) structures to promote good research practice and deal with research misconduct;
- Develop and promote "research on research integrity".

Although the primary focus was on the activities of researchers, research organisations and academies, and funding bodies, there was great interest among the 50 participants in the role of science journals and their publishers, editors, and peer reviewers in research integrity issues. I gave a presentation on "Research integrity in scientific communication" on behalf of EASE. A lively discussion ensued, covering topics such as whether research integrity could be improved by promoting communication between journals. For example, if suspected misconduct had been identified by one journal, could duplicate submissions of the manuscript in question be prevented by notifying other journals of the manuscript's details? Also discussed was the format of journal article retractions: is there a need for standardisation, to ensure that complete and appropriate details are published?

Pieter Drenth of All European Academies (ALLEA) called for research integrity to be enforced by the research sponsor. Discussants felt that role of journals was relevant: transparency and communication between publishers and funders would help funders to gather information from journals on misconduct by researchers, and vice versa. Such

information exchange could hinder those who persistently breached guidance on research integrity.

Carthage Smith from the International Council for Science (ICSU) questioned why journals do not always respond when they receive allegations of fabricated or falsified data, and provided examples of such situations. Many workshop participants favoured journals publishing annual reports on the number of cases of misconduct identified in the year, and the outcome, to demonstrate the scale of the problem, how it is dealt with, and how successfully.

Another topic that generated enthusiastic discussion was the misuse of impact factors. ICSU is promoting the use of instruments not related to citation measures. Delegates agreed that the impact factor is an inappropriate measure of scientific success, and that its use as an incentive for career progression encourages research misconduct, because of the desire to publish an impossibly large number of articles. Many were in favour of a return to peer review of grant proposals instead of reliance on impact factors, though it was acknowledged that impact factors provide a faster means of assessment and peer review is not without its own limitations.

The "Scientific Red Cards" project (<http://www.scientificredcards.org/>) was presented by Claire Ribault, one of a group of researchers and PhD students who aim to increase the visibility of retracted publications and details of why they were retracted, using their website to disclose the information. They argue that such publicity is not necessarily a bad thing for the public image of scientific research. This presentation attracted heated debate among the audience, but there was much support for the project, which is still in development. The Red Cards team are keen for editors and publishers to contribute, for example by sending content on retracted articles for their website, and they will present an update on their project at the EASE conference in Pisa in September 2009.

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EASE-Forum Digest: October to December 2008

You can join the EASE-Forum by sending the one-line message "subscribe ease-forum" (without the quotation marks) to majordomo@helsinki.fi. Be sure to use plain text format because only plain text is accepted by the forum software – HTML-formatted messages are not recognised. More information can be found on the EASE website (www.ease.org.uk). When you first subscribe, you will be able to receive messages, but you won't be able to post messages until your address has been added manually to the file. This prevents spam being sent by outsiders, so please be patient.

Discussions on the forum over the last quarter have focused on sensitive terminology and the equally delicate topic of whether active verbs should be used in biomedical article titles.

Defining a country's developmental status

Richard Hurley is a copy editor at the *BMJ*, which has an excellent and constantly evolving style guide. A current debate among his fellow copy editors is whether the term "developing country" should be changed to the possibly less euphemistic term "poor country". Richard pointed to the terminology's minefield reviewed in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developing_country. Linda Free replied that "developed", "developing", and "least developed" are the terms favoured by UN agencies and WHO. Pippa Smart said that the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) maintains a list of countries under a "human development index", which grades countries as "high", "medium" or "low" according to GDP, literacy, life expectancy, etc. Wikipedia has an article about the grading linking to the index. Linda suggested "less-developed" as did Pippa who added that "non-industrialized" is another favoured term. Judith Baggot referred to *The Economist's* special report on globalization (20 September 2008, p.10) which proffered the term "emerging", noting that "if a recession comes along... it might call for a new tag—"submerging". Judith thought "developing" better for general use because "emerging" refers to the level of market activity, which was the focus of *The Economist* piece.

Finally Mary Ellen Kerans asked "Would the 'poor countries' cover the ones where large numbers are poor but the leaders and their friends have Swiss bank accounts they tap into on their ski trips, etc, etc. Or countries whose financial system collapses but whose banking leaders, educated with Fullbrights in the US, somehow manage to keep their money in the right foreign accounts at the right time." (This posting was made before the onset of the banking crisis in the US.) Mary Ellen did not think "developing" any worse or more euphemistic than "poor" and saw it as a term that connotes a country that is changing out of some feudal or colonial situation into another sort of situation as yet to be defined.

Controls

Is "control" a treatment and does the word take the definite article, asked Yateendra Joshi, giving the following examples:

The experiment comprised four treatments, namely the three concentrations (X, Y, and Z mg/litre) and control.

The experiment comprised three treatments, namely drying the flowers under shade, drying them in the open, and drying them in a hot-air oven; fresh flowers served as control [the control?].

Forum contributors unanimously rejected "control" as a form of treatment and assured Yateendra that the word takes the definite article (which makes me wonder why I increasingly encounter "control" alone and forlorn without its article). Rod Hunt suggested editing Yateendra's examples to read:

The experiment comprised treatments of concentration X, Y, or Z mg/litre, and an untreated control.

The experiment compared three drying regimes for flowers: under shade, in the open, and in a hot-air oven. Fresh flowers served as a control.

Elisabeth Heseltine saw "control" as a tricky word when describing participants in case-control studies because "cases" are files not people. Referring to patients as "cases" is therefore dehumanizing. However, participants who do not receive treatment are referred to as "controls". I wonder if using "control" to denote a human is equally dehumanizing. "Control participant" or "volunteer" could be used to avoid this problem.

Questioning informative titles

While on 17 December Father Christmas was busy preparing his reindeer at his home in Rovaniemi, Finland, Carol Norris at Helsinki University was pondering titles of academic articles that comprise a sentence. Nancy Boston pointed out that many journals do not allow active verbs in titles, to avoid informative titles that announce the results/conclusions of the study. These journals prefer descriptive titles which indicate the rationale for the study. Nancy had noticed that informative titles are found in more informal journals or those with a general readership, or were used for non-research type articles. Vivienne Mawson saw not objection to informative titles and felt that getting round active verbs by using the "ing" form could infer that the study was still ongoing.

It is a shame that this discussion arose when not only Father Christmas but also many forum contributors were preoccupied with seasonal festivities. Journal editors should perhaps give more thought to article titles. Neville Goodman has shown (*BMJ* 2000;320:914-915.) that informative titles are becoming more common, a trend he found worrying because these titles can be an inaccurate description of study findings. Busy physicians might base their clinical decisions on informative titles of papers, which they might