

Grace Darling, MS, ELS  
Editor

Karen L. Klein, ELS  
Proofreader

Shirley Peterson, MS, ELS  
Newsletter Staff  
Contributor

Kendall W. Sterling, ELS  
News Reporter

Direct all  
newsletter  
correspondence to:

Grace Darling, ELS  
411 North Washington  
Suite 6900  
Dallas, Texas 75246

214-824-0154  
214-824-0463, Fax  
darlingg@airmail.net

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## BELS 5th Annual Meeting

The 5th annual meeting of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences was a resounding success. The turnout was spectacular, the food excellent, and the company delightful. Big thanks to Claudette Reed Upton, ELS, for making the local arrangements.

Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D), our revered Executive Director, spoke of the many contributions to BELS by Karen Phillips, ELS, and presented her with a plaque as a token of our appreciation. Ed Huth, well known author, editor, and former president of CBE, was elevated to the status of Honored Editor in the Life Sciences, or ELS(H). In his address to us Dr Huth pleaded for unity among the various professional editors' organizations and for working jointly toward the common goal of excellence in scientific communication. Shirley Peterson, ELS, presented the Treasurer's report (see below) and Miriam Bloom, ELS, distributed the new BELS lapel pins (\$5), which went like hotcakes. If you don't have one yet, or if you didn't receive a copy of the 1996 BELS membership directory, write to Miriam at SciWrite@umsmed.edu or 4433 Wedgwood St, Jackson MS 39211.



## BELS Financial Report 20 April 1996

Income	
Balance forward from 1995	\$4036.61
1996 dues (127)	3175.00
1996 fees	1475.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>8686.61</b>
Expenses	
Postage	185.07
Phone (fax)	90.59
Copying	12.84
Supplies	91.75
Rent (meeting, test rooms)	200.48
Bank charges	12.00
Pins	740.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>1332.73</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>7305.24</b>



## Directory Update

The following are additions or corrections to the 1996 BELS membership directory (phone numbers are day, evening, and fax):

Allen, Catherine Judge, ELS  
fax: (219) 987-3075  
cjallen@netnitco.net

Brewer, Robyn L, ELS  
8311 Red Oak Ln  
Little Rock AR 72205  
(501) 225-7779  
(501) 224-4276  
(501) 225-6738

Bristow Marcalus, Suzanne, ELS  
inpress2@dpnet.net

Conner, Freda M, ELS  
adav@delphi.com

de Wijs-Christenson, Ruth, ELS  
sbrew@rivm.nl

Dorrell, Gary, ELS  
5 Ramsey Rd  
Wilmington DE 19803  
(302) 886-2828  
(302) 477-0803  
(302) 886-5300

Eliason, Jo Ann M, ELS  
*Journal of Neurosurgery*  
1224 W Main St, Ste 450  
Charlottesville VA 22903  
(804) 982-1209; 924-5503  
(804) 987-1485  
(804) 924-2702

Hales, Carolinda, ELS  
Am Assoc of Blood Banks  
8101 Glenbrook Rd  
Bethesda MD 20814-2749  
(301) 215-6597  
(202) 234-0336  
(301) 907-6895  
carolinda@aabb.org

Hodges, Denise, ELS  
101 Arroyo Ct #7  
San Mateo CA 94402-1571  
(415) 225-5576  
(415) 347-0225  
(415) 225-6000

Lanni, Nancy Tortora, ELS  
(352) 392-1282  
(352) 462-1947  
(352) 846-1855  
tortora@nervm.nerdc.ufl.edu

Nadziejka, David E, ELS  
6009 Osage Ave  
Downers Grove IL 60516  
(708) 252-3019  
(708) 969-9407  
(708) 252-3387  
dnadziejka@anl.gov

Newman, Julie, ELS  
(505) 899-3512  
(505) 899-8643  
(505) 899-8643

Peterson, Shirley M, ELS  
petesm@op.net

Prokop, Laurel J, ELS  
TechStyle Communications  
12840-197th Pl Northeast  
Woodinville WA 98072-5666  
(206) 881-6608 or 6516  
(206) 881-6608 or 6516  
(206) 881-7062  
chetp@techstyle.com

Raley, Patti L, ELS  
2322 Queen Elizabeth Ct, Apt C  
Indianapolis IN 46227  
(317) 276-0585  
(317) 780-0395  
(317) 276-8051

Reynolds, Michael, ELS  
PTI Environmental Services  
15375 SE 30th Pl, Ste 250  
Bellevue WA 98007  
(206) 643-9803  
(206) 430-1684; 888-3698  
(206) 643-9827

Robillard, Renee J, ELS  
2538 E Joshua Ln  
Flagstaff AZ 86004  
(520) 779-2771  
(520) 526-0161  
(520) 774-3525  
rrobilla@wlgore.com

Scales, Jennifer, ELS  
*American Journ of Clinical Nutrition*  
9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda MD 20814-3998  
(301) 571-1820  
(301) 527-1264  
(301) 571-8303  
jscales@ascn.faseb.org

Stein, Becky, ELS  
3326 Santiago  
San Francisco CA 94116  
(415) 221-4810, x2480  
(415) 566-4944  
(415) 750-2273  
becky@itsa.ucsf.edu



## Survey Results

Jonathan Briggs, ELS

BELS members were recently asked two questions as part of an informal survey:

- 1) How did you prepare for the BELS examination?
- 2) What is the benefit of BELS certification to you?

A majority of respondents felt that experience in editing biomedical communications, especially journals, is the best preparation for the test, and the more experience, the better. Most agreed that you need to know how to recognize and fix problems in punctuation, usage, nomenclature, and organization. You do not have to be an expert in the life sciences. One person with more than a decade of editing experience found the test difficult; another said the 2-year minimum requirement was probably not enough. The typical reply was "All I needed to know I had learned by editing." Other comments:

"The amount of scientific information one needed to know was minimal, but the grammar and usage questions were tough."

"In general, the questions have to do with your mastery of the editing process rather than with any specific scientific knowledge."

When queried about particularly troublesome questions in the examination, many respondents mentioned SI units. Also remembered less than fondly were questions dealing with biostatistics, terminology of tables, the metric system, and formats of bibliographic citations.

Among the sources used to prepare for the examination, the CBE manual (now *Scientific Style & Format*) was mentioned most often, followed by the AMA manual, Mimi Zeiger's *Essentials of Writing Biomedical Re-*

*search Papers*, and Edie Schwager's *Medical Usage and Abuse*.

Regarding the second part of the survey, although many respondents thought BELS certification was valuable, few had tangible evidence for this. One person reported that "the idea of board certification appeals to physicians," presumably because they have to do it too. Another member believes BELS certification "distinguishes you from agency writers or other general-

ists who may not be familiar with the conventions of science or medicine, but who may be competing with you for work." Other comments:

"Helps you overcome a liberal-arts handicap."

"Many government employees are being pushed to come up with 'metrics' by which to measure what they do...[and] degrees and certification are an easy count."

"I work with scientists who view credentialing in anything as important."

"The last two raises I received were the direct result of BELS certification and finishing a master's degree."

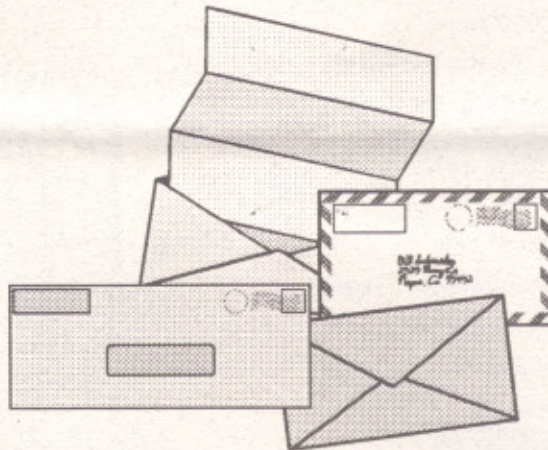
"My boss kept saying there was no such thing as quality in a publication, that it was all a matter of one person's opinion versus another's. The BELS test proved that there was a knowledge base that a technical editor should have."

But the common theme detected in our members' responses is that BELS certification

"...Strengthens self-confidence, improves self-esteem"

and "is a way to get personal satisfaction."

My thanks to everyone who responded. JB





## Attention CBE Members

by Judy Dickson, ELS(D)  
Chair, CBE Author's Editors Committee

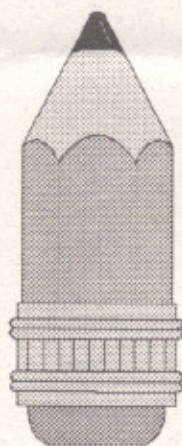
The Author's Editors Committee of the Council of Biology Editors (CBE) has several big projects underway and would love input from BELS-certified manuscript editors. The committee is charged with developing strategies for facilitating communication among authors, author's editors, journal and book editors, and publishers. A second assignment is to develop standards for author's editors. The committee is also responsible for the Workshop for Manuscript Editors (formerly the Short Course for Manuscript Editors), including updating the workshop's source notebook. All committee activities arise from these charges.

One project is to develop the committee's page for the CBE Web site. This seemed like a good place to post information on levels of edit because we face this issue continuously in our work. Have you come across any particularly good descriptions? Send them to us.



Another project concerns the committee's theme for the 1997 CBE meeting and the subject of a session during the workshop: ethics and the author's editor.

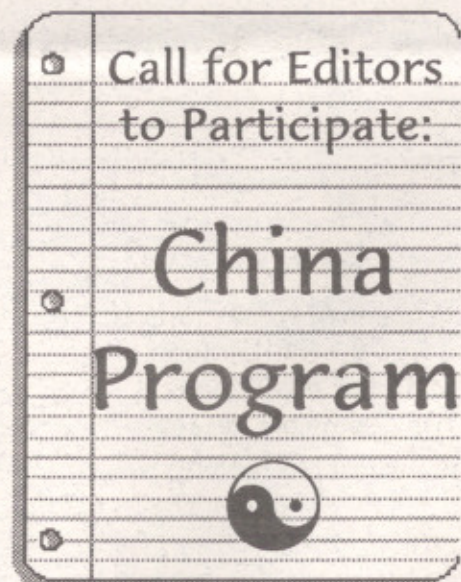
Committee members are compiling a list of ethical responsibilities of an author's editor; this list will be discussed at an open meeting of the committee next year to which all CBE members will be invited. What do you think should be included in such a list? Have you experienced any situations in which having such a list would have helped?



A continuing project is to update the source notebook for the workshop. The notebook was developed last year for the short course and contains chap-

ters on editing references, science references, editing on the computer, Internet resources, professional organiza-

tions, and courses on editing. For the 1997 workshop, the notebook is being fleshed out. Each month committee members will be asked to submit updates and comments for a chapter, but you can send us your contributions at any time: eg, your favorite style book or dictionary, an editing course in your vicinity. Please address all correspondence to me at [jdickson@radix.net](mailto:jdickson@radix.net) or 14213 Briarwood Terr, Rockville MD 20853. *JD*



A new program to teach English-language biomedical writing and editing in China is seeking Western editors to take part in various ways. Editors are especially being sought to review participants' manuscripts, host editorial interns at their offices, and house interns in their homes. Most roles will entail a limited time commitment and will not require travel to China. Honoraria will be offered for some types of participation.

The program, based at Beijing Medical University, is intended to increase Chinese publication in the international biomedical literature. It is funded by the China Medical Board, a US foundation that has long supported medical education and research in China.

Editors who wish to participate should write or call Barbara Gastel, MD, principal consultant to the program,



*China Program, continued*

for further information and an application form. Dr Gastel can be reached at  
 Department of Journalism day: (409) 845-6887  
 Texas A&M University fax: (409) 845-5408  
 College Station TX 77843-4111 b-gastel@tamu.edu

*Ed Note: If you would like to see the application form and fact sheet for this program on an informal, no-strings-attached basis, drop me a note or call me and I'll send you a copy. GD*

- A series of radiologists
- A colony of bacteriologists
- A plague of epidemiologists
- A helix of geneticists
- A host of parasitologists
- A batch of virologists

Contributed by Retta Whinnery, ELS

Terms of Venery

Have you ever hunted for just the right word to describe a collection of people or things with similar characteristics? *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition* by James Lipton gives more than 1,000 terms of venery, an archaic word for "the hunt." Some are historical (a pride of lions, a school of fish); some are recent coinages (a discourse of fax machines); all are creative and amusing. Here are some examples:

- An ultimatum of executive editors
- A penultimatum of managing editors
- A caprice of assignment editors
- A mangle of copy editors
- A query of checkers
- A conjunction of grammarians
- A shush of librarians
- A stratum of geologists
- A nucleus of physicists
- A colloid of chemists
- A family of biologists
- A pullulation of microbiologists
- A bool of teratologists
- A tribe of anthropologists
- An entrenchment of archaeologists
- An extended family of sociologists
- A tree of genealogists
- A number of statisticians
- A set of mathematicians



Net Browsing

The following Internet sites may be of interest to editors, scientists, and lovers of language.

<http://www.fusebox.com/cb/alife.html>

This is the Artificial Life (Alife) site. Here you can play with virtual models that behave like living organisms. You can alter initial behavioral or ecological conditions and see what your changes produce. For a catalog of Alife experiments, look up <http://alife.santafe.edu/~joke/zooland/>



<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~churchh/austt10j.html#songlist>

For die-hard Jane Austen fans, a compendium of JA jokes, including JA's top-ten songs, JA's punishments...you get the idea.

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~churchh/sgtheirl.html>

For examples of singular "their" etc. from the OED and elsewhere, including Austen:

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~churchh/austhlis.html>

<http://www.well.com/user/mmcadams/reference.html>

Reference Books: A Bibliography for Copy Editors.



*Net Browsing, continued*

<http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/reference/index.html#phone>

The Virtual Reference Desk.

<http://www.nova.edu/Inter-Links/reference.html>  
Reference Shelf.

<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~larsson/hsic94/resource/writebib.html>

A comprehensive bibliography of resources for scientific communicators.

These journal sites will give you some idea of the wide variety of home pages out there.

*Behavioral Neuroscience,*

<http://www.apa.org/journals/bne.html>  
*Cell,*

<http://www.cell.com/cell/>

*Environment,*

<http://www.eneews.com/magazines/environment/>  
*Internet World,*

<http://pubs.iworld.com/iw-online/>

*Journal of Biological Chemistry,*

<http://www-jbc.stanford.edu/jbc/>

*Microbiological Reviews,*

<http://journals.at-home.com/ASM/MCB/>

*New England Journal of Medicine,*

<http://www.nejm.org>

*Smithsonian,*

<http://www.si.edu/resource/simag/start.htm>



## Odds & Ends

Perseids are the debris left behind in the orbit of comet Swift-Tuttle, which passed close to Earth less than 4

The annual Perseid meteor shower will reach maximum frequency and brightness on the night of August 11-12. Look high in the northeastern sky after midnight (in North America) and you will see up to 50 meteors per hour, some with fireballs and glowing trails. The Per-

years ago and which will not come again for another 120 to 130 years. We cross this planetary dust trail every year when our orbit crosses the comet's path. The meteors are particles ranging in size from sand grains to small pebbles that burn upon being swept into our atmosphere. They are visible without binoculars and appear so bright because they are less than 50 miles above our heads. The moon will cooperate with meteor watchers by being a very narrow crescent that night.



Behavioral scientists have determined that people whose personalities fall into certain well-established categories face an unusually high risk of developing stress-related diseases.

These people's bloodstreams carry higher than normal levels of glucocorticoids and epinephrine—the stress hormones. Among the diverse personality types linked with overactive stress responses are depressive, passive ones (cannot cope); anxiety disorders (constant feeling of dread); type A (competitive, overachieving, impatient); John Henrys (always take the hard way out); and Martha Stewarts (repressive, rule-bound conformists).



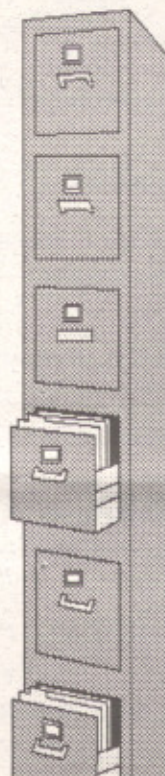
Most vertebrates other than fishes but including humans possess a structure called the vomeronasal organ (VNO), which is usually attached to the nasal cavity. The VNO's sole known function is to receive pheromonal messages. According to some reports, people tend to relax in the presence of certain odorless chemicals extracted from human skin, responding to subliminal communications in a process that is still poorly understood.





Researchers at the National Weather Service have found a clue to the high temperatures and dry conditions that have plagued the American Southwest during the first half of 1996. The heat and drought are attributed

in part to La Niña, a wide area of lower-than-normal water temperatures in the central Pacific Ocean. (The better-known El Niño increases water temperatures in the same region; both deviations can influence weather on a global scale.) La Niña sends the jet stream to the north, triggering above-normal rainfall and flooding in the Pacific Northwest, and stations a high-pressure dome over the Southwest, causing record-breaking hot, dry weather in Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The effects of La Niña are compounded by a unique wind circulation pattern called the North Atlantic Oscillation, which has weakened the stream of moisture emanating from the Gulf of Mexico and thus expanded the scope of the drought.



The officers and board of directors of the organization need your input for a true cross-sectional poll of CBE's rank-and-file. Task force members alone cannot represent the interests of all individuals under the CBE tent, yet the very diversity of the organization is what lends it strength. If the findings of the task force are to be reliable, we must hear from you directly. Remember, by November the task force will have made recommendations that will likely influence the course that CBE will take in years to come, and you will forfeit the right to complain later if you don't cast your vote now. Your opinions will be treated confidentially but will make a difference in the final tally. I urge you to write, fax, or e-mail me your thoughts on this. GD

The Editor

## Your Comments, Please

There are many CBE members among the BELS community, and to those of you I pose an invitation. The 1996 CBE Scope & Mandate Task Force wants your ideas on the following matters it has been charged with:

- defining CBE's constituencies, their needs, and how to meet them
- identifying long- and short-term goals of CBE
- assessing the consequences of broadening CBE to all sciences
- evaluating the need for restructuring CBE and, if so, how
- recommending new directions for CBE

(This is an abbreviated list of the most pressing issues.)

## Congratulations!

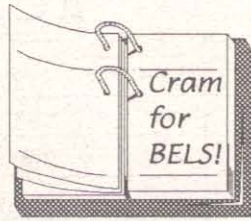
A heartfelt welcome to our most recent members, who passed the BELS certification exams given earlier this year:

Robyn L. Brewer  
 Gary Dorrell  
 Jo Ann M. Eliason  
 Carolinda Hales  
 Denise Hodges  
 David E. Nadziejka  
 Laurel J. Prokop  
 Patti L. Raley  
 Michaele Reynolds  
 Jennifer Scales  
 Becky Stein



Addresses and contact numbers are listed under Directory Update.





### BELS Exam Schedule

- April 19 - Burbank
- May 3 - Philadelphia
- May 24 - Helsinki
- July 12 - Atlanta
- November 11 - Boston

For more information, write to BELS, PO Box 824, Highlands, NC 28741-0824.



### Notable Quotes

When you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers,...you have scarcely...advanced to the stage of Science,...whatever the matter may be.

*Lord Kelvin*

To be a scientist involves extensive training, an insatiable curiosity, and a job.

*Daniel E Koshland Jr, in a Science editorial*

Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.

*Martin H Fisher*

The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.

*Ludwig Wittgenstein*

When an idea is wanting, a word can always be found to take its place.

*Goethe*

The words *information* and *communication* are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.

*Sydney J Harris*

"Ah, you're back."

"Yes."

"Was it boring?"

"Yes."

"Did you get very sick?"

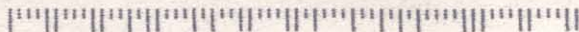
"Yes."

"Did you bring back notes you can't make head or tail of and forget to ask all the important questions?"

"Yes."

"When are you going back?"

*Nigel Barley, The Innocent Anthropologist*



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BELS Letter  
411 N. Washington #6900  
Dallas, TX 75246