

The BELS *Letter*

Published by the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences



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What is a Freelance Editor?

By Kathleen Lyle, ELS

There are Editors and Editors

There are many definitions of the word "editor," and many different editorial functions, even within the relatively limited field of science or medical journal editing. What I do as a freelance editor is mainly what I call copyediting—which may or may not be what you think of as technical editing.

Many large and smaller journal publishers send out journal papers to freelance editors. Sometimes, the entire project management of a journal may be subcontracted to a freelance editor. Short-deadline journals like the *BMJ* and the *Lancet* are now exceptional in carrying out their editing in-house. Manuscripts are generally sent out to freelancers after they have been accepted for publication. We are not involved in deciding on scientific merit or publishability—that may already be a matter of contractual obligation by the time a paper reaches us.

What Do I Mean by Copyediting?

The lowest common denominator is markup. In traditional hard copy editing, this was done by writing instructions to the typesetter on the manuscript; in modern on-screen editing, it is done by applying character or paragraph styles or perhaps by inserting codes. It's important for the editor to get this right, but markup alone is not editing. It's possible to mark up a manuscript without actually reading the words at all (and many typesetters and some journal publishers do just this).

A more significant set of editorial tasks involves ensuring the integrity of the document. For me, this is a basic part of copyediting, but it is sometimes called manuscript editing.

- ✓ Checking that the file or hard copy is complete (and that they match, if

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both are provided).

- ✓ Checking that the sequence of any numbered elements (headings, equations, etc.) is correct.
- ✓ Checking that the figures, tables, references, etc. are all present, the correct copy has been provided, and the captions match the figures; everything is keyed into the text, and the text callouts are in the right order (Figure 2 should be mentioned before Figure 3, for instance).
- ✓ Checking cross-references to other parts of the text—it's quite common to find a reference to an appendix that has in fact been deleted in the final version.

Integrity of this kind has become more important than ever with the introduction of electronic documents that have hotlinks from callouts to references. For example, errors or dead ends are immediately obvious to the reader.

Other tasks that should be carried out by the copy editor are:

- ✓ Checking for possible breaches of copyright law, e.g., where permissions are needed for quotations, artwork, or tables taken from other publications.
- ✓ Pointing out anything else that might be actionable, such as defamation.
- ✓ Querying any obvious errors or omissions.

Then we get down to the editorial nitty-gritty (sometimes called line editing):

- ✓ Imposing house style—e.g., *ise/ize* spellings, Fig. or Figure, recommended style for references, units, drug names or other standard terminology, inclusive language, etc.
- ✓ Checking arithmetic—totals in tables, etc.
- ✓ Language editing—which may be heavy if the author's English is poor and may give rise to further queries.
- ✓ Details like spelling and punctuation.

To expand a little on the subject of arithmetic: although I can check whether percentages add up to 100, for example, or that totals in a table are correct, I cannot query or rework an author's statistics or mathematical calculations; that should have been done at the review stage.

I have deliberately (and perhaps provocatively) placed language editing quite far down my list. Remember that the manuscript has been accepted and scheduled for publication before it reaches me. This accept-

ance is usually unconditional; the author is justified in thinking that if the paper has been accepted, it must be in an acceptable form. Authors often welcome careful editing, but they do not welcome rewriting at this stage, especially if they fear it might delay publication. My clients, the publishers, do not expect me (or pay me) to rewrite the author's material or even to edit it heavily just to improve the prose style. They certainly would not expect me to do anything that invited another round of revision from the author. Anything of this magnitude should have been dealt with earlier, perhaps in conjunction with an author's editor.

I am not a subject expert—I often have to work on material I don't understand. Of course, I query anything that seems contradictory or incomprehensible because of linguistic or syntactic confusion, but sometimes I simply have to make the best of a bad job—see below.

I don't consider any of what I do to constitute ghostwriting, although that may be hard to distinguish from heavy editing. However, some of what I am asked to do seems to me to be ghost editing.

Ghost Editing

By ghost editing, I mean things that are left to the anonymous copy editor that should have been sorted out earlier by the journal editor whose name appears on the masthead.

Sadly, some editors of journals apparently think their task is done when they select which submissions should appear. Papers may be passed on for copyediting without any further intervention—indeed, often without being read by any member of the editorial board unless they have been directly involved in the peer review. This is obviously not a good practice.

So, what am I expecting the journal editor or editorial board member to do?

- ✓ First of all, recognize where appropriate spheres of expertise lie, and what they can and can't expect copy editors to do. Journal editors decide on journal policy and acceptance of papers: they are chosen because they are authorities in their subject area. They should read each paper to see whether it makes sense; clarify anything ambiguous, syntactically scrambled, or linguistically incomprehensible (which ought not to have survived the peer review process, but often does). Journal editors have the subject expertise to do this, but copy editors probably do not.

- ✓ Although journal editors need not and should not spend time on details that are the province of the copy editor, they should check that the paper conforms to house style in important respects, such as referencing. If authors have used, say, a name-date system rather than a numbered system, they should be asked to provide a new version using the referencing system described in the instructions for authors. This is something reviewers should be asked to comment on so that it can be attended to in revision of the paper, rather than left until after the paper has been accepted.

- ✓ Check that the material is legible (if it's hard copy) or that the files are usable (if submission is electronic).

- ✓ Check that figures and tables mentioned in the text are present and look at artwork to see whether the quality is good enough to use without expensive redrawing or relabelling. (Or indeed that the figures and tables provided are really necessary—another thing that reviewers should be asked to comment on.)

The same level of editorial attention should be applied to multi-author books or reports, with one important addition. In a journal, each paper is considered to be self-contained. In a multi-author book, however, the editor also needs to check that material is not duplicated in various chapters—for instance, the development of a particular subject or technique may be described in many chapters. This usually happens as a result of inadequate briefing of authors.

I can't emphasize enough how important it is for the overall quality of a publication that these matters should be attended to before a paper leaves the editor's desk. It can save time, tempers, and money later and contribute immeasurably to the successful running of a journal in an increasingly competitive environment.

The Copy Editor's Contribution—An Underused Resource?

Ideally, the copy editor should provide feedback to the journal editor about papers that are seriously deficient in presentation, because this may highlight deficiencies in the review process; ideally, too, the journal editor will respect the copy editor's judgment and take such points on board. This should present no problem for an in-house copy editor working closely with the journal editor. It is more
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difficult for a freelance editor, especially when the chain of communication is via a third party, such as a commercial publisher. In this situation, often no direct contact exists between the freelance and the journal editor, and no guarantee exists that feedback will be passed on. Frequently, the harassed in-house editor will instruct the freelance to stop grumbling and just get on with it. Only the bravest will persist. A potentially valuable opportunity for quality control is lost, and the journal suffers. With sufficient goodwill on all sides, this situation could change—it is in everyone's interest that it should, assuming we are all stakeholders in the quality of our publications.

This article is being reprinted with permission from Kathleen Lyle and *European Science Editing* May 2001;27(2):32-33.

From the Editor

I must profusely apologize for the lateness of this issue of the *BELS Letter*. I injured my back while exercising in late May and have been plagued by the injury all summer. It really threw a wrench into my work schedule. But I am back on track now (Nordic Track, that is).

You will notice that the *BELS Letter* looks different. I decided it was time to give it a facelift (one begins to think about such things as one gets older). As always, your comments about the design, color, content, or anything else are always appreciated. Article ideas are particularly welcome.

In the Fall 2001 issue of the *BELS Letter*, you will see another change. The *BELS Letter* will have a new column titled, "BELS Serves. Summarized Q&A From the BELS Mailing List Server." **Barbara Schwedel** has enthusiastically agreed to be the column editor. She is diligently working on her first column and may have contacted some of you already. This column will be a terrific addition to the *BELS Letter*. Not only will it provide a concise rendering of discussions among BELS members, but it will also allow BELS members not on the mailing list server to benefit from the Q&As.

This Summer issue has many interesting features. Articles by **Kathleen Lyle**, our new Prez **Shirley Peterson**, a book review by **Paula Robbins**, a discussion by **Kim Berman** of the proctoring meeting held at the CSE conference, and an overview of the CSE conference round out this issue. Enjoy.

Ann Morcos, ELS

In Memoriam

Christy Wright, a longtime BELS member and friend to so many, passed away unexpectedly on Friday, June 8, 2001. Our hearts go out to her family in this time of sadness. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.



Book Review

Karl Sabbagh. *A Rum Affair: A True Story of Botanical Fraud*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

By **Paula I. Robbins, ELS**

Karl Sabbagh, a producer of science programs and documentaries for the BBC and PBS, has written a book that is as gripping as any detective novel but that can also be read as a treatise on how the scientific world deals with scientific malfeasance. Sabbagh relates how he stumbled across evidence of a case of botanical fraud that seemed to him to have been suppressed. He read the obituary of John Raven, a classics tutor whom he had known as an undergraduate at Kings College, Cambridge, and was surprised to read the following: "In 1954 he was at the centre of a curious episode. A reputable biologist had recorded finding, mainly on the Isle of Rhum, several plants not previously found in Britain. The botanical world was surprised, not to say suspicious. John went to investigate. His report was deposited in Trinity College Library and has never been published." Years later, Sabbagh mentioned this story over lunch to a prominent botanist and was sur-

prised at his reluctance to expand on the story despite acknowledging that the whole profession knew about the accusations although they had never been openly published.


Sabbagh describes, in gripping fashion, how he managed to uncover details of John Raven's search for evidence that Prof. John Heslop Harrison had planted specimens of alien plants on a privately owned island in the Inner Hebrides, which he then claimed to have discovered as being indigenous.

Sabbagh also speculates at length about the psychology and motivation of his two protagonists. Heslop Harrison, an authoritarian personality who in class-conscious Britain had been able to rise to the chairmanship of a university department, was anxious to provide evidence in support of a pet theory. Raven, a gifted amateur botanist, relished the excitement of the chase.

Of most interest to BELS members will be the chapter describing the role played by scientific publications. The editor of *Scottish Naturalist* refused to publish an article by Heslop Harrison in which he tried to refute Raven's findings, the only publication of

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which was as a letter to *Nature*. Although the botanical world quietly erased Heslop Harrison's questionable findings from the textbooks, it never went so far as to destroy the man's professional character. He retired in full standing and continued to appear outwardly respectable until his death. Sabbagh describes other similar cases of scientific fraud during the twentieth century that were well known but for which the perpetrators were not punished.

Sabbagh has written a book that will keep you turning the pages until late at night, but will also raise questions about the nature of scientific inquiry that you will ponder the next morning. 



Message from the Prez

By Shirley Peterson, ELS

The presidential directive given members attending the elegant celebration of BELS 10th Anniversary was "Spread Out and Surround 'Em." 'Em, in this case, being two groups of people. First, our own members who are active, inasmuch as they pay annual dues, but are not involved in the workings of BELS. Second, editors who lack an ELS after their name and could benefit from the initials.

With the most recent dues notice (and also in a mailing of the *BELS Letter*) you received a volunteer sheet and a return envelope. Many of you returned the volunteer sheet, and most of those who did so agreed to do several jobs that will help BELS in its mis-

sion of giving exams and conferring certification upon those who pass. Thank you! We know who you are, and we need all of you. BELS now has more than 300 members. It is time to spread out the jobs and the responsibilities that make BELS function efficiently.

The basic jobs, the ones that are closest to exam giving, are onerous. The mountain of paperwork faced by the Registrar has been reduced by the BELS Web site, ably managed by **Jan Jerrells**. Nearly all applicants now glean basic information and download the application form from the Web site. **Leslie Neistadt**, the new Registrar, is dealing with a burgeoning number of applicants and may be tapping volunteers to help with some aspects of registration.

Proctoring is one of the tasks that falls under the aegis of the Registrar. Head of the Proctor Committee is **Kim Berman**. She and Leslie, with help from **Peggy Chen**, have revised the *Handbook for Proctors* and instituted proctor training meetings, the first in Washington, DC, in May. We hope to have proctor training sessions at all future meetings of CSE and AMWA. Because our exams are increasingly well attended, we need a cadre of trained proctors to provide one proctor for about every 10 examinees. The exam in Chicago (September 15) already has 2 proctors, but please let Kim know if you are available for proctoring the exam at the AMWA meeting in Norfolk (October 23).

Another ongoing, and difficult, job is exam development, the committee currently led by **Karen Phillips**. The most recent exam included new questions being validated. Eventually, we hope to rotate 20 different questions into each exam. Until you try to write a multiple choice question, you won't know how difficult it is. Give it a try, and send the results to Karen.

Web site management is yet another job subject to immense pressure. Jan Jerrells will be tapping volunteers soon to help her with aspects of site administration.


The Treasurer, **Nancy Taylor**, will be taking on an assistant and introducing that person to the intricacies of the Treasurer post. The office of Treasurer is also strained by a membership of more than 300.

Mary Ann Schmidt is our Secretary. In addition to producing minutes of meetings, she also produces the BELS Membership Directory. Send her any changes in address, phone, e-mail, etc. And you might ask Mary Ann what you can do to make her life easier. She has volunteered to look into archiving the

BELS papers. Know anything about archiving?

Other officers (Councilors, according to the bylaws) can use help. The Public Relations Councilor, **Angela Lorio**, will have the PR program up and running soon. Angela has the volunteer list, but if you have done PR and are not on the list, please let her know. **Susan Aiello** is the Councilor for Member Relations. In addition to mailing dues notices, she supervises other tasks related to membership. Ask her how you can help. **Ann Morcos** is editor of the *BELS Letter*. Do you write? Send her a piece for the newsletter, or ask her what kind of help she needs.

BELS truly needs to spread out the work. It isn't ALL work, mind you. Although BELS is not a social organization, working with other like-minded people is a joy. Who else can you play word games with? Make awful puns, and get one (probably even worse) thrown right back? BELS people are witty, hard working, and a lot of fun. Freelancers especially enjoy the collegial interaction on a BELS committee.

The second group of people we need to surround and draw in are editors who have not yet taken the certification exam. Several publishing houses, journals, and at least one pharmaceutical giant are encouraging their editors to acquire certification, and are running ads that say "ELS preferred." This is what BELS has been working toward—recognition of the value of certification. When you encourage your friends and colleagues to take the certification exam, please be sure to stress that the exam is focused on manuscript editing. People in other specialties with "Editor" in the title are unlikely to have the nuanced experience required to pass the exam. Still, many editors are out there who need to know about BELS certification. So spread out and surround 'em. Please. 



An Overview of the 44th Annual CSE Conference May 4-8, 2001, Washington, DC

By Ann Morcos, ELS

Rarely in life do we do things in isolation. When editing copy, we may indeed sit quietly alone going about our task. However, when we edit, we are sculpting material so that it is educational, enjoyable, and clearly understandable to another human being—the reader. “Serving the Readers of Scientific Publications” was the theme of this year’s CSE conference.

The conference, with 441 attendees (approximately 50 more than 2000), comprised a keynote address, two plenary sessions, 25 concurrent sessions, and 2 workshops that replaced an afternoon of concurrent sessions. Here is a sampling.

Keynote Address

Vitek Tracz (Current Science Group, London, England) in his keynote address pondered whether these are the worst of times or the best of times in scientific publishing. Tracz sees this time of flux in the publishing world as a transition from an outdated system to a new and better one where new opportunities exist. With Web technology, word count or restrictions on the number of tables, figures, and references allowed need no longer confine scientific publishing. Tracz cited PubMed Central and BioMed Central as 2 systems that may evolve as the new models for scientific publishing.

Plenary One

Edward Tufte (Graphics Press; Professor Emeritus, Yale University) gave a dynamic presentation to bring home his message that words and numbers must be stitched together seamlessly in graphics used to present information. Tufte turned to the past for exquisite examples of effective use of visuals: the 1520 edition of the first English translation of Euclid, owned by Tufte but previously owned by Ben Jonson, and Minard’s famous graph of the fate of Napoleon’s army in Russia, which demonstrates Tufte’s five principles for displaying information (enforce

visual comparisons; show causality; show multivariate data, integrate word, number, and image; provide quality, relevance; and integrity of substance and content). Good visual explanations, said Tufte, do more than just display information, they tell us how to reason and think about evidence.

Plenary Two

Susan Okie (*The Washington Post*) in her discussion of how science is reported in the newspaper explained that medical and science reporters are bombarded with press releases and tables of contents from journals, which must be triaged in some way. Okie advised editors to choose material that is newsworthy, such as firsts, new information about prevalence and risk, definitive proof, findings that overturn old assumptions, and such hot topics as stem cells, genetic engineering, and obesity. Keep press releases brief (6- to 7-line paragraph), accurately describe the study’s purpose and findings, and don’t use words like “breakthrough” unless you can back them up.

SSF7: A Preview of the Next Edition of the CSE Style Manual

Peggy Robinson (Style Manual Subcommittee Co-chair) explained that the 7th edition of CSE’s *Scientific Style and Format* will continue the goals of the 6th edition (broader information about all sciences, simplifying formats and style, and reducing keyboard work) but will try to fine tune the improvements. Some chapters will be substantially revised or will contain new information about general style, ethics, and the mechanics of publishing.

The publication date for the 7th edition has not been established. The manuscript should be submitted and reviewed in the summer of 2002, however. Now is the time to submit corrections of the 6th edition that you would like to see included in the 7th edition. Contact Peggy Robinson no later than **December 2001** at phone: (613) 260-1852; fax (613) 260-5696; e-mail: p-robinson@home.com.

Plain Language in Science: Signs of Intelligible Life in the Scientific Community?

Fewer than 50% of adult respondents to a survey understand that the sun orbits the earth yearly. Only 21% can define DNA. Just 9% know what a molecule is. These are startling statistics presented by **Joanne N. Locke** (US Food & Drug Administration) and **Lily**

Whiteman (US Mint, Department of Treasury). Using plain language is not dumbing down, it is reaching out to a larger audience. Using plain language has many benefits, such as winning research funding, encouraging multidisciplinary breakthroughs, press coverage, and inspiring the public.

Locke and Whiteman offered ten writing tips for better communication: trumpet the conclusions in the abstract; use structured abstracts; provide a “What this study adds” box; use summary boxes as needed; offer human interest boxes, include a clear, specific opener that gives context; eliminate unnecessary jargon; use short sentences; provide a plain language summary of the article; use the active voice.

Publication Issues for Non-Anglophone Scientists

Is publishing in international English language journals the only way for scientific results to be widely disseminated? Many scientists feel the answer is yes. But publishing the work of non-English-speaking authors poses problems for editors of international English-language journals.

Magna Nylenna (*Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*) said scientists should, whenever possible, publish their work in both English and non-English journals because non-English journals help preserve and expand specialized terminology. **Waleria Mlyniec** (freelance editor, formerly with the *Journal of Applied Genetics*) suggested that when an article is published only in English, an abstract in the author’s native language could be published concurrently. Cann advised ESL authors to use active voice, write short sentences, not use jargon, use actual data, create effective graphics, and have English-speaking colleagues review articles for language, style, structure, and correctness of medical terminology. **Miriam Bloom** (SciWrite) said that ESL authors should use editorial services and that editorial services should be written into grant proposals.

Editors can help authors of articles written poorly in English but that include valid data by sending such manuscripts to reviewers who are willing to help other scientists succeed.

Other Concurrent Sessions and Workshops

Other sessions addressed such issues as “The Journal’s Role in Educating Readers” and “Where Do Readers Want to Do Their Reading?” Several sessions focused on ethical issues: “Nothing About Me Without Me: The

Ethics of Writing About Patients," "Ethical and Quasi-ethical Problems in Publication," and "The Third CSE Authorship Retreat" workshop.

Web design and editing were covered in the workshop "Evaluating Web Sites: The Impact of Information Design" and the concurrent sessions "Following Your Readers With Web Statistics," "Editing on the Web: From the Text to the Screen," and "The Arcanum of Bricks and Clicks: What Is the Right Mix to Survive Today's Publishing Watershed?"

The business end and mechanics of running a journal editorial office were discussed in such concurrent sessions as "Building New Business Models," "Manuscript Submission and Tracking: Current Workflow and Online Solutions," "Putting Your Vintage Issues Online," "The Editorial Office Ain't What It Used to Be," among others.

Conclusion

The conference hotel was a bit more expensive than hotels used for past conferences; however, its excellent location made the extra expense worthwhile. It was a short 5-10 minute walk from the White House, and restaurants of many sorts were close by. Particularly interesting was China Town just 2-3 blocks away. The weather, though hot the Friday I arrived, turned cool for the remainder of the conference, making evening walks quite pleasant.

Coming in the Fall Issue of the *BELS Letter*

BELS Serves. Summarized Q&A From the BELS Mailing List Server

*Column Editor
Barbara Schwedel, ELS*

Stalking the Elusive Proctor

By Kim Berman, ELS

As you are probably aware, BELS sponsors certification exams each year, with testing locations across North America and Europe. We are always on the lookout for BELS members who are willing to proctor the exams, especially those folks located in the city where the exam is being given. At this spring's annual CSE meeting in Washington, DC, we held a recruiting-training session to provide potential proctors with background information on the "proctor experience." Despite the hectic CSE conference schedule, several BELS members turned out for our early morning get-together, and we were happy to recruit proctor volunteers for some of the future exams. Many thanks to the members who have proctored past exams, and many words of encouragement are extended to those who have signed up to proctor future exams—you are all doing a great service for BELS!

Over the past few months, I have worked to update the *Handbook for Proctors* to include our most current procedures. Many thanks to **Bobbie Reitt**, **Norman Grossblatt**, **Shirley Peterson**, and others who provided perspective on proctoring, the editorial eyes of eagles, and great suggestions for changes to this document. During the updating of the handbook and review of the exam procedures, **Peggy Chen** scrutinized the security of our testing process; she has vast experience working with the folks at the Educational Testing Service (the providers of the SAT and GRE exams). Lots of thanks to Peggy for her suggestions regarding test security and the examination process; I never realized how unscrupulous some folks could be!

For those of you who think you may be interested in proctoring but aren't really sure what is involved in this volunteer effort, I encourage you to give me a call (518.868.2218) or drop me an e-mail (skberman@midtel.net) for more information. If you are planning to attend the CSE or AMWA meetings, please consider arriving a day early to proctor the exam. Upcoming exams that will need proctors are shown below:

Location	Date
Princeton, NJ (Princeton Public Library)	March 23, 2002
Memphis, TN (St. Jude Children's Hospital)	March 23, 2002
San Diego, CA (CSE annual meeting)	May 4, 2002
San Diego, CA (AMWA annual meeting)	October 29, 2002

BELS Member Contact Information Update

Patricia Connelley, ELS

New day phone, fax, and e-mail address:

Day: (610) 832-8181

Fax: (610) 832-9484

e-mail: pconnelly@altavista.com

Gary Dorrell, MS, ELS (1996)

Renewed his membership:

Gary Dorrell, In.c

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BELS Certification Examination Schedule

Date	City & Association	Registration Deadline
2001		
September 15	Chicago, IL	August 25
October 23	Norfolk, VA, AMWA	October 2
2002		
March 23	Princeton, NJ (Public Library)	March 2
March 23	Memphis, TN (St. Jude)	March 2
May 4	San Diego, CA, CSE	April 13
October 29	San Diego, CA, AMWA	October 8
2003		
March	San Francisco, CA (Asilomar)	TBA
May 3	Pittsburg, PA, CSE	April 12
June 8	Bath, England, EASE	May 16
October-November 2003	TBA, AMWA	TBA

Please note: The deadline for registration is 3 weeks before the scheduled date of the examination. Please allow at least 5 weeks for the application and registration process if you use the US mails. International mails take longer than 4 weeks.

For more information, write Registrar, BELS, c/o Leslie E. Neistadt, Hughston Sports Medicine Foundation, Inc. 6262 Veterans Parkway, Columbus, GA 31909, USA. Phone: (706) 576-3322. Fax: (706) 576-3348.
e-mail: neistadt@hughston.com



Upcoming Meetings of Interest

AMWA 61st Annual Conference
October 24-27, 2001
Norfolk, Virginia

**American Society of Indexers (ASI)
34th Annual Conference**
May 16-19, 2002
Moody Gardens
Galveston, TX

ASI is looking for topics of interest to indexers and information specialists of all kinds and levels of expertise. In addition, this year ASI will be offering an editorial track aimed at indexers and editors. Deadline for submission of topics is November 1, 2001.
www.asindexing.org

News About Members

Shirley Peterson is the new BELS president.

Nancy Taylor is the new BELS treasurer.

Angela Lorio is the new BELS public relations councilor.

Leslie Neistadt is the new BELS registrar.

Ann Morcos has been inducted into Who's Who in US Writers, Editors, and Poets and International Who's Who for Entrepreneurs.