Scientific editors: How they can help you

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Disclosure

I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose.
Introduction

About me

– MS in Biomedical Writing
– BA in Journalism
– Editor in the Life Sciences
– Educator since 2011
– Director of Editorial Services since 2014

Rachel Box, MS, ELS
Introduction

What I do

• Edit
  – Help authors communicate their research
  – Help authors publish their work

• Educate
  – Teach the foundations and skills of scholarly scientific writing
WHAT IS SCIENTIFIC EDITING?
Components of editing
Components of editing

Content
Components of editing

- Content
- Style
Components of editing

- Form
- Style
- Content
Components of editing

- Implications
- Interpretation
- Accurate reporting
- Detailed methods
- Rationale
- Background/context

Content
Components of editing

Organization
Transitions
Emphasis
Flow

Style

Attention to the readers’ needs (both primary and secondary audiences)
Components of editing

Form

Grammar
Punctuation
Usage
Typographical errors
Spelling
Components of editing

- Content
- Style
- Form
WHO ARE SCIENTIFIC EDITORS?
Who are scientific editors?

- All are language experts
  - *E.g.*, degrees in English, Writing, Communications, Journalism, Language Arts

- Some are subject matter experts
  - *E.g.*, degrees in scientific field, clinical credentials
Who are scientific editors?

- **Knowledge**
  - Conventions of scientific writing
  - Best practices in scientific writing
  - Research and publishing ethics

- **Skills**
  - Reading critically
  - Querying authors
  - Suggesting revisions
  - Improving tables/figures
Who are scientific editors?

• Credentialing
  – *Board of Editors in the Life Sciences*
    • ELS Designation
  – *American Medical Writers Association*
    • Medical Writer Certified
Key functions

- Read critically
- Ask questions
- Suggest revisions
Read critically

• What does your audience know?
• What do they not know?
• Why should they care?
• What value does your study offer?
• How is your study novel/important?
Ask questions

- Is every sentence clear?
- Is the information complete?
- Can the text be more concise?
- Are data and terms consistent?
- Is the story of your study cohesive?
- Is your manuscript compelling?
Query example: *clarity*

**Text:** “Thoracic outlet syndrome may occur secondary to scalene muscle hypertrophy caused by swim training.”
“Thoracic outlet syndrome may occur secondary to scalene muscle hypertrophy caused by swim training.”

Query: What do you mean by “swim training”? Simply frequent swimming? A rigorous program (e.g., for a competitive swimmer)? Something else?
Query example: completeness

Text: “In one study, 20% of swimmers met the criteria for generalized ligamentous laxity.”
In one study, 20% of swimmers met the criteria for generalized ligamentous laxity.

Query: Please provide the n values (numerator/denominator) and indicate what kind of swimmers they were (recreational? collegiate? elite? Olympic?).
Query example: conciseness

Text: “While rare, there are reported cases of thoracic outlet syndrome in swimmers. This may occur secondary to scalene muscle hypertrophy caused by swim training. (24 words)

Revision: Rarely, thoracic outlet syndrome occurs in swimmers, possibly caused by training-induced scalene muscle hypertrophy. (14 words)
Text: “Freestyle has been associated with lower risk of knee pain compared with other strokes (OR, 0.5).”
Freestyle has been associated with lower risk of knee pain compared with other strokes (OR, 0.5).
Text: “Most swimming deaths occur in nonswimmers. In the U.S., 10 drowning deaths are reported each day, 20% of which are in children younger than 15 years.”
Text: “Most swimming deaths occur in nonswimmers. In the U.S., 10 drowning deaths are reported each day, 20% of which are in children younger than 15 years.”

Query: In a review of current treatments for swimming injuries, the incidence of drowning deaths in the US is not relevant. Recommend deleting.
Query example: conviction

Text: “Our goal was to provide the sports medicine physician with a comprehensive review of evidence-based literature on swimming injuries.”
Text: “Our goal was to provide the sports medicine physician with a comprehensive review of evidence-based literature on swimming injuries.”

Query: Can you help reviewers understand the importance of your study? No recent reviews on the topic? Inconsistencies in treatment? Major advances since the last review was published?
Query example: conviction

**Text:** “Postoperative return-to-swimming protocols should be tailored to the surgery performed.”
Query example: **conviction**

**Text:** “Postoperative return-to-swimming protocols **should be tailored** to the surgery performed.”

**Query:** How can a reader *use* this information? Can you provide more specific advice here? Perhaps a table or figure showing protocol options by procedure?
Suggest revisions

• Asking, “Do you mean A or B?” can help authors recognize ambiguity in their writing
Beyond the basics

Identifying target audiences

Avoiding plagiarism

Choosing a journal

Adhering to guidelines

CONSORT  PRISMA  STARD  STROBE
What editors DON’T do

• Editors do NOT
  – write your paper for you
  – qualify for authorship on your paper
  – take responsibility for the scientific integrity of your work
HOW CAN EDITORS HELP YOU?
How editors can help

• Improve your “hit rate”
  – Avoid rejections! This saves time
  – Example
    • Mean acceptance rate of top 10 orthopaedic journals is 28%
    • Our authors’ annual hit rate is consistently >50%
How editors can help

• Help you write more efficiently
  – Clinical article template
  – Chronology of writing
  – Early-stage feedback
  – Journal requirements
How editors can help

• Guide you in journal choice
  – *Who is your target?*
  – *Look beyond impact factor*
  – *Consider journal scope and requirements*
How editors can help

- Help you avoid common pitfalls
  - Misleading/uninteresting title
  - Incomplete abstract
  - Data discrepancies
  - Inappropriate target journal
  - Incomplete response to feedback
  - Reviewer “pet peeves”
    - Eg, “trend toward significance”
    - “our study is the first to…”
How editors can help

• Organize your references
  – Reference management
  – Welch Library resources (EndNote Basic and RefWorks)
  – Journal style adherence
How editors can help

• Improve your writing skills
  – *Teach through querying*
  – *Point out recurring deficiencies*
  – *Explain rationale for revisions*
  – *Direct you to further resources*
Thank you

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