

A New Dictionary; Self-Tests for Editors

Clinical Trials Dictionary: Terminology and Usage Recommendations

Curtis L Meinert. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Center for Clinical Trials; 1996. ccviii + 363 pages. Hardcover \$110. ISBN 0-9646424-09

The terminology used in communications about clinical trials is often confused. A "randomized" clinical trial, for example, has been incorrectly considered the same as a phase III trial, and "effectiveness" has been confused with "efficacy". Likewise, the differences between randomized and historic "controlled" trials too often are blurred. Such confusion has the potential of increasing as more clinical trials are conducted by researchers speaking different languages in centers throughout the world. The trend toward conducting simultaneous clinical trials in many nations may increase further the complexity of communications about clinical trials.

Curtis Meinert's highly usable *Clinical Trials Dictionary* is a unique and authoritative reference for professionals and the public on the vocabulary of the dynamic field of clinical trials. The dictionary includes terms, synonyms, and antonyms covering the entire scope of clinical trials. The coverage is sufficiently broad to fulfill the needs of students and specialists in biostatistics, clinical medicine, epidemiology, and other overlapping disciplines interested in the design, conduct, reporting, and interpretation of clinical trials. Meinert has provided the reader with both current usage and clear definitions. The usefulness of the dictionary, although best measured by the large number of likely users, is enhanced by being self-contained and by reflecting the ongoing dynamic evolution of clinical-trial methodology and reporting. One example of this dynamism is the inclusion of terms and usage recommendations for designing and reporting primary disease-prevention trials as well as therapeutic trials.

The scope of the content is impressive: 6400 definitions and more than 500 usage notes and recommendations; a table of con-

tents; extensive explanatory notes; a detailed section on usage practices, cautions, and recommendations; a separate listing of entries; and detailed subject and author indexes. Strengths of the book include the large number of entries and a view of the dynamic usage of clinical trials vocabulary. While some clinical-trial specialists may find mistakes of exclusion, or some usages too broad, too short, or even wrong, such deficiencies can be modified to better reflect the current usage of clinical-trials vocabulary. Welcome is the recommended usage of "treatment" as a term for all types of interventions, including therapeutic and behavioral-intervention trials. The dictionary should not be viewed as a guide to the performance of statistical methods, however; for example, it is not possible to perform a valid meta-analysis based on the dictionary's definition of the term. Only professional statistical training and experience would suffice.

Meinert, a specialist in clinical trials, has made many contributions to the field during the last 20 years and was a member of the Coordinating Center Models Project Research Group. He is a professor of biostatistics and epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health and was the founding editor of *Controlled Clinical Trials* in 1980, a position he held for the first 14 years. He is a founding member of the Society of Clinical Trials and coauthor of the well-known text *Clinical Trials: Design, Conduct, and Analysis*. He has been a long-standing advocate of precision and brevity in the design, conduct, and reporting of clinical trials, having published in 1980 an editorial "Terminology: A Plea for Standardization", in *Controlled Clinical Trials*. His background makes Meinert an ideal author of the dictionary.

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have been involved in the design, review, analysis, and reporting of numerous clinical-therapeutic and prevention trials of multiple types of treatments for several diseases.

Meeting Editorial Standards: Volume 1, Self-Tests; Volume 2, Solutions and Discussion

Editors' Association of Canada; North York, Ontario: Captus Press; 1996. Vol. 1, 214 pages, ISBN 1-895712-90-4; Vol. 2, 270 pages, ISBN 1-895712-47-5. Softcover \$62 for both volumes.

This 2-volume set from the Editors' Association of Canada will go a long way toward helping a new editor learn the analytical process that makes a good editor. A would-be editor can get a good picture of the challenges, rewards, and tedium of careful text editing. An experienced editor whose focus has narrowed to a particular discipline or a particular aspect of editing would relearn some forgotten skills or gain the confidence to try a new discipline. Finally, the jaded editor used to seeing the same mistakes time after time might get recharged by this collection of careful exercises; he or she might conclude that intelligent editing that respects the author is still a valued skill.

An annotated bibliography of texts useful for editors appears at the beginning of *Self-Tests*. Then 26 editorial exercises are set out so that editors and would-be editors can try their hands at them. The chapters, grouped under the headings of "Publishing Process", "Style and Structure Editing", "Copy Editing", and "Proofreading", test a wide range of skills, all of them important to success in publishing houses, governmental and institutional editorial departments, and commercial enterprises that depend on clear, logical, comprehensible communication.

The accompanying volume of *Solutions and Discussion* does not let the reader off the hook with pat solutions. A way to edit the document is usually shown, but the rationale for the choices acknowledges many other possible choices. In doing so, the book

allows the reader to learn from the combined experience of its creators and from himself or herself. The best example is the chapter "Canadian Railways", which asks the editor to create and apply a consistent style to a rather botched document. The discussion leaves open the precise details of the style sheet and the corrections to the manuscript, pointing out instead what decisions should be made and where they should be applied.

Respect for the author is a prominent theme in the exercises. "Banana Peels", which asks that you edit the opening chapter of a bad novel, recognizes that changes here could be affected by passages in parts of the book unavailable to the editor. The solution is often a query to the author. "The Freestyle Stroke" advises the editor to prepare the author gently for the extensive editing to follow. Ironically, the exercise "Stakeholders", in which the editor is to write a detailed let-

ter instead of making changes in the text, seemed tedious and patronizing of the author. Surely the author wondered why an editor who would tell her precisely what changes to make ("Start with paragraph 4.") would not simply have edited it. I could not help but contrast it with the straightforward approach of "The Freestyle Stroke"; its extensive editing would, I thought, be accepted more readily by the author.

These differences aside, the exercises consistently preserve the authorial presence. Indeed, 1 exercise, "A Clerical Error", asks the editor to repair another's overzealous edit. Also welcome is a reminder that in "fixing" an inconsistency, the editor must guard against substituting 2 errors for one—consistent but wrong. A careful author query may be the only safe solution.

The range of materials is wide, from cookbooks and map editing to bibliogra-

phies and type markup. Every one is a challenge for the critical eye of an editor. If a friend wants to know what you do, show them an exercise from this book. The cookbook exercise, "Recipes for Art," would be a good one for science editors to select. You might be surprised at what you learn about what you do.

Walter Pagel

Walter Pagel, director of Scientific Publications at The University of Texas, M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, hires editors and trains them and for 25 years has edited scientific and medical manuscripts and grant proposals. As a member of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) Executive Committee, he helped develop the certification examination for editors in the life sciences.