

## Editorial Research; Numerals in CBE Views

The paper by Thomas Lang, "Physical and Processing Characteristics of Manuscripts Submitted for Substantive Editing" (*CBE Views* 1996;19(5):111-5), is a gem. It is full of both information and insight and should be useful for other editors, program administrators, and authors.

I hope that it will encourage other CBE members to undertake original research on the editorial process. Those of us who are convinced that good editing adds substantial value to good science are likely to be under increasing pressure to prove our case. Mr. Lang's article is a strong start on understanding demands for editorial input and effort, but we also need research on improvements in communication to the reader, the value of good editing (including queries) in improving the substantive content of a paper, publishability (as determined by journal editors), and many other matters. The relation between scientific quality and editorial quality at the time of initial submission, is particularly intriguing and raises many hypotheses with substantial implications.

For many decades, scientists, editors, and others have made grand claims about things they see as vital to their professions, such as journal peer review, academic tenure, the positive reinforcement between teaching and research, and good editing. These are only now beginning to come under serious scientific study. Mr. Lang's paper opens new territory, and I hope that other CBE members will think hard about how they can do original research on additional matters related to our profession.

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*Editor's Note: The editors and editorial board of CBE Views welcome submission of manuscripts presenting the results of editorial research. As a way to stimulate research, perhaps formal or informal discussions at CBE annual meetings or in the pages of CBE Views*

*might help possible researchers identify the truly important issues and how best to study them.*

May I put in my 2¢ worth regarding the use of numerals in *CBE Views*? I'm glad you brought up the subject.

Somewhere in a recent issue I was stopped cold by the expression "on the 1 hand". Then I began to notice that the whole publication was peppered with numerals that had little or nothing to do with enumeration or quantification in any usual sense. Don't you think it's misleading, not to mention a tad pretentious, to write vaguely defined words as numerals, which by their very nature imply precision?

We can and do use numbers for qualitative descriptions that are no more exact than "a few" or "some" or "many". A crowd of 1000s . . . 100s of years from now . . . 1 000 000 and 1 reasons—ugh! How ungraceful. Next thing you know, we'll be writing "1 crowd of 1000s". By extension, "once" will become "1 time"—1 time in a while. Then, for the sake of consistency—that hallmark of good editing—we'll use numerals in expressions like "numero 1". (How about the national restaurant chain, Pizzeria 1?)

It we really want to get into the pseudo-precision thing, there are other possibilities: Tom, Dick + Harry . . . \$s to donuts . . . @ no time . . . seeing \*s. Think of the savings—less paper, less ink, less labor. (A keystroke saved is a keystroke saved, I guess. Life is short. As long as the meaning is clear, why waste time trying to craft graceful prose?)

Having said all this, I do have to add that I think you're doing a great job with *CBE Views*. The new "departments", with their practical, workaday focus, are a nice addition, giving members a chance to network long-distance. The publication could stand a new look—something a little brighter; but the changes I've noticed (3-column format, for example) are good, and I'm sure there will be more.

Your editorial in the October-November 1996 issue was a joy to read (despite "flying

from 1 city to another"). "Rummaging around my mental attic"—what a nice metaphor. Get rid of the visually disruptive numerals in descriptive text and you will have a publication that is as pleasant to read as it is informative.

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*Editor's Note: We're glad that you enjoy the content, if not the numerals, in CBE Views. Thanks for writing. As you may know, even though it is not a scientific journal, CBE Views follows the style recommended by Scientific Style and Format (SSF) as a way to help readers become familiar with it. Most responders to a question in the "Review the Views" survey about using SSF style supported that decision, but a few described the use of arabic numerals as pedantic, too formal, distracting, annoying, and jarring. What do the rest of you think? Should we continue to use the style recommended by SSF, including arabic numerals? Let us hear from you.*

### The WordWatcher

*The Weak-Verb Syndrome—Edited Examples (see page 69)*

Treatment failed in 45 patients . . .  
The subgroup analysis has to be interpreted . . .  
Pregnant mice are protected without . . .  
. . . if the government forgave loans to medical school graduates.  
Asthma was significantly exacerbated 24 times during . . .  
The data coordinating center entered the data a second time to verify them.