

# Gifts for and from Editors: Thoughts from CBE Members

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As the year end approaches, thoughts and conversation often turn to gifts. Science editors might wonder what, if anything, to give staff members, board members, and other associates. They also might ponder how to reply when friends and family ask what they themselves want.

To obtain ideas on gifts for and from editors, I informally surveyed by e-mail various CBE members of my acquaintance. The following are some highlights of the

responses.

## **Different Cultures**

Customs regarding gifts vary widely among editorial offices, the responses soon made clear.

“I’ve never given a gift to or received one from a science editor. That’s just not part of my culture”, one long-time editor wrote. “I always took my staff out for dinner once a year, and occasionally invited them to my house, but that was the extent of my gifting (unless you count handling our salary raises).”

In contrast, another editor reported being

“on a journal which has a long tradition of giving all the editorial board members gifts”. Usually, the gifts have been items of clothing with the journal’s logo embroidered on them. Gifts also have included calculators, desk clocks, and backpacks or canvas carry-on bags bearing the journal’s logo.

## **Books: A Favorite**

“We have also given out bound copies of the journal each year, sometimes with the member’s name embossed on them”, this editor added. “Recently that’s switched to a CD-ROM of the journal.” He noted that

other possibilities were style manuals, books on interpreting statistical tests, and other reference works useful to editors.

Indeed, various respondents mentioned books and software as favorite gifts. Among books noted as preferred picks were the new American Medical Association Manual of Style (1), Edith Schwager's Medical Usage and Abusage (2), an unabridged dictionary, and, of course, the CBE manual, Scientific Style and Format (3).

"Book certificates to university bookstores are particularly delightful", wrote San Diego editor Elizabeth Whalen. She added, "One of my editing colleagues asks me for a gift idea every year, and I'm always ready with a list of books that I've seen reviewed in CBE Views, the AMWA Journal, Editorial Eye, or Copy Editor." Other editors mentioned gathering gift ideas from holiday issues of *The New York Times Review of Books* and gift-books sections of *Science News*.

Bookmarks and bookplates, especially those with scientific or medical themes, can serve well as smaller gifts. Lightweight, they can easily be sent or carried to colleagues overseas.

### For the Desk or Computer

For a much larger gift, several respondents recommended an "editor's desk". "It's a slanted board with two recessed areas, one for pencils and one for books, etc.", explained Marianne Mallia, of the Texas Heart Institute. "It allows me to edit without straining my neck." Respondents noted that such a "desk", which sits atop a conventional desk or table, is available from the Levenson Company (4).

Similarly, Susan Eastwood, of the University of California, San Francisco, recommended a "standing desk" ("a tall pedestal with foot rest and a quite large, tilted writing surface that one can stand at and write comfortably"). She also listed a "book pillow" on which to prop a book on one's lap as one reads.

Editors suggested various desk accessories as gifts. A number mentioned giving or receiving pens, including antique fountain

pens and favorite types of pens for editing. "The price range of pens allows considerable variety and flexibility", Jason Moore, of Houston, observed, "as well as ready ability to match the pen with both person and budget." Mechanical pencils also can make good gifts.

Well-traveled editor Seth Beckerman, who had "just battled with several motel telephone systems while attempting to retrieve my e-mail", wrote that "a 'road warrior' kit might be a useful gift for someone who travels with a laptop." He said that such a kit could include connectors and adapters, extension cords for telephone and electricity, and "Velcro strips to keep all cords neat and tidy".

Gifts mentioned by other editors included an ergonomic keyboard (which lets one's hands rest in a more natural position than a regular keyboard does), attractively designed desk sets (consisting of, for example, a ruler, a stapler, a letter opener, and scissors), electronic "personal organizers" (containing "do list", date book, calculator, and so forth), and paperweights. On the lower and lighter end, one editor mentioned liking to receive pads of self-adhesive notes bearing humorous sayings or illustrations.

### On a Lighter Note

Other editors also identified favorite less serious gifts. "I treasure an old circuit board given me by technical writers, a weather gauge consisting of a rock suspended by a leather thong (if it moves, it's windy outside), and a miniature wok because I like wok puns", emeritus CBE member Domenic Fuccillo wrote. "I guess the best gifts have a personality like the givers, and perhaps the receivers."

Susan Eastwood suggested giving "a pair of 'popping dolls' (small, rubber space creatures: Squeeze them and their eyes, nose, and ears pop out) for exercising keyboard-weary hands, relieving stress, and providing a much-needed laugh from time to time!" Another editor mentioned giving chocolates or tiny bottles of champagne.

Walter Pagel, of the MD Anderson Cancer Center, said that his most humorous gift

was a "brown-nosing gorilla", which his staff gave him on Bosses' Day. "You punch a button", he noted, "and it says things like 'good idea', and 'fantastic', and 'you're a genius'."

As an alternative to the usual pens and books, Walter's office sometimes has given departing editors saplings. "So many editors are closet landscapers", he observes.

### Gifts Other Than Goods

Along such lines, Ellen W Chu, editorial director of Northwest Environment Watch, sent a reminder to keep the environment in mind. Limit consumption, she advised; choose gifts that leave little "ecological wake", or consider trading services instead of goods.

Indeed, some respondents did suggest gifts other than merchandise. "How about a membership in CBE?" Frances Porcher of Atlanta asked. "Maybe we should institute a gift membership that is cheap for a supervisor to give."

Seth Beckerman offered another suggestion: thanking a mentor, or offering to be a mentor oneself. "Not all gifts", he noted, "are wrapped with pretty paper and tied with a ribbon."

For me, some of the most welcome gifts are submissions to CBE Views. Those of you who recently have written pieces for Views or helped with the publication in other ways: Please accept my year-end thanks. 

### References

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