

## What Authors Really Mean

"Everyone in the field knows what XYZ is." Seasoned editors know the true meaning of this comment: "I haven't a clue, but everybody uses it." Early in one's career, or when one is working in an unfamiliar field, the "everyone knows" (EOK) response typically elicits a frantic search of reference works or a rereading of 17 background articles. The long-time prose strategist, however, knows what to say to an EOK: "I'm sure that's true, but could you remind me? I'm putting together a list so I won't have to bother authors with these annoying questions."

Yes, that analysis sounds a bit condescending, the approach somewhat manipulative. But it's a jungle of egos out there. To survive, editors of all descriptions—from "authors" to "in-chief"—must learn what authors really mean. Further examples follow.

I know the print is blurred, but I'll get a better one before publication.

Translation: I just KNOW the next gal will work.

You don't need to see the reviews—that's just technical stuff you wouldn't understand.

Translation: I got creamed. They hate it and think the conclusions are overblown, the data poorly presented, and the experimental design sketchy. They're idiots.

This journal just loves summary tables in the introduction.

Translation: Look, I made this table and I'm bloody well going to use it. . . . Besides, it's easier than writing.

I've given the means for 3 experiments to save space.

Translation: I couldn't replicate the damned thing.

I need this back within 48 hours because these findings are really HOT.

Translation: The tenure and promotions committee is meeting next week.



Cartoon by Richard Cunningham

We have modified the manuscript in accord with the reviewers' comments and suggestions and have accepted the majority of their suggestions.

Translation: We did exactly 51% of what those idiots asked.

And my personal favorite, a line that has reverberated through my many years as a copy, managing, and author's editor:

We prefer not to propose a definite explanatory mechanism as causation appears to be multifactorial.

Loosely translated, this typically means, "Nobody knows what the hell is going on here, but we've got lots of data."

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