

Guides for the Perplexed, or How to Do Anything Better: The CSE GuideLines Series

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The CSE GuideLines Series was originally conceived of as a series of small booklets that could be compiled as needed to target various audiences for specific purposes, said Susan Eastwood. Five booklets are now available. This session at the CSE annual meeting featured discussions of each of the GuideLines and potential topics for future booklets.

The CSE GuideLine “The Publication Process at Biomedical Journals” was written for novice writers and authors who are not familiar with the publication process to give them an idea of what happens when they submit manuscripts, said Karyn Popham, who was sitting in for Karen Klein, author of the GuideLine, who could not be present. She explained that

this GuideLine breaks down the publication process into an input-output system. First, authors’ editors can help a manuscript before it is “input” for a journal. Communicating an important message, choosing the right journal, and correcting distracting flaws are all steps that authors and editors can take to help make submissions more likely to be accepted. The “output” may take the form of rejection without review, acceptance with revisions, or acceptance without revisions. All comments should be taken as a good editor’s critique. The next “input” for the journal should include a cover letter addressing all previous concerns about the manuscript, complete figures, and a disk of the files. The author should still carefully check proofs to make sure that data and text are properly represented.

David E Nadziejka discussed the GuideLine “Levels of Technical Editing”, which he wrote. Most levels-of-editing systems include at one extreme a “light” editing level, which includes general copyediting and spell-checking, and at the other extreme a “rewriting” level, in which the editor contributes content to the author’s original work. Nadziejka developed a new system for defining levels of editing. This three-step system includes some technical editing even at its lowest level. He pointed out that light editing normally includes only mechanics and copyediting; this emphasis is necessarily eased to make the technical content of the manuscript a component of even the lightest of editing. The three steps in the system are rush editing, standard editing, and revision editing. This system provides a way of addressing an author’s main concerns at every level of editing, Nadziejka said.

The “Posters and Poster Sessions” GuideLine is particularly useful for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows who

are preparing posters for the first time, said Shirley M Peterson. It gives pointers on how people read, how to assemble a poster, what colors to use, how to divide space, and what to take to the poster session.

To illustrate the need for the GuideLine “Editing Science Graphs”, Peterson showed several examples of graphs that needed editing. For example, one graph was inconsistent between its chart label and its y-axis labels. In another example, two side-by-side pie graphs that were meant to illustrate a significant difference could not be compared because the wedges did not start at the same radius. Possible areas for improvement in most graphs include textual descriptions and graphic representations of data.

The GuideLine “Editing Grant Proposals” offers advice to editors that includes ensuring that the grant application is complete, that it follows the rules of the request for applications, that the specific aims of the grant are clear, and that the text supports those aims. Popham suggested cross-checking the timeline, budget, budget justification, and narrative to make sure that they are all in agreement.

Finally, Miriam Bloom, who is the general editor of the GuideLines series, listed a few potential forthcoming titles in the series, including developing an in-house style guide, producing digital figures, the ethics of editing, and setting up a portable office. Other potential topics include preparing meeting presentations, writing and editing proposals and contracts, preparing slides, and careers in editing.

Anyone interested in suggesting titles or writing GuideLines should get in touch with Miriam Bloom. 