

## Tom Lang: When Pen Meets Sword

The “pen is mightier than the sword”, according to 19th-century playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who penned the famous line in *Richelieu*. Even so, CSE past president and skilled martial artist Tom Lang prefers to study both, just in case.

Lang, currently chair of CSE’s awards committee and representative to the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), heads a consulting company, Tom Lang Communications, based near Sacramento, California. As a consultant, he offers medical writing and editing services, consultation on document design and scientific publications, and on-site training in medical writing, statistical reporting, and critical appraisal for a variety of domestic and international clients.

Previously, Lang has been manager of medical editing services at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio, and a senior scientific writer in evidence-based medicine at Tufts University and New England Medical Center in Boston. In addition, Lang has worked as a grants officer, a technical writer, a masseur, and a normal volunteer for medical research at the National Institutes of Health. His publications include several articles and book chapters about communication and his 1997 book (with Michelle Secic), *How to Report Statistics in Medicine: Annotated Guidelines for Authors, Editors, and Reviewers*.

Lang also frequently teaches medical writing and editing courses around the world and has presented more than 100 3-hour workshops at national and regional AMWA conferences. In 2002, Lang’s work earned him the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award from AMWA and the Excellence in Continuing Education Award from the American Statistical Association.

Established as he is in the medical editing field, Lang’s interest in martial arts traces back even further. His passion for martial arts began when he was just a child. At age 6 or 7, Lang wrote away for a book on jujitsu, a weaponless Japanese martial art that emphasizes throwing, grappling, joint locking, and restorative



massage. “I remember as a kid being fascinated by the thought that a small person could overcome a larger person by using leverage”, he said.

Lang never lost that fascination, and in 1971 he took a physical education class in jujitsu while a student at California State University, Chico. With practice, both his interest and his skill continued to grow. “I just fell in love with the body mechanics of it”, he said.

Lang has since earned a fourth-degree black belt in jujitsu from the American Judo and Jujitsu Federation and a second-degree black belt in iaido, the art of Japanese sword drawing, from the All Japan Kendo Federation. He teaches both arts about twice a week in Sonora, California. Lang also has taught jo and hanbo, the 4-ft and 3-ft staffs, and sword drawing, and he is the author or coauthor of related books, including *The Japanese Short Staff and Jujitsu: Techniques and Tactics*.

For Lang, practicing jujitsu and iaido is not just a hobby independent of his career. In many ways, the study of martial arts has nurtured Lang’s interest in biomedical communication and has equipped him with skills for the task.

In the late 1970s, for example, changes in rank examination requirements made it necessary for jujitsu students to learn the human body’s response to various strikes. “That’s really where I got my background in anatomy and physiology”, Lang said.

Jujitsu continued to manifest itself in Lang's medical writing throughout the years, as in his 1984 article for *Annals of Emergency Medicine* called "Katsu: traditional Japanese resuscitation techniques". The article described many traditional Japanese resuscitation techniques included in the system of jujitsu practiced by Lang but unknown to Western medicine.

Even Lang's success as a medical writing and editing instructor has its roots in martial arts. It was by teaching jujitsu and iaido that, Lang says, he first learned the voice projection, clarity, organization, and confidence required to teach effectively.

Loosely translated, *jujitsu* means "to

give way without giving in or giving up". Whether in writing, editing, or teaching, that skill has become an integral part of Lang's professional and personal life.

"In martial arts, you encounter an opponent", he explained. "In life, you encounter adversity. . . . One of the things I have learned is to give way when necessary but not give in or give up when faced with adversity."

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