

Teaching Scientific Writing: Early Contributions of the Council

Domenic A Fuccillo

Editor's note: Emeritus member Domenic A Fuccillo contributed this piece in honor of CSE's 50th anniversary.

In 1962, while I was attending my first meeting of the Conference of Biological Editors (the early forerunner of CSE), Vernon Bryson of Rutgers invited me to join an informal group of "fledgling writers", as David E Davis called them. Davis, chairman of the CBE Committee on Graduate Training in Scientific Writing, was following up on a CBE recommendation that a group of articles be written to improve writing and manuscript preparation at the postgraduate level.

Our group discussed how that could be done, and, because I was fresh out of journalism school and easy pickings, it tapped me to conduct a survey of CBE's 170 editors about the manuscripts they received.¹ Other members of the group also began writing articles, following those such as Selma DeBakey,² who had been suggesting how authors could write better medical papers.

Enter F Peter Woodford, editor of the *Journal of Atherosclerosis Research* and *Journal of Lipid Research*, who began drafting a manual for teachers of scientific writing.

In his 1967 draft, Woodford praised Davis's pioneer work and cited the chapter on writing in the CBE *Style Manual for Biological Journals*.³ He acknowledged help given to the committee by Lois DeBakey⁴ and others.

Woodford tested the 1967 draft with prospective teachers. The Alfred P Sloan Foundation sponsored a series of annual CBE workshops to encourage the use of

the manual. At one workshop, with other editors, I began to appreciate the difficult task scientists face in writing up a research project. Many of those editors stepped up to the equally hard task of teaching scientists to write better manuscripts.

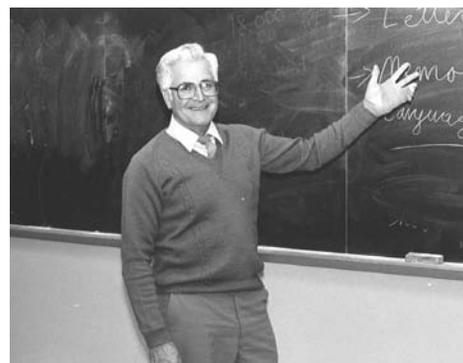
We gathered courage from the draft and workshop to persuade our institutions to start workshops. A few years earlier, Lois DeBakey⁵ had proposed and succeeded in organizing what appear to have been the first curriculum-approved courses in the subject at a medical school, Tulane (personal communication, 8 December 2006).

I taught many writing workshops alongside my regular editorial duties. For 7 years at the University of Wisconsin, I taught a full-semester course in technical writing, using Woodford's material for graduate students who were writing research papers.

Scientific Writing for Graduate Students,⁶ the printed version of the manual, was first published in 1968 by Rockefeller University Press under CBE copyright. The Council later became publisher and issued a fourth reprinting, with references updated by Woodford, in 1986. In 1999, CBE published "a completely rewritten, updated version".⁷

The updated version lists two collaborators, Maureen Goode and Barbara Gastel. Goode coauthored the chapter on writing research-grant proposals and Gastel, the chapter on communicating science to the public. Woodford's 1967 draft lists a chapter on "Writing for a Wider Audience" by Theodore Melnechuk, who gave a paper on the subject at the CBE workshop I attended. His chapter did not appear in Woodford's first edition.

From the draft version to the present edi-



Domenic A Fuccillo teaching technical writing at the University of Wisconsin (around 1980)

tion, the manual has been used for many courses in the United States and elsewhere. Woodford was CBE chairman (president) in 1968-1969. 📄

References

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