

*Writing Scientific Papers in English. An ELSE-Ciba Foundation Guide for Authors*

by Maeve O'Connor and F. Peter Woodford

Associated Scientific Publishers; Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1975

vii + 108 pages. Dfl. 21.00; \$ 8.75

In the Introduction the process of getting down to writing a scientific paper is likened to trying to start an old car on a frosty morning — though an editor might be forgiven for thinking that some authors have cars connected to a refinery and never turn off the ignition. Anyhow, the book is about how to get the old car started. It is a guide for scientists of any nationality who want to submit papers to journals published in English, though much of its advice will also be valuable to English-speaking authors.

The first two chapters are about planning and preparing. They advise you only to write when you have something original to say, to choose a 'target' journal and read its instructions to authors, and how to decide whose names will be on the paper. They also contain sections on organizing the paper, designing tables and illustrations, and obtaining permission to reproduce copyright material. The next three chapters describe how to write the first draft — preferably at one sitting — revise it, and, finally, refine it. In them there is much useful information, for example on preparing illustrations and lists of references and on the intricacies of the English language. Certainly if the last is taken to heart papers will be much less flatulent than they are so often now. The sections on problems with verbs, pronouns, nouns, verbosity and pomposity, imprecision, and punctuation are well done and good reading. Why no attempt has been made to guide writers through the pitfalls in the use of definite and indefinite articles in English is beyond me. From not inconsiderable experience I think this is one of the most difficult things for non-English speakers to master.

There follow useful chapters on typing, submitting the paper, and responding to the editor. The last is full of very sound advice such as, when one's paper is rejected, 'consider contesting the decision only if you honestly think, after considerable reflection and at least one night's sleep, that the editor and referees have made a superficial or wrong judgement.' The final chapter is about correcting proofs.

The five appendices list the steps in writing a paper, describe the SI system of units and their abbreviations, list general abbreviations and symbols and those of particular use in biochemistry and taxonomy. By far the best, that provides entertaining bedside reading, is a list of expressions to avoid or leave out. The reader is told to omit the expressions 'concerning this effect, it may be borne in mind that', 'it is of interest to note that', and many others and to use the appropriate preposition such as in, for, about, with, instead of such ridiculous phrases as; 'in regard to', 'in relation to', 'in respect of', 'in terms of', 'in the case of', 'in the context of'. There is a useful bibliography and the ISO's recommendation and transliteration of Slavic Cyrillic alphabets is reproduced.

This is a well written book, well proofread, and undoubtedly useful. It is perhaps a little tedious to an English-speaking reader, somewhat repetitive, and, to my mind, subdivides the process of writing a paper into too many steps. This may have been deliberate and is perhaps useful for readers not very familiar with English. Editors of journals published in English will be heartened if their authors pay attention to the precepts in this book but they may regret being less frequently able to reject a paper on the grounds that it is atrociously written.

S. P. Datta

*Review of Dynamics of Energy-Transducing Membranes.* FEBS Lett. (1975) 55, 294. The reviewer regrets an incorrect citation in paragraph 1. The show, based upon the stories of Damon Runyon, in which occurs the song 'Luck be a lady', is of course 'Guys and Dolls', and not 'Pal Joey'!