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Cooperation Between Authors and Copy Editors: One Key to High-Quality Publications

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Notes from a Copy Editor

Cooperation Between Authors and Copy Editors: One Key to High-Quality Publications

Elizabeth Whalen¹

The copy, or manuscript, editor is the person who prepares a manuscript for the final printing process. Ideally, the author and the copy editor work together to produce a published article that pleases both the author and the readers and that meets the publication standards of the Journal. Undoubtedly, some authors do not understand the responsibilities of the copy editor. The best articles are those that are skillfully written by the author and then polished, with the author's approval, by the copy editor. In this short paper I try to encourage this cooperative effort by suggesting ways that authors can work effectively with copy editors.

Submitting the Manuscript: Follow the Guidelines

The first step in cooperating with the copy editor is to follow the guidelines for authors that are printed in every issue of the *AJNR*. Most of the guidelines concern the format of the paper and are steps that can be performed easily by the typist or word processor who is preparing the manuscript for submission. The author should make sure that this person has a copy of these guidelines and that they are followed closely. If a problem arises, (e.g., the figures cannot be prepared in the manner requested), it should be stated in a cover letter, explaining why an exception to the guidelines is necessary. Authors should always feel free to telephone the editorial office for clarification of the guidelines.

At the *AJNR*, "Notes from a Copy Editor" are sent along with the editor's letter requesting revision. These Notes typically request clarifications, point out discrepancies, and indi-

cate potential problems that should be resolved in the revision. It is easier and more efficient to make these changes at this stage rather than later in the publication process.

Revising the Manuscript: Communicate with the Editorial Office

Authors are encouraged to communicate with the editorial office at every stage of the publication process, especially at the revision stage. An author who tries to guess at what is required in a revision will probably face more revisions. Any time the comments from the editor or reviewers are not clear, the author should call the editorial office and discuss the problem.

If authors believe they will have trouble complying with all the requests, they should find out what changes are obligatory. Changes in format are requested on the assumption that most articles are prepared on a word processor and thus the changes will be easy to make. If an author disagrees with any of the requested changes, the substance of the disagreement should be stated in a cover letter. If authors are uncertain about how to handle any aspect of the revision, they should call the editorial office—the answers are there.

After Acceptance: Expect Changes and Make Corrections Clearly

After an accepted article is copyedited, the author receives a copy of the edited manuscript along with the author "gal-

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leys." These galleys are oversized sheets of paper with columns of type; the long columns are then cut up and arranged with the figures into the page-length format that appears in the Journal. The author should not be shocked by all the marks on the manuscript. Many of the marks simply tell the printer what size type to use and how to format the paper.

A copy editor reads through a paper and tries to see it as a typical Journal reader would. If a sentence is unclear or the choice of words is not precise, the copy editor will make changes to clarify the meaning. Copy editors use specific guidelines and standard references so that the Journal will have a consistent style and the reader will not be misled by inappropriate or odd usage of words. Clarity, simplicity, and brevity are our goals. The copy editor also checks consistency of data as much as possible. Because authors often make many revisions and data are changed, added, or subtracted each time, the final draft sometimes includes tables or figures that do not agree with the text. The copy editor is the last person to look at the paper with such a close eye before publication, and we strive to find and resolve all inconsistencies before any article is published.

If any of these changes are objectionable, the author has an opportunity to make that clear on the galley itself. If an author writes, "Your editing changed the meaning; reinstate the original," chances are good that the original *will* be reinstated. However, it is even better when the author provides a new sentence in which the original meaning is more clearly stated (if the copy editor is confused by the original, perhaps the readers will be, too). Copy editors certainly do not want to change the author's meaning or ruin his style; we want to polish the article so that it is a credit to the author and to the Journal. If the author finds typographic errors in the galleys, he should mark the needed correction clearly in the wide margin.

The copy editor also determines the size and layout of the figures in each article. The editor indicates how the figures are to be cropped so that the area of interest is clearly featured and then determines what size figure is most appropriate. The quality of a reproduced figure depends mostly on the quality of the original. Authors receive proofs of their

figures with the galleys; they can tell from those proofs what part of each figure will be shown and how large each figure will be. If they think that a figure has been cropped incorrectly, sized too small or too large, or printed too light or too dark, they should indicate that on the figure proof and put a note about the change on the galley page that contains the figure legends.

Authors will also find queries to the author on their galleys. It is important that these queries be answered, even if the author simply writes, "OK as is," because we do not have time to telephone every author about every question. The questions have been written by the copy editors on the manuscript page and are indicated on the galley by the stamp "AUTHOR QUERY, SEE MS. PAGE X." If authors write their answers clearly in the wide margin on the galley page near the query stamp in question, the copy editor will be sure to see the answer and make whatever change is necessary.

Any author who disagrees with the Journal's style is welcome to state an opinion. However, occasionally, we may decide to retain our original change (particularly in regard to hyphens and commas) to maintain consistency within the Journal.

Conclusion

The copyediting process is provided as a service to the authors. The computer codes are marked on the manuscript so that the printer will prepare each article for publication in consistent *AJNR* format, and the pages are analyzed carefully to make sure that the appearance of each article is attractive. When changes in wording are made, it is with the belief that the author is the scientist and originator of data and we are the "word crafters," striving to make each article concise, clear, and correct. If we make mistakes, we hope the authors will find them when they look at the galleys; we will gladly correct them. We have a stake, as authors do, in maintaining the high quality of articles published in the *AJNR*, and we respect without question every author's right to be satisfied with the article that bears his name.