

# The BELS Letter

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

Promoting editorial proficiency in the life sciences

## From the President

Well, 2021 is already off to a busy start!

I hope you were able to join our exclusive, members-only event in January to learn more about PerfectIt proofreading software from its CEO and founder, Daniel Heuman. While this software does NOT take the place of skilled human editors (like us!), it does help make our lives a little easier by pointing out inconsistencies and potential errors for editorial review. A 30% discount on a single license is a perk for BELS members, and you can find out more about it at <https://intelligentediting.com>.

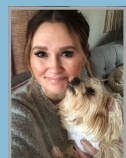
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### *The BELS Letter*

Karen Stanwood, ELS  
(with Eevee)  
Managing Editor



Alex Rudie  
Publications Coordinator

# From the President

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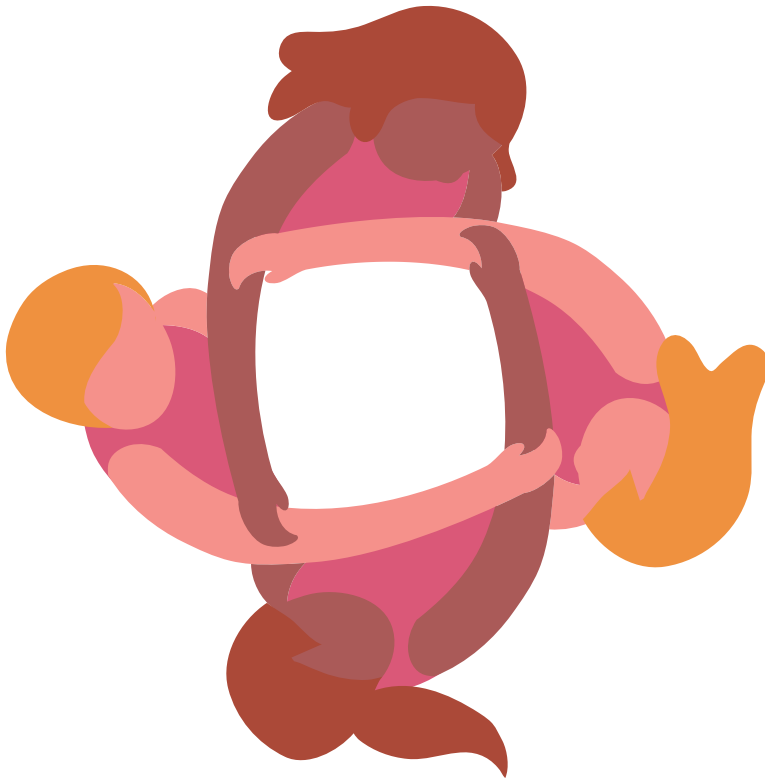
We also welcomed a new ELS(D) in January: Joely Taylor, PhD, AE, ELS(D). Joely (pictured at right) is the proprietor of [Well Writ](#), based in Camberwell, Victoria, Australia. Congratulations, Joely, on your outstanding achievement!

This issue's Ask the Editors addresses room temperature, and there are new photos in the BELS Gallery and new Featured Members. I hope you enjoy this issue! We welcome your feedback about the newsletter at any time; email us at [info@bels.org](mailto:info@bels.org).

*Kristina Wasson-Blader, PhD, ELS  
BELS President*



*Joely Taylor*



## Renew Your Membership!

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# Ask the Editors

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Related to using “RT” for room temperature, I advise authors against using that altogether. RT is not correct/precise scientific reporting. I advise the author(s) to report the room temperature in degrees Celsius instead of the sloppy use of RT. On another note, RT is a lazy abbreviation. Why not have an autocorrect entry to change RT to “room temperature” and spell it out for the sake of clarity (similar to WT for wild-type or wild type). Generally, a term needs to be used more than 4–5 times in the text to qualify to be abbreviated.

Does anyone else agree with me on not using RT? I relate the use of RT to reporting the centrifuge rotation (rpm) instead of the relative centrifugal force. It is noninformative..

*Farid Rahimi, PhD, ELS*

I agree that “room temperature” is very imprecise. The problem is that most scientists don’t record the ambient temperature at the time of every experiment, so “room temperature” is the best you’re going to get.

Autocorrecting RT to room temperature is going to be problematic when it is used for reverse transcription, real time, or some other reasonable use. At most, I would search and replace, checking each instance before replacing.

*Naomi Ruff, PhD, ELS*

I agree about not using RT. I would spell RT out everywhere and put the room temperature range in parentheses at the first mention, like this: “...kept at room temperature (20–22 °C [68–72 °F]).”

*Melissa L. Bogen, ELS*

I’d like to add one more consideration to the RT conversation. The correct definition of RT and how it should be described does depend on the audience and the context. Everyone who replied so far with their opinion is correct, depending on the audience.

*Gregory C. Cuca, MS, ELS*

Per the journal’s style, “room temperature,” whether abbreviated or not, is defined in degrees Celsius at the first instance and can be used many times in a protocol in which, for example, centrifugation is performed repeatedly. And the journal does not allow rpm to be used when stating centrifugation conditions (which must be specified, no matter how brief the step).

*Jean Marie Cassidy, ELS*

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# Ask the Editors

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I agree with Naomi (although I'm pretty sure I helped write the style rule Jean's referring to in *Nature Protocols*, Jean?). I normally try to query for a "temperature or temperature RANGE" for "room temperature" because some experimenters might in fact maintain a fairly carefully controlled room temperature, and most don't, and it could matter which it is for some experiments, but not for most. I used to get 25 C a fair bit because that was an old chemists' convention for "standard temperature" (although now that is defined as 0 C, I think), but not so much lately. Usually people reply with a more reasonable 21 or 22 C, and sometimes they say something like 21–23 C (which is probably more likely), but either way, I think it's useful to make authors consider this, including the crucial question of how precise they think they should be with it. As editors, messing around with scientists' preferred or instinctive level of precision is a bad idea, I find, whether in this or in adjusting the number of significant digits or anywhere else. If they don't think they need to be too exact with their "room temperature" specificity and want to just say 22 C and ignore possible minor

variations, then that's most likely OK for the situation they're describing.

As for RT, yes, I would avoid. At least in what I've worked on lately (which does skew toward molecular biology), the main use now is "reverse transcription." "Real time" is mostly omitted now because so much PCR is "real time," and it's no longer a terribly interesting aspect of a technique, and other uses are potentially confusing.

*Rebecca M. Barr, MS, ELS*

On the basis of extensive experience with compendial science, I respectfully submit that controlled room temperature and room temperature are scientifically valid and useful constructs; indeed, pharmaceutical stability studies are based on these foundational concepts.

The major pharmacopeias devote some effort to defining, measuring, and studying the effects of environmental conditions during pharmaceutical manufacturing and distribution. For example, reliable and well-managed about cold-chain

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# Ask the Editors

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custody and distribution are crucial for some vaccines.

I grant that reverse transcription is sexier than monitoring tablets and capsules in a box during degradation studies, but physical chemists do important work and deserve professional respect.

*Stefan Schuber, PhD, MS, ELS*

Some thoughts prompted by the discussion.

In the past, both RT or WT were great time savers for readers and writers. The difference between “RT” and “room temperature” was rather noticeable for those who had to write or type (and re-write and re-type) their theses and papers without the luxury of copying and pasting. As to “RT” vs. “RT-PCR,” it’s a bit like “but” and “button”; no one would confuse them, right?

“RT” or “room temperature” means that the procedure can be done on your working bench without cooling or heating equipment to control the temperature. An interpretation of

room temperature as 20–22 °C or 21–23 °C narrows down the range too much. For example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines for labs describe the optimal temperature as 20–25 °C. Anyway, if the difference between 18 °C, 20 °C, 22 °C, and 23 °C is important for the outcome, no scientist will describe the conditions as “room temperature.”

*Alexandra V. Andreeva, PhD, ELS*

## Have a Question for Ask the Editors?

Email your question or topic to [info@bels.org](mailto:info@bels.org), and we’ll crowdsource BELS members’ thoughts, opinions, and answers.



# BELS Gallery

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*“I love that my begonias bloom all winter. They bring some cheer to the long winter season here in Minnesota. I am also very fond of my garden-themed mug, advertising our municipal compost. (Note that the leaf contains an image of Lake Superior.)”*

*~ Naomi Ruff, PhD, ELS*

**Send your BELS Gallery photos to [info@bels.org](mailto:info@bels.org)**

## BELS Featured Members



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### MEMBER PROFILE

*Kelli Rhea Minor,  
MLS, ELS*

Senior Medical Editor  
Nucleus Global

Year of ELS certification:  
2009

Grammar pet peeve:  
incorrect use of 'your'  
instead of 'you're'



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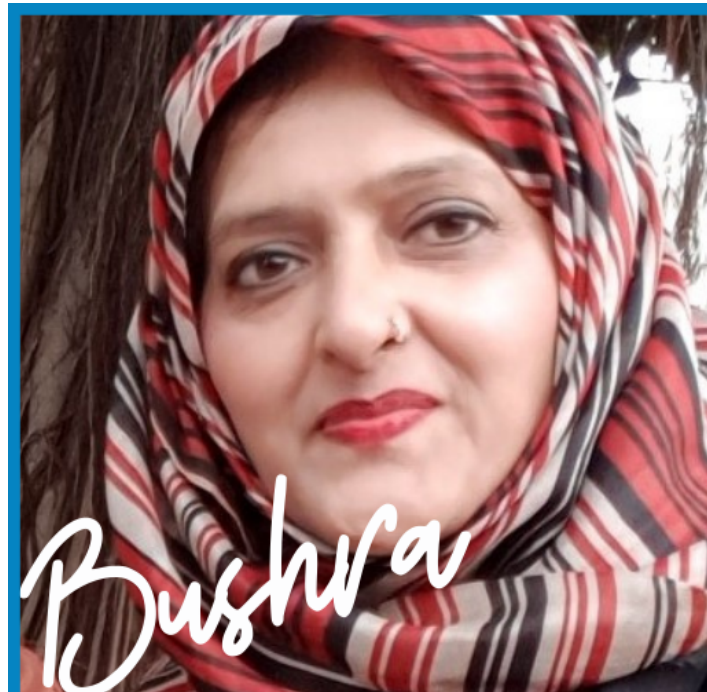
*Sally Woollett, ELS*

Freelance

Year of ELS certification:  
2005

Grammar pet peeve:  
the decline of the semi-colon;  
it seems that some publishers  
have abandoned this important  
form of punctuation

## BELS Featured Members



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*Bushra Rashid,  
PhD, ELS*

Freelance Editor  
C I INFOSOLUTIONS

Year of ELS certification:  
2010

Grammar pet peeve:  
when writers do not focus on  
parallel construction



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### MEMBER PROFILE

*Jane M. Krauhs, PhD,  
ELS(D)*

Retired, KBR

Year of ELS certification:  
2001

Grammar pet peeve:  
failure to be concise, e.g.,  
'allow for,' 'could potentially'



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The Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) was founded in 1991 to evaluate the proficiency of manuscript editors in the life sciences and to award credentials similar to those obtainable in other professions.

Potential employers and clients of manuscript editors usually have no objective way to assess the proficiency of editors. For their part, editors are frustrated by the difficulty of demonstrating their ability. That is why both employers and editors so often resort to personal references or ad hoc tests, not always with satisfactory results. The need for an objective test of editorial skill has long been recognized.

To meet that need, BELS developed a process for testing and evaluating proficiency in editing in the life sciences. The Board administers two examinations—one for certification and one for diplomate status. The examinations, written by senior life-science editors assisted by testing experts, focus on the principles and practices of scientific editing in English.