

The BELS Letter

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

Promoting editorial proficiency in the life sciences

From the President

Happy New Year! Here's hoping 2021 will be a happy and successful one for all of us!

Before we jump into the new year, let's take a minute to recap our 2020 accomplishments. We launched the ELS exam online and welcomed 14 new certified editors (see the list on page 9); relaunched the newsletter in a monthly format with lots of new features; and held 5 virtual get-togethers, including a Holiday Happy Hour with mixologist, Sade Montague, owner of The Art of Libations. (You can find her delicious recipes on page 2.)

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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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This issue's Ask the Editors addresses the en dash, and you can read about the experience of one of our newest certified editors in taking the online ELS exam on page 5. Don't miss the BELS Gallery either; the photos are hilarious!

As always, there's a new set of Featured Members. Renew your membership now to be included in this section and BELS social media channels! There are many member benefits that make it well worth the price.

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

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Sade Montague (pictured at left), owner of The Art of Libations, taught us the 1-2-3-count pour method of measuring these cocktails. To learn more about this method, watch this video from Thirsty Bartenders: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TilEk6Lc8tA>

Spiked Hot Cocoa:

Hot chocolate (homemade or any brand)
Godiva Chocolate Liqueur (3 count)
Smirnoff Vanilla vodka (2 count)
Whipped cream

Add the chocolate liqueur and vanilla vodka to your prepared hot chocolate and stir. Top with whipped cream.

Caramel Appletini:

Apple cider
Smirnoff Kissed Caramel vodka (2 count)
DeKuyper Sour Apple Pucker Liqueur (1 count)
Caramel sauce (homemade or sundae topping)

Swirl some caramel sauce around the inside of your martini (or other) glass. Add the caramel vodka and sour apple liqueur. Add the apple cider to fill the glass.

Enjoy!

Ask the Editors

I would love to get other editors' thoughts on use of the en dash. The American Medical Association manual doesn't explain it very well, and many editors aren't proficient at using it.

Sue A. Elam, ELS

Here are some thoughts on a topic I've spent a lot of time training people on and, in all honesty, have gone back and forth on certain aspects while doing so! I hope these notes are of use.

I find that use of en dashes, even more than for other punctuation, is a matter of house style rather than across-the-board rules, so there are differences between publications, as well as some broad variations between usage in the U.S. and the U.K. (where they are liable to refer to the dash itself as 'en rule'), plus a lot of personal opinion. The main uses I know are as follows.

To denote ranges, e.g., "20–30 years," "refs. 3–7," "Fig. 1a–c," "CI 0.52–1.07." This is common but not universal; some styles call for hyphens.

(Mostly in the U.S.) As a kind of "super hyphen" in forming compound modifiers when one of the entities being connected contains a required space or another hyphen, e.g., "ethidium bromide–stained gel," "a New York–bound train," "FITC–anti–

CD11c," "University of Wisconsin–Madison." (This opens the can of worms that is compound modifiers, so don't expect uniform opinions.)

(Related but different, and more common in the U.K., although the Chicago Manual of Style lists both these points) To connect two (or more) entities of parallel type and weight in a compound term. Another way of describing this (from the *Nature* style guide): "An en rule takes the place of a conjunction or a preposition between two words or numbers, thus: the 1939–1945 war (1939 to 1945); refs.1–6; a pressure–temperature diagram (pressure versus temperature); the Michelson–Morley experiment (Michelson and Morley); DNA–protein interaction; CED4–CED9 complex." This opens up a different set of cans of worms regarding what types of pairings rate the en dash, plus issues with technical notation, e.g., whether genetic constructs should take en dashes ("a GFP–ABC1 fusion construct" or "a GFP–ABC1 fusion construct"?).

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Ask the Editors

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Some house styles call for using an en dash set off by spaces in place of an em dash as sentence punctuation – like this. (Also, some house styles distinguish between en dash and minus characters, and some don't, so if that seems likely to matter, consider checking with the production staff or typesetter.)

Cautionary note: A hyphen with Symbol font applied (in Word or Acrobat) becomes an en dash, so they can slip in accidentally next to Greek letters and other special characters, for example in chemical names. (As far as I know, en dashes are never used in formal chemical notation, so if you see one in a chemical name, it's probably wrong).

Rebecca M. Barr, MS, ELS

Although it is not directly focused on the question about the en dash raised by Sue Elam, my musing on the em dash, published in the *AMWA Journal* some years back in the Sounding Board department (linked here), might be relevant and amplify the discourse: "[The Dash Cramped: Should We Liberate the em Dash?](#)"

Jack Aslanian, MD, ELS

For several decades, I've followed the rules that Rebecca Barr described. They make sense to me, but I have to admit that virtually none of the authors of material that I've worked on has the slightest interest in what kinds of dashes, if any, belong where in a manuscript (and don't even get me started on hyphens). That applies to many editors, also (not BELS-certified editors, of course). Like many other small copyediting matters, such as spelling, dash choice generally doesn't affect understanding. (That's generally, not always.) But I still have to pay attention to them because, well, because I just have to.

Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D)

I love en dashes! The poor things are so neglected, I do a little silent cheer whenever I see one used outside of a range.

Loretta Bohn, ELS

Have a Question for Ask the Editors?

Email your question or topic to info@bels.org, and we'll crowdsource BELS members' thoughts, opinions, and answers.

Ask the Editors

Since taking the ELS exam online is so new, I'm sure people are curious about what it's like. I asked one of our newest certified editors, Emily Densten, ELS, to describe her experience for our readers. Her piece is below.

*Karen Stanwood, ELS
Managing Editor*

When I first got the email that the BELS exam would be online this past fall, I thought "Well, I guess I don't have an excuse not to do it." I figured if I could take it at home, the most I'd be out was the 3 hours if I didn't pass and I could try again in the future. Once I officially decided I was going to take the test, everything started moving pretty quickly. It was mid-October and next thing I knew I had applied and was registering for early November. I asked my managing editor, a BELS-certified editor herself, for study tips, and she mentioned that one of our coworkers read the American Medical Association style guide cover to cover. I pictured the thick book sitting on my desk at work (where I hadn't been for more than 5 minutes in about 6 months due to the pandemic) and thought there was no way I'd be able to read that whole book, but that's pretty much what I did.

I started by taking the practice test and reading through the chapters on the questions I got wrong, but once I finished that, I just kept reading. Every night after work, I'd curl up with my iPad and AMA ebook and read through a chapter, highlighting things that stuck out to me. I felt like I was in college again. The test itself, too, felt like college. I don't know anyone personally in remote school right now, but I had read enough technical issue horror stories online to be worried about how remote proctoring would work. I went through the entire check-in process (e.g., showing the proctor behind my ears, my fingernails, every visible square inch of my bedroom), and then the proctor told me we had been disconnected. I was confused because we were still video chatting, but I had to exit out and get back online. The second check-in, thankfully, went smoothly, and I began the test. The time seemed to fly by.

After the test, I expected every other new email to have my results. I had almost pushed it to the back of my mind, knowing they would come when they came, when on my last day of work before taking some vacation at the end of the year, the email came in. I had passed! It was the perfect early Christmas present to myself.

Emily Densten, ELS

BELS Gallery



"If I decide to work anywhere other than a desk, especially in my comfy recliner, the cats and ferrets are on me like velcro. It's a wonder I manage to meet all my deadlines with this crew!"

~ Angela Morben, DVM, ELS



Jane Krauhs, PhD, ELS(D), has an unexpected new coworker. Although he might be entertaining, he may find himself written up for eating flowerbed plants!



Kelly Schrank, MA, ELS, shared her favorite mug. We made it a little more SFW. ;)

Send your BELS Gallery photos to info@bels.org

BELS Featured Members



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Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

MEMBER PROFILE

*Kerry L. Evans,
PhD, ELS*

Director, Science Communication Group
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Year of ELS certification:
2018

Grammar pet peeve:
unnecessary apostrophes



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MEMBER PROFILE

*Karin Hosking, BBS,
MEd, AE, ELS*

Independent professional academic editor

Year of ELS certification:
2015

Grammar pet peeve:
I have no pet peeves. Grammatical
errors keep me in business!

BELS Featured Members



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MEMBER PROFILE

Ann Conti Morcos, MA, ELS

Senior Medical Editor
Vaniyam Group LLC

Year of ELS certification:
1999

Grammar pet peeve:
using 'there is' or 'there are' to
start a sentence



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MEMBER PROFILE

*Colleen M. Sauber,
MEd, ELS*

Editor and Instructor in Biomedical Communication
Mayo Clinic

Year of ELS certification:
2009

Grammar pet peeve:
use of 'impact' rather than 'effect';
use of singular verb for groupings of
2 or more terms (eg, 'consideration
and treatment is the hope')

New Certified Editors

Kristel Benitez, ELS

Michael Stavis Bohl, MD, MPH, CPH, MWC, ELS

Sarah K. Bulis, MD, ELS

Rosalind S. Carney, PhD, PMP, ELS

Emily Densten, ELS

Isaac V. Greenhut, PhD, ELS

Melissa Hellman, ELS

Kristin Inman, PhD, ELS

Leona Anne Kanaskie, BA, MS, ELS

Joseph Francis Kinsley, ELS

Daniel Moreira, ELS

Kanika Sharma-Mittra, ELS

Suzanne Wolfe, ELS

John Barrymore Wright, PhD, ELS

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Executive Director

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.