

# The BELS Letter

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

Promoting editorial proficiency in the life sciences

## From the President

“Adjusting to the new normal” is a phrase I have heard too often over the last 6 months. As you know, when COVID-19 hit the United States and the rest of the world in March, onsite conferences were canceled. At the time, we were hopeful that in-person conferences would resume by summer, and then by fall, but now no one is talking about a timeline to “return to normal.” Associations are adjusting to the new normal and providing virtual events. I am excited to report BELS is adjusting, too!

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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 fall, BELS will be providing its first computer-based certification exam. Test takers will be able to take the exam either at a testing facility or on their home computers. Stay tuned to BELS communications for more information, so you can tell your colleagues who have been waiting to take the exam.

To help keep us connected, our new Membership and Marketing Committee chair, Karen Stanwood, ELS, has organized virtual get-togethers. These happy hours, coffee breaks, etc., are informal, yet informative, events. Bring your favorite beverage and join us about once a month for a lively chat about the editing life. Our next get-together will be a coffee break on September 15.



*Sonic and Carbon, eager for treats and supportive of the Oxford comma.*

Finally, to enhance communication with our members, we are producing *The BELS Letter* on a monthly basis (and we hope you like the redesign). To do so, we need your help. Volunteer your editing skills and send your news—job updates, accomplishments, exciting news, and even pet photos—to Karen at [kstanwood@](mailto:kstanwood@slackinc.com)

[slackinc.com](mailto:kstanwood@slackinc.com). I'll start: Meet Sonic and Carbon, my current office mates who are great at snoring and barking loudly during Zoom meetings.

I hope you are adjusting to your new normal and to virtually see you soon.

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

## #growourcommunity

We'd love to follow, promote, praise, and retweet you on Twitter via our [@BELS\\_editors](https://twitter.com/BELS_editors) account, but we can't do that unless we know how to find you! Tweet us at [@BELS\\_editors](https://twitter.com/BELS_editors), so we can follow back. Bonus points if you follow us and tag another account you think we should be following!

# Tribute

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## Thank You, Norman

by Karen Stanwood

In this issue, we'd like to pay tribute to Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D), as he steps down, after many years of outstanding service, from the BELS Board of Directors. To name just a few of his accomplishments, Norman was a founder of BELS, a senior editor with the National Academies, and the 2008 recipient of the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award (AMWA's most prestigious award).



Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D)

In the early 1990s, after losing the financial support of the Council of Biology Editors (now the Council of Science Editors) for an editorial certification program, Norman and his colleagues decided to take on the project themselves. They rewrote and retested the exam items, yielding a final test with 105 questions covering grammar, logic, consistency, and more (Melcher, 2011).

Each BELS founder chipped in personally to fund the launch of the certification program.

"The whole endeavor was a gamble—creating the test, forming the organization, and awarding certification and the right to use initials after one's name. It involved a lot of guesswork" (Melcher, 2011).

That gamble paid off. To date, more than 1500 editors have been certified as an Editor in the Life Sciences (ELS) and 30 have achieved diplomate status, ELS(D), a more prestigious designation awarded based on peer review of an individual's portfolio of work. In his Swanberg Award address, referring to the work of a manuscript editor over the past half century, Norman noted, "It seems that everything involved in it has changed...everything except the use of the human editor's knowledge and judgment" (Grossblatt, 2008).

We thank you, Norman, for your dedication to BELS since its inception, your hard work in making the ELS exam and diplomate program a reality, and your unfailing support of professional standards for editors.

### References

- Grossblatt, N. (2008). A life in the day of a manuscript editor. *AMWA Journal*, 23(4), 166–170.  
Melcher, T.M. (2011). Founding the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS): An interview with the National Academies' Norman Grossblatt. *Science Editor*, 34(4), e12.



# Announcements

## Volunteer on a BELS Committee

Have you been looking for an opportunity to get more involved with BELS? If you're a BELS member, consider volunteering for one of our committees that are taking on new, exciting initiatives!

Committees include:

- Budget and finance
- Membership and marketing
- Certification exam development
- Diplomate exam development
- Exam administration



Explore the committees and submit an interest form [here](#).

## Ready to Advance Your Editing Career?

Are you a highly proficient editor who is BELS certified and has extensive experience in scientific communication? Then, the diplomate program is for you! There are two steps: apply for candidacy and, once accepted, submit a portfolio of edited material with a statement of circumstances surrounding the editing.

Check your eligibility and find out more [here](#).



## COMING THIS FALL!

Beginning this fall, the BELS certification exam will be available to take online. If your application has already been accepted, all you need to do is register. If you've not yet applied, [click here](#) to learn more!



## BELS Featured Members



BELS  
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

### MEMBER PROFILE

*Elaine R. Firestone, ELS*

Owner and Lead Editor  
ERF Editorial Consulting

Year of ELS certification:  
1997

Grammar pet peeve:  
'due to' and 'since' being used  
instead of 'because of'



BELS  
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

### MEMBER PROFILE

*Amy Walters Redmon-  
Norwood, MA, ELS*

Formerly with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of  
Public Health, Waverly, Inc., and Willams & Wilkins

Year of ELS certification:  
1991

Grammar pet peeves:  
commas placed illogically and  
the Liberty Mutual ad "only  
pay for what you need"



## BELS Featured Members



BELS  
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

### MEMBER PROFILE

*Lori Potraffke, MA, ELS*

Owner  
Underscore Editing, LLC

Year of ELS certification:  
2006

Grammar pet peeve:  
improper use of semicolons



BELS  
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

### MEMBER PROFILE

*Carrie Thurber, ELS*

Quality Control Editor  
Research Square

Year of ELS certification:  
2019

Grammar pet peeve:  
use of 'comprised of'

## Officers

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

**Lisa Kisner, ELS, CAE**  
Secretary

**Christine F. Wogan, MS, ELS**  
Treasurer

**Thomas P. Gegeny, MS, ELS**  
Past President

## Board of Directors

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**Jane Krauhs, PhD, ELS(D)**  
Chair, Diplomate Examination Development

**Leslie E. Neistadt, ELS**  
Chair, Registrar and Examination  
Administration

**June Oshiro, PhD, ELS**  
Chair, Nominations and Elections

**Naomi Ruff, PhD, ELS**  
Chair, Certification Examination  
Development

**Karen Stanwood, ELS**  
Chair, Membership and Marketing

*Non-voting Board Member*  
**Sheryle Hazard, CAE**  
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, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (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.