

The **B E L S** Letter

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Dr. Barbara Gastel earns ELS(H) status

**By NORMAN GROSSBLATT,
ELS(D)**

The BELS bylaws state that “honored membership is awarded from time to time by the majority vote of the members of the Executive Council to persons who in the judgment of the Council have distinguished themselves in the field of life sciences editing. The honored member may use the abbreviation ELS(H) after his or her name.” In February of this year, the Executive Council voted unanimously to name Barbara Gastel, M.D., the fourth honored editor in the life sciences. (The other three are Maeve O’Connor, Ed Huth, and Edie Schwager.)

Dr. Gastel is known to many BELS members as the editor of the Council of Science Editors journal *Science Editor*, but the list of her credentials and accomplishments is as long as your arm.

She specializes in biomedical writing and editing and is associate professor of veterinary integrative biosciences, humanities in



Photo by John Wachter, CPS Media

Dr. Barbara Gastel, ELS(H), receives congratulations and a BELS pin from Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D).

medicine, and biotechnology at Texas A&M University, where she coordinates the master’s degree program in science and technology journalism.

Dr. Gastel has a B.A. from Yale University and an M.D. and an M.P.H. from Johns Hopkins

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BELS cuts public relations position

The position of Councilor for Public Relations has been eliminated from the BELS Executive Council.

The Executive Council recommended that the BELS bylaws be amended to eliminate the office because the number of candidates applying for BELS certification suggests that there

is no longer a need for special recruiting efforts.

A vote was conducted by ballot presented to supporting members of BELS. The ballots were tallied by two people appointed by the president. An overwhelming majority of voting members approved the measure. Of BELS supporting members, 168 voted as

follows:

- Accept: 163
- Reject: 4
- Abstain: 1

Therefore, the bylaws have been amended as necessary to eliminate the office of Councilor for Public Relations.

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University. After medical school, she did an American Association for the Advancement of Science mass-media fellowship at *Newsweek*. She then worked in communication and administration at the National Institutes of Health. She has taught science writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, spent 2 years as a visiting professor of technical communication at Beijing Medical University (now Peking University Health Science Center), and been assistant dean for teaching at the University of California, San

Francisco, School of Medicine.

Since 1996, Dr. Gastel has directed the U.S. aspect of a program, funded by the China Medical Board of New York, to teach biomedical writing and editing in Asia. The program is designed to facilitate publication of Asian research in English-language international journals. It includes online lessons in scientific writing and editing and internships in U.S. and Canadian editorial offices.

Dr. Gastel is the author of three books: *Presenting Science to the Public*, *Teaching Science: A Guide for College and Professional School Instructors*, and *Health Writer's Handbook*; and she is the

coauthor (with Robert A. Day) of the sixth edition of *How To Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*. She has also served several journals in various capacities.

She is a Fellow of the American Medical Writers Association, which has presented its Golden Apple Award and Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award (its highest award) to her; a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and a recipient of the Council of Science Editors Distinguished Service Award.

Having Dr. Gastel as an honored editor in the life sciences does BELS proud.

BELS honored and diplomate editors

BELS Honored and Diplomate Members as of June 5, 2006

Honored Editors:

Barbara Gastel, M.D., ELS(H)
Edward J. Huth, M.D., ELS(H)
Maev O'Connor, ELS(H)
Edith Schwager, ELS(H)

Diplomates (* indicates BELS Founder):

Miriam Bloom, Ph.D., ELS(D)
Martha Brookes, M.S., ELS(D)*
Gillian Fansler Brown, Ph.D.,

ELS(D)*

Gil Croome, M.Sc.(F), ELS(D)*
Grace Darling, ELS(D)
Judith Dickson, M.S., ELS(D)
Susan Eastwood, ELS(D)*
Norman Grossblatt, ELS(D)*
Nancy A. Hemphill, ELS(D)
Elizabeth L. Hess, ELS(D)
Stephen R. Kepple, ELS(D)
Carol Kakalec Kohn, ELS(D)*
Walter J. Pagel, ELS(D)*
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ELS(D)*

Laurel Derks Prokop, M.T.(ASCP), ELS(D)
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Debra G. Share, ELS(D)
Matthew Stevens, M.App.Sci., ELS(D)
P. Lynne Stockton, V.M.D., M.S., ELS(D)
Martha M. Tacker, Ph.D., ELS(D)*
Pamela Paradis Tice, ELS(D)

BELS members gather in Florida for annual meeting and banquet

By MARY ANN SCHMIDT, ELS

The 15th annual meeting and banquet of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences was held on Sunday, May 21, at the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City, Florida. According to its Web site, Ybor City is Tampa's National Historic Landmark District, and its Latin Quarter experience beckons visitors back to another era. The area features wrought-iron balconies, globe streetlights, brick-lined walkways, and the majestic architecture of cigar factories, social clubs, and other unique buildings. The Columbia Restaurant is Florida's oldest Spanish restaurant, and it's filled with history and irresistible kitsch.

After dinner, President Kim Berman called the business meeting to order and thanked Wilma Guerra and Maria Uravich for their choice of venue and handling of the details in planning the banquet. She also announced the recent election results—Mary Ann Schmidt, current secretary, is president-elect, and Nancy Wachter is our new treasurer. Ms. Berman appointed Janice Jerrells to serve as secretary for one year, completing Ms. Schmidt's term.

Because of the increasing amount of work involved in maintaining our Web site, and with the resignation of our Webmaster, the Executive Council contracted with an outside company, IntelliSites, to handle our Web



Photo by John Wachter, CPS Media

BELS President Kim Berman calls the annual meeting to order.

site setup and maintenance. David Galloway, editor of *The BELS Letter*, will work with IntelliSites to align our public image with the newsletter.

Leslie Neistadt, chair of the Certification Examination Administration Committee, announced that the study guide and the current certification exam have been updated, with the exam containing several new questions. Seven exams were given since the last meeting: 113 people took the test. Of these, 64 (57%) passed and were awarded ELS certification. The percentage of those who passed the exam is lower than in previous years. There are 152 candidates eligible to take the exam. The latest exam was administered in Krakow, Poland, in conjunction with the meeting of the European Association of Science Editors.

Ms. Schmidt, who has been serving as acting treasurer,

provided a short report of the board's finances. BELS is still operating in the black. Its sources of income are exam fees, dues, and Web ads. Expenditures are mainly in exam and general administration, Web maintenance, and newsletter production and mailing.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of honored editor status to Dr. Barbara Gastel. In her acceptance speech, Dr. Gastel said that she was both delighted and overwhelmed to be selected to join Maeve O'Connor, Ed Huth, and Edie Schwager as an honored editor. Our choice put an end to a quandary she's experienced for the last several years. Every year on the Sunday of the Council of Science Editors meeting, she would see a group of people she wanted to talk with go off to the BELS dinner and wish

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Blog log

By **KIM BERMAN, ELS**

Anyone interested in what is going on outside our cloistered cubicles of editing? Wondering what is encouraging or raising the ire of pharmaceutical company scientists? Trying to clarify your own thoughts on the ethics of biomedical communication and publishing? Can't take the time away from work (or afford to spend the money) to attend conferences discussing these topics?

I've found a way to keep up on the current controversies in these areas by tracking some great Internet blogs. For those of you who have no clue what I'm talking about, a blog (short for "weblog") is most easily defined as a personal diary, daily pulpit, collaborative space, political soapbox, or breaking-news outlet (to paraphrase a great Web site, <http://www.blogger.com>). Individuals or groups set up a blog, enter their musings on a daily or less frequent

basis, and encourage comments and dialogue from their readers.

My current favorites include a blog called *Adventures in Ethics and Science*, hosted by Janet D. Stemwedel, aka Dr. Free-Ride (a philosopher who used to be a chemist). To find it, enter <http://scienceblogs.com/ethicsandscience>. This blog contains some great perspective on how to do quality science in an academic setting, while also trying to instill the idea that ethics is pertinent to both scientists and philosophers. I love the running dialogue on whether these two groups have anything in common (other than fighting over campus parking spaces).

Because of my history in pharmaceutical research, I also find *In the Pipeline*, hosted by Derek Lowe (an organic chemist in the pharmaceutical industry) really thought-provoking. To find his blog, enter <http://www.corante.com/pipeline>. The cranky,

opinionated, insider perspective on what he sees happening in the pharmaceutical industry keeps me coming back for more. The comments from readers are highly entertaining and sometimes a little scary, as most of the writers use pseudonyms to protect themselves from possible corporate reprisals! Derek's blog is just one of a great set hosted by Corante. Very cool stuff.

WARNING – These blogs contain links to other great blogs and Web sites. Once you start reading and clicking on a link to another site and then another, you'll get sucked into the system and forget that you were on deadline! Use with caution!

Anyone else have blogs that you'd like to bring to our attention? Contact David Galloway at BELSletter@sbcglobal.net with the address and a short description of why you find the blog worth reading.

—BELS council gathers for annual meeting—

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that she could join them because they always seemed to be excited about attending the banquet. She considered applying for and taking the certification exam but thought, "What if I fail the exam? What if Norman and Leslie look at my answers and start giggling?" All was put to rest when she received a letter from Norman Grossblatt and was astounded and thrilled to learn of her election to honored status in BELS.

In that letter, Mr. Grossblatt

asked whether she would grace the members in attendance at the banquet with some brief remarks. Well, this presented another problem—in China, "brief remarks" means a three-hour lecture. She also wondered what to talk about, wanting something not too heavy but still substantive. She decided to share some of her thoughts on and experiences in editing.

Her favorite CSE sessions are those related to language, which she considers the heart of editing. To her, the most satisfying part of

editing is polishing manuscripts that have great content, but poor execution. She also enjoys condensing larger papers without sacrificing their meaning, making her editing invisible to the author. It's like a game to her.

She shared several humorous stories about her editing experiences, including those in medical school, the teaching of scientific editing, and editorial detective work. All in all, it was an enjoyable and entertaining talk, ending the evening on a lighthearted note.

Topics from the listserv

Past or present?

Original question:

*Dear BELS Members,
A colleague and I have a debate going regarding the appropriate tense to use when describing a clinical trial in the methods section of an abstract or manuscript. If it is a randomized clinical trial with a finite duration, the trial has concluded, and we are now reporting the result, which is more correct?*

“XYZ was a 2-year, double-blind, Phase III study of adult patients with active...”

or

“XYZ is a 2-year, double-blind, Phase III study of adult patients with active...”

Lots of money—not really, just pride—is riding on this. I won’t tell you which side of the debate I’m on (unless I win).

*Thanks,
Stacy*

* * *

A colleague and I debated whether it is appropriate to use past or present tense when referring to the concluded portion of an ongoing randomized clinical trial in the methods section of an abstract or manuscript. Torn between utter confidence in my own conviction and my great respect for my colleague’s grammar skills, I turned to BELS members to break the deadlock.

I received 13 responses, and the score was Past 12, Present 1. Although some acknowledged that, in unique situations, it might be permissible to use present tense, the overwhelming majority agreed that if the trial has concluded, you should describe the trial using the past tense. *“Writing in the sciences. Exploring conventions of scientific discourse”* by A.M. Penrose and S.B. Katz (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998) was cited

for its discussion on verb tense in scientific articles. The authors recommend using the present tense in the Introduction and Discussion sections and past tense in Methods and Results. Two members shared enlightening and insightful perspectives on tense usage when discussing Results. The first: “If a present tense sneaks its way into a piece, it is our regulatory group who shouts more loudly than anyone.” The second shared learnings from Sam Trelease’s book, “that using the present tense for results is a presumptuous assertion that your specific results amount to general truths.”

What surprised me most were the congratulations I received for choosing the right tense for this sentence. I thought I had presented the issue in a neutral manner so as not to sway the jury. Was this respondent assuming that now, armed with the collective knowledge of several BELS members, I would know which path to take, or was he clairvoyant? No money—only pride—was riding on this. And to prove I retain absolute respect for my losing compadre, I had him read this for grammos for me before submitting.

—**STACY SIMPSON, ELS**

Ackl-ronyms

I asked BELS members for memorable acronyms, abbreviations, and initialisms. Here are some of the better responses. I received many submissions—too many to acknowledge all. They are grouped by discipline or organization. Attributions, if any, are in brackets.

Medicine

ACHOO (Autosomal dominant Compelling HelioOphthalmic Outburst) syndrome: A disorder

characterized by nearly uncontrollable paroxysms of sneezing provoked in a reflex fashion by the sudden exposure of a dark-adapted subject to intensely bright light, usually to brilliant sunlight. (www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=11491) [Michael Altus]

BOOP: bronchiolitis obliterans with organizing pneumonia [Catherine Judge Allen]

60yo male SOB (medical chart): 60-year-old man w/shortness of breath [Jessica Ancker]

PIA (medical chart): “Pain in the a***”—written on corner of medical charts to describe some patients’ attitudes, not their medical condition. (Good thing none of the patients were of royal descent, otherwise the term would have been “RPIA.”) [Elaine Firestone]

Clinical Trials

CARET: beta-Carotene and Retinol Efficacy Trial [Jessica Ancker]

www.mtdesk.com/lstTrAcry.shtml contains some gems: *DAISY*: Diabetes Autoimmunity Study in the Young; *DINAMIT*: defibrillation in acute myocardial infarction trial; *VANQWISH*: Veterans Affairs Non-Q-Wave Infarction Strategies in Hospitals; and *PAC-A-TACH*, Pacing in Atrial Fibrillation and Tachycardia [Michael Altus]

And three by Faith Reidenbach:

- *TRISTAN*: TRIal of Inhaled STeroids AND long-acting beta-agonists

- *ISOLDE*: Inhaled Steroid in Obstructive Lung Disease in Europe

- *SMOG*: Smoking Modulates Outcomes of Glucocorticoid therapy in asthma

New members pass BELS examination

New BELS members include the following:

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—New BELS members—

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—From the listserv—

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NASA [all Elaine Firestone]

*LoCNES*S: Low-Cost NASA
Environmental Sampling System
WiSPER: Wire-Stabilized
Profiling Environmental
Radiometer

THOR: Three-Headed Optical
Recorder

RAMSES: Radiation
Measurement Sensor with
Enhanced Spectral Resolution

SIMBAD: Satellite Validation
for Marine Biology and Aerosol
Determination

CoASTS: Coastal Atmosphere
and Sea Time Series

High-Tech

*PUMCODOXPURSACOMLO-
PAR* received a vote from a Web
researcher for the worst acronym.
It stands for “pulse-modulated
coherent Doppler-effect X-band

pulse-repetition synthetic-array
pulse compression lobe planar
array.”

EAT-CHIP and *SMASH-CLP*
 (“clip”): The first—derivation
unknown—was a bit of 90s
technology related to air traffic
control; the second stands
for “Systems Management
Architecture for Server Hardware-
Command Line Protocol.”

THWAQ: “To Hell with Annie
Quinn,” the name a jilted Silicon
Valley engineer gave to a much-
used ROLM Corp. software
program in the ’80s [Tricia Ward-
Dolkas]

ELMER: Electronic Line
Management Enterprise Reporting

ELMER nicely sets up the
last category, submitted by BELS
member Flory Nye-Clement:

Environmental Sciences

FUDS: formerly used defense
sites—which if monitored by
ELMER, would of course be

ELMER FUDS

LUST: leaking underground
storage tank

OEHHA (pronounced “oh-
ee-hah”): [California] Office of
Environmental Health Hazard
Assessment

QAPP (pron: “kwapp,” as
Elmer Fudd would say): Quality
Assurance Project Plan

. . .and her personal all-time
favorite:

PIGWETS: Proposed Interim
Groundwater Extraction and
Treatment System

And in a category of its own
and a class by itself: *EIEIO*, the
initialism for a surveillance study
called “Emerging Infections
and the Epidemiology of Iowa
Organisms”—appropriate for a
farm state [Gordon Rudy]

—**Robert E. Johnson,**
ELS

—New BELS members—

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Erratum

The new member listing
in the February 2006 issue of
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incomplete and incorrect
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