

The **BELS** Letter

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From Proofreader to President

Early *BELS Letter* Volunteer Takes Reins at AMWA

By Don Harting, ELS, CHCP

When Karen P. Klein, MA, ELS, GPC, took office in October as president of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), she became the 8th of 15 AMWA presidents since the turn of the millennium to carry the ELS credential. Do the math, and readers will quickly realize that roughly half of the current generation of leaders of America's top association for biomedical communicators have passed the BELS exam.

What's more, AMWA's president-elect, Stephen Palmer, PhD, has passed the exam, and so have Lori Alexander, MTPW, and Christine Wogan, MS, the association's secretary and treasurer, respectively.

Some readers may be wondering how frequently the ELS credential appears within the rank-and-file AMWA membership. According to Shari Rager, the association's deputy director, all members were asked in a 2013 needs assessment to list their membership in other professional organizations, and 14.5% of 944 respondents cited BELS.

Now here are more questions to ponder: Is the growing popularity of the ELS credential among people at the pinnacle of power within AMWA a statistically significant trend? If so, what does it signify?

The BELS Letter posed these questions informally to a convenience sample of past AMWA presidents.

Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD, ELS, who served from 2008 to 2009, wrote, "You don't need a formal statistical analysis to be impressed by the findings that 53.3% of recent AMWA presidents *and* 14.5% of AMWA members carry the ELS credential. In my opinion, that's a resounding endorsement."

James R. Cozzarin, ELS, who served from 2006 to 2007, said it's no surprise that AMWA prefers BELS members for leadership roles because "anyone who is willing to sit for an invasive, 3-hour credentialing exam has got what it takes." The suburban Cleveland, Ohio, resident added, "It's not like someone can say, 'Gee, the Browns are blacked out this weekend, I

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Karen P. Klein, MA, ELS, GPC
AMWA President 2014-15

AMWA Presidents Since 2000

2013-14 Brian Bass
2012-13 Doug Haneline, PhD
2011-12 Barbara Snyder, MA
2010-11 Melanie F. Ross, MSJ, ELS
2009-10 Thomas P. Gegeny, MS, ELS
2008-09 Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD, ELS
2007-08 Sue Hudson
2006-07 James R. Cozzarin, ELS
2005-06 Susan E. Seifert, ELS, CBC
2004-05 Dominic De Bellis, PhD
2003-04 Flo Witte, MA, ELS
2002-03 Marianne Mallia, ELS
2001-02 Helen E. Hodgson, PhD
2000-01 Lynn M. Alperin



Cindy Hamilton, PharmD, ELS

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think I'll take the BELS exam.' If you make a professional investment like this, it shows you're a cut above the norm, you have a certain selfless dedication to the industry, and you're willing to further the profession. There's your talent pool."

The ELS credential "helps demonstrate a certain level of achievement," said Melanie Fridl Ross, who served from 2010 to 2011. "It shows a commitment to excellence and education."

Klein sees the clustering of BELS members among AMWA presidents as a sign that leaders enjoy learning. "We're just hungry for information," she said. "We all like to learn in our own way, formally or informally."


Klein was among the first to take the exam, passing it on her first try in Toronto, Canada, in 1991. She had majored in classics and history at Brown University in Rhode Island, earning a bachelor of arts degree in 1979. She later went on to earn a master of liberal arts degree in 2000 from Wake Forest University in North Carolina. Her master's thesis examined the history of our modern clinical trial system, with a focus on Walter Reed and yellow fever in Cuba in 1901.

By now Klein's name has graced the masthead of quite a few publications, including the *New*

England Journal of Medicine, *American Journal of Surgery*, *Wake Forest Journal of Medicine and Science*, and *Health* magazine. But one of her first gigs after passing the exam in 1991 was as proofreader for the inaugural issue of *The BELS Letter* (see photo).

Klein now serves as director of grant development and editing at Wake Forest University Health Sciences in Winston-Salem. She has consulted on grants for Bayer Corporation and the National Institutes of Health. More recently she's been invited to review grants for well-known foundations, including Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Lance Armstrong, and Avon.

Klein is also an enthusiastic member of the Medical Writing Certification Commission, which will offer a new credentialing exam this fall in conjunction with the AMWA annual conference. Stories Klein heard about challenges overcome by the people who established the BELS exam nearly 25 years ago, as well as her experience taking a different exam to become a certified grants professional, encouraged her to persevere with the commission despite controversy over the medical writing test.

"If they can do it, it can be done," Klein said she told herself repeatedly. "Now we've built it. We'll see if anybody comes." 



SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars NOW to attend the annual BELS membership dinner meeting in Philadelphia, PA. The meeting will be held Sunday evening, May 17, during the Council of Science Editors annual conference. It is always fun to spend some time with fellow BELS-certified editors – especially when good food and excellent guest speakers are involved. Make plans now to attend.



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From the President

It's hard to believe that it's already been almost 2 years since I received the gavel from Susan Aiello and became BELS president. Time flies when you're working with committed and talented people to further a worthwhile organization.

When I became BELS president I really didn't know what I was getting into. I knew that BELS was a great organization; I had enjoyed meeting many of you at the events held in conjunction with AMWA over the years and was, honestly, a bit awed. Now that I know more of you and have worked with more of you, I'm even more awed—by your talent and by your commitment to the goal of clear communication in the life sciences. The job wasn't quite as easy as Susan promised, but she also failed to mention how rewarding it was. It has *truly* been a pleasure and a privilege.

Our organization is robust. When I started 2 years ago, Don Harting (editor of *The BELS Letter*) asked me what my mission was as president, and I have to admit that my main goal was to make sure I didn't break anything – because BELS is a well-oiled machine! And, to date, I am pretty sure nothing has broken, so... *whew!*

Indeed, we have made notable progress in several areas. Interest in BELS certification and the BELS Diplomat Program continues to grow, and thanks to our registrar, Leslie Neistadt, exams are administered across the country – and in other countries as well. Don has been a trooper working to revive *The BELS Letter*, which is now available to both supporting and nonsupporting members (via www.bels.org). The exam revision process is well under way, thanks

to the efforts of Rick Weisburd and those on the exam development committee. We have twice given the Executive Council award, enabling two members to attend professional conferences. We have up-dated the look of our brochures and other BELS materials, and we are testing the value of having a BELS booth at AMWA and at CSE.



Mary Anne Mitchell, ELA

We have exciting *new* plans in the works as well. It is apparent to those of us on the Executive Council that BELS needs more administrative help than can be provided by volunteers. We hope to hire an association management company (probably part-time at first) to help us achieve many of our larger goals (online payment for registrations; better web presence; listserv or other member communication tool – to name just a few), particularly those that are simply outside the skillset of our volunteers. Stay tuned.

As I prepare to hand the BELS gavel to Tom Gegeny in May, I am excited for our organization. Tom is a proven leader with a clear vision

of where BELS needs to be headed. Our *raison d'être* is to administer the certification exam, but *how* we administer it, and how we ensure that the exam's content is continually reviewed and revised as needed -- particularly as our world becomes more and more digitized -- those are our challenges.

Tom is well equipped to lead us through these challenges, but he can't do it alone. The Executive Council can't do it alone. We need the talent, commitment, and energy of all of you to ensure that BELS remains relevant while the modes of composition and delivery of written materials continue to change.

You can help continue our mission to make BELS certification synonymous with committed and proficient editorial professionals. If you're not a supporting member, please consider sending in your annual dues (\$25). If you are a supporting member, please consider volunteering with BELS: proctor an exam (read about our new Proctor Incentive Program elsewhere in this issue); write an article for *The BELS Letter*; help staff the BELS booth at AMWA and CSE meetings; talk to your colleagues about the value of BELS certification. There are many opportunities to help, and I am certain there will be many more as we move forward.

As we say in Texas, "Let's git'er done!"

All the best,
Mary Anne



Like BELS on Facebook!

Welcome New Members

Exam #146
Seoul, South Korea
September 27, 2014

Jae Hwa Chang, MA, ELS
Seoul, South Korea

Soo-Hee Chang, MS, ELS
Seoul, South Korea

SoonWon Hong, PhD, ELS
Seoul, South Korea

Paul S. Lague, ELS
Tainan, Taiwan

John D. McDonald, MA, ELS
Gwangju, South Korea

Anthony Thomas Milliken, ELS
Seoul, South Korea

Eunah Shin, PhD, ELS
Seoul, South Korea

Exam #147
Memphis, TN
October 8, 2014

Alayne Bakken, ELS
Mahopac, NY

Jennifer Barnes, PhD, ELS
Charlotte, NC

Cheryl L. Belton, PhD, ELS
Tucker, GA

Rosa M. Blau, PharmD, ELS
Hillsborough, NJ

Zachary Bohannon, MA, ELS
Houston, TX

Deborah Bowman, MFA, ELS
Lake St Louis, MO

Sarah Bronson, ELS
Houston, TX

Chhavi Chauhan, PhD, ELS
Silver Spring, MD

Cathy L. Fischer, MA, ELS
La Crosse, WI

Elizabeth Gardner, ELS
Durham, NC

Jocelyn T. Graf, MA, ELS
Los Angeles, CA

Ian Lasell Kimmich, ELS
Portland, OR

Amber Lancaster, PhD, ELS
Lubbock, TX



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via Wikimedia Commons

Rachel Lerner, PhD, ELS
North Bend, WA

Cherisse Loucks, PhD, ELS
Plainview, NY

Laurance M. Macke, MS, ELS
Vero Beach, FL

Sarah Matsuura, MA, ELS
Kamakura, Kanagawa, Japan

Benjamin Mull, PhD, ELS
Houston, TX

Nadine Odo, CCRC, ELS
Augusta, GA

Hilary B. Osborne, ELS
Oak Park, IL

Lisa C. Ragsdale, MA, ELS
Albuquerque, NM

Christopher Snyder, MSc, ELS
Allschwil, Switzerland

David Twombly, MA, ELS
Memphis, TN

Qing Zhou, PhD, ELS
Pelham, NY

Exam #148
Washington, DC
December 14, 2014

Eloise DeHaan, ELS
Norristown, PA

Philip Hess, ELS
Ossining, NY

Rosemary A.J. Hulse, ELS
Long Beach, CA

Pamela Marcus, PhD, ELS
Kensington, MD

T Martin, Jr., ELS
Wilmington, DE

Heather McNeill, MA, ELS
Kansas City, MO

Christina Norwood, ELS
Owings Mills, MD

Katharine Ristich, ELS
New York, NY

Leslie Rosenbaum, ELS
Randolph, NJ

Sue Russell, MFA, ELS
Bryn Mawr, PA

Kristen Skopowski, ELS
Wilmington, DE

Benjamin Snow, MS, ELS
Rockville, MD

Follow @BELS_Editors on Twitter!

Proctor Incentive Program

All the work of BELS is done by unpaid volunteers. But, “unpaid” doesn’t have to mean “unrewarded.” In addition to gaining the satisfaction of giving back to the organization that works to develop and administer your certification exam, you can **WIN PRIZES!**

Beginning in 2015, BELS members who proctor an exam will be automatically enrolled and can earn prizes for proctoring up to 3 exams:

- 🔔 The 1st time you proctor, you will receive a BELS-logo coffee mug.
- 🔔 The 2nd time you proctor, you will receive a BELS-logo tote bag.
- 🔔 The 3rd time you proctor, the prize is a \$50 Amazon.com gift card.
- 🔔 If you proctor more than



3 times, you will become an Honored Proctor and your name will be listed on the BELS website. If you can help proctor an

upcoming exam (see the calendar on the last page of this newsletter or on the [BELS website](#), then

please contact Leslie Neistadt at neistadt@slu.edu. Whenever possible, we will call on proctors who live near the

exam site in order to keep our expenses low and minimize the burden on volunteers. If you haven't proctored before, that's all right; we'll team you up with an experienced proctor and provide our terrific handbook (thanks, Kim Berman), which describes the process in detail and supplies the script.

Be among the first to earn BELS rewards!



Let BELS Help You

Each year, the Executive Council offers awards of up to US\$500 each to two BELS-certified editors to support attendance at a professional meeting, workshop, or similar activity.

Awards are conferred semiannually, and meetings may be held anywhere in the world. The deadline has passed for activities taking place during January 1–June 30, 2015. For activities taking place during July 1–December 31, 2015, applications are due by May 31; applicants will be notified of the award by June 30, and expenses to be reimbursed must be incurred by December 31.

Each awardee must submit a registration receipt and other expense receipts for reimbursement *within 1 month after the activity*. Receipts received later will be ineligible for reimbursement.

To learn more about the Executive Council award, visit the link on the [BELS website](#). You may also [download the application form here](#). Incomplete applications will not be considered. Decisions of the Executive Council are final.

Show Off Your Achievement

Visit the [BELS merchandise website](#) and be the first person on your block with a BELS T-shirt, sweatshirt, or polo. Your perfect apparel choice for touring Philadelphia, staffing the BELS booth at CSE, or attending our annual dinner on May 17.



BOOK REVIEW

The Wave Watcher's Companion.
Gavin Pretor-Pinney. 319 pages.
New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

Reviewed by Brittany Moya del Pino

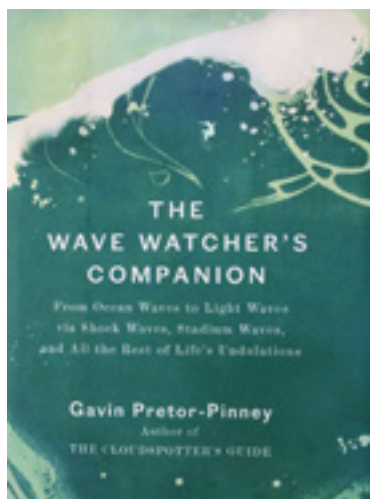
It's easy to look past the small wonders in life. I was reminded of this recently when I picked up *The Wave Watcher's Companion*. The cover led me to believe it would be a good bedtime read about surfing or ocean navigation, possibly even about fish. Each of these expectations is correct, it turns out, but they don't cover the whole story.

Pretor-Pinney captures the imagination with whimsical, yet concrete examples of energy in motion. Did you know that if you strike an open note on your new guitar, the same string on your old guitar will resonate in sympathy from across the room? Ever notice

that church bells and foghorns can be heard from surprising distances on foggy days? He explains these wave phenomena and more, including how snakes change their undulation depending on the surface or medium through which they travel.

This book should be on your short list if you enjoy reading about science, if you like seeing connections between seemingly unrelated things, or if you seek a good example of how to balance didactic prose with a moderately playful voice. After reading *The Wave Watcher's Companion*, I find myself paying closer attention to the world that surrounds me and asking, almost as a game, "How many waves do I see in this picture?"

[Brittany Moya del Pino, MA, ELS](#), is a freelance writer and editor working from her home on the island of Oahu, Hawaii.



You Were Going to Publish THAT?

"Also, it is unclear as to whether preoperative ciprofloxacin would eliminate the incidence of discitis since although none of the patients who were given preoperative ciprofloxacin developed discitis; the actual number of patients who were given ciprofloxacin was low enough that it is possible that there just wasn't enough patients to reach the level where someone would develop discitis."

--- Example of unedited medical writing contributed by Janet L. Tremaine, ELS, Dublin, Ohio

👉 *Nota Bene*

Misty R. Bailey, MA, ELS(D), science editor for the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, was invited to attend the elite University of Tennessee Leadership Institute. This year's institute, held in Gatlinburg, will include activities to learn one's own leadership style and become a more effective leader.

Brittany Moya del Pino, MA, ELS, attended a science writing retreat hosted by the Highlights Foundation in Honesdale, PA. Lectures, one-to-one manuscript critiques, and ample writing time gave retreatants the tools and insights to chart a path to success.

Donald M. Harting, ELS, CHCP, and his wife, Laura Harting, LCSW, a child and family therapist, are building a blog titled [Best Books for Children of Divorce](#). They have identified more than 90 books so far, and Laura has reviewed 17. Comments are welcome.

Habeeb Ibrahim Abdul Razack, BPharm, MSc, ELS, of Bangalore, India, has received a US\$500 BELS EC award to attend the 2nd International Congress on Medical Writing in Amjan, United Arab Emirates, March 5-7, 2015. The congress is being co-sponsored by the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors, the World Association of Medical Editors, and the European Medical Writers Association.

Janet L. Tremaine, ELS, has coauthored a new e-book, *Sports Concussions: What Every Parent and Athlete Should Know*, to educate parents, coaches, and athletes about the far-reaching consequences of this traumatic brain injury. Her coauthor is Kenneth O. Cayce IV, MD, a board-certified sports medicine physician. The e-book is available from www.amazon.com.

The Art of Querying

By Jo Ann Eliason, MA, ELS(D)

Author querying is art rather than science. Although we strive to be objective and analytical in scientific exposition, the query letter or set of questions placed within text establishes a polite yet probing discourse between editor and author whose methodology is closer to dialectics than analysis. The goal of the editing process is to seamlessly blend the need for precision writing with the requirement of allowing the authors' voice and knowledge to shine through the work.

An editor queries an author when a portion of text, table, or figure appears to be confusing, inaccurate, contradictory, superfluous, or omitted. In the query the editor attempts to elicit information from the author that will clarify materials within the paper and solidify the author's conclusions. In one sense the editor acts as pupil, soliciting additional instruction from the author to complete the work. In another sense, the editor embraces the role of instructor, guiding the author in the practice of precise English usage and grammar.

How the editor goes about phrasing the query depends on his relationship with the author and the context in which the editing is done. Editor and author may have just met or collaborated with each other for years. The author may be a young investigator or a seasoned physician or scientist. She may be self-assured about her proficiency in writing or unsure and eager to learn the ins and outs of scholarly publishing. Also, English may not be the first, or even second, language of the author, which presents its own

set of difficulties. Added to these is the context in which the relationship between editor and author exists. Before the author submits her paper or book to a publisher, she may seek out a self-employed editor or an author's editor of long standing with a department or laboratory. More rarely seen these days, the substantive editor may work for a publisher and be assigned the paper after it has passed peer review.

“In one sense, the editor acts as pupil In another sense, the editor embraces the role of instructor”

Questions posed by the editor should be clear, concise, and to the point. They should leave no ambiguity in the author's mind that could lead to unclear or inappropriate responses. To this end, the editor may want to state why a reader could be misled by the present phrasing and suggest one or more alternative statements that would better suit the author's intended meaning. If the editor has no idea what changes might be appropriate in this instance, he should politely seek more information from the author.

If the author is not readily conversant with the English language, the editor's role of teacher becomes especially valuable. Instructions on how best to phrase something in a paper can carry over to how to conduct conversations in English. If, on the other hand, the

author is an established English-speaking researcher with 300 papers and presentations in her curriculum vita, yet the passage in question is incomprehensible, the editor may prefer to play the role of acolyte. In this way he can ask the author to explain the procedure or findings in greater detail so the editor can obtain sufficient knowledge to clarify the author's writing. Last, if the author and editor have worked together often, or if a deadline looms, both queries and responses may need to be brief and precisely on point, leaving no ambiguity in the minds of the parties concerned.

At all times the editor should view his job as that of a facilitator who can switch the roles of teacher and pupil as the need arises. Writing generally is not a clinician's or researcher's day job. For some it is a “necessary evil” required to publish what they have discovered for the betterment of society and to hasten their rise through academia. For others, writing provides a pleasant alternative to a day spent at the lab bench. Regardless, the responsibility for the study and its description lies with the author and not with the editor. As editors, our role is to assist in the dissemination of the author's ideas; we cannot own those ideas ourselves.



Editor's note: This essay was submitted by the author in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the BELS diplomate program. Additional essay topics may be found on the last page.

Upcoming BELS Exams*

Date	Location	Meeting	Register by
May 2	Chapel Hill, North Carolina	AMWA Carolinas	April 11
May 16	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	CSE	April 25
September 30	San Antonio, Texas	AMWA	September 9
May 14, 2016	Denver, Colorado	CSE	April 23, 2016
September, 2016	Seoul, South Korea	---	August, 2016
October 5, 2016	Denver, Colorado	AMWA	September 14, 2016

*Please check www.bels.org for the latest updates.

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Sample Essay Questions

For certified editors considering applying for diplomate status, here is a partial list of essay questions. Diplomate candidates are required to submit 2 essays of 500 to 1,000 words each.

- How do you reconcile an editor's emphasis on clarity on behalf of readers with an author's need to be recognized as knowledgeable, as represented, for example, in specialized vocabulary or long and complex sentences?
- What are the most serious flaws in the writing you are called on to edit? How do you handle these as editor?
- What is meant by "substantive editing"? How does it differ from "copy editing" or "technical editing"?
- What, in your view, is meant by "duplicate publication"? Is it justified? Under what circumstances?
- What are your criticisms of style manuals you use?
- What is the role of the editor of scientific manuscripts in helping an author to rebut reviewer criticisms and to revise a paper for resubmission?
- Discuss the impact of the computer on the author-editor relationship.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of structured versus narrative abstracts.
- Discuss the art of querying.
- Discuss the reference works that you consider essential for editing in your field, explaining and defending your choices.
- Discuss the serial comma.
- How much does punctuation matter?
- Discuss the role of "ghostwriting" in science.
- What limitations, if any, should editors place on their helpfulness to authors?
- Discuss the use of abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms.
- Does the "gray literature" have a legitimate role in science publishing?