



THE ELEMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH STYLE: A GUIDE TO WRITING CORRESPONDENCE, REPORTS, TECHNICAL DOCUMENTS, AND INTERNET PAGES FOR A GLOBAL AUDIENCE. EDMOND H WEISS. ARMONK, NEW YORK: ME SHARPE; 2005. XVII + 162 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$34.95, SOFTCOVER \$18.95. ISBN 0-7656-1571-1 (HARDCOVER), 0-7656-1572-X (SOFTCOVER).

Many science editors edit English-language materials for readerships that include non-native users of English. Likewise, many science editors communicate in English with nonnative users of the language, whether in correspondence, queries, instructions, or other writing. Adapting writing to facilitate understanding by such users can aid science editors and their constituencies.

*The Elements of International English Style* offers guidance in thus adapting one's own and others' writing. Written by Edmond H Weiss—previously a communication-school administrator and business-school faculty member and now a consultant whose specialties include “internationalization for business and technical communication”—the book contains material that the author has tested and refined in professional seminars. Although it seems targeted largely to students and professionals in business fields, specified audiences include technical writers and editors.

Using the Strunk-and-White approach alluded to in the title, much of the book consists of exhortations followed by exposition. The exhortations, which the author terms “tactics”, are gathered in five of the book's seven chapters: “Principles of Simplicity”, “Principles of Clarity”, “Reducing Burdens”, “Principles of Correspondence”, and “Principles of Cultural Adaptation”. An introductory chapter (“The Language of Global Business Is International English”), a chapter on writing for translation, and five appendixes round out the book.

Some of the 57 exhortations present principles that manuscript editors already tend to follow. Examples include using standard spellings; limiting use of abbreviations, contractions, and acronyms; dividing long paragraphs; using long sentences sparingly; and converting some types of running text into tables or bulleted lists. Some other advocated measures may be fairly apparent on reflection—for example, not placing dates in formats (such as 5/10/05) that are interpreted differently in different countries; avoiding literary and cultural allusions, sports vocabulary, slang, irony, and humor; and favoring simple sentences rather than compound or complex ones. And some of

the advice, such as that on using controlled English (tightly restricted vocabulary), has rather limited application to science editing.

Probably most useful to the science editor are some of the measures Weiss advocates that are not routine or might not be obvious. Some examples:

- To avoid confusion, use words with one meaning or a few meanings rather than many, even if doing so entails using longer words.
- Use simple verb forms, which tend to be those most familiar to readers who are nonnative users of English.
- When it is feasible, choose words that are readily pronounceable by the intended readers, because many readers mentally speak the words they read and therefore falter when they encounter words they cannot pronounce.
- Retain optional words, such as the *that* introducing a clause, that can clarify the structure of a sentence.
- To guide readers, punctuate liberally, for example, by setting off introductory phrases with commas, using serial commas, routinely hyphenating compound modifiers, and, where doing so might increase clarity, inserting hyphens between prefixes and stems.

Also instructive are the observations on cross-cultural differences in format and content of business letters and the advice given for adapting one's correspondence accordingly.

Weiss discusses two competing strategies: globalization (writing English in a way that nonnative users anywhere should be able to understand) and localization (gearing the document to readers in a specific place or culture). Science editors may implicitly apply these strategies, for example, globalizing the language in a journal article but localizing correspondence with an author in a given country. The book, however, may help to grant the strategies more explicit attention.

Features of the book include discussion questions at the ends of chapters, lists of sources and resources, a set of 25 sentences to edit for easier understanding by nonnative readers of English, and a checklist for

gearing Web sites to international audiences. Especially interesting and enjoyable is a set of three letters informing recipients in Japan, Australia, and Mexico that a contract for travel services will not be renewed; the letters make amusingly clear how vastly the norms for correspondence can differ among cultures.

*The Elements of International English Style* is quick and easy to read, and the page layout facilitates access to the information. Other strengths include the use of many examples; although they are drawn largely from business, their applicability to science editing generally is apparent. The book does, however, have a few typographic errors—including, in one place, the substitution of *coma* for *comma*. An answer key might have been a helpful addition. Also, the more conceptual passages seem less powerful than the more applied ones.

The proof of such a book may lie largely in whether readers actually use the advice. In the weeks between reading *The Elements of International English Style* and writing this review, I found myself applying principles in it more than before to my communication with nonnative readers of English. Other science editors may find themselves similarly affected. If this book helps to prevent even an occasional lapse in understanding, an evening or two devoted to reading it is likely to be well spent.

**Barbara Gastel**

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## Book Note

CASE STUDIES IN GENES AND DISEASE: A PRIMER FOR CLINICIANS. BRYAN BERGERON. PHILADELPHIA: AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS; 2004. 272 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$33.00. ISBN 1-930513-50X.

*Case Studies in Genes and Disease* makes the case that today's clinicians must decide what part they will play in helping to define their role in the era of medicine that began with the first draft of the human genome. This well-illustrated book, divided into parts covering technology and sociopolitics, is written to help clinicians understand the fundamentals of genomics and proteomics and give them a conceptual framework with which to critically evaluate the many new findings in postgenomic and proteomic medicine.

Before diving into the new genetic technologies, the book provides a clear, detailed review of cellular structures, DNA replication, chromosomal mapping, and protein structure and function. It examines several clinical cases of genetic diseases, including sickle-cell anemia and cystic fibrosis, and introduces the different classifications of genetic diseases, such as monogenic and polygenic. Bryan Bergeron, an assistant

professor at Harvard Medical School, points out that "the most challenging diseases deviate significantly from the classical Mendelian inheritance pattern". The clinician's role, he notes, is to explain to patients the roles of environment and patient behavior in regulating the expression of genes that they may have for a particular phenotype, such as obesity.

In the sociopolitical arena, the book covers such topics as eugenics, genetically modified foods, and the hazards posed by widely available information on the human genome (such as biologic warfare). Medical therapeutics—such as artificial chromosomes, therapeutic cloning, and stem-cell research—are examined, as are genetically modified foods and livestock and biopharmaceuticals. Useful glossaries on genomics and bioinformatics, covering more than 350 terms, are provided, as well as a list of eight online glossaries.

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