Editorial: The Virtues of Deliberation   John Webb

As I approach the end of my tenure as *ITAL* editor, I reflect on the many LITA members who have not submitted articles for possible publication in our journal. I am especially mindful of the smaller number who have promised or hinted or implied that they intended to or might submit articles. Admittedly, some of them may have done so because I asked them, and their replies to me were the polite ones that one expects of the honorable members of the Library and Information Technology Association of the American Library Association. Librarians are as individuals almost all or almost always polite in their professional discourse.

Pondering these potential authors, particularly the smaller number, I conjured a mental picture of a fictional, male, potential *ITAL* author. I don't know why my fictional potential author was male—it may be because more males than females are members of that group; it may be because I'm a male; or it may be unconscious sexism. I'm not very self-analytic.

My mental picture of this fictional male potential author saw him driving home from his place of employment after having an after-work half gallon of rum when, into the picture, a rattlesnake crawled on to the seat of his car and bit him on the scrotum.

Lucky him: he was, after all, a figment of my imagination. (Any resemblance between my fictional author and a real potential author is purely coincidental.) Lucky me: we all know that such an incident is not unthinkable in library land. Lucky LITA: it is unlikely that any member will cancel his or her membership or any subscriber, his, her, or its subscription because the technical term "scrotum" found its way into my editorial. *ITAL* is, after all, a technology journal, and members and readers ought to be offended if our journal abjures technical terminology. Likewise they should be offended if our articles discuss library technology issues misusing technical terms or concepts, or confusing technical issues with policy issues, or stating technology problems or issues in the title or abstract or introduction then omitting any mention of said problems until the final paragraph(s).

ITAL referees are quite diligent in questioning authors when they think terminology has been used loosely. Their close readings of manuscripts have caught more than one author mislabeling policies related to the uses of information technologies as if the policies were themselves technical conundrums. Most commonly, they have required authors who state major theses or technology problems at the beginnings of their manuscripts, then all but ignore these until the final paragraphs, to rewrite sections of their manuscripts to emphasize the often interesting questions raised at the outset.

What, pray tell, is the editor trying to communicate to readers? Two things, primarily.

First, I have been following with interest the several heated discussions that have taken place on lita-l for the past number of months. Sometimes, the idea of the traditional quarterly scholarly/professional journal in a field changing so rapidly may seem almost quaint. A typical *ITAL* article is five months old when it is published. A typical discussion thread on lita-l happens in "real time" and lasts two days at most. A small number of participants raise and "solve" an issue in less than a half dozen posts. A few times, however, a question asked or a comment posted by a LITA member has led to a flurry of irrelevant postings, or, possibly worse, sustained bombing runs from at least two opposing camps that have left some members begging to be removed from the list until the all clear signal has been sounded.

I've read all of these, and I could not help but wonder, what if *ITAL* accepted manuscripts as short as lita-l postings? What would our referees do? I suspect, for our readers' sakes, most would be rejected. Authors whose manuscripts are rejected receive the comments made by the referees and me explaining why we cannot accept their submissions. The most frequent reason is that they are out of scope, irrelevant to the purposes of LITA. When someone posts a technology question to lita-l that generates responses advising the questioner that implementing the technology in question is bad policy, the responses are, from an editor's point of view, out of scope. How many LITA members have authority—real authority—to set policy for their libraries? A second "popular" reason for rejections is that the manuscripts pose "false" problems that may be technological but that are not technologies that are within the "control" of libraries. These are out of scope in a different manner. Third, some manuscripts do not pass the "so what" test.

Some days I wish that lita-l responders would referee, honestly, their own responses for their relevance to the questions or issues or so-whatness and to the membership.

Second, and more importantly to me, LITA members, whether or not your bodies include the part that we all have come to know and defend, do you have the "-" to send your *ITAL* editor a manuscript to be chewed upon not by rattlesnakes but by the skilled professionals who are your *ITAL* Editorial Board members and referees? I hope (and do I dare beg again?) so. Your journal will not suffer quaintness unless you make it so.

John Webb (jwebb@wsu.edu) is a Librarian Emeritus, Washington State University, and Editor of *Information Technology and Libraries*.