


Improving Quality: A Reader's Advice to C&RL Editors

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Gloriana St. Clair, immediate past-editor of *College & Research Libraries*, wrote an editorial entitled "Improving Quality: An Editor's Advice to Authors" (May 1993) in which she listed reasons for rejecting articles submitted to *C&RL* for publication. St. Clair presented some very helpful observations and suggestions for prospective authors. This article, in response to the issues raised in St. Clair's editorial, suggests that there are many useful things that journal editors can do to help authors and to improve communication among authors, editors, and reviewers.

 In the past couple of years, *College & Research Libraries (C&RL)* has published a number of articles and editorials that advise its authors and book reviewers on improving the quality of their contributed works. Stephen Lehmann and Bob Walther, immediate past book review editors for *C&RL*, lamented that the problems of book reviewing "are symptomatic of a larger failure" of academic librarianship and noted that "[b]ook reviewing should not be regarded as an activity solely for unpracticed writers to cut their teeth on."¹ Peter Herson and Cheryl Metoyer-Duran directed librarians' "attention to the role and value of literature reviews and references for placing studies within a broader perspective."² Gloriana St. Clair, immediate past-editor of *C&RL*, provided a succinct list of reasons behind the rejection of articles submitted for publication in *C&RL*.³ Finally, Peter Herson, Allen Smith, and Mary Bailey Croxson provided empirical support for St. Clair in their article, "Pub-

lication in *College & Research Libraries: Accepted, Rejected, and Published Papers, 1980-1991*."⁴

Both St. Clair and the authors of the last-mentioned article agree that "the most common reasons for rejection of papers" for publication in *C&RL* are:

- not generalizable;
- failure to answer the "so what?" question;
- poor writing;
- inadequate scholarship;
- weak statistical methods;
- wrong choice of journal;
- bad luck.⁵

Although it is imperative that *C&RL* contributors take note of *C&RL*'s reasons for rejecting certain articles for publication and make sure that their papers address and overcome these problems as best as they can, it should be pointed out that the process of writing and submitting articles for publication is a bit more complicated than what is implied in the editors' advice. An unstated assumption

behind a typical editor's advice on writing articles is that bad papers are always rejected and good papers are most often accepted for publication. The peer review process, which is employed by journals such as *C&RL*, is supposed to act as a gatekeeper—keep out the bad papers and let in good papers. Although such a picture is aesthetically pleasing, the reality is that the scholarly gatekeeping function undertaken by the editors and peer reviewers is prone to error; sometimes relatively weak papers get published and strong papers get rejected.

In any case, most of the editorial advice seems to be condescending to authors and to discourage academic librarians from submitting articles unless the librarians are gifted. To the contrary, academic librarians should be encouraged to

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participate fully in all aspects of the scholarly communication process including writing, refereeing, and editing scholarly articles. One way to provide this encouragement is to openly discuss and debate the editorial and refereeing process and to counter the inadvertent negativism conveyed in most editorial advice.

The typical editor's advice fails to acknowledge or glosses over the weaknesses of the editorial and refereeing functions of the scholarly journals. St. Clair concedes part of this problem when she acknowledges that certain good papers were rejected due to "bad luck."⁶ Another part of the refereeing problem is that relatively weak papers get published. This aspect of the problem may be substantiated using Hernon, Smith, and Croxen's article as an example. Given *C&RL*'s concern with the quality of information published, it should be safe to assume that

Hernon, Smith, and Croxen's article is free of most of the serious flaws listed in St. Clair's editorial. However, the article, which must have gone through a rigorous refereeing process, suffers not only from some of these errors, but from additional problems as well. It is conceivable that a different editor would have either rejected the paper or suggested major revisions. Hernon, Smith, and Croxen's article, for instance, exhibits failure to answer the "so what?" question, poor writing, and failure to make appropriate links between the information they present in the literature review and their own data. The article then goes on to commit an egregious act—setting up a straw man with the purpose of tearing him down. Finally, their article raises important ethical issues that are not fully or satisfactorily answered in the text.

"So What?" Question

The data on the geographic distribution of *C&RL* authors reported by Hernon, Smith, and Croxen should have elicited the "so what?" question from the reviewers. After going through a series of paragraphs full of numbers and percentages on the geographic distribution of authors, one is left wondering about the significance of this information. Is the distribution unusual in any way? Are certain regions or states overrepresented in relation to their general populations or number of librarians or libraries? Based on the literature search, did the authors propose a hypothesis on the distribution of authors by geographic region and on the rate of acceptance of papers? No such discussion could be found in the Hernon, Smith, and Croxen article.

To give the benefit of doubt to the authors, it may be assumed that they had an unstated hypothesis that, among geographic regions, the acceptance rate of papers may be disproportionate to their rate of submission. However, an examination of the data shows no differences among regions on the proportion of pa-

pers accepted to the number of papers submitted. Even going to the level of states, no significant difference could be found. Herson, Smith, and Croxen concede this point:

No significant differences appear in the frequencies of states for submitting and accepted authors. . . . (p. 311)

The states with the largest number of authors whose papers were rejected are identical to those given for the greatest number of submissions. (p. 312)

Therefore, one is left with the question, so what? There is a series of numbers on the geographic distribution of authors, but those numbers add nothing to the readers' understanding of the issue under consideration.

Poor Writing

Herson, Smith, and Croxen's article exhibits poor writing and, in some areas, resembles the boilerplate writing favored by attorneys. The authors should have used tables and charts to achieve an economy of expression, checked for accuracy of the data they presented, and provided information in a more focused manner.

Economy of Expression

Herson, Smith, and Croxen present their findings under three headings: submissions, accepted papers, and rejected papers. This organization resulted in unnecessary duplication of information, made reading of the article tedious, and masked inconsistencies in the data.

Duplication of information follows the observation that $n_r = n_s - n_a$, where n_r is number of rejected papers, n_s is number of submitted papers, and n_a is number of accepted papers. Given the two variables n_s and n_a , it is easy to calculate n_r . In light of this observation, consider the following paragraphs:

Overwhelmingly, [the authors who submitted articles] work in academe:

- 26 in community colleges;
- 50 in baccalaureate institutions;
- 217 in master's-granting institutions;
- 854 in doctoral-granting institutions. (p. 308)

Over three-fourths (404 or 77.7 percent) of the 520 authors affiliated with academic institutions [whose papers were accepted] work at doctoral-granting institutions. The next largest percentage (16.1 percent or eighty-four authors) is associated with master's-granting institutions. The remaining 6.2 percent encompasses baccalaureate programs (twenty-two people) and community colleges (ten). (p. 311)

Given this information, is it possible to calculate, for instance, the number of authors from doctoral-granting institutions whose articles were rejected? The number is the difference between 854 and 404, which is 450. The authors are, of course, helpful and they tell us:

Some 71.8 percent (450) of the 627 individuals affiliated with academic institutions [whose papers were rejected] work in doctoral-granting institutions. The next largest percentage (21.2 or 133 people) is associated with master's-granting institutions. The remaining seven percent includes baccalaureate programs (twenty-eight people) and community colleges (sixteen). (p. 312)

Reading paragraphs with a series of numbers and percentages is tedious, and it is hard to compare the submission, acceptance, and rejection numbers because they are on different pages and thus are physically separated from one another. In terms of economy of expression, present-

ing these data in one table would have been more efficient.

Accuracy of Data

The greatest difficulty with the arrangement chosen by the authors is that it is confusing and may have masked inconsistencies in data. The authors present different numbers for the statistic "total number of submitters." This number could be either 1,242 (according to the gender distribution of 630 female, 599 male, and 13 undetermined) (p. 307) or 1,246 (according to the geographic distribution of 1,124 U.S. authors, 103 non-U.S. authors, and 19 undetermined). However, adding the gender and geographic distributions that are presented under the headings "Accepted Papers" and "Rejected Papers" produces slightly different totals. For instance, in the case of gender distribution, the total comes out to 1,225, instead of 1,242. Why the difference? Endnote 46 cryptically explains that "[e]xcluded from the presentation of gender are the authors of papers needing revision before an editorial decision could be rendered."⁷

Comparing data on the geographical distribution of authors gives rise to a similar disparity. Tallying the numbers given under the papers accepted and papers rejected sections gives the total of 1,233 after taking into consideration that the geographic location of nineteen authors is undetermined. What happened to the missing thirteen authors?

In any case, carefully designed tables and graphs would have presented the same information in a more readable manner, and would have either avoided or explained such inconsistencies in a more straightforward and understandable manner.

Better and More Focused Writing

A good editor should have caught the authors' favorite expressions: "viewed from another perspective," "viewed from a different perspective," "another way to

view the data," and "expressed another way." This repetition added to the tedium of the article. "Viewing from different perspectives," in some instances, clouded matters more. For example, when the authors said, "[v]iewed from a different perspective, sixty-one of the 110 papers (55.4 percent) submitted by faculty members at accredited library schools were accepted for publication," (p. 311) there was no reason to view from this perspective because nothing in the preceding sections prepared readers for such a statement. The fact that library school faculty submitted 110 papers is new information; the preceding paragraphs concentrated on the number of authors, not the number of articles.

Another interesting approach used by the authors is mixing two unrelated topics within one paragraph, as in the following cases:

More than one-third (35.1 percent) of the accepted papers had more than one author. The gender of the 562 individuals who had papers accepted for publication was . . . (p. 311)

Only 22.7 percent of the rejected papers were coauthored. Of the 663 authors, 358 (54%) were women . . . (p. 312)

In their zeal to share with readers every piece of data they gathered, the authors lost sight of the article's readability and allowed it to become unfocused. The "Findings" section starts with the statistic on "number of papers." However, in the next paragraph, the authors switch their attention to the statistic on "number of individuals/authors submitting papers," and much of the paper revolves around this statistic. The authors then switch to two other measures, "number of recommended changes before accepting papers" and "number of reasons for rejecting papers."

Sometimes the numbers in the texts and tables could be baffling. For example, the authors state:

Table 4 summarizes the editorial decision rendered for the 922 submissions examined for this study. The various editors accepted 385 (or 41.8 percent) papers for publication, while rejecting 518 (56.2 percent) papers. For the remaining nineteen papers, the authors withdrew them from consideration . . ." (p. 310)

Examination of table 4 reveals that the number of papers accepted for publication is 447 and the number of papers rejected for publication is 481, which is not the same as the 385 and 518 mentioned in the paragraph above. In a misguided attempt to help the readers, the authors clarify further by using three symbols, "*", "+", and "‡." In case it is not clear, readers are referred to endnote 33, which goes on a different tangent and fails to shed light on the discrepancy between the numbers cited in the text and those listed in table 4.

Demographic data such as gender and geographic distribution would have been better presented in the form of tables. Likewise, data presented in some of the tables would have provided better information if they were in the form of Pareto diagrams. For instance, a Pareto diagram would have shown more clearly the numbers and cumulative percentage of articles coming from administrators, reference librarians, and library school faculty.

Missed Opportunities for Providing Clarification

Hernon, Smith, and Croxen missed several opportunities to provide clarification and explanation of data. They make two points: (1) doctoral-granting institutions account for three-fourths of authors who submitted articles and three-fourths of authors whose articles were accepted for publication; (pp. 308, 311) and (2) almost

half of the submitters are library administrators and reference librarians, and half of all the authors whose papers were accepted for publication also are administrators and reference librarians.⁸ Is there a connection between these two observations and the types of articles favored for publication in *C&RL*? Does *C&RL* attract or favor, by design or by accident, topics and methodologies that appeal only to those who work for doctoral-granting institutions and who are primarily interested in administration and reference services? Is the scope of *C&RL* so narrowly defined as to discourage technical services and information technology personnel from submitting articles? No attempt has been made to connect these two points, leaving readers with disconnected pieces of information.

The literature review quotes Mary Biggs, "when consensus among reviewers, or even a majority 'vote,' is required for acceptance of a manuscript, the tendency toward safe, unexceptionable decisions, and avoidance of intellectual risk-taking is likely to be especially marked" (pp. 304-5). Does Biggs's comment apply to *C&RL* decisions? That is, does *C&RL* shy away from potentially controversial articles in favor of safe, but unexceptional articles? St. Clair, for instance, left unanswered the question, What does she do when one of the two reviewers recommends publication of an article and the second one rejects it? (p. 195). Conflicting recommendations may arise from, among other factors, innovative or controversial approaches taken by the author. Determining whether *C&RL* avoids or welcomes controversy would have been a relevant contribution.

Although Hernon, Smith, and Croxen were careful in providing parallel data for geographic distribution and gender of authors under the categories "articles submitted, articles accepted," and "articles rejected," they did not maintain that parallel structure for more important information. For instance, there is a list of

frequently occurring topics among rejected papers (pp. 312-13), but no such list is presented in the case of accepted papers. That would have given readers some idea as to emphasis or bias on the part of the C&RL editors.

Even the papers that were accepted for publication suffered from problems in the areas of "editorial and writing, interpretation and conclusions, and presentation of results" (pp. 311-12). The 385 papers that were accepted for publication generated 1,054 reviewer recommendations (p. 311), as opposed to 1,426 reviewer comments on 518 rejected papers. How do these comments compare and contrast with each other? One notes that nearly half the recommendations on papers accepted for publication are "related to editorial and writing problems" (p. 311), whereas only 9 percent of the reviewer reasons for rejecting papers come under the heading "poorly written." What does this mean? Without these connections, the conclusions presented by the authors remain weak and unconvincing.

Straw Man Strategy

One of the more troubling parts of the Herson, Smith, and Croxson paper is the setting up of library school faculty as a straw man. The authors set the stage with the statement "[g]iven the leadership role that schools of library and information science should play in research and publishing. . . ." (p. 316). The editor picked up the cue by using this statement in a pull-quote. We are given clues as to the straw man strategy because of the special attention paid to the library school faculty who number 136 out of, say, 1,242. Consider the following statements:

Some sixty-three authors are affiliated with accredited graduate programs in library and information science. Viewed from a different perspective, sixty-one of the 110 papers (55.4 percent) submitted by faculty members at accredited li-

brary schools were accepted for publication. (p. 311)

Fifty-three authors who had papers rejected for publication were affiliated with accredited graduate schools of library and information science. . . . In effect, 45.7 percent of those submitting papers from these schools had their paper rejected. Viewed from another perspective, forty-nine (44.6 percent) of the papers submitted by faculty of these schools were rejected. (p. 312)

These statements are structured in an unusual manner. In the case of any other type of submitters (e.g., library administrators), was a link made between number of authors and number of papers they submitted? These unusual statements alert readers to the fact that the authors are making a special effort to tell them something. A few pages later, readers see what the authors are driving at:

Given the leadership role that schools of library and information science should play in research and publishing, it is important to know more about the breadth, depth, and quality of the research emanating from them and whether other journals experience similar rates of rejection for these faculty members. (p. 316)

To further prepare readers, the authors explain explicitly why papers from "these faculty members" were turned down:

Rejection was based on the fact that the paper offered few new insights, reflected poor scholarship, was poorly written, or had problems in the methodology or in the presentation of findings. (p. 312)

In short, papers from "these faculty members" suffered from the same ills as those of "those librarians!"

There are three reasons why library school faculty should not have been subjected to such special scrutiny: (1) rates of rejection of articles are remarkably consistent among different groups—administrators/reference librarians, people from doctoral-granting institutions, and library school faculty; (2) the authors do not address editorial biases/emphases; and (3) one cannot draw blanket conclusions based on the experience of one journal alone.

The authors implicitly assign the role of infallibility to library school faculty. It seems that by accepting a position as a faculty member in a library school, one is suddenly thrust into such a high responsibility that any sign of fallibility, such as having one's paper rejected for publication in *C&RL*, makes that faculty member run the risk of losing his or her halo and invites inquisition into "the breadth, depth, and quality" of his or her research. Such infallibility, however, is not in accordance with reality. In every field, journals turn down papers from faculty members for a variety of reasons, including poor writing and poor methodology. Library school faculty members are not that special!

Given the fact that readers have not yet understood the impact of the *C&RL* editors and editorial boards on the content and style of articles that were accepted or rejected by *C&RL*, it is hard to draw reliable conclusions on the reasons behind rejection of articles by library school faculty members. For instance, there could be a mismatch between what the library school faculty members were writing and what *C&RL* was willing to publish given its orientation to doctoral-granting institutions, reference librarians, and library administrators. If such is the case, other reasons such as poor writing may be merely secondary reasons for rejecting those papers.

Four out of ten articles rejected by *C&RL* appear in other sources.¹⁰ This is a conservative estimate conceded by the

authors. Specifically, readers do not know how many of the articles submitted by library school faculty find eventual publication. Submitting an article to *C&RL* is not a final act in scholarly communication, nor is getting an article rejected by *C&RL* a matter of high crime for which the library school faculty members or any others should hang their heads in shame. It is conceivable that authors use one journal as a sounding board for their ideas, using the comments from that journal to improve upon papers and submitting them elsewhere. Given that Hernon,

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Smith, and Croxen did not examine the manuscripts themselves, they are basing their conclusions on the reviewers' and editors' comments. But their own literature search draws the readers' attention to researchers' concerns about the refereeing process itself. Before jumping to any conclusions, it is necessary to address those concerns.

Hernon, Smith, and Croxen's article is weak in terms of placing *C&RL* within the scholarly communication pattern of the field of library and information science. Jumping to broad conclusions based on a narrow study is unbecoming of serious scholarly work. Before unduly criticizing library school faculty, it is necessary to examine the rejection rates of articles submitted by faculty members from humanities and social sciences. How do those rejection rates differ from the rejection rates suffered by library school faculty? The trouble is that rejection is not necessarily based on scholarly reasons. Even when every article submitted to *C&RL* conforms to the highest standards, the editors have to reject a certain portion of those submitted because of journal space limitations and other considerations. This

point is noted by the former *C&RL* editor who identified "bad luck" as one of the reasons for rejecting a paper. A member of the editorial board did concede that he or she rejected "perfectly good articles" for other reasons (p. 314). In fact, the type of presentation—e.g., quantitative presentation versus essay-type presentation—may have a bearing on the acceptance of the papers. Ironically, a recent article noted that the articles rejected by *C&RL*, in terms of readability, are better than those accepted and published!¹¹ In any case, a scholarly article should not isolate one segment of the population for special treatment in the absence of legitimate intellectual or methodological reasons.

Ethical Issues

The Herson, Smith, and Croxen article raises important ethical issues. The first issue is the protection of confidentiality of the correspondence between *C&RL* editors and submitters of manuscripts. When an article is submitted, there is an implied understanding that the correspondence between editor and author is confidential; the only person who will see the complete correspondence is the editor and others will see only parts of that correspondence on a need-to-see basis. For instance, in a double-blind refereeing system, which is followed by *C&RL*, reviewers do not see the names of the authors of articles they are reviewing. Herson, Smith, and Croxen's article was the result of the editor sharing the full correspondence with a third party. Although opening up of the correspondence can be justified on the basis of furthering scholarship, one is left wondering what the rights of the authors are in keeping that correspondence confidential.

Although the issue of confidentiality is troubling enough, there is another one that was not even recognized by either the *C&RL* editor or Herson, Smith, and Croxen. This is the expectation of objectivity that researchers should bring to

their research projects. The article by Herson, Smith, and Croxen is problematic because it does not seem to be sufficiently objective.

Herson, Smith, and Croxen complimented *C&RL*'s editors and reviewers on "their responsible approach to their work, their unending patience with authors, and their careful study of the manuscripts" (p. 317). The authors concluded, "refereeing for *C&RL* filtered manuscripts and served the readership of the journal" (p. 317). These congratulatory and complimentary statements should be accorded some skepticism. The senior author at the time of the study was a member of the *C&RL* editorial board. The study was conducted with the cooperation of the editor, who provided the journal's internal records to the authors; thus, the authors are beholden to the editor. Given this context, one wonders how truly objective the authors can be in evaluating the work of *C&RL*'s editors and editorial board.

The question of author independence and objectivity is important because it may have an impact on the type of questions the authors ask or fail to ask. Herson, Smith, and Croxen are a little too quick to be complimentary to the *C&RL* editors and reviewers; they fail to probe the effect of the editorial board and the reviewers chosen on the direction of the journal in terms of the topics and types of articles that are deemed appropriate for the journal. Such topical and format biases may influence the acceptance/rejection rates of the articles submitted. For instance, does the editorial board have a preference for issues that primarily affect major research university libraries? Does the editorial board have a preference for certain scholarly apparatus, thereby ignoring articles that deal with potentially important topics and issues because they lack such scholarly trappings? Does the composition of the editorial board work against intellectual diversity?

The editorial board was reported to have conducted its business "without rancor, major disagreements, egotistical rantings, or self-promotion" (p. 317). Is it because the board is too homogenous? Does one not expect disagreements among editorial board members who are intellectually alive?

Recommendations for Improvement

The above discussion on Herson, Smith, and Croxen's article is presented to demonstrate the ambiguities involved in the refereeing and editorial process. It shows that an article that was accepted for publication by one editorial board could be easily challenged by another reviewer, editor, or editorial board. In other words, there is not an insignificant chance for error in the refereeing process; good papers could get rejected and not-so-good papers, on the other hand, could get accepted. Therefore, the message that should be sent to authors is: If your paper is rejected for publication, carefully read the reviewers' and editors' comments, accept and implement reasonable comments, reject those that are not sensible, and, above all, do not be discouraged. Having a paper rejected is not something to be ashamed of; simply try again.

At the same time, the discussion of Herson, Smith, and Croxen's article has implications for referees, editors, and editorial boards as well. The typical line of communication between editors and authors is one way—from the editors to the authors. Communication from the authors to the editors is relatively sparse because of power differential; authors have trouble arguing with those who always have the last word. The fact that in only eight instances did the authors complain about editorial decisions is a sad testimony to the perceived power of the editors (p. 314).

But in these days of total quality management, there is a good possibility that editors of journals such as *C&RL* may benefit from listening to the authors and

improving communication with the authors. Such a two-way communication may improve the quality of the journals and their relevance to their readers. Here are some suggestions from this reader who has two decades of experience as librarian, library educator, author, and reviewer, and who had his share of accepted and rejected papers.

- The primary function of peer-reviewed library journals such as *C&RL* is quality control by publishing only those articles that meet certain explicit or implicit quality criteria. Although this quality control function is valuable in itself,

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library journals should make the teaching function an integral part of the reviewing process. There is a need for editors, editorial boards, and reviewers to assume this teaching responsibility. Many library school graduates do not possess appropriate skills and experience in writing journal articles; library school programs are too short and too disjointed to inculcate such skills. Many young librarians lack confidence and experience in designing, conducting, and writing a research project; often they labor without sufficient encouragement from their own colleagues and institutions. Therefore, it is necessary that scholarly journals published by ALA broaden their perspectives and play active roles in training new cadres of researchers, authors, and scholarly reviewers. When teaching and training responsibilities are considered as integral to the journal article reviewing process, reviewers will realize that they have to take more time in evaluating the papers and explaining their evaluations to the authors, suggesting relatively detailed ways of improving the rejected articles, and even suggesting the names of experts

who can be of further assistance to the authors. As a profession, we owe it to ourselves to encourage and nurture talent. This can be done without in any way sacrificing the high standards set by the editors for accepting articles.

- Actively train reviewers and members of the editorial boards. Teach them how to review and evaluate articles, how to critique them constructively, and how to advise the authors to improve their submissions. Reviewers need to be open to unorthodox points of view, should not take authors' arguments personally, should refrain from making snide and insulting comments, should learn to distinguish between substantive weaknesses in the article from the run-of-the-mill spelling and grammatical errors, and should learn not to jump to conclusions based on trivial weaknesses in the articles. The U.S. Department of Education, for instance, distributes a training manual that instructs members of peer review panels to "prepare constructive written comments, instead of offering snide commentary."¹² Often reviewers fail to see the broad picture and get lost in details. To assist such reviewers, develop a top-down evaluation method, looking at the most important criteria first, then the next level of criteria, and so on. In such an approach, problems such as spelling errors and grammatical mistakes are at the bottom because they can be fixed with greater ease compared to errors in research design.

- Regularly evaluate the reviewers, members of the editorial boards, and the editors. Some reviewers tend to be more critical of the articles routed to them than other reviewers. Recognize that being highly critical is not always a sign of high standards. It is not uncommon to come across reviews which show that the reviewer is profoundly ignorant of the topic under consideration. Insist that the reviewers and the members of editorial boards provide reasoned and documented arguments when they comment

on the submitted articles. It is only fair because the authors are expected to document their arguments as well.

- Clarify the role of the editor. Tell the author what to expect from the editor. An editor or someone on the editor's staff should take responsibility for assisting the authors in improving the content, style, and presentation of the information contained in the articles accepted for publication. Editors should be master writers; they should help the authors present their arguments in the best manner possible.

- Explicitly state the subject content that is favored by the editor and the editorial board. Editors must clearly articulate the types of articles desired and from whom, if such is the case, to prospective authors.

- Inform the authors of the journal's reviewing policies and procedures—for example, how long the reviewing process takes and when the author can expect to hear from the editor. It is only courteous to provide a timely response to the authors.

- Recognize that not all authors have ready and reliable access to "local peer reviewers." Friends and colleagues of authors cannot always anticipate the types of questions raised by journal editors and reviewers, and, sad to say, many colleagues do not know how to critique someone else's paper. In any case, comments and suggestions from friends and colleagues do not carry the same weight as those of journal editors and reviewers. In fact, there may not be any correlation between the questions raised by "local peer reviewers" and those raised by the members of the journal peer review panels.

- Editors should retain ultimate authority to accept or reject papers. Reviewers' recommendations should be just that—recommendations. Rank-order the recommendations in terms of importance. Encourage the authors to "talk back" to the reviewers; not all the recommendations from the reviewers are sensible or

crucial for improving the paper. It is annoying to the authors to carry out recommendations of one review panel only to be told by another panel to revert back to the original version. Many of these problems occur because of the editors' failure to exercise leadership and let everyone know that they—and not the anonymous reviewers—are responsible for the final decisions.

- Broaden the membership of the editorial boards and manuscript reviewer pool to include a wider spectrum of librarians. Do not treat these positions as spoils to distribute among editors' friends. Make sure that there are adequate opportunities for young librarians to participate in various aspects of journal publishing. Use internships to attract bright, young librarians.

- Conduct regular surveys or focus group interviews of your readers, and identify ways of improving the journal in terms of content, readability, relevance, and appearance. To this author, *C&RL* is too staid, boring, and uninviting; it fails to convey the excitement of intellectual and technological changes sweeping academic librarianship.

- *C&RL* seems to revel in the expansive use of scholarly apparatus—an abundant use of endnotes, footnotes, endnotes to footnotes, unchecked and extraneous discussions in endnotes, and so on. In a number of instances, the primary purpose of discussion in endnotes seems to be to display the authors' research prowess. The trouble is that this type of scholarly apparatus may bury some useful information and create a barrier between author and reader by making the articles difficult to read and understand. Control the use of endnotes by using a simple rule: If the information presented in the endnotes is important, it should be incorporated into the article itself; otherwise, get rid of it.

- Finally, be kind to authors. Writing is a difficult task. Although some people find writing quite easy, most have to work

hard to produce even a three-page manuscript. Most people make all sorts of mistakes, using clichés and trite language and misusing grammar, to name a few. Most people know one or two bright people who cannot spell even if their life

Make sure that there are adequate opportunities for young librarians to participate in various aspects of journal publishing.

depended on it (sorry for the cliché). However, such mistakes may not have any bearing on the worth of the paper; therefore, do not be sidetracked by them but, instead, give a fair and critical reading on the substance of the paper first and the grammar later. Remember that no one intentionally writes articles with poor grammar and spelling; it only shows that the help of a good editor is needed.

Summary

Improving the quality of any journal is a two-way process. Authors must take their task of writing articles for consideration seriously and pay attention to the editors' advice. At the same time, editors should constantly examine their operations and continually implement changes to improve the quality of their journals. They should honestly explain the ambiguities involved in the peer review and editorial processes to their authors and readers, and offer to work with their authors. Instead of lecturing or talking down to authors, they should work toward improving communication between editors and authors, and encourage authors to talk back to the editors by raising questions, pointing out reviewer inconsistencies, and, in general, communicating their concerns. Authors have a right to expect polite, courteous, thoughtful, and speedy responses from editors. After all, ALA journals are supported by membership dues; they are our journals and are not the properties of editors and editorial

boards. In the end, authors, editors, reviewers, and editorial boards need to work together to improve the quality of library journals!

Notes

1. Stephen Lehmann and Bob Walther, "Our View of Reviewing," *C&RL* 54 (Mar. 1993): 91-92.
 2. Peter Hernon and Cheryl Metoyer-Duran, "Literature Reviews and Inaccurate Referencing: An Exploratory Study of Academic Librarians," *C&RL* 53 (Nov. 1992): 499-512; George E. Pettengill, "Letters to the Editor," *C&RL* 54 (Mar. 1993): 178; and Robin Babou, "Letters to the Editor," *C&RL* 54 (May 1993): 271.
 3. Gloriana St. Clair, "Improving Quality: An Editor's Advice to Authors," *C&RL* 54 (May 1993): 195-97.
 4. Peter Hernon, Allen Smith, and Mary Bailey Croxen, "Publication in *College & Research Libraries*: Accepted, Rejected, and Published Papers, 1980-1991," *C&RL* 54 (July 1993): 303-21; "Corrections," *C&RL* 54 (Sept. 1993): 415; and Wendy Culotta, et al., "Letters to the Editor," *C&RL* 55 (July 1994): 372-3.
 5. Hernon, Smith, and Croxen, "Publication in *C&RL*," 317.
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. *Ibid.*, 307; 308 and endnote 43; and 311-12.
 8. *Ibid.*, 309 (table 3), 311.
 9. *Ibid.*, 313 (table 5).
 10. *Ibid.*, 315 (table 7).
 11. Cheryl Metoyer-Duran, "The Readability of Published, Accepted, and Rejected Papers Appearing in *College & Research Libraries*," *C&RL* 54 (Nov. 1993): 517-26.
 12. *Reviewing Applications for Discretionary Grants and Cooperative Agreements: A Workbook for Application Reviewers* (Washington, D.C.: Horace Mann Learning Center, 1991), 1-10.
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Authors' Response

The authors thank the author of "Improving Quality: A Reader's Advice to *C&RL* Editors" for his careful reading of "Publication in *College & Research Libraries*: Accepted, Rejected, and Published Papers, 1980-1991." Although we strongly disagree with many points, it is our hope that readers will hold "Improving Quality" to the same scrutiny. As noted in our references, there is an extensive literature on peer review and assessment of manuscripts submitted to journals for publication. A number of descriptive studies report author characteristics of articles published in different journals, and two studies present statistical profiles of publication patterns of articles appearing in *C&RL*. We attempted to cast our article within the context of this literature, and we are not convinced that hypothesis testing is meaningful for statistical profiles,

although we think it is informative to provide the descriptive information relating to, for instance, the number of authors and the geographic distribution of those submitting papers for possible publication.

Issues relating to privacy fall within two discrete areas: (1) researcher access to the referees' evaluation sheets for the manuscripts submitted, and (2) the steps we took to adhere to strict procedures to protect privacy. Our article discusses both of these points. As the literature indicates, other professional associations have allowed researchers some access to internal documentation and have produced some very interesting results. We attempted to examine the issues the studies addressed and noted that none of them engaged in hypothesis testing.

We agree with the observation that the data might have been presented in a dif-

ferent manner (some charts were eliminated in the review process itself),¹ but would also maintain that the data were submitted to extensive validation. If the author "wonders how truly objective" we were in evaluating the work of the editors, he should first duplicate the work (as would be the case in other disciplines) and then offer observations on objectivity. Also, although he makes numerous assumptions about quality, a careful review of the works cited in our paper would have tempered some of these assumptions.

What is more important, there are ample opportunities for research. The more we probe the internal reviewing process of different journals in library and information science, the more we are able

to see how our discipline stands in relation to other disciplines. Developing a data collection form to capture the reviewing process was much more difficult than previous research suggested.

Not all research can be expected to fit the same pattern. We are pleased that our results parallel research in other disciplines. Given the nature of the published literature, it is important that research within library and information science portray itself within that broader context. Let a criticism of research on the reviewing process do the same!

Peter Hernon is Professor and Allen Smith is Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College.

Note

1. Examples of the eliminated charts can be found in Peter Hernon, *Statistics: A Component of the Research Process* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1994), 91-92.

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