

The Habits of Highly Effective Authors

Scientific Writing and Editing: Tools for
Grant Writers and Authors

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My route to scientific editing and writing

- PhD (Georgetown University) in Cell & Molecular Biology
- Post-doc (Rockefeller University Nobel Laboratory of Paul Greengard)
- Not the biggest fan of the bench...
 - ... but interested in wide range of topics
- Did a lot of freelance writing and teaching
- Started at Nature Medicine as an intern
 - » Assistant Editor April 2004
 - » Associate Editor October 2004
- News Editor at The Journal of Clinical Investigation
- Program Manager, Conferences at The New York Academy of Sciences
- Director of Life Sciences – a LOT of grantwriting
- VP and Scientific Director – still a LOT of grantwriting

The habits of effective authors

- Pick journal or grant carefully
- Start by presenting a novel hypothesis
- Understand that papers that belong in very high-impact journals are:
 - *Conceptually novel*
 - *Technically convincing*
 - *Important to the field and beyond*
 - *Interesting to a broad readership*
 - *Elegant*
- Prepare paper well
- Peer review will help you make the paper better
- Remember there's a next time
- Address the major issues with substantial revisions – respond to important concerns if you have the opportunity

Your letter suggested that the scope of the paper may not be of sufficient interest to the broad readership of *Nature XXXX*. Indeed, in reviewing the title and the abstract of the paper, we realized that we may have chosen overly conservative and narrow descriptors.

Therefore we have revised the abstract and the title to better reflect the manuscript's contents. We trust that these changes should merit a re-evaluation of the overall scope of the paper and thus its suitability for review.

In addition, we have re-discussed the paper with several esteemed colleagues, who were highly impressed by its contents, and strongly advocated that I contact you again regarding the suitability of the manuscript for review by *Nature XXXX*.

At their suggestion, I enclose a list of our recent publications in *Nature* journals and those of similar stature, to further support our suggestion that the paper in question merits review in *Nature XXXX*....

The habits of effective authors

- Do the experiment – don't just rewrite
- Don't propose or conclude the impossible
- Calm down before you call or email
- Study should be well-controlled
- All animal and/or human experiments must be approved
- Write a good abstract that clearly summarizes the work
- Prepare a good cover letter
 - *Feel free to suggest referees, but not all your best friends.*
 - *Fine to suggest people you think should be excluded, in a reasonable manner (not entire fields or institutions).*
 - *Explain appeal to broad audience or the target audience*
 - *Anticipate obvious concerns*
 - *Identify related in press or submitted manuscripts*

November 26, 2002

Editor
Nature Genetics
345 Park Avenue South, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10010-1707
USA

Dear Editor,

It is not clear why a cover letter is required except to fulfill the silly British preoccupation with letterhead and other emblems of status.

Please accept my correspondence.

Sincerely,

The habits of effective authors

- Include *in press* related papers and point out how this submitted one is a significant conceptual advance beyond that
- Read the instructions to authors
 - *Format the manuscript properly*
 - *Use the correct references*
 - *Respect word limit*
 - *Submit figures at the correct resolution*
 - *Histology should be saved at highest resolution for production purposes*
- Don't selectively reference things
- Only submit to one journal at a time
- If your grammar is weak, it is a good idea to have a native English speaker or professional medical editor look over the paper before submission

Cover letter

Title:

Sexual disorder between couples results in launching cerebral signs cancerous cellular growth at their sexual cellule.

(Corresponding Author) [redacted]

Department of clinical pathologist, [redacted]
faculty of vet. Medicine, [redacted]

Author address

[redacted]

Sir / editor of Nature journal

My research explain discovering of a new early tumor markers called Male Oncogenic Antigen (MOAg) in female breast cancer and Female oncogenic Antigen (FOAg) in male prostate cancer, in their Blood and Saliva, As a result of Sexual disorder between couples and also We succeeded in recession the cancer ,by using antibodies that formed against this antigen As anti- for signals cancer cells continuous their uncontrolled multiplications and we hope to use it as a new therapy for cancer.

No. of figure (7 figure) No. of tables (4table)
No. of References (22 Ref.)

Good authors avoid unnecessary jargon

“To elucidate these issues, we utilized the caprine model”

OR...

“... we used goats”

A past title in molecular biology:

Requirement for a Hsp90 chaperone-dependent MEK1/2-ERK pathway for B-cell antigen receptor-induced cyclin D2 expression in mature B lymphocytes.

J Biol Chem. 2002 Jan 31

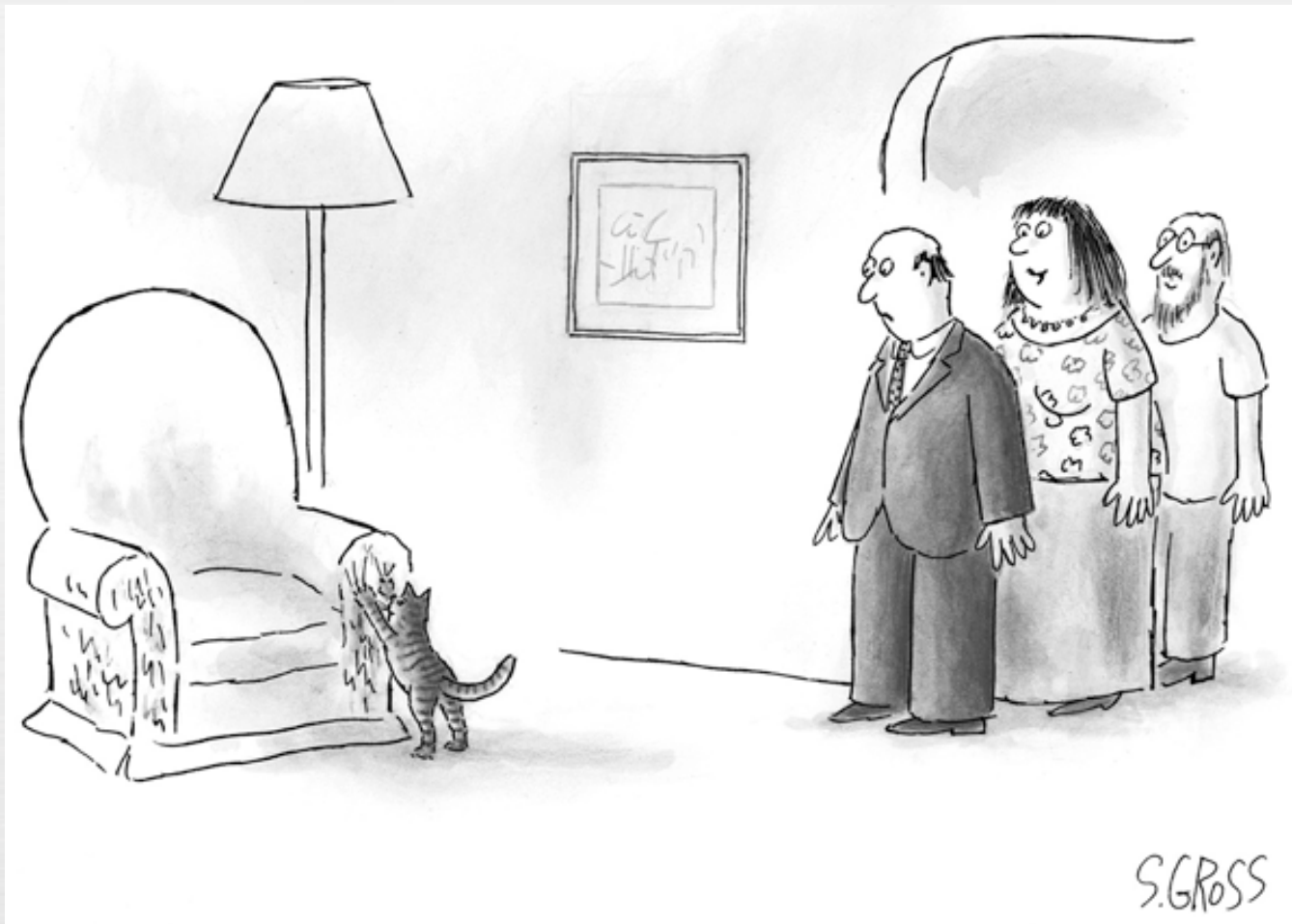
A recent title in paleontology:

Tyrannosaurus was not a fast runner

Nature 2002 Feb 28;415(6875):1018-21

The habits of effective authors – grants, in particular

- Familiarize yourself with the process
 - Sometimes you cannot save your work
 - Most proposals are now accepted electronically
- Follow the instructions
- Do the LOI and save yourself time if you can
- Ask for the appropriate award
- Understand the penalties
- Be prepared to deliver on what you propose
- Complete your progress reports on time
- Understand how to draw down funds
- Ensure that your organization's files are up to date (AOR's etc)
- Complete the entire application



“We believe that in a former life she was an editor”

—The New Yorker

How can I become a science journalist?

- Take every opportunity to write for publication (on any topic)
- University news letters, press office
- Pitch ideas to magazines (The Scientist, alternative newspapers, etc)
- Internships (Discover, Woods Hole, The Economist, etc)
- Writing & journalism programs at universities
- Specialized science writing courses (e.g., UC Santa Cruz, BU, NYU)
- Short courses (e.g., Santa Fe Institute)