

# EDITORIAL

## ON WRITING... AGAIN

Over the 11 years that I have served as editor-in-chief of this *Journal*, several things have become apparent to me. First, is that writing is increasingly becoming a lost skill. Now, I don't confine this observation to authoring publishable papers, but rather to writing in general. This might seem paradoxical since more and more people are using computers for word processing and e-mail. However, when was the last time you wrote a conventional letter to a friend or relative? The terse word bite format of e-mail has taken over, and messages, not letters are sent. They are "to the point", with little or no frills. Indeed, the "Dear" in the salutation is generally omitted, as is the "Sincerely" at the end. Somehow cyberspace cares little for the niceties.

Another example is patient reports. In the distant past the optometrist either produced the report by hand or typewriter. This was followed by templates that specified examination areas in which the results were written or typed. Later, menus were added that accounted for the results that could be obtained in these areas. The optometrist's job then was to circle the appropriate item or items on the menu, and then turn the document to the typist. This occurred in the pre-computer days. Over the last decade the computer software, tailored for optometrists, has included patient reports that can be completed in minutes with virtually no writing required. However, what has been gained in efficiency has been lost in individuality. Many reports are "boiler plates" similar to what is re-

ceived in a communication from the telephone or electric company.

A second thing I have learned is that most optometrists are very hesitant about writing for publication. This is unfortunate because a lot of potentially valuable clinical information and speculations never find their way to print. A scanning of the peer reviewed optometric journals reveals that the overwhelming majority of articles are produced by those in academia or in government agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service. Where the "publish or perish" rule exists articles do get produced. An advantage in these settings is that there is usually help in the form of mentors who have previously published. However, this type of support is rarely available to optometrists in independent private or group practices.

The peer review process of the *Journal of Behavioral Optometry* is somewhat different from that of other journals. Early on we decided that a goal was to extend a helping hand to all authors, especially to those in independent practices. Over time we found it quite productive in an increasing number of instances to foster direct communication between author and peer reviewer or reviewers. In doing this we violated the conventional rule of anonymity between these two groups. However, over time a number of authors have stated that this type of personal interaction served as a mentored writing clinic, and that they now approach manuscript preparation in a more organized and efficient manner.

We have now sought to further provide help by creating a new "Instructions to Authors" document. It has been condensed from some three to one and one-half pages and its content is based on lessons learned in the peer review process. A careful read of this document will give a clear idea of the *Journal of Behavioral Optometry's* purpose and criteria for review, as well as an understanding of the peer review process. Following the instructions should act as a guide for submitting a paper that can facilitate the review process. This revised document is on pages 26 and 27 of this issue.

The editorial and peer review boards wish to thank all those who have submitted articles to us over the life of this *Journal*. We further wish to encourage those who believe they have information or a message they wish to share to put it on paper and submit it for publication. The experience and rewards can be considerable.

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