Book Review

How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper. Robert A. Day. Institute for Scientific Information, Philadelphia, Pa., 1979, 160 p., \$8.95.

Robert A. Day's recent book, *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*, probably can do more for microbiology and microbiologists than any scientific publication in the field this year. There are other authoritative style manuals, but this one is readable, short, and informative. For professors teaching students to write theses that will do their research justice, researchers writing manuscripts for the most effective and impressive publication of their vital discoveries, highly qualified scientific reviewers of manuscripts, dedicated scientific editors (not to mention managing editors), and all microbiologists who read the scientific literature, the time that the book can save could be enough to replace petroleum with microbial cultures or possibly even to complete a week of work by five o'clock Friday.

Although most of us find that writing is hard work, and "good writing is damned hard work" especially by the n-teenth revision, Mr. Day makes each aspect, from Title to Literature Citations (Chapters 1 to 11, in 41 pages), a much more interesting job, even if not a favorite pastime of the research scientist. He knows his readers well and answers their foremost question, "why," with clarity, example, and considerable poignant humor. Some of us less expert in writing might quibble with a minor point or two, but my colleagues and I are more than grateful for clear statements like "... Thus the rule: Present the data in the text, or in a table, or in a figure. *Never* present the same data in more than one way." (Chapter 12, page 45—if your graduate students' first drafts are like ours). We have suggested that each of our students

obtain a copy. Mine has been borrowed twice this week.

The book is not just for beginners. As Mr. Day makes clear, the written style of science has changed since some of us were told that "something can't be autoclaved any more than auto-mobiled." (Perhaps that too has changed. It's not mentioned in his book, but "sonicate" and "electrophorese" are.) In 26 short chapters on typing, submitting, dealing with editors, dealing with printers and their symbols, English usage, jargon, and more, Bob has generously shared insight, professional hints, and humor from the editor's world: "The working day of a managing editor wouldn't be complete until he or she had savored such a morsel as 'Lying on top of the intestine, you will perhaps make out a small transparent thread.'"

The appendices on accepted abbreviations for journal titles, abbreviations in table headings that require no definition, and current style and spelling ("pipette," "disk," and other friends I thought I'd lost), are convenient and frequently needed reference information.

Even though it has always "amazed" our managing editor that "A scientist will spend months or years of hard work to secure his data, and then unconcernedly let much of their value be lost because of his lack of interest in the communication process," he is able to present writing and editing as almost as interesting, and certainly as important, as the laboratory data. If (I nearly said "In case") my verbosity clouded my intent, I recommend that you read, enjoy, and value the book too.

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