

**Writing Scientific Papers in English.** By M. O'Connor and F. P. Woodford. (\$7.95). Amsterdam: Elsevier/Excerpta Medica/North-Holland. 1975.

Some years ago I was asked to comment on a draft paper with the intriguing title 'A hygienic standard for chrysotile asbestos dust'. At dinner that evening I mentioned this to a colleague, 'Hygienic standard', he mused, 'a sterilized lamp-post, perhaps, for well-bred dogs'. There is no reason why nouns should not be used adjectivally, although conversion of the modifying noun into an adjective may change its meaning. 'Protein iron' states the authors of *Writing Scientific Papers in English* is quite acceptable, but this must not be carried too far. 'Adult sheep muscle protein iron' impedes understanding and may even defy it.

The writing of good scientific papers, however, is not simply a matter of unsplitting infinitives, attaching lonely participles, and that sort of thing. I have always found that colleagues are very willing to help in this way. Right at the beginning of this excellent book it is correctly stated, 'The most troublesome blocks to writing a good scientific paper are conceptual and procedural'. Having thus clearly identified the main problem the writers produce useful advice on how to solve it. They suggest that the author should start by writing a 'working abstract', that will never appear but which will serve to clear his mind and rearrange his ideas. 'Clarity and the orderly arrangement of ideas are far more important than perfect grammatical form' is a maxim which might well be hand written at the top of every working abstract and penultimate draft.

Similarly they give the obvious but necessary advice that the aim of the writer should be to awaken interest rather than stifle it with fussy detail. Everyone must have read or listened to a paper in which the author sought to cover himself against all criticism when he need not have bothered, for his critics and others had given up, either turning their minds to other things or else falling asleep.

After much useful and frequently neglected advice on writing and revising the paper and on preparation of tables, graphs, and illustrations there is a chapter on responding to the editor. In my experience, the great majority of authors including the inexperienced and the eminent, appreciate the comments of the editor and the referees. Nevertheless a few, including the inexperienced and some eminent, react arrogantly and aggressively. The writers of this book rightly say that 'Criticism will nearly always have been made dispassionately, for the sake of the journal's reputation and the furthering of science, not with the aim of discomforting you or denigrating your work. Most referees are impartial in their assessment of papers submitted to them, and are too busy to spend time and effort inventing trivial objections to your paper'.

Every scientific author should convert his trio of Fowler, Roget, and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* into a quartet with this practical and clearly written book. The useful appendix on clumsy phrases to avoid has helped me in writing this short review.

W. R. LEE

## NOTICES

### Society of Toxicology

The annual scientific meeting of the Society of Toxicology will be held at the Marriott Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia from 14 to 18 March 1976. Further information may be obtained from: Dr Gale C. Boxill, Secretary, Society of Toxicology, Wyeth Laboratories Inc., Box 861, Paoli, Pennsylvania 19301, USA.

### International Radiation Protection Association

The IVth international congress will be held at the Paris Convention Centre, France from 24 to 30 April 1977.

The theme will be 'Radiation protection as an example of action against modern hazards' and all aspects of protection will be discussed. The languages of the congress will be French and English.

There will be an exhibition of techniques and equipment that have been developed in various countries for the protection of workers, the population, and the environment.

Further information may be obtained from: Mr Gilbert Bresson, General Secretary IRPA IVth International Congress, B.P. 33, 92260—Fontenay-aux-Roses, France.

### Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

The third international conference will be held in Liverpool from 4 to 9 April 1976.

Papers will be presented by those involved in the fields of alcoholism and drug dependence including educationalists, psychiatrists, physicians, psychologists, sociologists as well as representatives from social work agencies both statutory and voluntary.

Further information may be obtained from: Miss M. C. Smith, Conference Secretary, B15 The Temple, Dale Street, Liverpool L2 5RU.

### Erratum

Pilot study of closing volume in byssinosis by R. P. Fairman, J. Hankinson, H. Imbus, N. L. Lapp, and W. K. C. Morgan *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* 1975, 32. Line 1, column 1, page 236 should be printed at the bottom of column 1, page 235. It should therefore read: The study was carried out in a North Carolina cotton mill in which byssinosis is still a problem. Previous surveys using the Medical Research Council (MRC) questionnaire, and standard tests of ventilatory capacity before and after a shift . . .