

Current Trends in Library Journal Editing

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THE LIBRARY PERIODICAL remains the principal means for the formal and prompt communication of professional information. The journal can respond in a more timely fashion and to a greater variety of issues than does the monograph. Admittedly, it is not as current as addresses at meetings or various forms of informal communication among members of the profession. Except for the limited accessibility of some periodicals—for reasons of subscription costs—the journal is a more democratic form of professional communication and makes the same information available to all readers.

The key individual present in this process of communication is the journal editor. This individual plays several roles. First, and most important, the editor is a “gatekeeper” and in this role makes the ultimate decision as to which manuscripts to accept for publication. Second, the editor works as a counselor to authors, aiding them to achieve the clearest and most understandable way to express their thoughts and ideas in writing. Third, working with production and marketing staff, the editor seeks to realize a publication that will attract readers and hold their attention.

Although these three elements endure as basic components in the editor’s functions, some changes do occur with time. Such changes may occur slowly and not uniformly for any group of journals. In fact, one may sense no change at all. Thus, in reviewing ten years of magazine publishing, Katz is obliged to conclude that nothing has happened. He

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does qualify his abrupt dismissal by admitting that for some periodicals it does take longer than a decade to sense any changes.¹

Thus it may be true for the editing of periodicals in librarianship as well; changes that occur may not seem dramatic or may occur slowly. This article seeks to call attention to various trends in library periodicals in the recent past as they have affected the editor's duties. In some cases trends are so recent that we may not fully appreciate their consequences. These trends, insofar as they affect editing, arise from three sources: changes in the periodicals themselves, changes in the profession the journals serve, and changes in the technology available for their preparation, production, and distribution.

THE JOURNALS

Numbers of Journals

As in all disciplines, periodicals in librarianship continue to grow in number. Thompson Little provides a good historical view of the increase in the number of library periodicals since the beginning of the century and particularly since World War II. Writing in 1968, Little observed that 63.75 percent of all journals had begun publication since the war.² The actual count of the number of journals being published does vary according to one's definition of the field as well as the inclusion of various kinds of serial publications. In 1979 Tegler reported estimates that ranged from 500 to 1000 titles.³

Using the principal U.S. indexing service, *Library Literature*, one does not experience this dramatic growth, at least in the recent past, because of *Library Literature's* control of the number of journals it covers. Thus a count over the past four decades shows 176 titles indexed in 1957, 185 in 1967, 235 in 1977, and 200 in 1987. Some shakedown occurred in the decade 1977-87; the 1987 volume of *Library Literature* records a net increase of twenty-one titles covered as compared with the previous year.⁴

Employing *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory* (1983) and *Ulrich's Irregular Serials and Annuals* (1983-84) for their count, Bottle and Efthimiadis provide a recent view of this growth. They note a cumulative total of 1545 journals currently published in 1983. Reviewing the period 1860 to 1933, they calculate that the number of journals for the profession doubles every 13.8 years.⁵ At one time some critics expressed the fear that there are too many journals. Moon, for example, recommended in 1969 that at least one in three library periodicals cease publication.⁶ Such concerns have not recently been uttered.

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With this growth in numbers there does arise a greater number of editorial openings in library periodicals. Only a handful of library journals employ a full-time editor. Openings are part-time in nature, generally filled on a volunteer basis by a person who already has a full-time position. Often the person receives no remuneration for the duties performed. Because of the volunteer, part-time nature of the editorial positions, considerable turnover occurs. Additionally, in some professional associations there are limits on the length of time one may serve as an editor. Thus there exists a greater number of opportunities for would-be editors.

One must retain some perspective when viewing the increase in number of library periodicals and realize that the numbers are small indeed when compared with those in other disciplines. Very few library periodicals receive more than 100 manuscripts a year, yet Simon and her colleagues report the leading journals in the social sciences receive from 400 to 700 submissions each year.⁷

Specialization of Journals

As library journals have grown in number, the new titles have become increasingly specialized. Few if any of the new periodicals take a general overview of the profession. *Research Strategies*, from Mountainside Publishing, deals with bibliographic instruction. *The Bottom Line*, from Neal-Schuman, focuses on financial management. The Haworth Press has spawned the greatest number of specialized titles (now fifteen in number) ranging from serials, acquisitions, and cataloging, to library administration, library security, reference service, and cooperation.⁸ Meckler Publishing has focused on technology and has introduced a variety of journals related to specialized uses for computers in libraries.⁹ On a smaller scale, Pierian Press has moved from its bibliographically oriented journals on serials and reference sources to the field of automation with its journal *Library Hi Tech*.¹⁰

In the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), a further specialization of journals—beyond the basic *College & Research Libraries* and *College & Research Libraries News*—has occurred. Sections in ACRL are issuing their own newsletters, and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section has begun its own formal journal, *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship*. In a different vein, ALA's Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA) replaced its *LAMA Newsletter* with a formal journal, *Library Administration & Management*. Not only do these new publications provide additional editorial opportunities, they

also call for more specialized knowledge and skills from editors. Not necessarily possessing all the requisite knowledge, the editors will call upon their own advisors for aid. Thus the advisors perform a dual function: first, to give the editor the benefit of their own expertise; and, second, as discussed in more detail later, to serve as referees for manuscripts.

Changes in the Literature

Elsewhere in this issue Stephen Atkins provides an overview of the subjects for journal articles in principal library periodicals during the past decade. Although restricting herself to one journal, Cline has provided a review of subjects covered in the first forty years of publication of *College & Research Libraries*.¹¹

In the past, authors' treatment of their subjects has not met with an overall good reception from critics. The most damning criticism for the literature of librarianship was Moon's phrase, "this incredible stream of garbage,"¹² a phrase subsequently used by Jones for his own critique of British library periodicals.¹³ In recent years the criticism has lessened. There remain a few blips on the scope, however, such as Berry's diatribe against the *Library Administration Quarterly*, which he states "exhibits the right stuff to hold its own with the host of publications born to the genre in the last decade" and "is on its way to joining the others as a permanent drain on academic library serials budgets."¹⁴ Such a criticism, although colorful, is, in this writer's judgment, now in the minority. Overall, the quality of manuscripts does seem to improve. Roberts, providing his own summary of British library journals for 1969 to 1979, concludes that there has been a substantial improvement in the quality of professional writing.¹⁵

Judgments on the quality of writing will remain in part subjective. Students of the literature have used a more quantitative approach to study the subjects and the methodologies employed by writers in librarianship. Kim and Kim, for example, comparing articles in *College & Research Libraries* for the decade 1957-66 with the decade 1967-76, point out the major increase in studies that use quantitative methods. They acknowledge that writers did employ few sophisticated forms of analysis, yet these writers did recognize the need for more controlled forms of investigation.¹⁶ In her review of forty years of *College & Research Libraries*, Cline observes a greater adherence to scholarly standards over time.¹⁷

The overall changes in approaches and methodology have been documented in a series of other studies. The most extensive by Peritz in

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1977 described an increase in research-based articles from 5 percent in 1950 to 35 percent in 1975.¹⁸ Other studies, using a similar methodology (Nour in 1983; Eaton and Burgin in 1984; and Feehan, et al., in 1985), disputed Peritz's 35 percent increase and concluded that research at the time of their studies accounted for 23 to 24 percent of the published literature. Eliminating some journals from their sample, Feehan and her colleagues raised the total to 27.7 percent.¹⁹ Although not directing their attention to published articles, Coughlin and Snelson conclude that one-third of the papers presented at the ACRL national conferences in 1978 and 1981 can be considered research.²⁰

Even though there may be disagreement on the amount of research represented in the published library literature, whether it is one-quarter or one-third, commentators do agree that in their published writings librarians are becoming more sophisticated and disciplined in the methodologies they use.

This change may not be rapid enough to satisfy critics, but it does mean that editors are now receiving a greater number of manuscripts that use more advanced methodologies. Just as editors need to be more aware of specialization, they must also be capable to handle and judge various forms of research. If they are not, they must be able to call upon knowledgeable advisors for aid. An informal survey by this author among a group of library periodical editors during the preparation of this article confirms this assessment. They report a greater evidence of critical thinking and orientation to research and to problem solving. They report, in general, that the quality of manuscripts is improving, even if they still find that considerable efforts are needed to improve composition and grammar.

As to numbers of manuscripts they receive, the editors report no increase, and a few even report a decline. Several attribute the drop in submissions to new journals that cover the same subjects.

The editors also report an increase in manuscripts dealing with aspects of technology and library automation. Several report that they look for manuscripts that represent the cutting edge of technology and conclude that the individuals engaged in more advanced or innovative projects are busy "doing" and so are not writing. Thus as the number of journals has increased and as the new arrivals look to increasingly specialized subject areas, authors have made greater use of formal research methodologies and are producing better manuscripts. Editors are not encountering an increase in the number of manuscripts they receive and more and more they must call upon advisors to assist them in assessing papers.

THE PROFESSION

Changes in the library profession, particularly among academic librarians, have affected library periodicals and their editors in two principal ways: first, an increased emphasis on writing for publication, and, second, increased formality and more structured procedures in all forms of professional relationships.

Writing for Publication

The principal thrust by academic librarians has been to secure parity with members of the formal teaching faculty in their institutions. But as they seek equal privileges, they must also assume equal responsibilities. Unfortunately, the emphasis on responsibilities has generally preceded the emphasis on privileges.

One responsibility of the faculty is research and publication. Thus far this responsibility has affected a minority of academic librarians. Rayman and Goudy report in their 1980 survey that of the responding sixty-eight ARL libraries, 15 percent have a publication requirement for their librarians. Of the twenty-four libraries where librarians have full faculty status, in ten (42 percent) there is a requirement to publish. Rayman and Goudy note several respondents added that publishing requirements were soon to become mandatory in their institutions, and the authors conclude "the shift is clearly on the increase."²¹

Writing five years later, Watson reports from her study of eleven major journals from 1979 to 1983 that the requirement to publish has indeed affected the publication productivity of academic librarians. She further reports that at twelve of the twenty most productive libraries (in terms of publishing), the librarians have faculty status as well as the benefits and privileges that encourage research and publication.²²

Response by the Profession

The profession has supported the academic librarian's cause for status, and although it cannot directly secure working conditions that are conducive to research and publication for librarians, it has in a variety of ways tried to aid librarians in these endeavors.

Publications have appeared to facilitate the creative process. The directory, *Library and Library-Related Publications* (1973), lists 160 titles and provides brief guidelines for authors on manuscript submission.²³ Two similar directories followed in the next decade: Stevens and Stevens's *Author's Guide to Journals in Library & Information Science*

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(1982) provides, in tabular form, information on 140 periodicals to aid authors in submitting manuscripts. The guide includes data on the editorial review practice in each journal as well as information on acceptance rates and publication schedules. Norman Stevens's article, "Writing for Publication," serves as an introduction to the volume.²⁴ Bowman's *Library and Information Science Journals and Serials: An Analytical Guide* (1985) fills a similar function for the 311 titles it lists.²⁵ However, directories such as these are obsolete upon publication because of the turnover in journal editors and changes in publishers. At best they give a general idea of the professional market for librarian authors.

Two recent books, published within a few months of each other, directly address the mechanics librarians should employ in writing for publication. *Librarian/Author*, edited by Betty-Carol Sellen, includes chapters by individual authors on various subjects related to writing and publishing. (This author provided the chapter on preparing the journal article.) A directory of ninety-one journals in library and information science concludes the volume.²⁶ Alley and Cargill's *Librarian in Search of a Publisher* is a similar work but with only two authors it has a clearer focus and better organization.²⁷

Stevens continues as a leader in assisting librarians to write and publish. With a grant from the Council on Library Resources in the 1970s, he established the New England Academic Librarians' Writing Seminar to aid a group of area librarians in writing by means of mutual criticism of one another's work. A group of essays from the seminar was published in 1980,²⁸ but there have been no similar formal activities of this nature.

Programs on writing for publication continue as staple functions at library association conferences. The Library and Information Literature Membership Initiative Group (LIL'MIG) (now Library and Information Science Literature Task Force of Library Research Round Table [LILT]) sponsored a particularly good program at the ALA conference in 1982.²⁹ At the 1987 ALA conference two programs focusing on writing and publishing research were presented by two different units and competed for attendance since they were scheduled in the same time slot.³⁰

ACRL introduced the one-day workshop, "Writing the Journal Article and Getting It Published" in 1981, as one of its first continuing education workshops. It has since been offered numerous times at ALA, ACRL, and state library association conferences, as well as at individual libraries.³¹ Such actions by the profession may have played a role in

helping to increase the number, as well as to improve the quality, of manuscripts, thus possibly aiding editors in their work.

Professional Relationships

Professional relationships in libraries have mirrored those in society at large in that they have become increasingly formal. Procedures are spelled out in detail on what one should do and what one can expect in the workplace. Personnel manuals in libraries are written carefully to take care of all exigencies, and in some cases collective bargaining agreements serve as the major control for all work relationships. Library periodicals have not been exempt from such changes, and the relationship between editor and author has begun to follow certain rituals and procedures.

As part of the relationship between editor and author, significant attention has focused on the editorial review process a journal employs and the rise of a formal refereeing program. The subject of journal refereeing remains a popular one for many disciplines. Two librarians, A. Carolyn Miller and Sharon L. Serzan, provide a good overall view in their 1984 article, "Criteria for Identifying a Refereed Journal."³²

The subject of refereeing is linked with journal acceptance rates. The first article in librarianship to address these two issues is O'Connor and Van Orden's 1978 study. In it they surveyed thirty-three major library periodicals. They found that the journals had an average acceptance rate of 22.7 percent for unsolicited manuscripts.³³ The authors professed shock at this low rate, although it was roughly the same in other similar professional fields.³⁴ Miller and Serzan link librarianship with other professional studies in their analysis of journals and determine a mean acceptance rate of 26 percent.³⁵ Assembling these figures, O'Connor and Van Orden also asked editors about the journals' manuscript review procedures. They then described the variety of practices used—ranging from one person (the editor) deciding what is accepted through various arrangements of an editor working with an editorial staff or an advisory board to a formal double-blind refereeing process (with neither author nor referee knowing the other's identity).³⁶

John Budd has prepared the most recent review of this subject, with a survey of forty-eight journals. He has determined an acceptance rate ranging from 30.5 percent to 38.4 percent. Like O'Connor and Van Orden, Budd also queried journals on editorial review procedures. He is able to note, like the earlier authors, the variety of practices followed. But whereas only three of the thirty-three responding journals in the

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1978 study employed a double-blind refereeing process, Budd can report a decade later that fifteen of the forty-eight responding journals used double-blind refereeing.³⁷

As editors rely on advisors to assist them in technical and specialized subjects with which they are not overly conversant, through the double-blind refereeing process these advisors can aid in determining that the final editorial decision is reasonably objective and not subject to the whim of one individual. Although not all problems in editorial review procedures can be solved, there is general agreement that the double-blind refereeing process remains the best means for manuscript review.

Most of the research done regarding manuscript review has been directed to the author and the journal editor. Glogoff introduces a novel look at the third participant in the process, the referee, and his survey of this group demonstrates the emphasis they place on validity of claims and originality of thought as they review manuscripts.³⁸ The change that has occurred in the editorial review process has not only come from urging within the profession and the example of journals in other professions. There has also been the stated requirement in some academic institutions that publications offered to support an application for tenure or reappointment must have appeared in refereed publications. To date there exists no agreed-upon list of such publications, and it obscures the major achievements of some commissioned articles such as those that appear in a journal like *Library Trends*. As the refereeing process introduces, in one sense, a constraint upon the editor, it also serves as an excellent means of support and protection for the editor if that proves necessary.

In addition to these internally imposed controls, the profession has also introduced some external directives. One product of the Library and Information Literature Membership Initiative Group in ALA was a set of "Guidelines for Authors, Editors, and Publishers of Literature in the Library and Information Field" that were adopted by the ALA Council in 1983. The guidelines are "designed to aid authors in following procedures likely to encourage consideration and acceptance of their manuscripts; to inform authors of customary publishing practices; and to suggest fair and sensible procedures for publishers to follow in dealing with authors."³⁹ Although called guidelines, the statement is quite formal with an introductory set of definitions including the use of "shall" to mean a requirement and "should" a recommendation. The sections, too, are numbered in such a formal manner that one questions if it is a quasi-legal document for ALA. Despite its appearance, however,

the guidelines include good common sense and represent standard current practice. The first section concerns journal articles, and editors and authors can benefit from it.

The profession thus has had its impact on journal editing. By encouraging (and in some cases requiring) publishing by librarians, it has stimulated librarian authors to prepare manuscripts. With directories of journals, how-to manuals, conference programs, and workshops, the profession has helped to ensure a better quality of manuscript. As the author-editor relationship has become more formal, procedures for journal editorial review have changed so that authors are now assured of more equitable and objective consideration of their manuscripts.

TECHNOLOGY

Alternate Forms of Publishing

We are now witnessing some specific changes in the format of journals. ALA and OCLC have each introduced journals on videocassette. ALA's publication features a variety of articles appropriate for television coverage—for example, the fire in the Los Angeles Public Library. OCLC's video periodical is primarily a promotional device to describe its services, interspersing them with scenes in a network member—for example, the American Museum of Natural History. Production and editorial skills required for such a journal are much different from those involved with printed publications.

At another level we have electronic bulletin boards through which individual librarians may communicate with one another by personal computer. Although these bulletin boards can prove to be a relatively quick form of communication, the structure of a journal and the editorial control are lacking. At best it can serve as a fast way to share information among those who have the equipment; at worst it can provide a mechanism for gossip such as that heard in a hotel corridor at a library conference.

Text Preparation

Although we are now witnessing the introduction of alternate forms of publication, one area in which the computer has proved basic is in manuscript preparation. From this author's observations, most librarian writers now use some form of computer or word processing equipment to prepare their manuscripts. Dot matrix printers have

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improved immeasurably and now print fully formed characters complete with ascenders and descenders. The daisy wheel printers provide copy equivalent to yesterday's electric typewriter, and the laser printer gives a nearly typeset appearance to manuscripts.

Manuscript composition and revision have been radically changed; at that point we stop. With but few exceptions, our journals rekey the text of a manuscript on some other type of equipment. The informal survey of journal editors for this article uncovers little or no reuse of the machine-readable text of the manuscript or the electronic transmission of text from author to editor. We anticipate developments in this field, however, and look forward to the changes that will occur in the author-editor relationship and in the editorial review procedures.

Computers in Publishing

We have progressed in journal publishing from hot type and lino-type machines through cold type with phototypesetting equipment to digital typesetting by means of a computer. With rapid changes in personal computers and the provision of page layout software we are now witnessing the establishment of desktop publishing as a cottage industry. To the untutored eye, the output from a laser printer is equivalent to that of phototypesetting. Several periodicals issued by Meckler Publishing and Pierian Press now use this technology, and ALA itself is starting a prepress operation that will include much of its journal and book production.

Walt Crawford, editor of the *LITA Newsletter* (issued by the Library and Information Technology Association, a division of ALA), has converted his group's newsletter to desktop publishing. He prepares camera-ready copy on a personal computer and sends it on for printing and distribution. In doing so, he has cut back on production time thus improving timeliness for the newsletter, and he reports that because of savings he can now expand coverage without an increase in budget.⁴⁰ On the basis of Crawford's experience we now see, in terms of print on page, that the journal editor, using a personal computer, can now edit copy, set type, and lay out pages for final printing. Many formerly separate operations can now be combined as in an earlier age when printing first began.

Conclusion

A review of these trends shows a continuing increase in the number of library periodicals as well as their further specialization as they cover

new fields or subsets of existing areas. Thus opportunities for editors continue to grow.

Also, the quality of manuscripts is improving, and librarians are using more sophisticated methodologies in their research. Librarians are being increasingly encouraged or required to write for publication, and the profession has devised numerous means to improve skills in writing. Changes in the author-editor relationship have led to more formal methods for editorial review. Editors benefit from the advice of referees, and authors are better assured of objective consideration of their manuscripts.

Television and computers are now being used for alternate forms of journal publication, and authors use computers for manuscript preparation. Print journals as yet, however, are doing little to use the manuscripts in machine-readable form from their authors. The personal computer and page layout software, however, are now starting to have a definite impact on periodical production.

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