



Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS)

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Potential employers and clients of manuscript editors usually have no objective way to assess the proficiency of editors. For their part, editors are frustrated by their difficulty in demonstrating their abilities. That is why both employers and editors so often resort to personal references or ad hoc tests, not always with satisfactory results. The need for an objective test of editorial skill has long been recognized.

The Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) was founded in 1991 to evaluate the proficiency of manuscript editors in the life sciences and to award credentials similar to those obtained in other professions. Ten editors active in national and international associations in scientific editing and publishing, assisted by consultants in testing, worked to design a certification program. The first certification exam was offered in 1991 and there are now almost 700 BELS-certified editors around the world.

BELS offers 3 credentials:

- **Editor in the Life Sciences:** This designation is earned by candidates who pass a 3-hour multiple-choice test of scientific editing in English. Editors who complete the certification examination may use the designation ELS (Editor in the Life Sciences) after their names.
- **Diplomate Editor in the Life Sciences:** The diplomate program evaluates the abilities of more experienced Board-certified editors by means of a formal review of edited manuscripts in a portfolio submitted by the candidate. Editors who successfully complete the review process use the designation of ELS(D) after their names.
- **Honored Editor in the Life Sciences:** This group includes editors whose careers in editing in the life sciences have been so distinguished that BELS has bestowed the title Honored Editor in the Life Sciences (ELS[H]). This exclusive group includes Maeve O'Connor, Edward Huth, Edie Schwager, and Barbara Gastel.

Membership in BELS is not limited to those with a degree or editorial experience in the life sciences. Editors who have academic backgrounds in many different subjects have passed the certification examination. If you have experience in editing material published in journals, newsletters, textbooks, or reference books in any scientific

or related field, you have a reasonable chance of earning certification. Approximately 64% of applicants for certification succeed in passing the examination. (See page 215 for the list of AMWA members who have most recently passed the BELS exam.)



Editors who have obtained BELS certification are sometimes asked what education, skills, or qualities are needed to pass the certification examination. We recently reviewed the BELS applicant database and provide the following perspectives on who passes the examination:

- **Experience:** Applicants must have at least 2 years of experience as a "manuscript editor" in the life sciences; BELS defines a manuscript editor as one who is concerned not only with the form but also the intellectual content of a manuscript. When examination scores were evaluated by relative number of years of editing experience, it was noted that slightly higher mean scores were obtained by editors with more than 10 years of experience, compared with those having 5-10 years of experience or those with 2-5 years of experience, but the differences were not significant.
- **Education:** The Board also requires candidates to have at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent from an accredited academic institution. When reviewing examination outcome based on educational background, insignificant differences were found between candidates with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

The organization does not discriminate based on the type of degree an editor may have when determining candidate eligibility for the examination. Analysis of the database showed that most applicants had degrees in the physical or life sciences (45.0%) and English or journalism (37.5%), but 4.7% had degrees in the social sciences and 12.4% of the candidates had degrees in other liberal arts. Again, insignificant differences were found in overall scores for each of these candidate populations.

The organization sponsors examinations periodically throughout the calendar year, with testing performed at the annual conferences of AMWA, Council

of Science Editors, and European Association of Science Editors. Based on candidate interest, examinations are also held in other locations in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Several AMWA chapters now host BELS examinations as part of their chapter curriculum events.

Certification by BELS is recognition of an editor's skills and experience. It carries with it several membership-related benefits:

- The BELS Web site has a jobs opening page for members to peruse, and BELS members can advertise jobs in their organizations for free.
- Freelance BELS editors can advertise their businesses for free on the Freelance Ads page.
- The *BELS Letter* is published quarterly (both online and in hard copy), with contributions from members and the BELS Executive Council.
- The BELS Listserv is active with queries, discussion, and lively debate about editing topics, publication ethics, and tips on freelancing

What does BELS certification mean to potential employers? To quote an advertiser on the job posting page of the BELS Web site: "I specifically ask for BELS certification because I know that I'll end up with a skilled, experienced editor."

What does BELS certification mean to editors? The value of BELS certification to a writer/editor is immeasurable. Obtaining certification reinforces your confidence in your editing skills and the network of BELS editors that you can reach out to when you need help is just amazing. In addition, as BELS and its reputation have grown, more and more employers are specifically looking for BELS-certified editors.

For interested editors, the BELS Web site (www.bels.org) has details on the certification process, updates on current examination dates and locations, links to editing resources, and back issues of the *BELS Letter*.

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) Certification Examinations

Friday, February 29, 2008 • 1 PM–4 PM
Embassy Suites Orlando Hotel, Orlando, FL
(AMWA Florida Chapter Conference,
February 29–March 2)
→ Register by February 8, 2008

Sunday, March 30, 2008 • 2 PM–5 PM
Asilomar Conference Center, Pacific Grove, CA
(AMWA Northern California Chapter Conference)
→ Register by March 9, 2008

Friday, May 2, 2008 • 9 AM–12 PM
The William & Ida Friday Center for Continuing
Education, Chapel Hill, NC
(AMWA Carolinas Annual Conference,
May 2–4, 2008)
→ Register by April 27, 2008

Saturday, May 17, 2008 • 1 PM–4 PM
Hyatt Regency Vancouver, Vancouver, BC
(CSE May 16–20)
→ Register by April 27, 2008

Wednesday, October 22, 2008 • 10 AM–1 PM
TBA, Louisville, KY
(AMWA Annual Conference)
→ Register by October 1, 2008

Note: You must successfully complete the application process before you can register for an examination. Please allow at least 5 weeks for the application and registration process if you use the US mails. International mails may take longer than 5 weeks. Obtain an application form from the BELS Web site (www.bels.org).

For more information, contact Leslie E. Neistadt, ELS, Hughston Sports Medicine Foundation, Inc, 6262 Veterans Parkway, Columbus, GA 31909. Phone: (706) 494-3322; Fax: (706) 494-3348; E-mail: lnestadt@hughston.com.

Call for Entries

2008 Apex Awards for Publication Excellence

Submissions are now being accepted for the 20th Annual Apex Awards for Publication Excellence, which recognize excellence in editorial content, graphic design, and overall communications effectiveness. Communicators can choose from 110 different categories under several headings, including newsletters; magazines and journals; annual reports; brochures, manuals, and reports; electronic and video publications; and Web and internet sites. The Apex Awards are sponsored by the editors of *Writing that Works*, a newsletter for writing, editing, and communications professionals. The contest is open to corporate, nonprofit, freelance, and agency communicators. The entry fee is \$69 (per entry) for subscribers to *Writing that Works* and \$89 (per entry) for nonsubscribers.

Visit www.apexawards.com for more information, including a complete list of categories, the Call for Entries brochure, tips and advice on entering, and entry forms.

Entries must be postmarked by March 17, 2008.

*You researched, you wrote, you edited—now it's time to gain
the recognition you deserve!*

Writing competitions enable medical writers to be recognized for their skills, adding to their professional credibility. So take some time to review your work from the last year, select your best material, and submit it to one of AMWA's writing competitions noted here.

**2008 Eric W. Martin Award for
Excellence in Medical Writing**

Deadline: February 1, 2008

The Eric W. Martin Award is presented in honor of Eric W. Martin, PhD, 1971 AMWA president and author of AMWA's Code of Ethics. An award is given in 3 categories: Monographs, Articles (print and electronic) Intended for a Lay Audience, and Articles (print and electronic) Intended for a Professional (Medical) Audience. The criteria for the award include the following:

- Author must be an AMWA member
- Name of author must be in the byline of the monograph or article
- Monograph or article must have been published during the 2007 calendar year
- Article must be at least 500 words

Brochures and self-published electronic articles are not eligible. Entries are limited to 1 per person per category. An entry fee of \$20 and a completed entry form must be submitted with each article or monograph. (Entry forms are available on www.amwa.org.) Four copies of each entry are required.

Mail entries to

American Medical Writers Association
Eric W. Martin Award
40 West Gude Drive, #101
Rockville, MD 20850-1192
(301) 294-5303
E-mail: slynn@amwa.org

*See page 161 to read about this year's winners
of the Eric W. Martin Award.*

**AMWA's 2008
Medical Book Awards**

Deadline: February 29, 2008

AMWA invites entries for the 2008 Medical Book Awards competition. The competition recognizes authors of nonfiction and fiction medical writing, and awards are presented to the author(s) of the best English-language medical books in each of 3 categories: Books for Health Care Professionals—Physicians, Books for Health Care Professionals—Nonphysicians (formerly called Allied Health Professionals), and Books for Public or Health Care Consumers (formerly called Trade). Only first editions (or significantly revised subsequent editions) released in 2007 are eligible.

Authors may submit more than 1 title in each category. Entries are limited to 1 per person per category. An entry fee of \$50 (per entry) and a completed entry form must be submitted with the book. (Entry forms are available at www.amwa.org.) Two copies of each entered book are required.

Mail entries to

American Medical Writers Association
Book Awards Committee
40 West Gude Drive, #101
Rockville, MD 20850-1192
(301) 294-5303
E-mail: slynn@amwa.org

*See page 201 to read reviews of the books written by
this year's Medical Book Awards recipients.*

Visit the AMWA Web site (www.amwa.org) to find up-to-date details on various writing competitions.