sentences just have less chance of being complex. Mary Ellen concluded that a short sentence can sometimes be hard to understand and a long sentence can sometimes be easy to understand. This prompted Anna Sharman to post a reference to an article in American Scientist that has some wise things to say about sentence structure and length: http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/the-science-of-scientific-writing/.

Tom gave an example of a 198-word sentence written by R. Buckminster Fuller which he thought could be well understood. Joy did not agree and quoted another example from Winnie the Pooh, this time of a 194-word sentence which she used to demonstrate understandable long sentences to her students. But Karen highlighted that Milne is telling a story reporting individual events in a chronological order and stories are easier to understand than the relationships between ideas and concepts which Buckminster Fuller was proposing when shorter sentences would be easier to understand. Within a research article the methods and results section report sequences of events. Sentences therefore do not have to be short to be comprehensible but sentences in the discussion which analyse, interpret and explain should be written more like narratives.

Quite right, agreed Ed Hull, a narrative (a story) is easier for readers to understand so why not write research articles as a story? He saw the structure of the standard fairy tale (Once upon a time...) as similar to that of the standard (IMRAD) article. He asks his students to write a storyline of 800 words containing 10 main messages which should be in every research article. The main messages must link together to form a “story” that is readable by the non-specialist. They form the “skeleton” which the author should then support by filling in the technical details of background, methods, results, discussion and conclusion. The resulting article is readable at two levels: the non-specialist can skim over topic sentences of paragraphs for the main messages; and the specialist can read the details within the paragraphs to judge if they credibly support those main messages.

Katharine Timberlake felt that accuracy of thought was an important precursor for good quality English. She gave the example “AA did not contain X, similar to BB”, in fact meaning “AA did not contain X, in contrast to BB [which did]”. These examples show that the author was not aware of the difference between the two options. Sylvia regretted the paucity of thought diligence and clear thinking. During her session in Tallinn (http://www.ease.org.uk/ease-events/triennial-conference/editing-digital-world-tallinn/tallinn-programme/parallel-session-c), a delegate commented that she spends 70% of her time on thinking and only 30% on actual writing of an article. This, Sylvia thought, should be a rule among scientists, but it isn’t.

Katharine stressed that authors should however make sure that whatever they have written is accurate before it goes to a journal to avoid reviewers and copy editors being “faced with the massive challenge of spotting crazy infelicities wherever they may lurk.” In the same vein, Mary Ellen felt that despite the difficulties of assessing the quality of English there needs to be some means of doing so before review, especially in modest journals that are nonetheless SCI indexed. In particular, the person reviewing the English needs to understand the science.

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**Website developments**

There is a mobile-optimised user interface for the BioMed Central platform and journal-specific apps for both Apple and Android are about to be rolled out.

Finally, BioMed Central is soon to launch Cases, a new case reports database, which will be continuously updated and freely accessible, and will allow users to interactively explore data from peer-reviewed case reports, including those from other publishers, as long as the articles are open access. The database will offer structured search and filtering by condition, symptom, intervention, pathogen, patient demographic and many other data fields, allowing fast identification of relevant case reports to support clinical practice and further research.

**Competing interests**

Both the authors work for BioMed Central.

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**My Life as an Editor - Mohammad Abdollahi**

I am an editorial board member of more than 30 international scholarly journals. Over the past decades, I have served as a referee for more than 100 journals. I receive at least one reviewer invitation daily, and try my best to respond to most invitations (approximately 70%). As a researcher and supervisor of numerous students, I write, edit and revise 3-5 papers monthly. My writing and editing skills have greatly improved by publishing more than 450 papers in peer-reviewed journals. As an author, I treasure my experience of communication with reviewers and editors, who have guided me and helped me to become a science editor. All these achievements stem from my academic career in Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), the most highly ranked medical school in Iran, where I was offered a post back in the 1990s.

A turning point in my editing career was an invitation to take up the chief editor post of TUMS's two most influential journals, *DARU Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* (www.daruips.com/), and *Journal of Medical Hypotheses and Ideas* (http://ees.elsevier.com/jmhi), now published by BioMed Central and Elsevier, respectively. Back in 2001, I joined the DARU journal as an associate editor and helped in its conversion from a Persian to an English language journal and in indexing for online databases. Indexing was not an easy task back then, but I managed to get the journal indexed in most relevant databases by 2003. I am very proud of that achievement, which made DARU the most widely visible medium of communication for Eastern Mediterranean pharmacists and pharmacologists.

The *Journal of Medical Hypotheses and Ideas* was launched as an Iranian journal in 2007, and I was asked to edit it. Over the past five years, the journal has gradually become an international medium by widening its scope of interests and by diversifying its geography, authorship, reviewers' pool and editorial board membership. It is now an updated source of biomedical information for the whole Eastern Mediterranean region.

In 2004, I was offered the post of the Dean of TUMS Central Library, which I took for 3 years and helped to widen the visibility of more than 20 journals published by TUMS at that time. My previous experience with DARU proved to be instrumental for the library and information management job. I managed to set up online submission and editorial management for all TUMS journals, which allowed the journals to be published on time. My editorial colleagues were offered educational workshops on science editing and biomedical journalism. The strong foundation of biomedical science editing in TUMS eventually was transformed into a highly prestigious editing job and the publication of more than 40 fully peer-reviewed, open-access journals, most archived by PubMed Central and indexed by Web of Science databases.

Since 2010, I've been also working as an associate editor of the Encyclopedia of Toxicology, one of the major textbooks published by Elsevier. As a book editor, I have been cooperating with leading authors in the field, who generously shared their scientific knowledge and experience from various parts of the world.

With the experience I have gained in editing, I am committed to pursuing new scientific goals and continuing...