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The Value of Article Titles in Bibliographic Citations

Several recent letters in the *New Scientist* discuss the value of explicit titles for journal articles and their use and relevance in bibliographic citations. In 1963, I pointed out that the omission of article titles from bibliographic citations in *Science* and other journals creates an unnecessary burden for scientists and librarians(1). While supporting the pleas by Munroe(2) for better titles, Cawkell (3) points out that the adequacy of titles has been the subject of considerable research, especially in so-called automatic indexing systems. However, the value of including the original title of a *cited* article in footnotes or lists of cited references is a separate problem.

The article title of a cited work is *not* needed for the preparation of the *Science Citation Index*(4)(5). The inclusion of the article title is quite valuable to the reader of an article in determining the relevance and/or importance of the papers which are cited. Cawkell shows, however, that if article titles are omitted, the *Science Citation Index* can be used to determine their relevance. He provides an interesting example.

In a paper on "Electromagnetic Flowmeters for Blood Flow Measurement" by A. Kolin(6), no article titles are given in the cited references. However, upon referring to the *Science Citation Index*, it was found that most of the cited references were also cited by numerous current articles, the titles of which are given in the *Source Index* section of the *SCI*. Therefore, without going back to the original journals, by reviewing in the *SCI* the titles of the current articles, one can usually determine from the *SCI* which of the cited references should be obtained for further reading, e.g., one of the cited works by E. Wetterer(7) which has been cited in 1967 by W.G. Schenk(8). In the *SCI Source Index*, the full title is provided, that is, "Electronic Measurement of Blood Flow." Furthermore, since about ten other papers cite the Wetterer article, the reader has every reason to believe that it is, indeed, both relevant and important to the topic in question.

Cawkell points out that this simple look-up procedure, which can be performed by a clerk, takes only a short time in comparison with the time, cost and delay required in obtaining *all* the cited articles, since one usually finds that only a fraction of the cited items are of current interest or applicable to the new reader's interests.

I hope that journal editors will not cite the clever method developed by Cawkell as an excuse for omitting the titles of cited works. Numerous surveys have shown that bibliographies appearing in current papers are one of the most valuable sources of information in literature searching(9). One borrows from Peter to pay Paul to justify the omission of article titles on the grounds of saving space. To close on a positive note, it is gratifying that many leading journals, like *J. Clin. Invest.*, do include the titles of all cited works.

References:

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9. J. Martyn, "Unintentional Duplication of Research," *New Scientist* 377, 338 (1964)