

Uniformity of Editorial Policy,
on Titles in Citations Will Aid
Referees, Librarians, and Authors

February 24, 1975

Number 8

In a recent letter to *Science* Stoldal and Gordon¹ complained about the frustrating lack of uniformity in the styles used by scientific journals for references. Their complaint was perhaps more directly relevant from an author's viewpoint than was an earlier suggestion of my own.² Because of the variety in journals' reference styles, a manuscript rejected by your first choice of journal usually can't be sent right off to your second. The bibliography has to be revised, because the second journal in all probability uses a different style for its references. Another revision may be necessary if you have to contact a third journal. Stoldal and Gordon made the sensible suggestion (by no means a new one) that everyone would benefit if journals could agree on a uniform reference style.

One of the style differences mentioned by Stoldal and Gordon was the inclusion or exclusion of titles in references. I fully agree with them that the full title is "often the most useful and informative part of the reference list." In fact, to me this is the most important aspect of variations in reference style, and the most annoying. To emphasize this particular point, I wrote a letter to the editor of *Science*. (No doubt *Science* chose not to publish the letter because I insisted upon including titles in its references.) Part of what I wrote follows.

"The suggestion by Stoldal and Gordon¹ that scientific journals including *Science* give the titles of articles cited in their references is one I made several years ago² and have made many times since. No doubt *Science* and other title-droppers think they may or actually do reduce costs. If true, they do so only at the expense of their readers, who must later fill out the references again and again. Even if journals like *Science* remain adamant about published copy, authors should at least be allowed—indeed required—to include the titles in their submitted manuscripts for the benefit of referees. As a referee, I find the omission of cited titles particularly irksome. Were you to

relent in the policy altogether, review articles in particular would be much more valuable in teaching. This point ought to be considered in relation to the sale of reprints and to the republication of these same articles in anthologies."

As Stoldal and Gordon noted in their letter, a group of biochemical journals has agreed on a uniform reference style.³ As some readers may know, an informal agreement about reference style exists among some clinical journals, including those of the American Medical Association. The biochemical group's standard unfortunately doesn't require titles; that of the clinical group does.

Too many journals omit titles from references. One wonders how many of these journals harass authors about sufficiently "meaningful" titles. *Science* is only one among many title-droppers. *Nature*, *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, *Journal of the American Chemical Society*, etc. do the same. Though they provide titles of cited books, they drop titles of cited articles. In other words, if you cite the best known and most cited textbook or handbook in the field, it will be given full treatment. If you cite an article from some obscure journal, unavailable in the average library, the title will be omitted.

Since ISI[®] is hugely involved in the processing of citations, some readers may think my preference for inclusion of titles is obviously self-serving. It isn't. Let me point out two cogent facts: (1) the inclusion of titles of cited articles in references greatly increases ISI's data processing costs; while (2) it would tend to decrease use of the *Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]) and of *Current Contents*[®] (*CC*[®]) for the purpose of recovering dropped titles. One of the heaviest uses of the *SCI* is for verification and completion of citations.^{4,5} *CC* is also used for this purpose. That is one reason we provide a cumulated tri-annual journal index.

On the other hand, we do badly miss the titles of cited articles whenever we want to complete the citation of an older paper that did

not get into our data base. Editors could save readers and librarians a great deal of effort by using two simple criteria: *when* was the article published and *where*? A reference to any article more than 10 or 15 years old should include its title. Similarly, a complete citation, including the title, should be given when reference is made to an article published in a journal outside the core journals of science. Remember that fewer than 150 journals account for more than half of all reference citations.⁶

Rather than implementing or increasing page charges,⁷ journals would save us all money and energy by this limited degree of standardization. It should be noted that journals in the hard sciences have come a long way in standardizing editorial practices. In my

view, the worst offenders in the matter of footnotes and reference style remain the social sciences journals. Many of them still cling to the precepts of out-dated style manuals. It is awfully time-consuming to read through a labored footnote in search of the pertinent reference.

It has been interesting to observe how the reference style of some of these journals in the social sciences has tended to improve when they are printed by publishers who also issue journals in the natural sciences. The computerization of text processing is also having a beneficial effect. It makes plain the processing complexity and high cost of the footnoted style.

1. **Stoldal P M & Gordon D B.** Uniformity of references. [Letter to the editor of] *Science* **186**:1158-59, 1974.
2. **Garfield E.** Citations to popular and interpretive science writing. [Letter to the editor of] *Science* **141**:392, 1963.
3. **IUB Commission of Editors of Biochemical Journals (CEBJ).** The citation of bibliographic references in biochemical journals. *J. Biol. Chem.* **248**:7279-80, 1973. — I am indebted for this reference to Mr. Robert Harte, manager of *JBC*. The article first appeared in the *European Journal of Biochemistry* **37**:201-02, 1973.

4. **Williams J F & Pings V M.** A study of the access to the scholarly record from a hospital health science core collection. *Bull. Med. Libr. Assoc.* **61**:408-15, 1973.
5. **Garfield E.** Precise bibliographical verification with the *Science Citation Index*.[®] *Current Contents*[®](CC[®]) No. 35, 2 September 1970, p. 4-5.
6. -----, Citation analysis as a tool in journal evaluation. *Science* **178**:471-79, 1972.
7. -----, Page charges, for-profit and non-profit journals, and freedom of the scientific press. *CC*No. 7, 17 February 1974, p. 5-7.