

What's in a Name? If It's
a Journal's Name, Sometimes There's
Too Much!

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Attention, all you invisible-college presidents out there! Perhaps among you are some who've just drudged through the tedious detail of rationalizing, chartering, founding, and beefing up the membership of a new professional association or society. At last, you've come to the happy moment--no doubt your main purpose--when you can inaugurate your new journal!

Naturally, you'll want a good title, a dignified title, for your fledgling publication. If you, or some of your more persuasive colleagues, are too fond of older styles in titles, you may be tempted to cram into your new journal title everything but the kitchen sink. I urge you to consider the alternative of one or two well-chosen words. Think in terms of giving your journal a *name*, not just a *title*.

Do not, under any circumstances, call your journal something like *Journal of the American (British, French, Russian, etc.) Association of Whatever-you-are-ologists!* Forego also anything like *Proceedings of the American (British, etc.) Society of Whatever-it-is-ology!* If the journal doesn't succeed, the grandest or most thoroughly descriptive title in the world won't have helped in avoiding failure. If it does succeed, you'll eventually wish you *had* opted for elegant simplicity rather than pompous length. Scientists around the world will applaud your wisdom as they find themselves citing your journal over and over again. Librarians will bless you as they in turn, because of all those citations, find

themselves more and more occupied by your journal's business.

I've mentioned before, I think, my admiration for titles like *Gut*, *Lancet*, *Blood* and *Blut*, *Cancer*, *Chest*, *Lloydia*, *Audio*, *Auk*, *Race*, *Arctic*, *Hesperia*, *Lipids*--yes, and even *Archives*. They are crisp, arresting titles, simple, to-the-point. Much more important, they are bibliographically savvy--what in German might be called *bibliothekswürdig*. In English we might say library-worthy, as in seaworthy.

A title like *Blood* or *Gut* is not just easy to remember, though that means a lot. It is almost immune to bibliographical mayhem. It won't get abbreviated in innumerable, mostly unintelligible ways in references, journal lists, bibliographies, or whatever. The abbreviation *Rev. Int. Med.*, for example, may look good enough at first quick glance. Then you find that it is at least triply ambiguous. Does it stand for *Review of Internal Medicine*, *Revue Internationale de Medecine*, *Revista Internacional (Interamericana?) de Medicina*, etc. Don't underestimate the obfuscatory clout of a determined abbreviator. The famous example *Ann. Phys.* should be warning enough: *Annals of Physics?* *Annalen der Physik?* *Annales de Physique?*

A title like *Chest* or *Auk* won't get caught up in the problem of corporate origin or authorship. Don't underestimate either what the necessary cataloging rules can do to what you may think is a perfectly straightforward title. (I should note here

that you'll have no right to blame the cataloging rules. There's no question of chicken/egg priority in the matter. Bad titling spawned the rules, for the most part, and bad titling is still mainly responsible for the more regrettable anomalies of their application.) Does any one really know what the proper title of what I call JAMA is? Is it *Journal of the American Medical Association* or is it *American Medical Association. Journal*? Perhaps the AMA is too conservative to consider the advantages of the simpler title *American Medicine*, or perhaps it is indeed so conservative that it abhors what it sees as such a title's dreadful implications. The AMA might remember, however, that there was a *British Medical Journal* long before there was a National Health Service. Still it astounds me that there is neither an *American Medicine* nor an *American Medical Journal*. I add the latter as a possible title because there is some advantage in having the word *journal* in a journal title, if it's not the first word. It may avoid confusion between the journal and similarly titled books.

If you avoid a long title, especially one of corporate construction, your more carefully chosen title won't get turned into an acronym recognizable among only a narrow in-group. Indeed, acronyms are a characteristic vice of in-groups. Every astronomer may know that MNRAS is the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, but there are legions of information workers, reference librarians, and other scientists who don't. While a particular acronym may not turn out to have more than one meaning, its use can nevertheless cause lots of extra work in bibliographical verification of what the one meaning is. In my own field I find that many people aren't sure whether the proper title is *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* or JASIS, the acronym that appears on each issue's front cover! How much better if the editors had chosen *Information Science* or *Information Science Journal*. Its predecessor was *American Documentation*,

not *Journal of the American Documentation Institute*.

Titles like *Audio* and *Race* also avoid another problem that is not as trivial as the uninitiated may assume. If you publish in English or any other of the widely used languages of science, the many words in your long, impressive title must be connected somehow with prepositions, particles, conjunctions. (*the, le, la, les, der, die, of, for, von, de, and, und, et, i, des, degli, etc.*). When they begin a title, such words are ignored by man and machine in the making of catalogs and lists. But they usually are not when they occur within the title. If you consult almost any of the widely used periodical directories for information about the *Journal of Scientific Agricultural Research*, you won't find it, because the proper title is *Journal for Scientific Agricultural Research*. In one such directory more than six pages of entries separate *Journal d'Urologie* and *Journal of Urology*.

Thus, if you are a native of Erewhon,¹ and have founded a society or association for research on kleptomania, don't call your journal *Journal of Erewhonian Research on Kleptomania*, or anything resembling that. Call it *Kleptomania Journal*, or plain and simple *Kleptomania*. You could even call it *Klepto* or *Klepto Journal*. That should put it ahead of anything else to do with kleptomania in lists and catalogs. It won't be buried amongst the thousands of other titles beginning *Journal of...* And your name won't be cursed every time someone searches for it in those lists and catalogs.

Despite everything I've said about English as the international language of science, you may unwisely insist upon publishing in your classical Erewhonian vernacular. In that case, a short title like *Klepto* or *Klepto Journal* is almost a necessity. It will not only survive ordinary day-to-day linguistic and typographical blunders. It will probably survive even the elaborate translation program someone will inevitably initiate once American members of

your international invisible college have talked and written enough about Erehwon's alarming, and by now probably unsurpassable lead in kleptomania research. (You can hurry this process along by using citation analysis to prove the journal's importance in the topology of science.) *Klepto* is much more likely than any longer title to survive transliteration of your ancient alphabet and translation of Erehwonian into English. The *Zhurnal Eksperimentalnoi i Teoreticheskoi Fiziki* has been metamorphosed in English as *Soviet Physics JETP*. Give your new journal the Erehwonian title *Журнал Исследования в Области Крадательства* (proper transliteration: *Jultainu d-Erehwunyu vi Rassadi d-Kleptomania*; proper translation: *Erehwonian Journal for Research on Kleptomania*), and you can be fairly sure it will end up in a translation version titled *Erehwonian Psychology JERK*.²

It is advisable, in this matter of titles, to look to the future. If you know that a few members of your invisible college are already branching out into pyromania research, *plan ahead!* Don't temporize with *Klepto* and be forced later to change the title to *Klepto and Pyro*. Call the journal *Manias* from the beginning. There was surely as much foresight as compliance with requirements of generality that gave us the titles *Science* and *Nature*. To give the journals those all-embracing and eternally suitable names was a mark of wisdom.

Title changes are a bibliographic nuisance. The once plain clean *Soap* has frothed out as *Soap and Sanitary Specialties*, *Soap and Chemical Specialties*, *Soap/Cosmetics/Chemical Specialties*. Regrettable, perhaps, but understandable. Why on the other hand, did *Sky* have to become *Sky and Telescope*?

If your journal grows, either by shrewd engulfment of allied research interests (those *Grenzgebiete* of so many German journal title-tags) or by burgeoning of subspecialties into (suddenly well-funded) major specialties, don't divide the journal into

sections with numbers and letters and subtitles. The *Journal of the Chemical Society* no doubt deserves its scientific eminence, and one can perhaps excuse the nostalgia of the title's Victorian egocentrism. But the journal's proliferation of sections with kaleidoscopic subtitles is as blameworthy as its consistent failure to use a volume number. The Chemical Society of London is not, of course, alone or worst in this matter. A well-deserved doctorate in library science surely awaits any student masochistic enough to undertake an elucidation of the journal publication history of societies like the IEEE, the APA, and others. Avoid sectioning at all costs. Found a new journal if you need more pages. Or publish more often, turning your quarterly into a monthly, your monthly into a weekly. In this respect, the American Chemical Society has taken the wiser course.

Quite frankly, I regret the apparently increasing reluctance to use *names* in titles, or *as* titles. There is something special about *Virchows Archiv* (without the added *Abteilungen*). Recently the publishers of *Naunyn-Schmiedebergs* changed the rest of its title. They should have settled simply for *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg* or *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg Journal*. Just as the editors of *Zhurnal Vysshei Nervnoi Deyatelnoi imenii I.P. Pavlova* overlooked the advantage of calling the journal simply *Pavlov* or *Pavlov Archives* in the first place.

Titles are an important commodity at ISI[®]; thus my concern with them. Some titles harass every working day, and some of them are grotesque enough to disquiet sleep. *Current Contents*[®] (CC[®]) has badgered many a journal, for its own and our good, about the format and legibility of its contents page, frequently with success beneficial to both journal and CC.

Perhaps it's time CC started badgering about titles. If it is, I'll start with the *Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences*. The title should be changed. Its absurd length and archaism are hardly credible. Its abbreviations could provide oddities enough for a

collector's hobby. At one time, these *Comptes Rendus etc., etc., etc.* may actually have been what their title says they are. I have trouble, however, imagining any scientific *séances hebdomadaires* of the *Académie's* long-lived members. Today the title is a troublesome bore. One wishes DeGaulle had been able to spare the journal a moment's attention. I haven't the slightest doubt that he'd have ordered the title changed to *France Scientifique*. If you suspect me of some national bias as regards

the archaic nature of the *Académie* and its *Comptes Rendus*, I refer you to a recent issue of *Le Monde*.³

Your new journal's title, or its *name*--if you're wise enough to give it a real name--won't by itself, no matter how clever, establish the journal's reputation. Your editors and authors must do that. But a good sensible name will, bibliographically at least, stand you in very good stead. And make life a bit simpler for us all.

1. Readers who don't know Samuel Butler's novels *Erehwon* and *Erehwon Revisited* may nevertheless recognize the word as *nowhere* spelled backward. Butler used it, as I've borrowed it, to avoid the 'ideal' connotations of the more familiar *Eutopia* and *Utopia*.
2. The 'ancient' alphabet and this journal-title sample of the Erehwonian language are imaginary, though both have some base in reality.
3. "Un rapport au gouvernement: rajeunir l'Académie. [A suggestion for the government: rejuvenate the Academy]." *Le Monde de la Médecine* 22 October 1975, p. 18.