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Unconventional academic writing

An addendum to Hartley's *Academic writing and publishing: A practical handbook* (2008)

Guillaume Cabanac

Received: February 19, 2015 — a very special day

Structured abstract

- *Background:* James Hartley, Honorary Research Professor of Psychology at Keele University, UK turns 75 on February 19, 2015. As a co-author and friend, I wished to celebrate his 75th birthday by assembling this paper for his amusement.
- *Aims:* A selection of scientific papers is introduced as a modest addendum to Hartley's *Academic writing and publishing: A practical handbook* (2008). These materials are masterpieces of *unconventional* academic writing and publishing.
- *Methods:* I collected unconventional academic papers during the past few years from a variety of sources: readings, informal chats with colleagues at the coffee machine, online forums, social media, and so on. Most I found serendipitously. Each paper was systematically filed in a folder of my computer upon encounter. As February 2015 was approaching I edited all these to form the present paper, following the outline of (Hartley, 2008). No significance tests were used. No subjects were harmed whatsoever.
- *Results:* Discover about 130 papers showing attempts at whimsy, humour, or conveying various human emotions that we hardly encounter in scientific literature (e.g., surprise, irony, anger, scorn). These amusing papers were published in virtually all fields of science. As Kohn (1982) put it: Humour is the interdisciplinary denominator of science.
- *Conclusions:* Happy 75th birthday James! I hope you'll enjoy this fine, ever-growing collection of *unconventional* academic papers.

Keywords Academic writing · Publication · Humour · James Hartley

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1 Introduction

James Hartley's desk and shelves are overloaded with literature materials about one of his favourite topics: Text design and academic writing. There are books (e.g., Silva, 2015; Strunk & White, 1999; Sword, 1999; Wallwork, 2011), specialised books (e.g., Zobel, 2005), manuals of style (e.g., APA, 2010), and piles of journal articles (e.g., Reuber & Sharma, 2013) as well as unpublished materials (e.g., Steingraber, 1985).

James contributed to the understanding of the art of academic writing along his prolific career ("Lifetime Achievement Award: James Hartley", 2014). He notably shared his experience and knowledge in *Academic writing and publishing: A practical handbook* (Hartley, 2008). This piece discusses each constituent of a nicely written paper (i.e., title, abstract, introduction, and so on) with force references to state-of-the-art studies on academic writing.

In honour of James's 75th birthday, the present paper introduces a collection of *unconventional* academic writings. It is intended to read as an addendum to the handbook (Hartley, 2008). A wealth of literature discusses the relations between science and humour (e.g., see Clotfelter, 1997; Kohn, 1982; Kilbourne, 1996). The value of humour and, more generally, unconventional writing is not universally acknowledged yet. Supporters praise attempts at whimsy (Sand-Jensen, 2007; Francl, 2013; Heard, 2014) while detractors raise ethical concerns about their reception by scientists and the general public (Ronagh & Souder, forthcoming; Bartlett, 2014).

This paper does not pretend to discuss the pros and cons of unconventional writing. Its purpose is much more modest. I simply wish to entertain readers by showcasing selected examples of such an amusing genre. The paper is organised the same way as (Hartley, 2008).

2 The academic article

"Whatever anyone else says has no value to me concerning my work. I don't need approval. I have confidence in what I'm doing." — Andy Warhol

For the rest of us scientists, publishing research papers is our own way of getting feedback and approval. . .

2.1 Titles

These eye-catching titles might nicely illustrate one of James's papers on the topic: "There's More to the Title than Meets the Eye: Exploring the Possibilities" (Hartley, 2007).

2.1.1 Provocative titles

- In a paper titled "Publish *and* Perish" Hurt (1961), an undergraduate English teacher, explains why it is his duty not to publish. This is a satire of the "publish or perish" phrase that Garfield (1996) traced back to (Wilson, 1942, pp. 63 and 197) while noting that "the term was in fairly common usage at the time." Actually, I found an even older occurrence of "publish or perish" in (Bowman, 1934, p. 1980).
- The premier journal *Nature* published a paper titled "Jodrell Bank finds a Pulsar [News and Views]" (1968) about the Centre for Astrophysics Jodrell Bank. Unfortunately, the metadata hosted at *Nature* is misleading, as it shows "Bonk" instead of "Bank" (Fig. 1).

- Rotfeld (1997) had a tooth against reviewers: “We Unequivocally Do NOT Thank the #\$\$* & \$ Anonymous Reviewers.”
- Solomon (2009) suggests there are three kinds of authors in Computer Science: Programmers, Professors, and Parasites.
- Schwartz (2008) reminds us about the importance of feeling stupid in scientific research.
- How ironic: Harvie, Lightfoot, Lilley, and Weir (2013) published a paper titled “Publisher, be damned! From price gouging to the open road” in the *Prometheus* journal. After the editors accepted it, the published tried not to publish it. Eventually, after a big controversy that reminds us about the Streissand Effect, it was printed with the following note: “Opinions and views expressed in this article (the Proposition) are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis.” (p. 229).
- The cost of hamburgers in local currency is used to illustrate a statistical fallacy in “Big Macs and Eigenfactor scores: Don’t let correlation coefficients fool you” (West, Bergstrom, & Bergstrom, 2010).
- The study by Aleixandre-Benavent, Montalt-Resurrecció, and Valderrama-Zurián (2014) criticized “deceptive titles.” In this paper, they argued that humour is not welcome in papers. Hartley (forthcoming) did not agree with their definition of deceptive titles and voiced his concern in a letter to the editor.
- The facetious authors of “The Genetics of Murine *Hox* Loci: TAMERE, STRING, and PANTHERE to Engineer Chromosome Variants” (Tschopp & Duboule, 2014) coined acronyms reading as French puns (Jump, 2014).

2.1.2 Illustrative titles

These masterpieces read as take-home messages:

- The readability of words with letters scrambled is discussed in “Raeding Wrods With Jubmled Lettres: There Is a Cost” (Rayner, White, Johnson, & Liversedge, 2006). This title shows an example of such a text while answering the initial question. Very clever!

The image shows a search interface on the Nature website. On the left, there is a 'FILTER BY' section with three categories: 'Journal(s)', 'Article type(s)', and 'Publication Date'. Under 'Journal(s)', 'Nature (1)' is selected. Under 'Article type(s)', 'News and Views (1)' is selected. The 'Publication Date' is set to 'On 2 November 1968'. On the right, the 'Search' bar contains the text 'jodrell'. Below the search bar, it says 'Results: 1-1 of 1' and 'Sort by Relevance'. A single result is displayed: '1. 2 November 1968 Jodrell Bank finds a Pulsar Nature 220, 429-429 doi:10.1038/220429a0 Rights and permissions'. There is a 'Show Context' button next to the result number.

Fig. 1 A typo on *Nature*'s website about “Jodrell Bank finds a Pulsar [News and Views]” (1968).

- “HT06, tagging paper, taxonomy, Flickr, academic article, to read” (Marlow, Naaman, Boyd, & Davis, 2006) has a title made up of tags — and the paper is about tagging.
- “Shit Happens (to be Useful)! Use of Elephant Dung as Habitat by Amphibians” (Campos-Arceiz, 2009)
- “The weirdest people in the world?” (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) is a critique of scientific studies with “samples drawn entirely from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies.” (p. 1)
- “An In-Depth Analysis of a Piece of Shit: Distribution of *Schistosoma mansoni* and Hookworm Eggs in Human Stool” (Krauth et al., 2012)
- “‘Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder’: People who think they are drunk also think they are attractive” (Bègue, Bushman, Zerhouni, Subra, & Ourabah, 2012)
- “First carrot, then stick: How the adaptive hybridization of incentives promotes cooperation” (Chen, Sasaki, Brännström, & Dieckmann, 2014)
- “Economical writing (or, ‘Think Hemingway’)” (Marroquín & Cole, forthcoming)

2.1.3 Tributes to your favourite bands

Skim through the TOP 50 and pick the best song matching your research, as a tribute to:

- Bob Dylan: “Nitric Oxide and Inflammation: The answer is blowing in the wind” (Lundberg, Lundberg, Alving, & Weitzberg, 1997). This was the first paper of a larger collection, as commented in the *Daily Mail*: “Swedish scientists reveal 17 year competition to slip Bob Dylan quotes into research papers” (Prigg, 2014).
- The Rolling Stones: “I can’t get no satisfaction: The impact of personality and emotion on postpurchase processes” (Mooradian & Olver, 1997).
- Abba: “Money, money, money: not so funny in the research world” (Cleary, Usher, & Jackson, forthcoming).

And sometimes titles can be understood as an ongoing discussion between scholars. For instance, Hartley (2011) suggested to “Write when you can and submit when you are ready! [Point of View]” as a pragmatic reply to “Write when hot — submit when not: Seasonal bias in peer review or acceptance?” (Shalvi, Baas, Handgraaf, & De Dreu, 2010).

2.2 Authors

As Price (1963, pp. 86–91) put it for chemistry, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, “The proportion of multiauthor articles has accelerated steadily and powerfully, and it is now so large that if it continues at the present rate by 1980, the single-author paper will be extinct.” If it wasn’t for the creativity of scientists. . .

2.2.1 Nature of the co-authors

Collaborative writing sometimes involves people from various backgrounds. And sometimes one feels the urge to acknowledge the supporting role of a pet animal.

- Real persons:
 - Four authors with the same family name but “unrelated by marriage, blood, or current campus” collaborated on a paper with an enigmatic title hardly informed readers about the topic addressed: “A Few Goodmen: Surname-Sharing Economist Coauthors” (Goodman, Goodman, Goodman, & Goodman, 2015).
 - A father and his three sons worked on “Quantum entanglement” (Horodecki, Horodecki, Horodecki, & Horodecki, 2009).
 - One of the saddest biographies ever:
 - “Jacqueline Kam was a management consultant in Hong Kong before taking a PhD at the University of Sheffield. She then became a Lecturer in the School of Economics, Finance and Management, University of Bristol. Recently, she has given up academic life altogether in order to make her fortune.” (Macdonald & Kam, 2011, p. 475).
 - The third author of this paper is an inmate serving a 15-year sentence (Black, Wilcox, & Platt, 2014). His affiliation reads “Arizona State Prison.”
 - “As one of the authors for this article, Brad has supplied both behavioral characteristics and specific examples. In addition to sharing his own observations from his prison yard, he has informally interviewed numerous inmates from other yards. Inmates know him and are willing to give him information they would not confide to an outsider.” (Black et al., 2014, p. 128)
- Fake authors:
 - Animal co-authors (e.g., see Deville, 2014a)
 - F.D.C. Willard was a cat (Hetherington & Willard, 1975).
 - G. Mirkwood was a dog (Matzinger & Mirkwood, 1978).
 - H.A.M.S. ter Tisha was a hamster (Geim & ter Tisha, 2001).
 - Stronzo Bestiale, i.e., “beastly turd” in Italian was third author (Moran, Hoover, & Bestiale, 1987).
 - France K. Shit does not seem to have authored any other papers and has no profile page on her university’s website (Wen, Yeung, Chu, Shit, & Metreweli, 2001).
 - Ike Antkare, i.e., “I can’t care” is a fake author made-up to demonstrate the flaws of Google Scholar in “Ike Antkare, one of the great stars in the scientific firmament” (Labbé, 2010).
 - Maggie Simpson, a faked dictator’s name (i.e., Kim Jong Fun), and an other Simpsons character appear as co-authors (Simpson, Fun, & Krabappel, 2014). This spoof paper was generated with SCIGen¹ as discussed by Stromberg (2014).

2.2.2 Order of the Co-authorship

Bibliometricians have long warned against inferring a hierarchy of authors from the order of authorships (e.g., see Kosmulski, 2012). There is indeed a whole gamut of techniques used to determine the order of authorship (see also Deville, 2014b).

¹ See <http://pdos.csail.mit.edu/scigen>

- “from a twenty-five-game croquet series held at Imperial College Field Station during summer 1973” (Hassell & May, 1974, p. 567).
- “by a tennis match” (Griffiths & Anderson, 1978, p. 115).
- “simulated coin tosses” (Jassby & Powell, 1990, p. 2044).
- “a flip of what William B. Swann, Jr., claimed was a fair coin” (Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990, p. 17).
- “a random process upon the completion of the manuscript” (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992, p. 71).
- “by proximity to tenure decisions” (Roderick & Gillespie, 1998, p. 529)
- “random fluctuation in the Euro/Dollar exchange rate” (Feder & Mitchell-Olds, 2003, p. 655).
- “rock, paper, scissors” (Kupfer, Webbeking, & Franklin, 2004, p. 517).

Chambers, Boath, and Chambers (2001, p. 1460) recall the story of Mr. Zelakovitch changing his name to Adler “after growing tired of being at the end of every queue.”

2.3 Abstracts

We know about James’s² bent for structured abstracts (e.g., see Hartley & Sydes, 1997; Hartley & Betts, 2008; Hartley, 2000). Turning the following real abstracts to structured might prove to be challenging, though. See for yourself!

- “Is the sequence of earthquakes in Southern California, with aftershocks removed, Poissonian?” is the interrogative title of (Gardner & Knopoff, 1974). The reader is spared the effort of reading the paper as the abstract states the answer in three letters: “Yes.” This might be the shortest abstract ever!
- Frey (2003) expresses his disillusioned view in a *Public Choice* paper titled “Publishing as Prostitution? – Choosing Between One’s Own Ideas and Academic Success”:
 “Survival in academia depends on publications in refereed journals. Authors only get their papers accepted if they intellectually prostitute themselves by slavishly following the demands made by anonymous referees who have no property rights to the journals they advise. Intellectual prostitution is neither beneficial to suppliers nor consumers. But it is avoidable. The editor (with property rights to the journal) should make the basic decision of whether a paper is worth publishing or not. The referees should only offer suggestions for improvement. The author may disregard this advice. This reduces intellectual prostitution and produces more original publications.”
- A short and inconclusive one: “Probably Not.” The interrogative title was “Can apparent superluminal neutrino speeds be explained as a quantum weak measurement?” (Berry, Brunner, Popescu, & Shukla, 2011).

² ... and his deference to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* stating that the possessive form of *James* is *James’s* (APA, 2010, p. 96) — this very example is given, see inset of Fig. 2. James visited me in September 2014. We were horrified by this shop named *James’* (Fig. 2) — no *s* after the apostrophe! James might well have sent a letter to the shop owner to correct this.

- As an exercise, recast the following scathing attack as a structured abstract with the following headings: Background, Aims, Methods, Results, and Conclusions.

“This paper reflects on the most current and some of the recent contributions of JK Vanclay, focusing on his methods, findings, and criticism about the journal citations reports and the web of science databases, the journal impact factor and the *h*-index. It is argued and demonstrated that some of the recent papers of the author about scientometric issues, measures and sources show so much demagoguery, ignorance and arrogance, have so much prejudice and bias, so profound errors in using the databases, calculating metrics, and interpreting search results that the papers are very unlikely to be meant as a genuine contribution from an academic who is a graduate of—among others—Oxford University, professor and dean in a respected university, a well-published and well-cited author and a recipient of the Queen’s Award (all the above in forest science). The papers are much more likely to serve as props for a staged, mock-up scenario

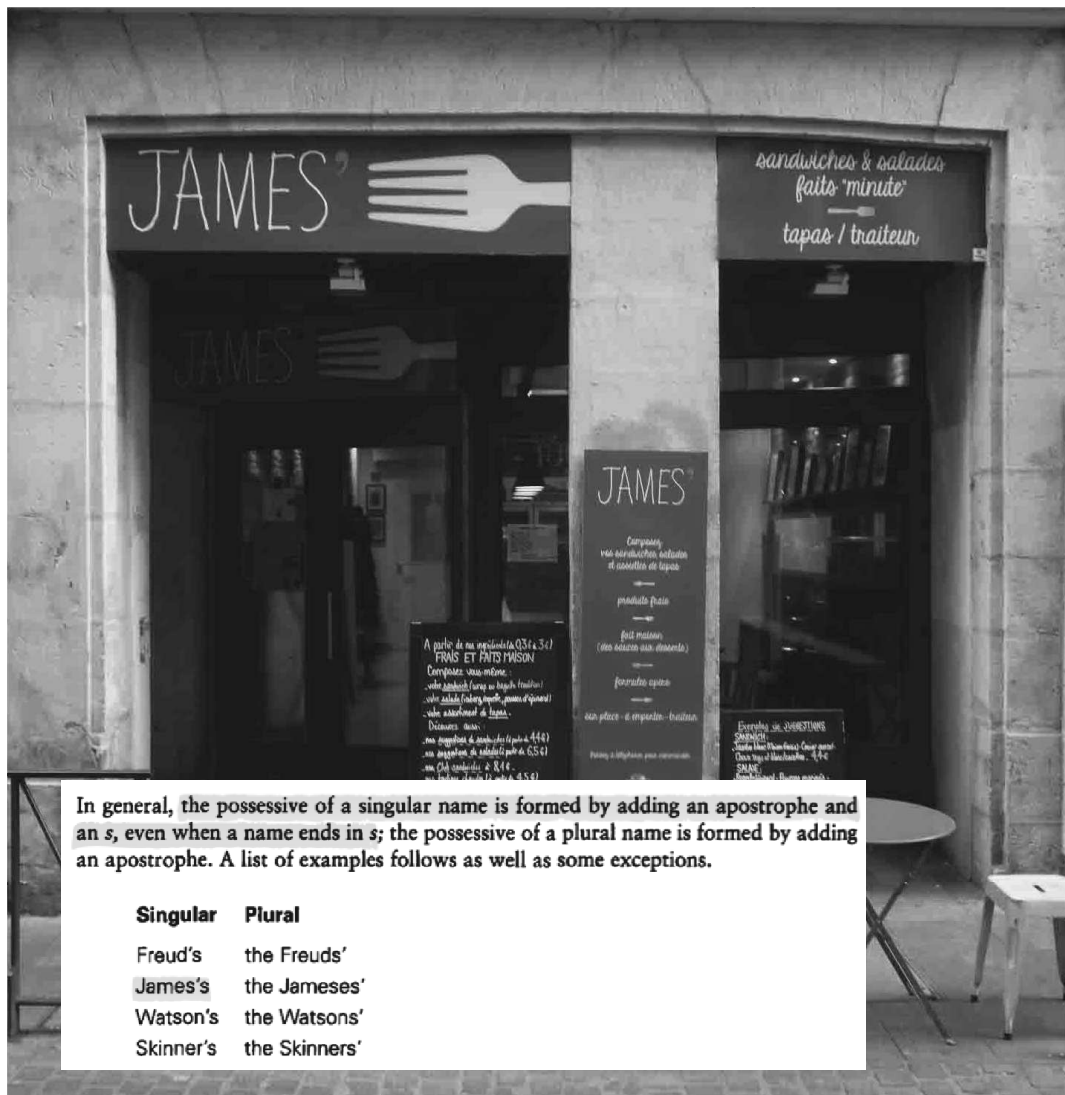


Fig. 2 A tiny shop located 24 rue des Filatiers, Toulouse that defies the APA (2010, p. 96), see footnote 2.

based on slipshod research in an experiment, to illustrate the deficiencies in the processes and in the assessment of scholarly publishing productivity and impact in order to present the idealized solution of Vanclay: using the *h*-index, portrayed as the Prince, mounted on the shoulder of the White Horse, Google Scholar.” (Jacso, 2012)

2.4 Key words³

C. Zhang and Liu (2011) reviewed Hartley’s works on structured abstracts. They used “James Hartley” as a key word! One may wonder how many papers mention a researcher’s name as a key word? This might be overlooked evidence of recognition by the research community serving the same purpose as eponyms, which “remind us that science and scholarship are the work of dedicated people” (Garfield, 1983, p. 393).

2.5 Introductions

When you fail to catch the attention of your readership with a witty title, precise keywords, and a structured abstract try to convey emotions in your introductions.

- *Scorn*. “There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is its style. The other is its content. That, I think, about covers the ground.” (Rodell, 1936, p. 38). This paper titled “Goodbye to Law Reviews” was published in the *Virginia Law Review* by Fred Rodell, Law School, Yale University. You feel the author’s energy from first sentences:

“It is doubtless of no concern to anyone that this is probably my last law review article. As a matter of fact, this makes one more article than I had originally planned to write. It was something in the nature of a New Year’s resolution. Yet the request to do a piece about law reviews seemed a golden opportunity to make my future absence from the “Leading Articles, Authors” lists a bit more pointed than would the business of merely sitting in a corner, sucking my thumb, and muttering Boo. Keeping well in line with two traditions—a course which lawyers will readily understand—I decided to break the resolution and wait for opportunity’s second knock. This, then, is by way of explaining why I do not care to contribute further to the qualitatively moribund while quantitatively mushroom-like literature of the law.” (Rodell, 1936, p. 38)

Twenty-five years later, the editors of the *Virginia Law Review* invited Rodell to “give an account of his present-day impressions of law reviews,” which he did! Here is the incipit:

“Hang on to your top-hats, boys; here we go again. Not that there is anything new or nastier to say about those citadels of pseudo-scholarship, those squanderers of numberless square miles of timberland (for paper is made from wood, remember?), the law reviews.” (Rodell, 1962, p. 286)

³ This is the exact wording of Chapter 2.4 in (Hartley, 2008, pp. 37–40). I noticed that James dislikes glueing words together. He keeps correcting our papers at proof stage: Co-author vs coauthor, multi-author vs multiauthor, and so on. Having his texts Americanised without his consent is a case for concern! But sometimes one must surrender, especially when submitting to the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*: “I have Americanised the spellings of hypothesized /analysed/ – my computer flags up English spellings as inappropriate. I usually take no notice but here the spellings seem more appropriate (especially for *JASIST*)!” (J. Hartley, personal communication, September 28, 2013).

- *Anger*. “No, we are not acrobats, we do not stand on the shoulders of giants. We are in the field created by human thought—and nothing more.” (Nalimov, 1987, p. 303).
- *Nostalgia*. The introduction of “Defending the Ivory Tower against the end of the world” reads like a dystopia about science:

“Once upon a time, science was pure and unadulterated: undertaken for the joy of discovery and without the need to have a particular study area justified. Most scientists conducted experiments in their spare time, were independently wealthy, or were muses of nobility. These lifestyles allowed scientists to work in any direction they wished. And the middle and upper classes loved it. The lecture circuit was a major source of entertainment, where scientists explained the world to the attending public. This was the Golden Age of Science: Life in the Ivory Tower. This existence is, perhaps sadly, no more.

We now live in a world where entertainment is driven by celebrity, and choice is everywhere. Faced with overwhelming options, science is not usually the first choice for entertainment. After all, the public no longer needs scientific lectures to understand the world: they have the accumulated knowledge of the world at their fingertips . . .” (A. J. Wright, forthcoming)
- *Amusement*. “Did you hear what the Pope’s first big decision was? To wallpaper the Sistine Chapel.” (Dundes, 1979, p. 221). A note on Polish Pope jokes was published in the *Journal of American Folklore* shortly after the 1978 election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as the first Polish Pope in history. The note discussed several such jokes.

2.6 Methods

A few good candidates for #overlyhonestmethods on Twitter (Bezuidenhout, forthcoming):

- If you are forced not to develop an idea due to space limitations, try using Fermat’s strategy. Circa 1630, he left a short annotation in the margin of a math book: “It is impossible to separate a cube into two cubes or a fourth power into two fourth powers or, in general, any power greater than the second into powers of like degree. I have discovered a truly marvelous demonstration, which this margin is too narrow to contain.” (Ribet & Hayes, 1994, p. 145) This apparently anecdotal annotation obsessed mathematicians for more than three centuries.
- Lander and Parkin (1966) report a counterexample to Euler’s conjecture on “sums of like powers” in just five lines. They used “a direct search on the CDC 6600” — a mainframe supercomputer — and discovered that $27^5 + 84^5 + 110^5 + 133^5 = 144^5$.
- Blatt and Brown (1974) published an innovative paper in the *Journal of Sedimentary Petrology* with virtually no funding. Here is an excerpt of their three-line abstract: “The technique consists of using a rubber contraceptive device inserted into the centrifuge tube. The technique is rapid and inexpensive.” They concluded that “Rubber contraceptives need not be sold only for the prevention of disease. They are functional in heavy mineral studies and no doubt have other scientific uses as well.” (p. 261).
- The scientific proof that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. . . “Thus, the aim of exploring the influence of different lunar phases on sleep regulation was never a priori hypothesized, nor was it mentioned to the participants, technicians, and other people involved in the study. We just thought of it after a drink in a local bar one evening at full

moon, years after the study was completed. Thus, this study reflects a post hoc assessment of the potential influence of lunar phase on sleep in a cross-sectional setting.” (Cajochen et al., 2013, p. 1486)

2.7 Results

“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”

— Winston Churchill.

- The no-hair theorem⁴ in astrophysics: A black hole has no “hair” (Misner, Thorne, & Wheeler, 1973, p. 876).
- Figure 3 is a demonstration of a stunning minimalist approach to reproduce a writer’s block (Upper, 1974). Published without revision!
- Lapointe and Legendre (1994) applied an array of statistical methods to provide the readership of *Applied Statistics* with a classification of pure malt Scotch whiskies!
- And the Vagueness and Uninformative Prize goes to a paper published in the *Annals of Physics* for stating: “Therefore, our assumption is more or less justified.” (Rahaman, Salucci, Kuhfittig, Ray, & Rahaman, 2014, p. 563).
- After pages of maths in supplementary materials the following note cheers up the reader: “Approximation 20 hides $\mathcal{O}(1/N)$ error from moving from the expectation of a square root to a square root of expectations, and dear reader we admire your perseverance in making it this far. Equality 21 follows from applying of the law of total expectation . . .” (Bulik-Sullivan et al., 2015, p. 29)

2.8 Discussions

Various stylistic devices can cheer up the reader:

- Price (1981) metaphorically compared authorship credit to “brownie points” that authors share.
- Kapoor (1995) coined a new syndrome in *The Lancet*. Scientists who appear in the bylines of papers with an increasing number of co-authors (up to “morbid proportions”) suffer from *Polyauthoritis Giftosa*.
- Fraenkel and Klein (1999, p. 847) rewrote a famous piece of literature into logics: “. . . one of the well-known tautologies $(2b \vee \neg(2b))$ is due to Shakespeare. . .”
- Keighren (2014) studied the figurative term ‘unpack’ in a paper ironically titled “Unpacking geography: A brief history, 1973-2013 [Commentary]”. He also notes: “On 20 February 2014, one satirical Twitter account, ‘Shit Academics Say’, published to its more than 17 000 followers a one-line lampoon of academic language: ‘You need to unpack this a bit’. As a familiar command in the contemporary academic lexicon, ‘unpack’ is an adjectival imperative that divides opinion.” A proper reference to ‘Shit Academics Say’ appears in the bibliography!

⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-hair_theorem

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*THE UNSUCCESSFUL SELF-TREATMENT OF
A CASE OF "WRITER'S BLOCK"*¹

DENNIS UPPER

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

REFERENCES

¹Portions of this paper were not presented at the 81st Annual American Psychological Association Convention, Montreal, Canada, August 30, 1973. Reprints may be obtained from Dennis Upper, Behavior Therapy Unit, Veterans Administration Hospital, Brockton, Massachusetts 02401.

*Received 25 October 1973.
(Published without revision.)*

COMMENTS BY REVIEWER A

I have studied this manuscript very carefully with lemon juice and X-rays and have not detected a single flaw in either design or writing style. I suggest it be published without revision. Clearly it is the most concise manuscript I have ever seen—yet it contains

sufficient detail to allow other investigators to replicate Dr. Upper's failure. In comparison with the other manuscripts I get from you containing all that complicated detail, this one was a pleasure to examine. Surely we can find a place for this paper in the Journal—perhaps on the edge of a blank page.

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Fig. 3 What a performance! Look at the referee's comment to (Upper, 1974).

- Hall (2014) attempts to warm up in "The Kardashian index: A measure of discrepant social media profile for scientists [Comment]" coined after the model Kim Kardashian. He notes that "Her notoriety is said to have stemmed from an inadvertent internet release of a video featuring her and a boyfriend in a private moment." (p. 424). The paper critiques academics showing off in the media despite poor scientific achievements.

And even Stigler's Law of eponymy stating that "No scientific discovery is named after its original discoverer" (Stigler, 1980, p. 147) is misnamed, as someone thought about this concept before (Kennedy, 1972).

2.9 Acknowledgements

As I was about to write my PhD dissertation, a fellow student passed me an amazing L^AT_EX template. The skeleton of the document was there: cover, abstract, acknowledgements, table of contents/figures/tables, parts, chapters, sections, bibliography, and index. All full of "lorem ipsum" filler but yet, a big part of the job was already done for me. Then I noticed in the acknowledgements section this forceful unattributed quote in French (translation is mine):

« Les remerciements sont comme le sexe : ils sont meilleurs lorsqu'ils sont gratuits. »
"Acknowledgements are like sex: they are better when they are free."

Hopefully, Hartley (2008, Chapter 2.9) provided a more serious definition of acknowledgements in his book! Cronin, Shaw, and La Barre (2003, p. 858) classified each part of acknowledgements into six types: conceptual, editorial, financial, instrumental/technical, and moral acknowledgement. Below is a fine collection of acknowledgements that proved difficult to categorise that way. However, they fit a scale of emotions ranging from gratitude to hostility through passive-aggressiveness.

- Positive acknowledgements
 - "Most of the paper was written during my daily commute from Vancouver to Surrey, Canada, and I would like to acknowledge TransLink, Metro Vancouver's regional transportation authority, for making the task of writing in buses and trains such an enjoyable exercise." (Ehrensperger, 2013, p. 156)
- Unintended positive consequences of a negative event
 - "B.J.H. [second author] would also like to thank the U.S. Immigration Service under the Bush administration, whose visa background security check forced her to spend two months (following an international conference) in a third country, free of routine obligations—it was during this time that the hypothesis presented herein was initially conjectured." (He & Raichle, 2009, p. 308)
 - "We would like to thank Karla Miller for sleeping late one morning, leaving Tim [Behrens] and Steve [Smith] a bit bored" (Behrens, Fox, Laird, & Smith, 2013, p. 4)
 - "I thank the National Science Foundation for regularly rejecting my (honest) grant applications for work on real organisms [...] thus forcing me into theoretical work." (Van Valen, 1973, p. 21)
- Passive-aggressiveness
 - "The author would like to thank eight anonymous reviewers and the editors of *ASR* who worked over 4.5 years and four rounds of review as this paper arrived in its current state. In addition, I would like to thank the following people for comments on the manuscript or research over the many years it has been slowly hatching: Herbert Gans, Kathy Neckerman, Phil Kasinitz, Tomas Jimenez, Roger Waldinger, Jack Katz, Mitch Duneier, Eddie Telles, John Mollenkopf, Nicole Marwell, Cecilia Menjivar, and others, to whom I must apologize if you have been left off after all these years." (Smith, 2014, p. 25)

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- “We appreciate the very candid critical insights of 2 anonymous reviewers, M. Gompfer, and K. Beard.” (Berger & Cain, 2014, p. 9)
 - Anti-acknowledgements a.k.a. negative/hostile acknowledgements:
 - “We gratefully thank Programme National de Physique Stellaire for financial support. **We do not gratefully thank T. Appourchaux for his useless and very mean comments.**” (Goupil et al., 2006, p. 461) — bold is theirs.

I once thanked “my daughter Lise for helping to collect data” (Cabanac, 2012, p. 994). This is plain truth: She was a very quiet 4-month-old baby sleeping by my desk while I was working on that paper!

Here is some nice advice about acknowledgements: “It’s unlikely the advice you are dispensing has arisen in a vacuum. Give credit.” (Dashnow, Lonsdale, & Bourne, 2014, p. 5).

2.10 References

It must have seemed like a good idea to cite all and every *Cortex* paper in a *Cortex* editorial (Foley & Valkonen, 2012). One more citation to each of the 117 papers published in 2010–2011 translates as a one-point bonus on the Impact Factor of 2012. The problem is that journal-level self-citations are frequently perceived as an attempt to game the Impact Factor.⁵

2.11 Footnotes

Professor Ivor K. Davies is an old friend of James’s. Using a fake name,⁶ he once co-authored a paper titled “Phrames are out: Phootnotes are in” (Ewe & Sopedantic, 1964). The authors demonstrate the “universal appeal” of so-called phootnotes.⁷

2.12 Responding to referees

Here is an honest, all-purpose way of replying to referees:

“Moreover, the Louvain and simulated-annealing algorithms are much more popular than spectral algorithms in investigations of community structure [14] (and life is short), so we only compare results using the Louvain and simulated-annealing algorithms for the remainder of this appendix.” (Onnela et al., 2012, p. 13)

“My late colleague F. W. N. de Boer once responded to an editor’s complaint that a data table was too long by offering to delete the first half, the last half, or every other entry at the editor’s discretion.” (C. Fields, personal communication, February 15, 2015).

Always look on the bright side of life! Even the smartest ideas were rejected once: “We Are Sorry to Inform You . . .” (Santini, 2005). Reviewer 3 might just have read “How NOT to review a paper: The tools and techniques of the adversarial reviewer” (Cormode, 2009).

⁵ See “*Netherlands Heart Journal* Editor Delivers Dutch Citation Treat” on the Scholarly Kitchen blog <http://wp.me/pcvbl-7O1>.

⁶ The byline reads “By Verra Ewe and O. Sopedantic¹” with the following footnote: “1—Do you think we’d give our **real** names?”

⁷ See? — their pun (footnote 1, central column of Ewe & Sopedantic, 1964). A subsequent footnote reads “See? You just can’t help it . . . It’s overpowering!”

2.13 Proofs

Did you hear about typos and proofreading failures? Here are a few horror stories demonstrating why you should always “look at every word, every number and every comma separately, two or three times at least” (Hartley, 2008, p. 71).

- A Freudian Slip? “. . . for variables with a screwed distribution. Normal distribution was achieved after log transformation of screwed data.” (Due, Toubro, Skov, & Astrup, 2004, p. 1285)
- This paper was reviewed, accepted, and published with the following ‘typo’ in the abstract: “In this study, we have used (insert statistical method here) to compile unique DNA methylation signatures. . .” (Xie, Weichel, Ohm, & Zhang, 2011). It was corrected afterwards on the publisher’s website but PubMed kept the first uncorrected version.⁸
- “Although association preferences documented in our study theoretically could be a consequence of either mating or shoaling preferences in the different female groups investigated (should we cite the crappy Gabor paper here?), shoaling preferences are unlikely drivers of the documented patterns both because of evidence from previous research and inconsistencies with a priori predictions.” (Culumber, Bautista-Hernández, Monks, Arias-Rodriguez, & Tobler, 2014, p. 1096). The clumsy note on Wiley’s website is hilarious:

“This article has been updated since first published on 12 July 2014 and subsequently replaced due to inclusion of an author’s note not intended for publication. The following reference has now been included: Gabor, C. 1999: Association patterns of sailfin mollies (*Poecilia latipinna*): alternative hypotheses. Behav. Ecol. Sociobiol. 46, 333–340.”
- In the supporting information of (Drinkel, Wu, Linden, & Dorta, 2014b), one of the co-authors leaves a note to the first author:

“Emma, please insert NMR data here! where are they? and for this compound, just make up an elemental analysis. . .”

 It was corrected afterwards, as explained in (Drinkel, Wu, Linden, & Dorta, 2014a) starting with the following statement:

“During peer review of the manuscript, a reviewer recommended and the assigned Associate Editor relayed a request that the manuscript be shortened. In response, the authors moved the Experimental Section provided in the submitted manuscript to a Supporting Information file. In the course of this text transfer, the authors regrettably introduced new text consisting of internal communication among the authors not intended for publication.”
- A paper titled “Academic urban legends” discussed “a remarkable case in which a decimal point error appears to have misled millions into believing that spinach is a good nutritional source of iron.” (Rekdal, 2014, p. 638).
- You should carefully check the submission/revision/acceptation dates shown on the first page of your paper. This will avoid chronological flaws. For example, Kim (2009) appeared to have revised her manuscript (April 28, 2008) before she initially submitted it (September 26, 2008). In a study of the work-life balance of *JASIST* authors and editors, Cabanac and Hartley (2013, p. 2183) stress that “30 articles were discarded because of chronological flaws.”

⁸ See <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22784623>

3 Other genres

3.1 Literature reviews

In the methods section of his citation analysis paper, Greenberg (2009, p. 1) cites 302 papers in a single footnote. It reads as a neat “¹⁻³⁰²” on the PDF. However, each reference is hyperlinked on the website version of the paper and the display is rather cluttered, see Fig. 4!

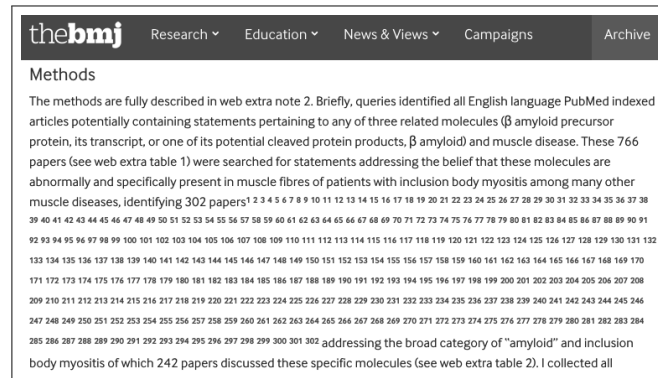


Fig. 4 Greenberg (2009, p. 1) cites 302 papers in a single footnote.

3.2 Tables and graphs

Be creative! Look at the chart of the paper titled “Come all ye scientists, busy and exhausted. O come ye, O come ye, out of the lab” in Fig. 5. Yes, it is made up of Christmas trees (Ladle, Malhado, & Todd, 2007)!

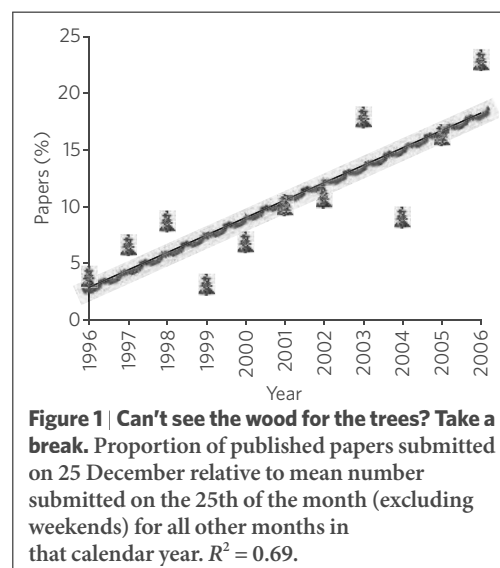


Fig. 5 A festive plot style by (Ladle, Malhado, & Todd, 2007).

Flam (1993) commented the (then) recent progress of chromosome mapping in a spoof note revealing the map of chromosome Y (Fig. 6). Note the relation to essential men's skills: "Spitting, Channel Flipping. . ."

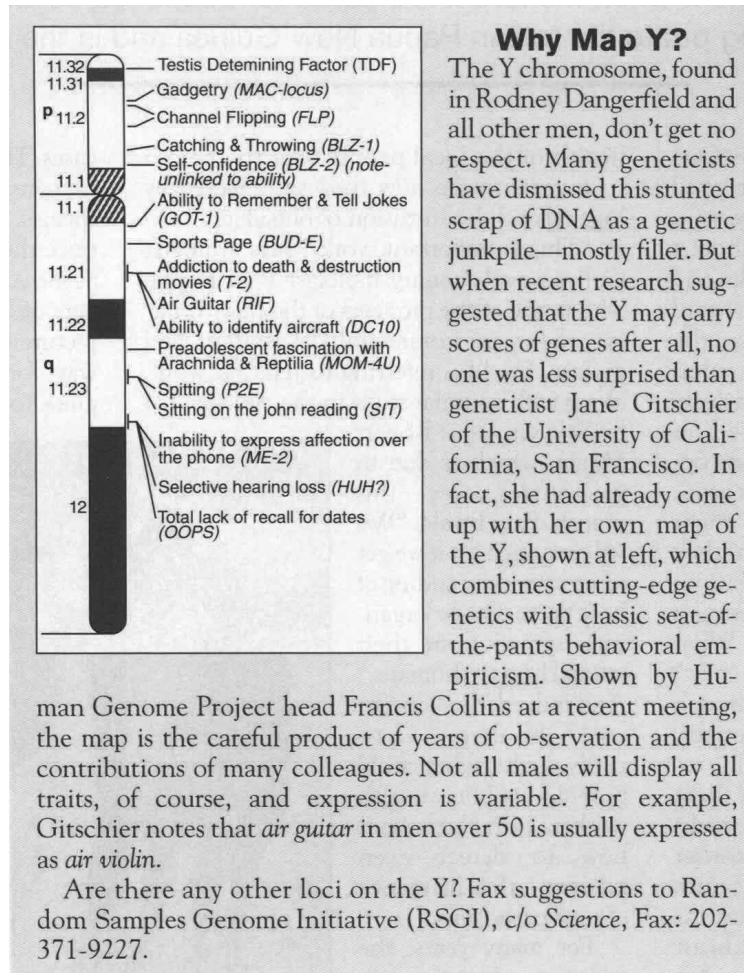


Fig. 6 A spoof comment of men's skills explained thanks to DNA sequencing (Flam, 1993).

A controversy is growing about graphical abstracts going too graphic (Eisen, 2014; Faulkes, 2014). It was triggered by the "Coconut woman" (D'Amato, Fasoli, & Righetti, 2012). People having fun with graphical abstracts (e.g., Fig. 7) collected them, see <http://tocrofl.tumblr.com> a.k.a. Table of Contents (where graphical abstracts appear) Rolling On Floor Laughing.

3.3 Book reviews

If you fail to find a book to review, just invent the ideal one! A fictitious author came up with a review published in *Social Science History* and titled: "When the Cows Come Home: Barn Architecture and Changes in Bovine Public Space" (Chopwhittle, 2001). Just in case readers did not recognise it is a spoof review, a note states: "This book does not exist, although perhaps it might. Many people contributed to the review; Paula Baker and Elizabeth Faue take responsibility for it." (p. 609).

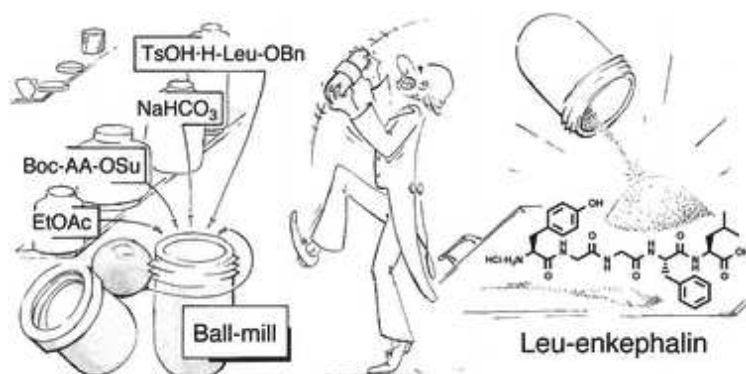


Fig. 7 There is magic out there! The graphical abstract of (Bonnamour, Métro, Martinez, & Lamaty, 2013).

3.4 Letters to the editor

Figure 8 shows a nice cover letter that you can tailor for your own papers!

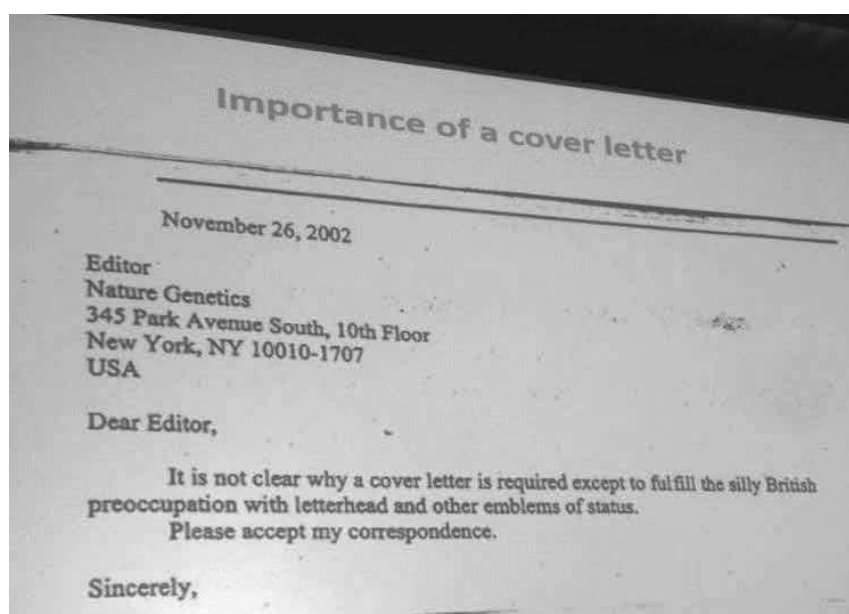


Fig. 8 An unconventional cover letter (source <http://twitter.com/leonidkruglyak/status/441738748535926784>).

3.5 Spoof papers

Unfortunately, the interested reader of (Hartley, 2008) will find no clue about the art of writing and publishing spoof papers!

- “The present is considered to be a most appropriate time to study analytically, with a view toward improving, the efficiency of functioning of committees, boards, and panels in general.” (Olds & Little, 1947, p. 118).

- “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” published in *American Anthropologist* (Miner, 1956). This paper is a satire of anthropological papers discussing “other” cultures: Nacirema is the mirror text of “American.”
- “Water beds and sexual satisfaction: Wike’s law of low odd primes (WLLOP)” published in *Psychological Reports* by Wike (1973) — a rare case of self-eponymy.⁹
- “Macroeconomic Policy and the Optimal Destruction of Vampires [Miscellany]” was published in the *Journal of Political Economy* by Snower (1982).
- “This paper demonstrates that, whether or not Columbus discovered America, the United States would have been relatively unchanged. Thus, America is invincible to tinkering with history to a degree heretofore unsuspected.” (McAfee, 1983, p. 738).
- “Scientific libraries are a modest but useful carbon sink [...] Referees and editors should consider manuscripts in the context of global climate change and seek to expand scientific carbon sequestering. Scientists should produce and overproduce. We are doing so anyway; now we have an excuse.” published in *Science* (Duffy, 1989).
- “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” published in *Social Text* (Sokal, 1996) triggered the so-called Sokal affair.
- “Losing time at the PlayStation: Realtime individuation and the whatever body” published in *Cultural Values* by MacKenzie (2000) “may not be a spoof but is hilarious if you don’t buy the premise” (A. Abbott, personal communication, October 20, 2014).
- “The theory of interstellar trade” is an essay on computing interest rates on goods in transit near the speed of light. It was first written in 1978 and eventually published as (Krugman, 2010). Incidentally Krugman was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2008.
- Dashnow et al. (2014) published “Ten Simple Rules for Writing a PLOS Ten Simple Rules Article” after a long line of *Ten Simple Rules* papers initiated by Philip Bourne in 2005. He confesses: “When I started the series in 2005, I had no idea it would be so successful.” (Dashnow et al., 2014, p. 1). Here are a few examples:
 - “Ten Simple Rules for Getting Published” (Bourne, 2005).
 - ... 43 of such *Ten Simple Rules* papers <http://bit.ly/10SimpleRules> ...
 - “Ten Simple Rules for Better Figures” (Rougier, Droettboom, & Bourne, 2014).
 - “Ten Simple Rules for Writing Research Papers” (W. Zhang, 2014).
- Various publishing houses charge for PDFs showing a page with “This page intentionally left blank.” Five scientists who mocked them on Twitter collaborated and wrote a paper to mock the silly situation: “This Study is Intentionally Left Blank: A systematic literature review of blank pages in academic publishing” (G. Wright, Coudert, Bentley, Steel, & Deville, 2014).
- “Search for humouristic and Extravagant acronyms and Thoroughly Inappropriate names For Important Clinical trials (SCIENTIFIC): qualitative and quantitative systematic study”

⁹ “First, names are not given to scientific discoveries by historians of science or even by individual scientists, but by the community of practicing scientists (most of whom have no special historical expertise). Second, names are rarely given, and never generally accepted unless the namer (or acceptor of the name) is remote in time or place (or both) from the scientist being honored.” (Stigler, 1980, p. 149)

was published in the *BMJ* by Pottegård et al. (2014). This journal has a tradition of publishing such unconventional, humoristic papers in the Christmas issues. The problem is that some authors don't get the joke and take the results for granted. The ethics of publishing such materials is then questioned, see this paper abstract:

“The goal of most scientific research published in peer-review journals is to discover and report the truth. However, the research record includes tongue-in-cheek papers written in the conventional form and style of a research paper. Although these papers were intended to be taken ironically, bibliographic database searches show that many have been subsequently cited as valid research, some in prestigious journals. We attempt to understand why so many readers cited such ironic science seriously. [...] publishing ironic science in a research journal can lead to the same troubles posed by retracted research, and we recommend relevant changes to publication guidelines.” (Ronagh & Souder, forthcoming)

The *Improbable Research* website¹⁰ is a great source of amusement as it collects the “Research that makes people LAUGH and then THINK.” No spoofs here, just serious but unexpected research. The best papers according to these criteria are awarded the Ig[®] Nobels!¹¹ For instance, the Psychology Prize 2013 winner was “‘Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder’: People who think they are drunk also think they are attractive” (Bègue et al., 2012) published in the *British Journal of Psychology*.

4 Concluding remark

These excerpts of *unconventional* academic literature are inspirational, aren't they? Let us refer those who believe in the contrary to “Suppress humor and flowery language” (section 8) of “How to write consistently boring scientific literature” (Sand-Jensen, 2007)!

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¹⁰ See <http://www.improbable.com/ig>

¹¹ Note the trademark here and on the website: It was subject to disputes among the editor of the *Annals of Improbable Research* and the editor of the *Journal of Irreproducible Results* (Nadis, 1997).

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