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# Making the search for genome editing tortured phrases a collective effort

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## ***Making the search for genome editing tortured phrases a collective effort***

[10.1089/crispr.2024.0015](https://doi.org/10.1089/crispr.2024.0015)

Dear Editors,

I was pleased to read a letter<sup>1</sup> in your journal on “tortured phrases” related to CRISPR. These expressions, which usually take the form of established scientific concept paraphrased into a nonsensical sequence of words, are being found in many fields<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to powerful tools like the Problematic Paper Screener<sup>A</sup> (PPS), designed by Computer Science Professor Guillaume Cabanac<sup>3</sup>, scholars can now compound their efforts to depollute the scientific record. This is an activity I recently engaged with. I personally identified nine of the twelve examples Teixeira da Silva refers to in their letter (Table 1) and I am convinced there are many more tortured phrases to be found. This is an endeavor I invite all readers of this publication to join.

DOI	Original PubPeer comment (archived)
10.1016/j.combiomed.2023.107191	<a href="#">4C3610F203D5F8C33B67961EADE349#1</a>
10.22541/au.165268627.74823408/v1	<a href="#">50E01339EC6B5B8F2215AA5C16AD0E#1</a>
10.21608/eajbsg.2022.234958	<a href="#">3D92AFF73ABE5E5A77341A9D9AAD98#1</a>
10.3390/molecules27175399	<a href="#">64338B66E8AF1AD05F5435B0D925E3#1</a>
10.3390/agronomy11122374	<a href="#">BF7391506E292E372EA9CF2F474B16#1</a>
10.15835/nbha49312459	<a href="#">202238706C5076C59A2FC8FC437A19#1</a>
10.32539/bsm.v5i5.235	<a href="#">A07BD05A3E0DD0F6508F2231632A9A#1</a>
10.1007/s12010-019-03188-7	<a href="#">B5E3BE7CA84390A60AD72BA14DBB2A#1</a>
10.1016/j.biopha.2019.109030	<a href="#">F78470862C88D02A48E83567231699#2</a>

Table 1. List of articles containing CRISPR tortured phrases identified by Levrier and cited by Teixeira da Silva

As shown in several examples, the CRISPR acronym substitutions are only part of the problem. The “double strand break” (DSB) is paraphrased as “twofold strand break”. Tortured versions of expressions such as “off-target” (“off-focusing”), “CRISPR interference” (“CRISPR impedance”) or “CRISPR activation” (“CRISPR initiation”) are also to be found in suspicious articles. And this is not limited to

<sup>A</sup> Available online at <https://www.irit.fr/~Guillaume.Cabanac/problematic-paper-screener>

CRISPR: other nuclease names and qualifications are also tortured. In at least one instance<sup>4</sup>, the TALE nuclease has become the “Story” nuclease. The next time you read a suspicious formulation in an article, do run it through the PPS and let others know by posting a comment on the platform PubPeer.

1. Teixeira da Silva JA. “CRISPR” Mutations: Inaccurate Linguistic Variations and Misrepresentation of the CRISPR Acronym. *CRISPR J* 2024;7(1):3–4; doi: 10.1089/crispr.2024.0005.
2. Cabanac G, Labbé C, Magazinov A. “Bosom Peril” Is Not “Breast Cancer”: How Weird Computer-Generated Phrases Help Researchers Find Scientific Publishing Fraud. 2022. Available from: <https://thebulletin.org/2022/01/bosom-peril-is-not-breast-cancer-how-weird-computer-generated-phrases-help-researchers-find-scientific-publishing-fraud/> [Last accessed: 2/29/2024].
3. Cabanac G, Labbé C, Magazinov A. The “Problematic Paper Screener” Automatically Selects Suspect Publications for Post-Publication (Re)Assessment. 2022; doi: 10.48550/arXiv.2210.04895.
4. Anonymous. PubPeer - The Ethics of Gene Modification: Considerations of Gene Edit... 2024. Available from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240220154240/https://pubpeer.com/publications/A07BD05A3E0DD0F6508F2231632A9A#1> [Last accessed: 2/22/2024].