



GWU Clinical Research Administration Program Newsletter

Writers Clinic: Monkey See, Monkey Don't...

Back in my youthful, athletic days I went skiing every weekend that there was snow on Snoqualmie Pass (in Washington state). So somebody at the *Seattle Times* (or maybe it was the *Post-Intelligencer*) asked me to submit a report every Sunday night.

To avoid embarrassment, I studied published ski reports to figure out how to write them. I called it my "Monkey-See, Monkey-Do" method. It worked for the ski reports. It worked when, as pilot's wife working with volunteer groups, I started submitting articles to the *Air Force Times*. But I don't recommend it now.

I can't say for sure whether standards have deteriorated (although I believe they have) or whether I have simply unlearned bad habits since then. But I do know that reading a passage in the *New York Times* or a medical journal, or hearing one on public radio, is no assurance of logic or clarity -- two words that repeatedly turn up in CRA

faculty criteria for grading papers.

A frequently seen phrase that offers neither logic nor clarity is a fairly recent way of making comparative statements. For example, I learned -- and for many years read -- that 35 is 5 times as much as 7. But what does "5 times more than 7" mean? Mathematically, it can mean 42.



Bill Walsh (copy chief for *The Washington Post*) [<http://www.theslot.com/times.html>] explains it this way: "The problem is that "times [blank]er" and "times more," while very common . . . , make no sense. . . such phrasing confuses addition with multiplication and, at least when taken literally, contains a built-in distortion."

As for comparisons, how about this kind, which I just noticed in a peer-reviewed journal article (names removed to protect the guilty)? "Patients

who received [drug A] spent a statistically significant longer period of time without toxicity (both haematological and non-haematological) when compared to [drug B]."

Grammatically, this particularly egregious example compares patients to a drug. Logic and clarity would dictate something like this: "Patients who received Drug A had a statistically significant longer period with neither haematological nor non-haematological toxicity than those who received Drug B."

Most of the editors I know can't help proofreading everything from cafe menus to the novel on the nightstand. Students who take a leaf from that book -- those who read with a critical eye -- won't assume that getting into print necessarily makes a passage lucid and logical. It can even help them to make their own writing meet those CRA faculty clarity and logic criteria.

~Jane Ganter

Fall on the Farm...

You're Invited

What

"Fall on the Farm"
A Gathering for CRA Program Faculty,
Alumni and Students

Where

Margaret Ann Isaacs-Skelton's Farm
749 Clifton Road
Berryville, VA 22611
Phone: 540 955 0458

When

October 22, 2005 @ 5 PM

RSVP

Sherry Reuter (sreuter@gwu.edu) by
October 1, 2005



More details to follow...