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**Editing the Refereed Scientific Journal: Practical, Political, and Ethical Issues. Robert A. Weeks and Donald L. Kinser, editors. The Institute of Electrical and electronics Engineers, Inc. New York, NY; 1994. xxxi + 264 pp., softcover. \$44.95.**

This book is actually the published proceedings of the 1992 Conference of Editors, which was sponsored by several scientific organizations and publishers and by Vanderbilt University, where the conference took place. A number of well-known medical and scientific editors took part in the paper presentations and the several discussions that followed. The topic, of course, is highly relevant, as editors find themselves dealing with rapidly changing publishing technology, as well as an environment in which the "publish-or-perish" syndrome, increased competition for grant money, and the biotechnology boom have raised ethical issues that rarely, if ever, had to be dealt with in earlier decades.

Weeks and Kinser state the conference's purpose in the Introduction to the book:

There have been few papers published about the factors with which an editor must work. There are generally no guidelines for such editors. The purpose of the conference reported here is to enumerate important topics that society expects editors to consider. Those topics include: refereeing; responsibilities of editors; the act of editing; cultural, discipline, and ethnic differences; who are authors; ethics of editors; structures of scientific manuscripts; and universal guidelines for editors. (p. xix)

To accomplish this purpose, papers were divided into 10 categories, presented here as chapters. The initial chapter deals with customer expectations of scientific journals, and the final chapter discusses the true functions of scientific journals and their implications for editorial ethics and practices. Between these are eight chapters, each consisting of from two to five papers on the topic and concluding with a transcript of the discussion that followed the presentation of the papers.

The largest chapters in the book deal with refereeing and related problems and ethical concerns of editors. Topics discussed under refereeing include how to select referees, blinding of referees and authors, consistency among referees, what makes a good review, guidelines for acceptance and rejection of papers, and arbitration of author disputes regarding criticism of their papers. The chapter on ethical concerns of editors includes discussions of potential conflict of interest, confidentiality, the editor as a guardian of research ethics, the ethics of aggressive or substantive editing, the editor's role as an ombudsman for authors, and the ethics of authors' editing. The papers presented in both chapters prompted lively discussion afterward.

One of the most interesting chapters dealt with the responsibilities of editors. The editor's responsibility for ensuring the correctness of citations; scientists' failure to identify fraudulent papers and what journals should do in such situations; and the frequency and severity of scientific misconduct are all discussed by knowledgeable, experienced journal editors, with some solutions offered.

Other topics covered are editorial panels, advisory boards, and rotating editors; cultural differences; editors as guardians of scientific excellence; editor-publisher conflicts of interest; and guidelines for editors.

Because of the cross-disciplinary and international flavor of the conference, there are many thought-provoking papers in the book. The problems experienced by editors of chemistry and engineering journals differ somewhat from those experienced by editors of biomedical journals. Similarly, cultural differences between scientists in the former Soviet Union and those in America create different ethical conflicts and affect the process by which an editor accepts or rejects a paper. The rights and responsibilities of editors can also vary widely across cultures, as evidenced by the papers and discussions published here.

Despite this limitation, however, the ideas presented are worth a reading by anyone interested in ethical issues or anyone seeking solutions to a particular political or ethical editorial problem. Many of the authors are well known and highly respected in their fields, and the variety of experiences brought to each topic makes the book of particular interest to anyone doing research on ethical issues and editorial practices at refereed scientific journals.

### **Kendall Wills Sterling**

*Kendall Wills Sterling, ELS, is a biomedical communications consultant providing writing and editing services to individuals, corporations, and publishers. She is a member of the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences and currently serves on CBE's Author's Editors Committee.*