

Writing scientific papers in English. By M. O'CONNOR and F.P. WOODFORD. Pp.vii+108, Figs.9. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1975. Price: f21.00 (about US \$7.95).

This book could have quite an important influence upon the standard of presentation of scientific work. It gives advice about all aspects of writing papers for publication; although it is aimed particularly at foreigners writing in English, most English speaking writers could learn a great deal from it as well. The fact that it is primarily directed at biologists does not in the least detract from its usefulness to physical scientists, and, if the authors of papers presented to this Journal were to accept the instructions given, the task of the Editors of this Journal would be made much easier. (For example, it is stressed that typing should be double-spaced – a request in our *Notes for Authors* that is largely ignored.)

The chapters are all very useful and could hardly be bettered. Instructions are given clearly and concisely and in unpretentious language. Grammar is treated only briefly, but the points made are those that the authors consider particularly important; we should, however, have welcomed a longer discussion of the use of hyphens, which we think could make some scientific writing a great deal less mystifying than it often is. Since English makes much use of nouns as adjectives, it is often not clear, except to the expert, what group of words is acting as an adjective to qualify a noun later on.

The only doubt that we have about the book is that it

seems to make the writing of a paper almost impossibly difficult. The number of steps recommended is large; in an appendix 27 such steps are listed leading to the presentation of a manuscript. A new author may well be led to believe that his work cannot really be worth all this effort!

One chapter, however, that is of undoubted use is that on typing. This will be of great help to any typist who is relatively new to the task of preparing a satisfactory scientific manuscript.

Appendix 5 (*Expressions to avoid*) is well worth while studying. It is particularly interesting to see the words 'anticipate' and 'sophisticated' in the 'avoid' column, as these are so often used in the wrong sense.

On the whole, we think that the book should be used as a reference book rather than as a manual. In other words, we think that an author should prepare his work as he thinks best, turning to the book only when he is not sure what to do. Otherwise, he might find that he has spent so much time thinking about the presentation that he has forgotten about the contents!

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