

Book Review

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Scientific Writing for Young Astronomers

Christiaan Sterken, ed., 2011.

Part 1, 165 pp., hardcover, EAS Publication Series Volume 49, ISBN 978-2-7598-0506-8. Price 36 Euro, including VAT (<http://www.edition-sciences.com/scientific-writing-for-young-astronomers-part-1.htm>).

Part 2, 298 pp., hardcover, EAS Publication Series Volume 50, ISBN 987-2-7598-0639-3. Price 61 Euro, including VAT (<http://www.edition-sciences.com/scientific-writing-for-young-astronomers-part-2.htm>).

Both parts include subject and name index and list of acronyms. Published by EAS, EDP Sciences, Les Ulis, France.

In 2007, the Board of Directors of the renowned journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics (A&A)*, and EDP Sciences, the publisher of *A&A*, decided to organize a School on the various aspects of scientific writing and publishing. In 2008 and 2009 these Scientific Writing for Young Astronomers (SWYA) Schools were organized in Blankenberge, Belgium, under the direction of Christiaan Sterken.

Both volumes are based on these Schools. Part one contains eight papers which deal with all aspects of scientific publication, from the peer-review process to the role of the publisher and beyond. Two of the papers provide insight in the services provided by astronomical libraries in a broad sense, and discuss how information on papers, and information provided in papers, are integrated in databases and repositories such as the NASA Abstract Data Server (ADS), the arXiv.org e-print repository, SIMBAD, and VizieR. Two contributions discuss language editing. One of these papers provides the guidelines to the English editing currently in use at *A&A*. Another paper, written by S. R. Pottasch, who was, together with J. L. Steinberg, the first Editor-in-Chief of *A&A*, provides an interesting overview on the creation of *A&A* and the obstacles encountered in merging several national and observatory publications into an international journal. Although most contributions are written from an *A&A* perspective, the discussed topics apply also to other major astronomical journals, probably with some nuances.

Part two, which is completely written by Christiaan Sterken, consists of three very extensive papers. The first paper deals with all aspects of writing a scholarly paper, from the initial drafting up to and including the deep

proofreading of the manuscript. One section amplifies on what to avoid at all price. Another section provides detailed answers on twenty-six frequently asked questions, such as “May I reproduce complete sentences?” and “How do I communicate with the referee?”. The second paper discusses communication by graphics, images, diagrams, and tables. Not only the types of graphs and the graph components are discussed, but also an in-depth look at technical aspects of file formats, image quality, and colors is included. While discussing colors, the author also takes color blindness into account. Many of the gray-scale graphs included in this paper are reprinted in color at the end of the paper. The paper also contains a section on what to avoid at all costs. The third paper, devoted to ethical aspects, elaborates on the truthful communication of scientific results and concepts of truth, error, quality, and value. Different kinds of misconduct together with a number of causes and cures are addressed. One section deals with bibliometry and bibliometrics, and another section assesses the biases of bibliometric indices and questions the value of these indices.

Both volumes cover, from an astronomical perspective, all aspects of scientific writing and publishing very extensively. Many of the discussed topics are accompanied by historical examples or examples from the personal experience of the editor. Numerous footnotes provide additional information and references to websites, or clarify terms used in the papers. Some overlap exists between both volumes, and even between papers in the same volume. The editor explicitly mentions that this overlap is built in intentionally, in order to allow the readers to consult the sections of their interest, instead of having to read the book and papers from start to finish. Both parts contain an expanded table of contents, an extensive subject and name index, and a list of acronyms. The books are well-produced and well-typeset, with keywords, key-sentences, important concepts, and important literary quotations clearly emphasized in Part 2. Although the title of these books indicates that they are written specifically for young astronomers, these books are undoubtedly also useful for astronomers in general, including amateur astronomers who want to publish their results in an astronomical journal.

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