

You have the final word!

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As I settle into my new job as Editor-in-Chief of the *AJO-DO*, I recognize the tremendous responsibility that I have in determining what our readers will see in print and online in the *Journal*. As you may already know, every article that makes it past my eyes must also be approved by our demanding referees. And even if the referees recommend publication, they usually provide the authors with a list of suggestions to improve and strengthen the manuscript before it is finally accepted. So, when an article appears in the *Journal*, one would expect that it should be nearly perfect. But that expectation is not always true. After all, there is a final measure of the quality of a scientific article, and that is from the perspective of our readers. YOU can either agree or disagree with the method, analysis, results, or interpretation of the information presented in the scientific articles that we publish in the *Journal*.

Some of you will simply read an article, digest the information, and keep your thoughts to yourselves. Others may want to question the authors. That is the purpose of the Readers' Forum section of the *AJO-DO*. Perhaps this is one of the meatiest portions of any journal. If you disagree with an author or interpret the information differently, you can send me a letter detailing your thoughts. If your comments are collegial, constructive, and politely challenging, then I will send your letter to the authors, request a response, and publish both in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*.

However, if your comments are condescending, destructive, or rudely demeaning, then your letter will not proceed any further. Let me give you an example. A few months ago, when I first became responsible for receiving and responding to the Letters to the Editor, I received a letter that contained the following phrases: "at best, these statements are outright fabrications" and "I don't even want to get into how ridiculous the photos are" and "not even a child who's looked at cartoons and coloring books would pick any of these" and "I can not believe that someone actually reviewed

this article." Yes, these are direct quotes from the letter! Wouldn't you agree that these statements are condescending, destructive, and demeaning? What was my response? I wrote back to the letter writer and said that if the letter was rewritten in a collegial and constructive manner, then I would pass it along to the author for a response. I have not heard back from that particular letter writer.

Another requirement for Letters to the Editor is that they be concise. I recently received a letter that challenged a clinical research project, suggesting that the methodology was not evidence-based. The letter was collegial and constructive, but it was also over 1500 words in length. One *Journal* page contains about 700 words. So, this letter would have extended over more than 2 pages. This was not a letter. It was a mini-article. There is no reason that a letter writer cannot synthesize his or her words into a concise statement and pose specific questions to the author. So, as your new Editor-in-Chief, I have imposed a limit of 500 words or less for the Letters to the Editor section. This limit should give you ample space to define your comments, suggestions, and questions to the author.

There are a few other stipulations or requirements for the Letters to the Editor section. First, this section is not a forum for extolling the benefits of or overtly marketing products in which the writer has a financial interest. Second, the letters must pertain to a specific article that we have published previously in the *AJO-DO*. Third, the letters must refer to an article that was published within the previous 6 months. Remember that our subscribers read these letters, and their ability to remember the details of articles from beyond 6 months might be challenged. So, if you're the type of person who's not afraid to challenge our authors, then take the initiative to compose a thoughtful letter about an article that you believe needs further clarification. Remember, as the reader, you have the final word!

