

Letter

A Journal by Any Other Name

Dear Editor,

I've been to all the SRBR business meetings, and have heard one editor after another tell us how great the *Journal of Biological Rhythms* is doing and then complain about not getting enough submissions. Want to know why you're not getting more submissions? It's because of your name. Real cachet requires a name comprising a single broad word, like *Science* or *Nature*, or, better still, a single syllable like *Cell* or *Gut* or *Blood* (or *Frogs*, *Lice*, *Boils*, etc.). Use a compound word—*Polysyllablology*—or add the word *Journal*, and you've started to slip. Add an adjective—the *Journal of Adjectival Gnosis* or the *Journal of Disciplinary Whatever*—and you're definitely looking at a second-rate journal. It could be worse, of course. More points are lost by adding the name of a country, a continent, or, even worse, *International*. Now you're somewhere near the *International Journal of Mediocre Science*. Compound nouns further diminish your standing, as do designations other than *Journal*, such as *Letters*, or *Reports*, or *Communications*. By this point, you're what people mean in reviews of manuscripts when they say "belongs in a more specialized journal." But there's still room to fall. Add an extraneous word, like *Research*, and still more syllables, and you've just about hit bottom: *The International Journal of Arcane Polysyllabic Research Letters*.

What to do? Besides finding a name and a niche that isn't already taken, a major source of difficulty is the

bureaucratic desire to actually specify what the journal is about. A mistake. Not only is it unnecessary, it's counterproductive. People don't *have to* be able to tell immediately what the journal is about, as long as there's some connection. Wouldn't you like to edit a journal called *Truth*? Could be anything. Or *Justice* (a law journal, I suppose)? Or *The American Way* (could be economics, sociology, history . . .)? *Truth, Justice, and the American Way*, however, would be a specialized journal about superheroes. For you, then, the way to go would be to change the name of the *Journal of Biological Rhythms* to *Light*, or *Cycle*, or *Tau*, or any of the kinds of names being grabbed up by gene namers. They know what they're about! Try suggesting that at the next SRBR meeting.

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Editor's response:

Thank you for your suggestions. It is difficult, however, to find a better way to generate fruitless, albeit heated and time-consuming, debate than to suggest a name change to a large group of people. It should only be done to forestall the adoption of some proposal even more fatuous.

