# Letters

## Who's Who

I would like to call attention to a disturbing inconsistency in the paper entitled "Malignant argyrophilic gastric carcinoids of *Praomys (Mastomys) natalensis*" (31 Jan., p. 470). In this report, the authors, who do not take the trouble to reveal the identity of *Praomys natalensis*, persistently refer to *Homo sapiens* as "man." Under the circumstances, this is taking a serious liberty, and I for one (*H. sapiens*, that is) protest such familiarity. If you refuse to identify *P. natalensis*, then *H. sapiens* is entitled to equal protection from invasion of privacy.

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We refer Rodnan to the papers by A. G. Oettlé and by K. C. Snell in reference 3 of our report, in which the characteristics of *Mastomys* are described. He might also be interested in our four full-length papers published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, from one of which (July 1967) I quote: "*Mastomys* are a distinct subgenus of rodent intermediate in size between the mouse and the rat. They were formerly called *Rattus (Mastomys) natalensis*, but according to the new classification by Davis (*1*), they should properly be named *Praomys (Mastomys) natalensis*."

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**Reference**

1. D. H. S. Davis, *Zool. Afr.* **1**, 121 (1965).

Possibly many readers like to skim through all the reports in *Science* trying to amass a little wisdom. Then why not make the task of communication a little easier by adding illumination to scientific precision? "Learning sets in an invertebrate" (16 May, p. 850) by Morrow and Smithson is a case in point. First, with invertebrates being what they are, the title is far from informative. Then, we read that the invertebrate in question is an isopod, *Porcellio scaber*. I should like to submit that a nonzoologist (I number myself in their midst) would have to dig very deeply in a quite excellent library to discover that the scholarly invertebrate, *Porcellio scaber*, is a wood louse.

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## Abstracts with Zest

R. C. Mathes' letter (9 May) on possible basic differences between managerial (action) and scientific (thinking) people may be true of their approach to writing documents, but it is not necessarily true of their preference, if given a choice, for reading documents. We tested this at Esso Research 10 years ago, 2 years after we had shifted the style of informative abstracts in our in-house technical abstract bulletins from the conventional order of elements (title, author, remaining bibliographical information, purpose of study, techniques and equipment, findings, and conclusions) to a news-type arrangement which placed findings and conclusions first, followed them with other details, and ended with the bibliographic information. Esso readers had received the conventional style of technical abstracts for 37 years before being introduced to the news-type abstract.

As might have been expected, we were eventually challenged by a few Mathes-type scientists who claimed that readers in general prefer to follow a deliberate trail of authors, name of journal, title of paper (subject of study), and so forth before they are willing to consider findings. Because these scientists could have been right, we questioned 660 bulletin readers as to their preference. Of the 402 respondents, 61 percent preferred the news-type abstract, 31 percent the conventional abstract, and 8 percent had no preference or had other ideas.

More to the point, we expected to find marked differences in opinion among different elements of our audience. Therefore we asked if readers were supervisors (162) or nonsupervisors (186); if they had doctorate (168), master's (89), or bachelor's (123) degrees; and whether they were chemists (151), chemical engineers (181), or had other degrees (39). Significantly, all preferred the news-type abstract, and their degree of preference actually varied very little: supervisors 64 percent, nonsupervisors 61 percent; Ph.D.'s 56 percent, master's 65 percent, bachelor's 67 percent; and chemists 61 percent, chemical engineers 62 percent, others 67 percent.

Scientists are certainly thinkers, whether managers are or not, but they have rarely been given an opportunity to choose the style of their own reading. If this study demonstrated nothing else, it showed that a large, heterogeneous chemical-research audience could be converted in 2 years from unconsidered acceptance of conventional-style abstracts to preference for news-type abstracts.

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## HEW Pesticides Commission

The news item on DDT (23 May, p. 936) states that the 11-member commission on pesticides and the environment appointed by Secretary Robert Finch of HEW "has National Academy of Sciences support." In fact, the only current relationship between the Academy and this commission is an offer to make available the resource material compiled by our Committee on Persistent Pesticides. Our committee expects to deliver to the Department of Agriculture in the very near future the report of its 2-year pesticide study.

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