

skills to advanced theory and practice. Where would any breakthroughs or discoveries be without some basic research that preceded them?

Second, the commitment. If the student of biology pursues a real study of biological principles from such a foundation of basics, then surely this must require a firm commitment on his/her part, a commitment of patience and tolerance. Patience to dig out from the accumulated data, sound conclusions; tolerance to review and consider prior knowledge and keep one's mind open to a new or different point of view.

This commitment to learning ideas and concepts may indeed seem at times boring and uninteresting. If, however, the learner keeps the long range view in mind—pragmatically, a career or use in everyday living, then these learning activities become a means to an end—the building blocks for future productivity and a happier existence.

The “basics” needed today are not only content of the various subject areas but three other R's—Reason, Responsibility and Rights. Reason and responsibility have been alluded to already; when these two R's are present the right to a sound education becomes a reality.

Anne Fraulo
Science Department Head
Hillhouse High School
New Haven, Connecticut 06511

“Humanizing Language:” More Reactions

I could hardly believe my eyes!

Your fiery editorial about “Humanizing Language” in the May 1978 issue of *ABT* was certainly a strong blow for women's lib. Such positive guidelines! “Starting with this month's issue we will be using the term *s/he* as the singular personal pronoun in *ABT*; *him/her* will be the objective form; and *hers/his* the possessive form.”

But then something on page 271

caught my eye. It made my hair stand on end (what little I have left). Page 271, the very page on which this editorial concludes, carried a memorable quote from Thoreau—“If a *man* does not keep pace with *his* companions, perhaps it is because *he* hears a different drummer. Let *him* step to the music *he* hears however measured or far away.”

I really could not believe my eyes. Those guidelines—what happened to them? “My,” said I to myself. “All those sexist words! I'd better rewrite Thoreau's quote in the new *ABT* style.” And so I did. But please note that I tried to replace the generic “man” with “human” until I realized that the “man” was still there. So I substituted a new word—*hubody*. After all, language cannot remain frozen, as you say. I feel that *hubody* is quite safe because members of both sexes have bodies. And so, the quotation now reads as follows:

If a *hubody* does not keep pace with *his/her* companions, perhaps it is because *s/he* hears a different drummer. Let *him/her* step to the music which *s/he* hears however measured or far away.

Having followed the *ABT* guidelines to the letter, I felt satisfied and happy. Then I tried to READ THE QUOTE ALOUD to my wife. As I was reading I heard terrible noises and muffled groans. Later I learned that those noises were caused when Thoreau turned over in his grave. Perhaps if you try to read this quote out loud, you too will hear those groans.

How does one pronounce “s/he” when reading aloud? Is it anything like Ms. which to me sounds like an abbreviation for miserable?

Philip Goldstein
193 Lake Carol Drive
West Palm Beach, Florida 33411

Masters Responds

We have already discussed Thoreau, who must be quite tired from all of that tossing about and groaning in his grave, in the September issue of the journal.

As to pronunciation, I would pronounce “s/he” as “she” but that is a matter of individual preference. Actually the form is a way of saying “she or he, whatever the case may be.” If that doesn't satisfy those who have problems with pronouncing “s/he” I can only refer them to Victor Borge who, I am told, has a marvelous way of pronouncing “/” as well as “;” and “:”. Unfortunately I haven't had an opportunity to investigate this for myself.

May I commend you on your recent editorial, “Humanizing Language.” (*ABT* 40:5) Not only was your article interesting and well written but you offer a solution for the grammatical pronoun problem; that is, using the form *s/he* as the singular personal pronoun; *him/her* in the objective form; and *hers/his*, the possessive form.

For the sake of interest, thinking your article and idea was so good, I have discussed it with seven public school teachers and three college professors. In summary, the results are—they also agree with your idea but admitted they never viewed this issue as a major problem.

As always, *ABT* leads the other journals. Keep up the good work.

Henry J. Bindel, Jr.
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

E. B. White and “Humanizing Language”

In support of the ERA, the NABT has taken a 70% stand through its “proportional” vote; in support of clear prose, it has chosen to clutter up language with “s/he” and “him/her.”

The NABT has taken an equivocal stand on the principle of equality for the sexes; the journal has taken a silly stand on a grammar issue.

But the disturbing point is that you invoked E. B. White in support of

your position. As the person who revised William Strunk, Jr.'s *The Elements of Style*, E. B. White is very unlikely to agree with your addition despite his agreement that language is sensitive to our hearts and habits.

Arthur P. Cooley
341 Durkee Lane
East Patchogue, New York 11772

Editor's Response

In our response to Stroessner and Bell in September's *ABT* [40(6): 373], we did not claim to have E. B. White's support for *s/he* or *him/her*. What we did say was that we agree that inequality for women is not an

issue that will be resolved simply by changing our pronouns; it will require a change in our hearts, our attitudes, and our thinking. However, our words will serve as a reminder that we must make a conscious effort to include women in our language—not just imply that they are somewhere on the periphery of it.

Cooley's letter gives us an excellent opportunity to recommend E. B. White's 2nd edition of William Strunk, Jr.'s, *The Elements of Style* to all of our readers. The paperback edition, published by Macmillan Publishing Company, is 78 pages of concise, clear, and witty guidelines on

how to write. *ABT's* editors consider White's book a classic that should be read at least twice a month.

Joan G. Creager, *editor*
Patricia A. Masters, *assistant editor*

The stumbling way in which even the ablest of scientists in every generation have had to fight through thickets of erroneous observations, misleading generalizations, inadequate formulations, and unconscious prejudice is rarely appreciated by those who obtain their scientific knowledge from textbooks.

James Bryant Conant

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.—Jerry P. Lightner

NABT Executive Director