

Positions Available

**FACULTY POSITION
Department of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering
University of Connecticut**

The Department of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering is seeking a tenure-track, faculty member at the level of Assistant Professor to begin on or about January 1, 2000. A higher level appointment is possible for a truly exceptional person. Requirements are a PhD degree or equivalent in a materials-related field, a strong interest in both undergraduate and graduate teaching, and motivation to develop a prominent research program. Current research programs in the Department include high temperature coatings, ceramic composites, materials simulation, solidification processing, alloy design, heat treatment, corrosion, mechanical behavior, and solid freeform fabrication. The Department is looking for a highly knowledgeable and energetic individual who can quickly establish a first class research program that will complement existing programs.

An application, including curriculum vitae, list of references, and supporting materials, should be sent to the MMAT Search Committee, University of Connecticut, 97 N. Eagleville Road, Storrs, CT 06269-3136 or e-mailed to metdept@mail.ims.uconn.edu.

Screening of applications will begin on **August 1, 1999** and will continue until the position is filled. For further information about the Department, visit our Web site at <http://www.ims.uconn.edu/metal/>.

The University of Connecticut is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. We encourage applications from under-represented groups, including minorities, women and people with disabilities.

**FACULTY POSITION
Princeton Materials Institute
Princeton University**

The Princeton Materials Institute at Princeton University invites applications for a quarter-time visiting faculty position in advanced imaging, with a specialty in high resolution transmission electron microscopy, for 1999-2000, with possible renewal. A PhD degree, postdoctoral experience, a strong record of research accomplishment, and leadership skills required. The successful applicant will supervise the operation of the imaging facility, help develop and implement our new interdisciplinary graduate program in Materials, including teaching courses and supervising graduate students, and is expected to collaborate in joint research with the Materials faculty. Salary will be commensurate with experience.

Send a curriculum vitae, list of publications, reprints of significant publications, a short description of research interests, and the names of three references, by **June 11, 1999** to: Dr. Robert Cava, Associate Director, Princeton Materials Institute, Bowen Hall, 70 Prospect Avenue, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08540.

Princeton University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

**TO PLACE YOUR AD CONTACT
MARY E. KAUFOLD TODAY!**

724-779-8312; kaufold@mrs.org

**Online Materials Research Society Membership Application:
<http://www.mrs.org/membership/>**

POSTERMINARIES

Writing Wrongs

"Are an an and an a afore an acronym apropos?" asked an articulate author. "Aye, absolutely!" answered an august article authority.

Anon.

Truly well written research publications do make it into print. When you consider all the steps in the publication process and the impediments each may raise, one must marvel at the result. The many actors in the publication play—authors, editors, reviewers, publishers, and readers—do not all read from the same script. Getting the show on the road can therefore be daunting to say the least. Even what seem minor chores and peculiarities of the process can often become show stoppers. Undoubtedly, most readers of *MRS Bulletin* are authors too. You

therefore have probably noticed that authoring and publishing can often be as painful as it is rewarding. Below we'll preach a little on the pain.

The Composition Conundrum

It cannot be repeated often enough that at the heart of a good article is an interesting, even fascinating, topic presented in a clear, compelling, and concise exposition. Whether the content is organized historically (with the beginning at the beginning) or axiomatically (with the end at the beginning), the context, criteria, and conclusions must be easily accessible to the intended audience. No matter how important the topic, it will not survive a badly botched composition.

Obvious, right? Unfortunately the one most expert on the topic, the one who has

sweated through the experiments and calculations, the one whose ridden the highs of discovery and lows of bad data, is more often than not the one least prepared to compose the report. Being too close to the details leads us to give the readers more credit than they deserve. They will not automatically appreciate unstated underlying assumptions, be familiar with sub-specialty jargon, or find the relevance of each made point trivially obvious. After manuscripts have bounced back a few times from editors and reviewers (who are readers too), one is inclined to take a more pedagogically transparent approach. Having a long-in-the-tooth co-author also helps a lot. Once this is mastered, one can confidently submit with great pride and high hopes to a prestigious outlet, knowing full well that subsequent reviewer cri-

tiques, if any, will deal with technical details—the kind your own expertise can easily field (it is your own work after all).

Sins of Syntax

You are however not yet home free. After remediating the problem of being too close to the topic before writing, one must contend with the problem of being too close to the writing itself. Remember that once wrought from a river of words, writing resists revision and repeated readings rarely raise recognition of required remedies. Seasoned authors know enough to put the work aside for one or more mental decay times (this time constant I have found is an inverse function of age) and then to attempt a fresh read that invariably finds formerly overlooked faults. The more of these fixed in advance of submission the better, but even if you succeed in fixing all the generic syntactical miscues, there is no way you can perfectly conform to the publisher's required standards of style.

From a usually anonymous cadre of copy and production editors resident at the publisher will come the stylistic critique. They live to fix your punctuation and syntax (not to mention your spell-checker's failings). They are often presumptuous enough also to question the clarity and organization of your presentation. After honing every turn of phrase, we are loath to alter anything at this point. In fact we had moved on to other things and long before assumed we would not revisit this work before seeing it in print. Best let those editors fix the overused commas and the underrated colons and semicolons.¹ They seemed fine as they were (or were not), but unless meanings are changed, one might as well defer to the experts.

Be grateful for the embarrassment saved when our effects, affects, principles, and principals are properly permuted. Likewise should authors of single-author papers not even propound the notion that first-person singular pronouns are more friendly than they are unseemly. When the grammar sounds stilted and pedantic as when the number of data is made plural, we should accept it graciously. As I was admonished once by a zealous copy editor who relished the decolloquialization mission, "data are not

¹ Neither is the period exempt. The perennial issue as to whether a period may end an equation that is grammatically at the end of a sentence has widened with the rise of the internet where the big question is whether a period may end a (or an) URL.

sheep!" Lastly, you must accept with equanimity violations of the rule of grammar requiring an a before a consonant and an an before a vowel, without regard for problems of elocution.² Those editors, who must move their lips when they read, are the culprits.

We protect our text against more massive revisionist challenges as we would our progeny. We see our own image (read ego) reflected in its style (read idiosyncratic phrasing). It's a matter of "parenthood," you see.³ Surrendering to a few repairs of punctuation is nothing compared to being asked to mutilate and amputate prose for the sake of clarity and concision (and saving trees). Given the interconnectivity and train of thought we so carefully crafted into our prose, rearrangement of the text now seems an unpleasant topological impossibility. This task may be the single greatest author-related postsubmission cause of publication delays.

OCD and Other Common Dysfunctions

Speaking of delays, the most common presubmission cause of delays is an "over-commitment disposition" displayed by far too many would-be authors. Whether arising from good faith but erroneous calculations of efficiency versus the number of hours in a day, from a desire not to disappoint when honored with an invitation, or from a "super(wo)man" complex, the result is the same. This does not affect the archival research journals where the only thing that's late due to a tardy author is that one author's own paper. An edited volume or a proceedings is however a different matter. Should publication be delayed, rendering the whole compilation less timely and penalizing the punctual authors (not to mention the readers of which there will be fewer the longer the delay)? Should one go to press without one or more late chapters whose absence renders the whole work less valuable and thus penalizes the punctual authors (not to mention the readers of which there will

² For technical articles, this goes far beyond the simple issue of voiced versus the unvoiced 'H's as in, e.g., an hour versus a hospital (or Eliza Doolittle's "an 'ospital"). We must decide between an Au (aurum) alloy and a Au (gold) alloy. Worse yet, decide among a Fe (ferrum) magnet, an Fe (iron) magnet, and an Fe (ef-ee) magnet. Any symbol or acronym (like LN₂ and SEM) that begins with a consonant whose name begins with a vowel presents the same dichotomy.

³ We can only suspect that giving birth to a tome is in some respects (labor, pain, and satisfaction) not unlike the biological analogue.

be fewer the less useful the volume)?

The solution to the "better late than never" and "better never than late" quandary is, in the first instance, to "just say no." Believe me, editors will thank an over-committed prospective author for the circumspection. Failing that, bail out at the slightest hint that the cycle of missed deadlines, apologies, and overly ambitious (or, perish the thought, disingenuous) setting of new deadlines has begun.⁴

Who's Whose Hostage?

The most pernicious consequence of the OCD syndrome is the now widely held belief that due dates are meant to be missed. Authors and editors (the latter essentially being proxies for publishers) are equally responsible for deadlines' loss of respect. At the heart of the matter is confusion over who is the customer and who is the supplier. Of course an objective step back tells us that the reader is the customer and the whole assemblage of content and physical (or electronic) media producers is the supplier. But within that supplier cabal, who needs whom more? The author needs to publish, but there are a plethora of avenues for that and the best authors can pick and choose. The editor/publisher needs content and content providers, but it's a buyers' market unless they insist on capturing the few already famous brand names. The due-date dance makes one want to retreat to the less exciting task of correcting punctuation.⁵

The opinions expressed here are solely those of the author. Whether you live in the purported publish-or-perish environment of academe or must shoe-horn your scholarly writing proclivities into your bottom-line-focused industry's lunch hour, we suggest that you wait for retirement and beyond to promulgate your own critique of the publishing process. Such restraint on all your parts probably accounts for the overall healthy and profitable state of technical publishing today.

E.N. KAUFMANN

⁴ By now every author who knows this author as an editor believes these complaints are about them. And, by now, every editor who knows this author as an author believes these complaints are about them. Of course, they are all quite right!

⁵ Fortunately, Posterminaries suffers little from any of these complaints. Everything here is discretionary. We may toy with the language with impunity, invent terminology on a whim, have no serious topic at all, and hide comfortably behind poetic license. The price of freedom from editorial tyranny is being pushed off the last page to make way for a classified ad. Serious authors need not apply.