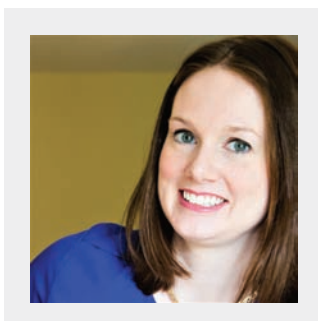


New Member Profile: Resa Roth

Tracey A DePellegrin and Resa Roth



Resa Roth is a new CSE member and our newest member of the *Science Editor* editorial board. She is a freelance editor and writer with experience in the biotech, medical, and pharmaceutical industries.

TAD: Welcome to CSE and to *Science Editor*! First I want to discuss your background, which includes a certificate in technical writing and editing from the University of Washington as well as a bachelor of science in zoology from Washington State University. Can you tell me a bit more about your path to science writing and editing?

RR: For a substantial portion of my life, I had envisioned that I would grow up and become a veterinarian. I entered into my undergraduate studies with loads of hands-on experience as a veterinary assistant and planned to complete a degree in zoology as a prerequisite for vet school. I applied for the WSU vet school early-admission program during my second year of college, and I was not accepted. This was discouraging, particularly because the interviewing committee wanted to see higher grades in science than I had received thus far. Science was actually always my weakest subject; I excelled at English, math, and foreign language (Spanish), but at the time, I could not see a career for myself in those fields. As I made my way through college and also worked in the vet school anesthesia department, I decided that perhaps I did not want to be a vet after all. Dealing with potentially terminal outcomes on a regular basis, including sharing news of cancer to pet owners, seemed like it might be too challenging for me. I'm a perfectionist to a certain extent, and I'm sure I would constantly wonder if I had made the correct decisions to affect the best patient outcomes.

I truly admire both human and animal doctors for their ability to navigate these difficult situations.

I learned about the field of technical writing and editing after I completed my undergraduate degree. It sounded like a great direction for my career—which at the time did not have much direction—because I could combine my passion for science with my writing skills that came more naturally. The concept of communicating information effectively to a target audience is such a worthwhile endeavor, in my opinion.

TAD: Were there elements from your veterinary work that you brought forward to your current career?

RR: Yes, definitely. My experience in the medical field (veterinary medicine has so much overlap with human medicine) has been invaluable. I've learned so much medical terminology and information about disease processes and treatments; I would say my veterinary experience has helped me tremendously with medical editing.

TAD: Right now you're working as a freelance editor for the Yeast Resource Center at the University of Washington. What's that like?

RR: I primarily edit proteomics abstracts for their online database. It has actually been a fantastic opportunity because I can work from home, and at the same time, I am able to care for my young family full time. I especially appreciate having the opportunity to copyedit some very interesting and potentially groundbreaking abstracts. Many of these abstracts describe projects that are aimed at treating diseases or shedding light on serious health issues. The projects are funded annually by the National Institutes of Health, and it is my responsibility to clean up the project abstracts and titles and provide periodic updates to ensure their accuracy, which in turn helps solidify their continued funding. The Yeast Resource Center is a great example of a collaborative site where researchers from all over the world work in partnership to build an even greater whole—in this case, an understanding of the protein complexes in the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.

TAD: Did you need to know genetics or proteomics beforehand? I'm always interested in how versatile we as editors and writers have to be to learn new topics.

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- RR:** I took both a general genetics course and an introductory biochemistry course in college to fulfill my degree requirements, but that is the extent of my knowledge. I understand the very basics, which luckily has proven to be enough to do my job. To ensure that I am making the proper edits, I frequently rely on web searches to learn more about any topic that is a bit unclear to me.
- TAD:** I see that you received your BELS certification last year. A few folks have said that they'd like to take the plunge, but the preparations and exam seem daunting. Do you have any advice?
- RR:** I would say to go for it! It is important to have a basic understanding of science, but they don't expect you to be an expert in every field (physics, chemistry, etc.). The BELS website describes various books and resources that are good to review in order to prepare. I found it useful to purchase the *AMA Manual of Style* and basically read it from cover to cover. *Scientific Style and Format* was an extremely helpful resource as well; I picked certain sections to focus on as opposed to reviewing the entire manual. I probably spent an hour a day for a month or two preparing for the exam. (Someone who is already very familiar with these resources may not need to spend as much time as I did preparing.) I felt that the exam was challenging, yet doable, and it is nice to know that when you have earned the credentials, it means you have reached a certain level of competency. It was also helpful to take the practice exam (available online); nonetheless, because the official exam has more questions, there is a broader variety of material covered. For me, the most difficult part of taking the examination was ensuring that I moved through it at a pace that allowed me to answer all of the questions. It's a good idea to remind yourself of the average amount of time you have to complete each question.
- TAD:** Following up, what has been (or what do you think will be) the most valuable part of your certification?
- RR:** Interestingly enough, I initially learned about the certification while browsing a list of job openings for Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center. When I came across a job I was interested in, the list of qualifications stated that they preferred someone who had obtained the BELS certification. So, certainly it is desired by some employers. Now that I'm certified, I think it's something that I can bring to potential employers to help demonstrate my proficiency in editing. And on a personal level, becoming certified has improved my sense of confidence as an editor.
- TAD:** You mentioned taking a CSE short course this year and you're planning to attend our annual meeting. You've also jumped right into volunteering for the *Science Editor* Board. What would you like to get out of your experience with CSE?
- RR:** I hope to gain a network of peers to learn from and share information with, as well as gain an even greater understanding of the field of scientific editing—it is so diverse, with an abundance of opportunities. By attending meetings (as you mentioned), watching webinars, and reading/contributing to *Science Editor*, I hope to continue learning and keeping up to date with emerging developments in our dynamic editorial climate.
- TAD:** You co-authored a book, *Exploratory Search: Beyond the Query-Response Paradigm* (White and Roth, 2009), that won an Excellence Award from the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. It's a nice scholarly dive into a process most people don't take the time to think about. Are there portions you think CSE members and those in our field could benefit from? Do you have any tips for how to become better users of search engines?
- RR:** Graduate students of computer or information science will benefit the most from the book; it primarily serves to define exploratory search as an emerging field. The target audience is those who design search engines, not the searchers themselves. The book helps engineers support ill-defined information needs or exploratory tasks on the web. In the future, we should expect even more intuitive computers, including computers that don't resemble PCs at all—this probably sounds familiar (smartphones, etc.)!
- TAD:** Can you tell our readers something that might surprise us about you?
- RR:** I worked at a dairy farm for a while during college. It was quite smelly, but there was something invigorating about being outside in the weather during all of the seasons' extremes. I think manual-labor jobs can be very satisfying, but obviously as one's body ages, the work becomes more difficult. Even though I enjoy working outdoors, I think having a desk job is ideal—mental stimulus is something I cannot live without. These days, I volunteer at a local horse rescue organization to get my fix of animals, outdoors, and weather extremes.

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TAD: What are some of your favorite pastimes?

RR: I would be an avid surfer if the ocean wasn't several hours away! I do enjoy surfing when I have the opportunity (during vacations usually). Also, I've always loved running, and after having kids, I signed myself up for some half-marathons. From there, I became interested in triathlons; I try to complete a few sprint-distance triathlons each year. I also enjoy hiking, camping, and cross-stitch.

TAD: What do you like about being a science editor?

RR: I've always loved language, and I truly found my passion when I discovered that as an editor, you can enhance the readability of documents—and consequently, information can be better understood by more people. At the same time, I love science because it is often related to the discovery of something new, and it is key to understanding the world around us. Being a science editor is the best of both worlds!