

Board of Editors in the Life Sciences Announces Certification Maintenance Program

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Nearly 2000 people across the globe hold the Editor in the Life Science (ELS) credential, but few know that the ELS has been linked with the Council of Science Editors (CSE) since the beginning. Founded by a group of 10 CSE—then known as the Council of Biology Editors—members in 1991, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) was established to evaluate the proficiency of manuscript editors in the life sciences through a certification examination and to award credentials like those obtainable in other professions.

Now, more than 30 years later, BELS continues to maintain and promote a standard of proficiency in editing in the life sciences. However, since launching the credential, technology has reshaped how we work and what skills we need. In addition, style guides, ethical guidance, and reporting guidelines have expanded; scientific publication practices have evolved; and scientific and medical advances have burgeoned. Editors must keep up with these advances to be effective in their work.

Thus, to ensure the ELS credential remains a relevant and accurate indication of skill and to bring the program in line with current best practices, BELS is introducing certification maintenance.

The concept of certification maintenance is industry standard within the credentialing community, and other programs in medical communications, such as those offered through the American Medical Writers Association and the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals, already require ongoing education and professional development.

BELS has considered the possibility of certification maintenance for several years. A task force, and later a committee, conducted research on the credentialing programs of peer organizations and other professional groups. Their work resulted in the recommendation to the BELS Board of Directors that certification maintenance

be adopted as a core component of the ELS program. The Board agreed, and BELS will launch a certification maintenance program on January 1, 2024.

Certification maintenance will elevate the ELS credential by encouraging professionals to seek continuing education; to stay current with new trends, evolving guidelines, and best practices; and to be better engaged through demonstrated service and contributions where appropriate. ELS-certified individuals, regardless of the year of certification, must complete qualifying activities (e.g., attending webinars, workshops, and conferences; membership in professional societies; teaching and mentoring others) to maintain their credential.

Renewing certification will involve pursuing and documenting professional activities in 5-year periods. Such activities are grouped into the categories of Education and Professional Development, Service, Contributions, and Experience. Each activity has a point value (for example, a 1-hour educational activity is worth 1 point), and a total of 50 points will be required to renew certification for another 5 years. Many activities offered by CSE can fulfill these recertification requirements, such as attendance at a meeting or short course, or participation in the mentoring program. The CSE website has a full listing of all offerings and ways to be involved: <https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/>.

Full details, including a list of FAQs, are on the BELS website, under the “Certification Maintenance” tab, at <https://www.bels.org> (<https://www.bels.org/certification-maintenance>).

Not BELS Certified?

The 2.75-hour examination is offered quarterly during the months of January, April, July, and October each year. Candidates may take the online, multiple-choice examination anytime throughout the offered months in the comfort of their homes or at an authorized test center. Editors who successfully pass the certification examination may use the ELS credential after their names to demonstrate to employers or clients that they have established a high level of credibility. Learn more at <https://www.bels.org>.

Lisa Kisner serves as secretary on the BELS Board of Directors.

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