

# JeffPost

*(Enhancing Scientific Communication at Jefferson)*

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## Role of PSERT in Shaping Next Generation Scientific Communicators

by Ankit Rochani

### **Introduction**

It all started at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), where nearly 50% of postdoctoral fellows are foreign nationals for whom English is a second or third language (1-2). At Jefferson, that number is closer to 70%, so communication of complex research into a simple and understandable science can be challenging. At UPenn, postdocs developed the first postdoctoral editing club, which became a benchmark model for many to follow.

Today, the high number of materials getting published in peer reviewed scientific journals creates an obvious need to have a group of expert reviewers and editors at the university who can help with manuscript development and review. The most common practice for this involves graduate students or postdoctoral fellows writing manuscripts and submitting them to their principal investigator (PI) for final review and edits. However, editorial glitches may arise due to repeated reading of the manuscript by people in the same research group or area of expertise. This can make good research difficult to read and can cause confusion in communicating interesting science. To avoid this situation, most publishing houses have expensive professional editing services in addition to publishing fees to help authors improve and provide necessary editing to create flow in their scientific story.

This probably gave rise to the free, university-based reviewing and editing service provided by postdoctoral fellows at UPenn. Other universities (shown in Table 1) have also developed groups of postdoctoral fellows and graduate students to avail their editing and reviewing services to their fellow researchers (2-4).

**Table 1:** List of some of the important editorial clubs at US universities

	University	Name of Association	Role
1	University of Pennsylvania	Postdoc Editor Club (PEC)	Editing and reviewing
2	Harvard University	FAS Postdoctoral Editors Association (FASPEA)	Reviewing & editing manuscripts, posters, abstracts, & meeting slides
3	Florida State University	Postdoc Editors Association (PEA)	Free confidential editing of scholarly writings
4	Thomas Jefferson University	Postdoctoral Scientific Editing and Review Team (PSERT)	Editing and reviewing for MS & PhD students and postdocs

Editorial clubs at UPenn, Harvard, and Florida State mentioned in **Table 1** were all developed or started by postdocs. They are open to university-wide scientific communities to provide editorial help, and most of these groups have input from both writing specialists and scientific experts with advanced degrees. The Postdoctoral Scientific Editing and Reviewing Team (PSERT) is one of these ventures started by the postdocs of Thomas Jefferson University. It spun out from the Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA) and is supported by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. PSERT works closely with the Office of Professional Writing, Publishing, and Communication (OPWPC) within Jefferson’s Center for Teaching and Learning. Their writing specialists provide professional editing and training to help Jefferson researchers publish manuscripts and communicate their research.

## ***Organization of PSERT***

### **1. Role of PSERT**

Its purpose is to help graduate students and postdocs at Jefferson to review and edit their drafts of manuscripts, review articles, abstracts, thesis proposals, or thesis before submitting them to their PIs for their final reviews.

**2. Model of PSERT:** PSERT has adopted two main ways to cater to Jefferson’s dynamic interdisciplinary scientific community.

#### **a) By Postdocs for Postdocs**

PSERT was established to help its fellow postdoctoral community at TJU. Postdocs comprise the editorial board of PSERT. The writing experts from OPWPC trained by the postdocs to help them understand the scope and role of being PSERT reviewers.

#### **b) By Postdocs and Senior PhD students for Students and Postdocs**

Later PSERT allowed senior PhD students to join the group to help graduate students with their thesis proposals, theses, manuscripts, and other scientific publishing. This model is close to the concept adopted by PEA at the University of Florida (4).

### **3. Structure of PSERT**

PSERT has 5 active editors who were trained by and closely work with OPWPC to review and edit scientific manuscript drafts from students and postdocs.

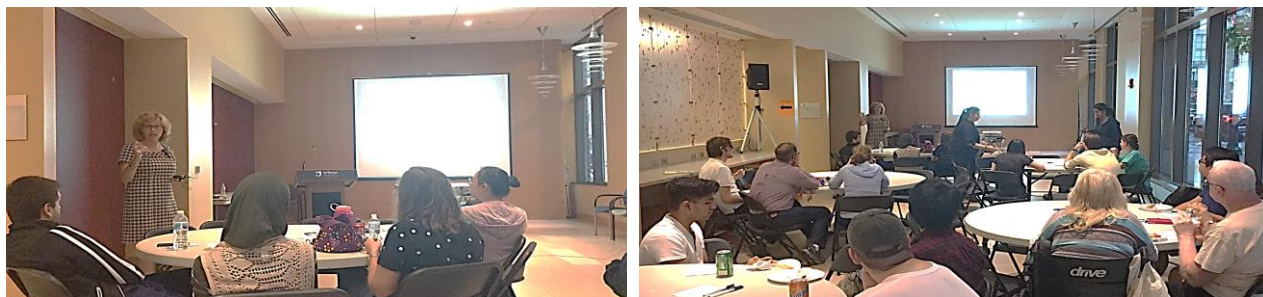


Figure 1: PSERT event for scientific story telling by Pam Walter

## 4. Training of PSERT Editors

In the last year, Pam Walter from the OPWPC conducted 2 training series each with 3 (1-hour) sessions. These events have seen participation from 29 postdocs from various scientific fields at Jefferson. The series is also open to others beside postdocs, including faculty, graduate students and clinical fellows.

### *Testimonials from a past editor and a graduate student*

“PSERT was a fantastic introduction to the world of scientific editing. Helping students at TJU to find their voice as a writer helped to prepare me for the breadth of experience and topics I’ve encountered since becoming an editor and helped me realize that this was the right path for me.”

*-Dr. Lucas Brand, Associate Editor, Molecular Cancer Research, AACR*

“PSERT was very enthusiastic about helping in the writing process. They were helpful when it came to think about how to best clarify the different points that needed to be made.”

*-Anonymous master’s degree Student, Thomas Jefferson University*

### *Testimonials from PSERT workshop and training sessions*

“We received useful tools I can act upon to improve/edit writing materials and to provide positive/negative feedback.”

“The tips regarding word-cutting to make our writing clearer and concise.”

“I learned about looking at the big picture of the manuscript but also each paragraph and how to be more concise.”

“Awareness on predatory journals, exercises on sentence rephrasing, trimming, critically analyzing articles, editing skills.”

### *Scientific Story Telling*

The primary focus of PSERT is encouraging communication of a simpler scientific story. This helps develop easier connections between investigators and students or postdocs, leads to increased publishable productivity, and generates support for science outside the research community. Hence, Pam Walter conducted a scientific storytelling event to teach trainees how to simplify their complex research into a simple scientific story. This event was attended by 33 trainees from various scientific disciplines. Its primary agenda was to address:

- a) Why story matters in science
- b) How simple scientific narratives increase the chance of citations

The event was extremely well received, and it was the first PSERT event that was kept open for the graduate students. It was extremely well received as we got mixed population of students, postdocs, and a few PIs.

## Conclusion

Science is most often a story by a researcher for a researcher. Yet with the broadening of communication media and google, the next generation of science communication is a story by a researcher for the public at large. PSERT is a group of trained researchers who understand science and help authors to communicate it in the simplest way possible. In its first year, PSERT has created trained editors and begun reviewing scientific works by Jefferson researchers. It has also hosted 3 events to help researchers communicate their research in the simplest manner. Currently, PSERT is actively looking for support from Jefferson PIs to enable their postdocs to participate in this editing and reviewing activity, both as editors and submitters.

**Meanwhile, authors and PIs can submit their manuscripts and drafts by following**

<https://www.jefferson.edu/university/life-sciences/postdoctoral-affairs/postdoctoral-association/PSERT.html>



(Scan QR code with Phone Camera or QR Scanner)

## References

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## Role of Elections in Developing JPA Executive Board

by Daniel Rubinstein

The Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA) Executive Board is comprised of 8 officers, President, Senior Vice-President, Vice-President (VP) of Communications, VP of Nominations & Elections, VP of Career Development, VP of Social, Treasurer, and Secretary. The most important things we are looking for when we nominate postdocs for an EB position are an interest in being part of the postdoc community and a desire to help us achieve our goals. There are many ways to do this, e.g. if you're very career-oriented and want to help other postdocs prepare for next steps, then VP of Career Development is the position for you. If you have ideas for community-building or just like meeting new people, we have VP of Social Affairs. If you have dreams of being a social media influencer, then you could be VP of Communications! Are you well-organized? Consider running for Secretary or Treasurer. Do you believe in democracy and want to be involved more generally? Then nominate yourself for VP of Nominations and Elections. After just one year in any of these junior positions, you can exercise your leadership skills as Senior VP or President. Or if there's another way you'd like to help your fellow postdocs, we can create new positions or committees to fill unmet needs. So, the next time you have a few minutes free, or find yourself wondering how things could be better as a postdoc, feel free to send a short note with your thoughts to [jpa@jefferson.edu](mailto:jpa@jefferson.edu).

**Contact:** [PRS@jefferson.edu](mailto:PRS@jefferson.edu)

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