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To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is in enthusiastic support of any application of KIMBERLY NUNLIST to do scientific or technical editing. My summary advice is, *Hire her!*

I met Ms. Nunlist this spring, at the request of a mutual friend. We talked for parts of two evenings. I found her to be intelligent (as a 3.93 grade-point average from the University of California, Berkeley would indicate); widely read, especially on environmental matters; balanced in her judgments; and good company.

She asked if I would write in support of her applications to do scientific editing. I asked her for before-and-after examples of her work. I saw, from two highly specialized, almost indecipherable drafts, that she had made major improvements in organization and readability. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but she certainly made the papers better.

I also asked her to read a paper of mine, published some years ago: "Luis Alvarez and the Pyramid Burial Chambers, the J.F.K. Assassination, and the End of the Dinosaurs." Alvarez won a Nobel Prize in physics and also with his son figured out (and proved!) what killed the dinosaurs. (I got my Ph.D. in his Group in the '60's.) Here is an excerpt from her comments:

In fact, the only changes [in sentence structure; there were also comments on other matters] I would suggest stem from the consideration that the paper's readership may not have the same sophisticated understanding of the English language as its author. Non-native English speaking readers may find your paper particularly difficult because of the highly varied sentence constructions you employ. For readers with excellent English language skills, this variety holds the reader's interest and is also well-matched with the paper's content, encouraging readers to take different approaches to a given problem. However, readers who are less familiar with the English language can have a hard time translating uncommon grammatical constructions, and therefore a recent trend toward making English sentence structure more explicit has been gaining traction.

This is remarkably thoughtful and well expressed. And useful: I teach (and am writing a text for) a physics course in which many of the students are not native English speakers. I would send you her full analysis on request. You would learn more about Ms. Nunlist's analytical and writing skills from her letter than you can from mine.

Ms. Nunlist's search for work is hampered because her B.A. is not in a scientific field. In my opinion, this stems from a misconception of what a *science* editor can do. An argument:

(1) As a graduate student, I would take my rather sorry drafts to a *science* editor. She knew little of the *science* I was writing about, but she had no problem knowing that the writing was bad. Bad sentences, needless wordiness, poor structure, etc. Magically, under her guidance my drafts shrunk by about a quarter and actually became readable.

(2) No one, no matter what his or her scientific background, can read with real comprehension the *science* of more than maybe 3% of the primary scientific literature (as opposed to

reviews and popularizations). I've taught physics at Berkeley for 40 years, and I could not begin to critique the *science* of the two highly technical examples Ms. Nunlist gave me.

(3) This is not to say that an editor can't become expert in some limited field, such as astrophysics, or climate science. Or can't clarify mathematics. But few people with a science degree can write worth a damn. I get to see that in the statements students—the very *best* physics students—write in support of their applications to graduate schools.

So, given a choice of someone with a science degree, and someone with a humanities degree that involved lots of writing, and who clearly knows how to think and write, I'd take the latter any day.

Sincerely,
Charles Wohl



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