LETTERS

June issue criticized

To the editor:

The purpose of this letter is to provide a review of the quality of the articles in Computer magazine. In this sense, the aim is at the quality of the professional writing of the articles rather than at their technical content or appropriateness.

The June 1986 issue of Computer has just arrived, and, alas, its quality appears to be spotty. Specifically, the issue contains four articles that represent poor professional writing. This is a judgment that is based on the following criteria:

1. Every article should have a statement of purpose in the first paragraph. This enables the reader to determine if he or she wants to continue to read the article. (To those who believe, no explanation is necessary. To those who do not believe, no explanation is possible.)

2. Every paragraph should contain one and only one thought. This is normally expressed in the lead sentence. The remainder of the paragraph expands on this thought.

3. Each sentence should contain not more than 25 words. As examples of good practice, consider the first-paragraph statements of purpose in the articles by John Maier (“This article explores China’s...”) and by Mark Sherman and Ann Marks (“Throughout this article we wish to share our experiences in designing...”).

As examples of poor practice, consider four other articles:

- The lead article, “Education and America’s Industrial Future.” I have read it twice. I do not know what the author’s purpose was in writing the article. I can speculate that it was a factual report, or that it was a call to arms and that something should be done (perhaps). Don’t know. I am reluctant to read it a third time.

- The second article, “Design Education in Computer Science and Engineering.” Again, I am unable to divine its purpose. Is it to state what has been done, what should be done, what the need is, etc.?

- “Vocationalism and the Whole Man” and “A Visual Approach to Browsing in a Database Environment.” Previous comments apply.

Can we accept that we should have clear articles in Computer? If so, then can we accept that there should be written criteria against which a judgment can be made? Or is our position that our standards are that there are no standards and that academic freedom knows no bounds?

We, as members of the Computer Society, have this lack of quality foisted off on us every month. It is time for a change.

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