Medicine and literature

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The classic essay *The Pillow Book* begins with the words “In spring, the dawn.” Each of the four seasons in Japan—spring, summer, winter, and fall—has its own face, but the author is telling us that in the case of spring the early morning hours are the best. When the plum trees are about to bloom, hinting that the bleak, harsh winter is about to end in chilly Kyoto 1,000 years ago, there is a sense of relief as the chill felt upon waking finally subsides. In the early morning hours, a mountain ridge can be seen veiled in a haze as one glances outside at the faint light of dawn. I think the scene depicted here is one in which the temperature has risen slightly, making it warmer than usual, and there is a sense of warmth and security in the view of the wispy haze. I imagine that this is the author’s way of expressing the relief of feeling the arrival of spring in your bones and with your eyes.

The opening line of *The Pillow Book* begins with this nominal sentence, which is then followed by one sentence. This essay, which is said to be one of the most eminent in Japan, begins by depicting the atmosphere of the four seasons in the ancient capital Kyoto in a way that is both concise and deeply poignant. I think the images are etched in the memory of many Japanese people.

Shifting gears, what are the requirements for a good paper? I think originality is important above all else given the fact that we are dealing with science, which requires constant progress. The more original the paper is, the greater its value will be. However, it is not always easy to evaluate papers from this perspective. I think there can even be papers where the value of the point they are trying

to assert is recognized for the first time at least several decades later, and the more brilliant the paper is, the more this maxim holds true. In an extreme case, the writer of a research paper that languishes for a long time could suddenly become a Nobel Prize candidate. Thus, it may be impossible to evaluate the value of individual papers by means of short-term peer review.

If it is difficult to evaluate the fundamental originality of a paper in the short term, the question then becomes: What is key to receiving a good evaluation at the submission and publication stages? I think that accessibility or readability may be one of the key factors. Being concise is the best way to create an accessible paper. It is my personal opinion that heavy use of words such as “although” and “however” ends up obscuring the point that the author is trying to make. It is not that I cannot understand what the author is saying, but the originality of the paper should be asserted more directly; For example, if there are currently three theories and the author wishes to put forth a fourth theory, I think that the paper will be easier to understand if the author does not go on at great length about the three existing theories.

Regardless of whether they are physicians or technicians, persons working in a clinical setting can be roughly divided into two types. One type attempts to adequately learn and apply current ideas and technology. The other type steps away from the status quo and has a vision of the future. Positively speaking, the latter type is creative. Negatively speaking, the latter type is divorced from reality. Both are important, and both types of people can write papers as a researcher. From the standpoint of clinical research, the type that learns and applies may be better.

The type of person with a vision is also important for advancement of medicine, which is a natural science. Researchers with an engineering background are ideally

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this type. In terms of what kinds of papers journals most want submitted, in the case of the *Journal of Medical Ultrasonics*, papers with a vision may be more appealing. Excellent papers of the learning and application type are being submitted to technical journals in many different fields. Given the fact that the *Journal of Medical Ultrasonics* is a technical journal in a field that deals with ultrasonography, which is a medical methodology, many of its readers likely want to read articles about ultrasonography itself and articles about new technologies. As a

clinician with a vision, I would like to be one of the “poster boys” for clinical application of new technologies.

Naturally, papers should be concise and have a clear thesis. I think *The Pillow Book* is easy to read because it begins with “In spring, the dawn.” It corresponds to the title of a scientific paper, while the next sentence does a wonderful job of expressing the exhilaration one feels in the spring. Literature and scientific papers may be polar opposites in terms of their goals and content, but their foundation as prose is the same.