

# An editorial comment on learning colorimetry

by Edline M. Chun, Adjunct Faculty

The writer entered the world of color science and color measurement systems through the door of spectrophotometers.

## Early lessons

In the early 1980s I worked as a technical writer for the Analytical Products Division of Bausch & Lomb Incorporated (B&L), which produced spectrophotometers and diffraction gratings. My work focused on creating and revising user manuals and service manuals for Spectronic® spectrophotometers. This was a line of instruments sold worldwide that could be found in high school labs, university and industrial research facilities, and manufacturing plants.

Besides writing, that was a time of learning how to set up lighting during a photo shoot at the photography studio of B&L to get quality black and white photos illustrations in user and service manuals. It was a time of line drawings in pencil and then ink and being able to visualize line weight and quality in other than original size submitted by the illustrator so that lines would hold and the drawing would be readable in its final size. I had prepared mechanicals prior to moving to Rochester, however I became very familiar with mechanical prep from the sheer volume that needed to be contracted out by the art director. This led to reading various types of proofs for my input on quality or for my sign-off. I also learned how to work with an award-winning in-house print shop.

In 1983 when B&L decided to divest itself of its Instruments Group, I suddenly found myself in charge of producing manuals for nearly all of the products in all the Divisions in the Group. When the dust settled from acquisitions and buyouts, the Analytical Instruments Division had become part of Milton Roy Company. Technical Publications still dealt with spectrophotometers, but now also developed manuals for the DIANO® line of color measurement instruments. These instruments were used to check such applications as color of automotive paints and if camouflage fabric and paint met government specifications. I was encouraged to take a course titled “Colorimetry: An Intensive Short Course for Industry” through the T & E Center of Rochester Institute of Technology. It was taught by the late Franc Grum who was Hunter Professor and headed the Munsell Color Science Laboratory at that time; Roy Berns, now Hunter Professor, was his assistant.

That was a time before students in the School of Print Media could take courses in color management systems or test targets. To have technical writers who could cope with the technology involved to produce user manuals that were easy to understand and work with, I hired freelancers who had knowledge of photography, and color science that

accompanies that discipline. Two of the writers were RIT undergraduates majoring in photography and the third was a writer who had a strong working interest in photography and computers.

I wrote drafts on a CP/M-based Kaypro portable computer and saved files on 5 ¼-in. diskettes. This computer, about the size of a heavy, small suitcase, allowed us to take the computer into a test lab or on the manufacturing floor for hands-on work with an instrument as we continued to develop a manual that was required for a first shipment of an instrument. In this situation to meet a ship date, a master printout went to a copy service for copies to be delivered with covers and bound with plastic binding strips. Otherwise conventional printing was used.

My desk references were Billmeyer and Saltzman (1981), *Principles of Color Technology*; the Federation of Societies for Coating Technology (1981) *Glossary of Color Terms*; Kueppers (translated by Marciniak, 1980), *The Basic Law of Color Theory*; Munsell (1981) *A Color Notation*; the workbook from RIT’s short course; and numerous copies of relevant articles. Tracking down information or checking facts was very time-consuming; this was before the convenience of the World Wide Web and search engines, before the existence of the International Color Consortium, and before the numerous partnerships and working relationships among professional groups. China was just opening up and we would listen with wonder and sometime disbelief at the stories the “Road Warriors” of that time would tell about their experiences of doing business in China.

I worked on the operator’s manual for Benjamin Moore’s first paint matching system. I recall my experience at Mayers, a Rochester neighborhood hardware store with a phenomenal woman in the paint department who mixed and matched paints. “Faith the Paint Lady,” as she was known to everyone who wanted a good color match, was very pleased that the store had brought in the color matching system because it enabled her to do more work and she no longer felt tired at the end of the day—exactly why such systems were developed!

## A look at today

Today, Billmeyer and Saltzman (2000) is still a standard desk reference, but it now carries the editor’s name, Roy S. Berns. Text books such as Sharma’s *Understanding Color Management* (2004), used in courses given by the School of Print Media, have joined my collection. Paper-based mechanicals may be a passing reference in a textbook and the term mechanical artist is no longer used because the function is now part of Prepress. Technical writers and editors have to be adept with using the computer, various types of application programs, and printers because in

some instances, they are responsible for functions that were once handled by the mechanical artist and other job positions now folded into Prepress due to technological changes.

Just as E-mail documents have evolved to become recognized as legal business documents by the government and therefore accepted by us as legitimate, so is the journey to acceptance of softproofing, the term as well as the reality of its convenience and accuracy. The improvement and advancement of technology that involve color science, colorimetry, and color management systems are at times overwhelming but always exciting when I think of possibilities.

When I am more reflective, I recall W. D. Wright's comment from *Twelve 'Columns' About Colour* (n.d., reprinted privately by author) about his Chinese "grand-student." A student writing to Wright on behalf of her teacher Wen-Ying Jin explained in a letter to Wright that a Chinese custom required that a teacher's teacher respectfully be called "grand-teacher," so she thought of herself as Wright's 'grand-student.' I like to think that I too can claim many such relationships when I think of all of the teachers I have had over the years and those I continue to learn from today.

Technical writing as a course or part of a course, is not a topic that students usually remember while they are still in school. I do not expect anyone to note that I am part of his or her writing genealogy. However, I am pleased to think that perhaps the editorial skills students acquire by applying the concepts and techniques of clear communication in a publication like Test Targets will continue to be refined as they continue to write and publish.

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