

# Names, Names, Names. . . .

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Although Gertrude was certainly right that a rose would undoubtedly smell as sweet (and look as nice) with any other name, it likely would not have escaped with such a simple and pleasant designator if it had been a cell signaling protein or a newly emerging technique. Instead it would probably have been called something like *Sweet And Pretty Petalled Image Except with Sharp Thorns* (SAPPIEST), which might be technically more accurate but not necessarily more informative, particularly for those not aware of the acronym. And if it had had the dubious honor of being a *Drosophila* mutant, it might have been *Fragrant, Blossomed, or Old Thorny*, guaranteeing its obscurity outside a select group of aficionados.

These designations probably wouldn't have bothered the rose lovers of the world, whose joy is primarily derived from the cultivation of these beauties of nature and not what they are called, but, unfortunately, such is not the case for the names of most things scientific. In a literature that should be the model of clarity and exactness, there is a steady increase in the introduction of terms and acronyms for entities, organisms, variants, methods, and almost anything else commonly encountered in the natural world (and the study of it) that are not widely understood. Biologists of all stripes are clearly among the most "active" in this behavior for a variety of reasons ranging from ignorance (it is difficult to give a new protein, for example, a clear, meaningful name when its function is really not understood) to personal interests (coining a name that is ultimately adopted is clearly career building, at least in the eyes of some people). However, with no "clearing house," terms accumulate in a haphazard way with redundancy a common and exacerbating problem. To be sure, there is usually a list of abbreviations in the paper in which they are introduced (although even this is not always true), but as they are carried forward, origin, meaning, and context is often lost, or worse distorted. One need only imagine roses being referred to by all the terms listed above (and more) indiscriminately and without definition to realize the result would be substantial if not complete confusion in, say, the garden store. Unfortunately, that is exactly the norm in the world of bioscience. How many titles alone in first-rate journals contain terms that are not known to the average worker (defined as a working scientist in the general field, e.g. molecular or cell biology, but not in the specific discipline, e.g. immunology)? And more to the point, how many of the terms remain obscure to this worker even after reading the paper? The answer for most of us is: "too many." One effect of this situation is an unnecessary strangulation of interest outside one's own little area of research, which contributes to a narrowing of focus at a time when scientists need to keep

abreast of a deluge of new information and cross-disciplinary fertilization of ideas has never been more necessary or profitable.

This issue is of concern to us at MCP (a case in point of the encroachment of acronyms?). We are confronted with a confusing and redundant nomenclature in proteomics, too. Furthermore, our problems are compounded by the fact that as a journal devoted to a new and emerging field, we can reasonably anticipate a number of "new" readers, i.e. scientists who are acquiring an interest in proteomics but are not necessarily schooled in the basic nomenclature let alone the rapidly accumulating numbers of new terms. At the same time, a developing field may well be expected to produce new terminology at an even faster rate than more established fields.

In an effort to address this problem, and taking advantage of our electronic version and association with HighWire Press, we would like to announce the addition of an electronic glossary to the *Molecular & Cellular Proteomics* web site at [mcponline.org](http://mcponline.org). The glossary can be accessed from the main page or from individual accepted articles. This feature is unique to the MCP web site and we hope will serve as a useful interactive resource aid. This initial version of the glossary should be viewed as a modest beginning and it will be an ever-evolving feature that will remain responsive to the developing and advancing field of proteomics. As it matures, we hope it will serve as a central location for the collective terminology of this field.

Solving the nomenclature problems of the biological literature will not be simple. Things will clearly improve with complete and accurate genome annotations and the subsequent full understanding of all associated functions, but this will take a long time and will not correct the old literature, which clearly is still of great value. Nor will it solve the variety of other necessary terms related to things such as the supporting technology. In the end, what will be required is a standard dictionary that is complete and authoritative. It will also have to be dynamic, because with all "language" it will keep changing. We view the glossary as one small start on this enormous chore and hope it will be a useful service to our readers.

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding the glossary and particularly encourage our readers to submit germane entries to ensure that it truly reflects and encompasses the large and expanding nomenclature of proteomics. All such correspondence including potential entries, which will be reviewed by the Editors and Associate Editors for suitability and relevance, may be submitted by email to [mcp@asbmb.faseb.org](mailto:mcp@asbmb.faseb.org).