quality of the figures. This is true of every chapter, without exception. Embryos are beautiful to look at and this book has captured that superbly.

As is needed, the chapters concentrate on the embryology and developmental mutants with sections to follow that give a flavour of the current trends in research in that particular species and any special experimental manipulations that are important to understand.

This book is essential for those teaching Developmental Biology to undergraduates and should be available in the lab while practical classes are in progress. It will also be invaluable to those new to development (perhaps forced there by having discovered their 'new gene'), to people interested in being able to make comparisons between species and those wishing to follow the literature in a species with which they are not familiar. I can also recommend it to those who just like to look at embryonic development!

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Clinical Genetics Handbook, 2nd edn. By ARTHUR ROBINSON and MARY G. LINDON. Blackwell Scientific Publications. 1993. 614 pages. Paperback. Price £32.50. ISBN 08 654 219 43.

The stated aim of this book is to provide the primary-care physician with access to information on genetics as the need arises in the clinic. The book is divided into two sections: the first deals with basic genetic concepts and diagnostic techniques and the second with clinical disorders with a genetic aetiology. The first selection is relatively short, presumably to encourage the non-specialist reader to complete this as an introduction to the terms used in the rest of the text. The chapters on genetic counselling and prenatal diagnosis, in particular, provide a useful summary for general physicians and obstetricians and should allow them to use such services more efficiently. The remainder of this book deals with specific genetic diseases and is divided into systems-based chapters. Generally these chapters are of a high quality with the section on pharmacogenetics being particularly strong. It is, however, very sobering to realize how quickly new genetic data change our clinical practices, such as the discovery of the molecular basis of Huntington disease and several hereditary cancer syndromes. The fact that these are not included in the text is simply a reflection on the rapid development of this field and a general limitation of printed reference materials as opposed to on-line systems such as OMIM. Another slightly disconcerting thing about this book from a clinical genetic standpoint is lack of references given for specific risk figures or clinical facts. This probably reflects our obsessions with raw data rather than a genuine deficiency in the book. UK readers will also find that the addresses of only US family support groups are given.

In summary this compact reference book has achieved that most difficult task in producing readable text in an intuitive, sensible layout with a good index. The genetic information provided is accurate and gives a reasonably comprehensive coverage of topics. I have no hesitation in recommending it to non-specialist colleagues who deal with genetic diseases providing they remember that things may have changed since the book was published.

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How to Write About Biology. By JAN PECHENIK and BERNARD LAMB. Harper-Collins, London. 1994. 262 pages. Paperback. Price £6.99. ISBN 0 00 499000 5.

It is a lamentable reflection on our schools that most undergraduates cannot write. It may therefore be reasonable for Dr Lamb to adopt a headmasterly approach to his anglicization of the American Pechenik's *A Short Guide to Writing about Biology*. But his style would turn me off; as in, for example, 'Acknowledge the struggle for understanding and work to emerge victorious; read with a critical questioning eye' – some sentence! So the best advice I can give the student is: keep this book on your shelf and consult it only as necessary. There is information here which will help you, even if it is often lost in rather pompous phrases.

Before reading the text, I checked the References, and was surprised by the absence of Fowler's *English Usage* and of Gower's *Plain Words*, which even civil servants are expected to understand. So I was prepared to trawl half-way through the book before I came to the chapter on punctuation, word choice (no mention of Roget's *Thesaurus*, which is an education in itself) spelling and grammar. This is a collection of writing tools which the student should already be familiar with, but if he does need to know when to use a colon or a slash there are paragraphs here to guide him, and there are even lists of commonly misspelled words. In my experience, most undergraduates learn to write by reading. As Sartre put it: 'People read because they want to write'. Students should have been encouraged to read Huxley, T. H. and J. S., Haldane, Medawar, Gould, Maynard Smith; and if they can find the classics of 100 years ago like Darwin, Weismann, Darcy W. Thompson and others, they will get a feel for style and language which reading about the mechanics of writing cannot provide. And it is more fun!

The bulk of the book is concerned with note taking, preparing essays and reports, recording experimental results and, finally, the writing of a publishable paper.

This starts badly for the section on taking lecture notes says: 'Get yourself in the frame of mind to concentrate on the lecture: do not eat or drink during it, or do a crossword, read a newspaper, chatter with your friends, or suffer from lack of sleep or from a hangover'. One wonders what happens in Dr Lamb's lectures, and why his editor let this gratuitous statement pass for publication. There are also other remarks like this, and if they had been eliminated the text would have been shorter and easier to read. Most of the advice on preparing data is helpful, but not all. For example, a tabulation of shell sizes of four species of snail gives averages to five decimal places, and this spurious accuracy deserves the editor's curse – or perhaps tables have been confused. There is a section on elementary statistics (mean, standard error, *t*-test, chi-square), but that comes later.

The author recommends a first draft should be in manuscript, but this is probably because he grew up in that tradition. Computer-literate students will already be familiar with the advantages of the wordprocessor, but not all of them will know how the computer can be used to search the literature. This is dealt with, but they will have to check that their library facilities can cope with their demands. As I said, this is a book to consult rather than one to read. If you do write a published paper on the strength of its advice you will find it gives you a set of proof-reader's symbols (incomplete) to use when you revise your copy. By the time you write, though, everything will be on floppy-disk.

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