

The 2 GHz mind of a computer

ON COMPLETION of a scientific manuscript or a grant proposal, I allow my computer to proofread the written manuscript. It takes its job seriously, silently highlighting words that it does not know or like, and attempting to help by offering alternative suggestions.

On a recent occasion, surprisingly, it passed my name without any comment, and instead suggested, provokingly, that my coauthor's name, one that is noted in his field, was fragmented, and that it needed to be revised. It continued on its one-track 2 GHz/512 RAM (random access memory) mind, attempting to write a proper manuscript. It felt that "sonicated calf thymus" should be rewritten as either "solicited or fornicated calf thymus" and repeatedly suggested that *aldehyde* should be replaced with *baldheaded*. It wanted me to change "lymphocytes were lysed by *sonication*" to "lymphocytes were lysed by *fornication* or *sanitation*". It even tried to be scandalous by suggesting that *trypsin* be replaced with *try sin*, that one should rinse "with *demonized (deionized)* water" and "that *mutterers (multimers)* are formed".

It asked me to change *nRNP* (nuclear ribonucleoprotein) to *nun* in a sentence that would then have read "*nun* was electrophoresed" and also to change *neutrophils* to *Europhiles* in a sentence that would have become "the *Europhiles* were incubated with biotin".

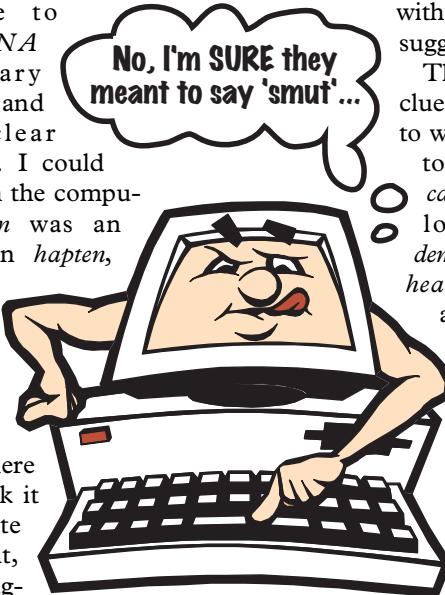
Sometimes it suggested words that I have never heard or read.

It asked me to change *cDNA* (complementary DNA) to *coda* and *nDNA* (nuclear DNA) to *nana*. I could never agree with the computer that *hatpin* was an improvement on *hapten*, that *stool* could be used for *cytosol*, or that *smut* could serve as a substitute for the *Sm* autoantigen. There are times I think it has some innate commercial slant, like when it sug-

gests that *Neutrogena* be used for *neutropenia* or that *antigenicity* should be split into *antigen city*.

However, the computer flatly refused to suggest alternatives to words like *fluoroisothiocyanate*, *haemocyanin* or *isotachophoresis*, yet, surprisingly, agreed on words like *atherosclerosis*, *phospholipids*, *toluene*, *electrophoresis* or *ELISA* without further comments or suggestions.

The computer clearly had no clue that obeying its directives to write something like "try sin to digest *hatpins* and *fornicated* calf thymus in stool, followed by rinsing with *demonized* water to form *baldheaded mutterers*, *Europhiles* and *smut* autoantigen in *antigen city*" would not make the slightest scientific sense.



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