

## Awareness and empowerment in document production and distribution as a “must” for open access: experiences from the “Nancy style” to guarantee quality

Paola De Castro and Sandra Salinetti

*Publishing Activities, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy*

Marcus Banks

*New York University Medical Center, New York, United States*

### Background

The debate on Grey Literature (GL) has now a very long tradition going from uncertainty and confusion, in the last century, to new certainties and appraisal in the open access era. This implies the general acquisition of the awareness of the importance of GL as a fundamental primary source of information, hence the necessity to empower authors and issuing organization to guarantee quality in both production and diffusion of GL. During the last international conference on GL held in Nancy in 2005, the proposal for the adoption of an *ad hoc* GL production style was discussed and most welcome by the grey community.<sup>1</sup> This led to the creation of the Grey Literature International Steering Committee (GLISC) which issued, in March 2006, the *Guidelines for the production of scientific and technical reports*,<sup>2</sup> informally known as “Nancy style” (freely available from [www.glisc.info](http://www.glisc.info)).

In the creation of the *Guidelines*, suggestions arising from different realities were closely evaluated and it was not always so easy to reach an agreement that would satisfy all requirements. When the first version was released, there was awareness that some missing points should be developed soon, particularly all issues related to digital GL and metadata.

### Goal

This paper intends to reflect on the necessity to update the *Guidelines*, one year after the first draft was presented in Nancy, taking into consideration the rapid changes in the information market. We are convinced that the *Guidelines* may represent a useful tool to improve quality of GL, increase the general awareness of its value, and empower authors and issuing organizations to allow a correct autonomous production of documents to be spread and exploited at best through the Internet. For the same reason, the best strategies to promote the adoption of the *Guidelines* will be investigated: involving GL authors and institutions, making translations available in different languages, establishing useful contacts with key persons in the information arena.

### Actions developed

With the objective to create major awareness on quality issues in GL creators, users, and policy makers, the following actions were developed:

- analysis of GL in the changing context;
- reflections on the development of the “Nancy style”;
- comparison between “Nancy style” and ANSI/NISO Z39.18;
- promotion of the “Nancy style”.

### Analysis of GL in the changing context

Within the hierarchy of information sources, GL has traditionally occupied a less prestigious status than peer-reviewed papers published in scholarly journals. During the print-only era, this was a valid distinction. Even though GL has always provided access to valuable and unique content, the costs in time and money of obtaining it were formidable. In such a climate, the regularity and reliability of peer-reviewed journals were significant advantages, irrespective of the quality of published papers.

The contemporary ease of electronic distribution has erased a key condition for the traditional hierarchy between grey and white literature. Although this point has not been reached yet, theoretically all scholarly content – be it a data set, a working paper, or a formal paper – could instantly be posted online.

The “open access” movement has focussed on increasing online availability of formal papers, but its general principle is applicable to all scholarly content. Even though distribution of all content has eased dramatically, the firm preference among many scholars for formally peer-reviewed content continues. This is true despite evidence that the consideration of GL enriches many scholarly investigations;<sup>3,4</sup> one of its

<sup>1</sup> De Castro P, Salinetti S. “Uniform Requirements” for grey literature: proposal for the adoption of “Nancy style”. *Publishing Research Quarterly* 2006;22(1):12-7.

<sup>2</sup> Grey Literature International Steering Committee. *Guidelines for the production of scientific and technical reports. Version 1.0*. GLISC; 2006. Available at: <http://www.glisc.info>; last visited Nov. 14, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Conn VS, Valentine JC, Cooper HM, Rantz MJ. Grey Literature in meta-analyses. *Nursing Research* 2003;52(4):256-61.