

Lignocellulose – A Courageous Title for a Scholarly Journal

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How does one go about choosing the name for a scientific journal? For instance, why is this journal called *Lignocellulose*? Why not something simpler, such as *Wood*? Or, alternatively, how about *Biomass*? Or maybe “wood-derived products” would be the most accurate descriptor for what the journal is about. Compared to these terms, the word “lignocellulose” is not nearly as well known. But the fact is that scientists are increasingly using the term “lignocellulosic” to describe the gross chemical composition of woody material. The irony is that this journal is not just for scientists; there is a lot in this journal that will be of interest to the public, as well as to practical industrial technologists. So in the end, the title *Lignocellulose* becomes known for the journal itself – regardless of how or whether different readers would define the term.

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Different Words for Wood

Search the web for the term “lignocellulose”, and the search engine may try to redirect your search towards the word “lignocellulosic”. If you persist in your search, not accepting the modified (adjective) form of the word, then you may come across definitions such as “any of several closely related substances constituting the essential part of woody cell walls of plants and consisting of cellulose intimately associated with lignin” (Merriam-Webster, m-w.com), or “Lignocellulose refers to plant dry matter (biomass), so called lignocellulosic biomass” (Wikipedia). And after a certain amount of study, you might conclude that “lignocellulose” really just means “wood”, or maybe it means “biomass”. So why is *Lignocellulose* an excellent name for this journal?

Back in the year 2006, before there was a journal called *BioResources*, my co-editor Lucian Lucia and I considered various possible names for a journal. Titles such as “lignocellulosic science” were among the options that we considered. But we decided that many potential readers would not recognize a term like “lignocellulosic”. We wanted to use a unique one-word term that potential readers would immediately understand. The prefix “bio-” has become very trendy among scientific researchers. The term “resources”, on the other hand, seems to emphasize practical usefulness of materials. There has been just one problem, though. If one looks through online dictionaries for a definition of “bioresource”, one will seldom find any statements related to cellulose or wood. And, just like the journal *Lignocellulose*, the journal *BioResources* is focused on the science of lignocellulosic resources, not just any bioresources. So, in the end, the term *Lignocellulose* seems to have been an excellent choice for a title.

Words to Suggest a Scientific Emphasis

Try the following experiment: Select a leading scientific journal in a subfield of chemistry, physics, or biology. Then select one or two scientific articles at random and try to read them. What you are likely to discover is that the article is written in a foreign language that you do not know. In many respects the language may appear to be English, or some other language used by scientists. But you will discover that many of the words used by the authors are either (a) terms that are known only to scientists studying in a narrow field, or (b) abbreviations and acronyms that you, the reader, are expected to memorize (or know in advance) in order to read the article. In theory, the use of such terms makes it possible for scientists to communicate more briefly and more precisely. But which of the following words is shorter, “wood” or “lignocellulose”? Even “biomass” is shorter than “lignocellulose”. So what could be the justification for using the longer term? Could it be that the authors are just saying to the reader, “You should regard our findings as authoritative, since they have been written by a team that knows the latest scientific jargon”? Or maybe, to put a positive slant on it, the scientists are using the term “lignocellulose” to mean “the chemical aspects of wood”, a phrase that is considerably longer than “lignocellulose”. (Hmmm... maybe the next journal in our area of technology could choose “chemical aspects of wood” as a title. How about, *Wood C: Chemical Aspects*. (Of course there are no such journals as “*Wood A*” and “*Wood B*”, but it just seems more trendy and important to call a journal “*Wood C*”.)

Courage to be Stewards of Natural Resources

Choosing the name for a journal involves some courage and some luck, but in the end one can expect that readers will forget about definitions. They will forget about connotations and associated meanings. In the end they just will associate the journal title with the journal itself. The name *Lignocellulose* has become a brand name in the minds of its authors and readers. And that’s why, in the end, it makes a difference what lies between the electronic covers of each issue. By presenting a series of useful and clearly described scientific findings related to lignocellulosic materials and their applications, the journal becomes known for some of the following attributes:

- Stewardship: An emphasis on taking care of natural resources and using such resources efficiently
- Open discussion: Providing a forum within which different scientific findings can be presented and compared
- Emphasis on the future: By helping to advance our branch of science, a journal can provide guidance and tools for industrialists and policy makers.
- Scientific soundness: By making sure that the authors have included proper replication of data, randomization of their experimental runs, and suitable control experiments, the editors help make sure that the published results are trustworthy.

The science of woody materials and its applications is a wonderful field in which to provide education, research, and other kinds of service, such as consultation and journal publishing. As co-editor of the journal *BioResources*, I salute the efforts of the team at *Lignocellulose* for their work in this important field.