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## Learning the ABCs because of an SFI

Learning the alphabet is fundamental to communication in any language. As kids, we are first taught to distinguish the letters that begin and construct words. Of course, 'A' is for 'apple' and 'B' is for 'ball'. As animal folks, we naturally appreciate that 'C' stands for 'cat' and 'D' for 'dog'. In school we learn all the ABCs and then we learn to combine them into words, which obviously I'm using to write this column. As we grow older, we become familiar with abbreviations like DMV, ID and FYI.

OMG, that's TMI (oh, my gosh, that's too much information)!

Science has its own language, including acronyms that aim to facilitate communication. Our chosen field of research and training with animals is no exception. Lab animal trainers are fond of sprinkling acronyms like AALAS, BID, OSHA and more into their presentations (all definitions listed in **Table 1**). And acronyms and their meanings make good test questions for certification and other professional licensing exams.

Most of us in lab animal science are familiar with the acronym SFI, a fundamental group of letters for AAALAC-accredited facilities. An SFI is a comment made by an SV during the peer review of a LAF and its program for the care and use of animals in research, testing and teaching. An SFI identifies a programmatic element that might need to be tweaked just a little bit. But those responsible for maintaining accreditation have come to fear these three little letters.

I've spent some time pondering why that is. I've been an *ad hoc* SV for AAALAC for a dozen years. Moreover, as a trainer and compliance person deeply engaged in regulatory affairs at my university, I inform the users in our accredited program about AAALAC and how it uses other letter combinations to evaluate our program: USDA, NIH, OLAW, EH&S, PHS, BMBL, etc. These are all fundamental and meaningful in the day-to-day operation of a LAF. When we invite AAALAC to visit our LAF, we are essentially

**TABLE 1** | Acronyms and definitions

AAALAC	Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care, International
AALAS	American Association for Laboratory Animal Science
BID	<i>bis in die</i> (twice per day)
BMBL	Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories
BSL	Biosafety level
CFA	Continued full accreditation
EH&S	Environmental health and safety
GMO	Genetically modified organism
HVAC	Heating, ventilating and air conditioning
LAF	Laboratory animal facility
NIH	National Institutes of Health
OLAW	Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PD	Program description
PHS	Public Health Service
SFI	Suggestion for improvement
SOP	Standard operating procedure
SV	Site visit or visitor
USDA	US Department of Agriculture

asking for an evaluation of our teaching and training. Phrased another way, we are asking how well the animal care personnel and investigators have been trained in the basic regulatory ABCs of running a LAF.

Evaluation and assessment are critical to the educational process, and letter grades are the manifestation of the effort. Although we should not fear either a grade or an SFI, being human, we do worry about our performance. After all, we prepare for a SV just as we do for a test. And we want to do well on both, so it's reasonable to be anxious. If we have prepared in the wrong way, it's the job of the instructor—the SV—to suggest to us what we should address in order to improve. In this way, SFIs are important outcomes from a SV.

Let me offer a personal example. In the last trimester of 2014, AAALAC came to my campus for our seventh SV. All summer long, we invested in the preparations of the fundamental letters of AAALACese: re-writing the PD, reviewing SOPs, evaluating BSLs, testing the HVAC system, etc. We pondered how we would do, what grade we would receive, naturally hoping for an 'A'

Well, we were awarded CFA—with a few SFIs. This pleased us very much, but somehow there was still the let-down of having something that needed to be improved. I reminded my colleagues that this is one of the reasons why we invite AAALAC to come. They agreed. But one particular SFI was bothersome because we were not aware of it. Curiously, it was about another abbreviation: GMOs. Like many LAFs, we were in the habit of freezing healthy culled mice for our reptile colony. After some discussion, the SV issued an SFI for us to review the NIH comments on the feeding of GMOs to other animals, which is stated in Appendix Q-I-B-1 on recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules ([http://osp.od.nih.gov/sites/default/files/NIH\\_Guidelines.html](http://osp.od.nih.gov/sites/default/files/NIH_Guidelines.html)).

I'm advocating that we consider a paradigm shift in our thinking about the ABCs and SFIs. For me, the enjoyment of being in research is the constant learning. The enjoyment of being a trainer is sharing what we learn. So, FYI, I share this lesson about ABCs, SFIs and GMOs for everyone. In the LAF, the test happens every day, not just during AAALAC's triennial SVs.