

With pencil and rubber in hand

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Every Monday, a stand-up meeting is held for the staff members of the Lead-Acid Batteries Department to discuss the weekly work schedule, synchronize the needs for analyses to be performed by the Material Science Laboratories, track the research workflow and make a brief project status update. At the end of each stand-up meeting, Prof. Pavlov used to address us with the appeal: “We need new ideas. This is the only way we can move ahead.” And while we racked our brains trying to think of something, he always had a couple of wild ideas. But he not only generated ideas - he wanted us to plan verification tests and experiments, apart from our current research activities, to confirm or refute these new ideas. And when some interesting experimental results were obtained, either based on these tests or on other investigations, Prof. Pavlov would sit down and start writing his next publication. He used to write only with pencil and rubber eraser in hand. When he thought that the draft of the new manuscript was more or less acceptable, he would give it to Mariana “to type it up”. Then, he would take the printed text home and come back with new ideas on the next day. He would sit at his desk, take a pencil, a rubber and a pair of scissors and start editing and “retailoring” the printed text. He would cut out separate sentences, whole paragraphs or graphs, reposition them in the text and glue them in place, then add some new text here and there. And the thus obtained “collage” of old text clippings, new handwritten texts, old and new graphs (he loved to hand draw the graphs on grid paper), with added arrows pointing to what should go where, was handed over to Mariana to type up this new draft version. A couple of days later, Prof. Pavlov would again take the scissors, pencil and rubber to produce a third revision of the manuscript. Then, after several more draft versions, he would come to the office somewhat disappointed and say: “The idea is crystal clear, but there is no intrigue. I want you to conduct some more experiments.” And the results of these new tests, of course, lead to a new revision of the text. So revision after revision (he sometimes made 10, 15 or even more draft versions), collage after collage, Prof. Pavlov would complete a perfect manuscript, meeting his own satisfaction, featuring a clear idea, a well-developed story as in a film script, easy to read and understand. Once I asked him why didn't he use a computer, which would allow him to make any changes, amendments and text formatting as he wished very easily. This is what he said to me: “It is not about the way you write, but rather about the way you think. When I write by hand, I have a picture of the whole paper in my mind, I see where and what to say, how to word it in the simplest and most comprehensible manner, so that any reader would understand what I want to say with this paper. When I tried to use a computer, my thinking pattern fell apart, my thoughts were concentrated on which key to press, why this particular key and not the other one, how to copy a piece of text, how to move it and insert it in place, and I could not see the whole paper. That is why I never got along with the computer.” Anyway, with pencil and rubber in hand, Prof. Pavlov wrote all his scientific publications, about 300 in total, as well as his remarkable book “Lead-Acid Batteries: Science and Technology”. Thanks to the brilliant translations in English made by Mariana (she was the only one who could sort out his handwritten drafts), all his manuscripts and the book were accepted by the publishers with almost no amendments or corrections. When Prof. Pavlov showed me the author copy of the second revised and updated edition of his book on lead-acid battery theory and technology, he said: “This is my swan song. I have now completed the mission of my life – to collect in a single book the whole knowledge about lead-acid batteries and to share this knowledge with other people.” And, indeed, immediately after its publication, Prof. Pavlov's swan song became “the bible” for lead-acid battery experts throughout the world – as a reference book, a handbook, a manual and an interesting novel to read.

