

Becoming An Author

Wherever I go, the most often asked question is: "How do I go about writing an article for **Radio-Electronics**?" I do not dismiss that question lightly. Our readers represent a vast untapped reservoir of knowledge. Each and every one of you has developed a special expertise in at least one particular area. Many of you have unique ideas and knowledge that is not widely known. The drive to acquire knowledge and share knowledge and ideas with others is immense. In fact, that is the main function of **Radio-Electronics**. It is a vehicle for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. For those reasons we encourage our readers to write articles.

What do you get out of writing an article? Aside from the extra income and recognition of having your name in print, there's the satisfaction of sharing your knowledge with others. In effect, you have advanced the knowledge of the members of this industry and have helped people just like yourself. Indeed, it is a rewarding and satisfying achievement.

Submitting an article is not difficult. It is simply a matter of sending it to my attention. The best first step, however, is to send me an outline of the article to see if we're interested in the subject. If we are, we'll tell you to go ahead and perhaps even make a few suggestions regarding your outline.

There are far too many steps involved in writing an article for us to cover here. However, we do have an Author's Guide that will answer many of your questions. If we've managed to stir your curiosity, then send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Author's Guide, **Radio-Electronics**, 200 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003, and we'll send you one.

Now what's your excuse for not writing an article?



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Cover photo by Robert Lewis

Radio-Electronics is indexed in *Applied Science & Technology Index* and *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*.

Gernsback Publications, Inc.
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WRITING FOR ETI

We welcome readers and other freelance writers sending us copy for publication and we get quite a lot submitted. We have to turn down a very high proportion of it not because the subject isn't interesting but because it's not been thought out properly. These notes are written to let you know our requirements and a few hints which can save both of us time and money.

It's not for us to say what other magazines require but we're not that unusual and ETI's editor has run five magazines elsewhere and the requirements didn't vary between any - generally these tips will apply to other magazines.

1. First analyse your motive for writing for us: you don't have to tell us your conclusions however!
 - a. Money. A perfectly sound reason but you've got to be good and scientific to make it worthwhile. The TV image of the magazine writer is very misleading. Movie stars rarely lure you back to their pads.
 - b. Prestige. Don't be ashamed of this. We credit ourselves at the front of the magazine - we like to see our name in print, why shouldn't you? If you're an expert, or even just knowledgeable in a field, it's useful in your career to have an article published. It looks excellent on a resume! Having your work published still carries with it a certain aura.
 - c. Publicity for something you care about. This may be for a product you or your company produce or for a cause you think is getting a raw deal. We have no objection at all to giving you, or a product, a plug but in this case we're going to scrutinise it carefully to make certain it's of interest to the readers above everything else. A hard sell article isn't going to be read, let alone published.
2. Subject Matter. This is the key to it all. You'll have to be guided by what you see in the magazine - it's a pretty broad field really.

It may seem obvious but it's got to be said - write about something you know about. If when you're preparing the piece you continually have to refer to reference books, you're doing it wrong.

The biggest mistake of nearly all authors is that they feel they have to write about something at the extremes of their knowledge. Somehow authors feel that they lose prestige if they write about something that they understand, deal with every day and can do easily.

Cont'd.....

Two of the best authors we know are both University Lecturers one is a full Professor but they both deal with beginners and simple staff. Overwhelmingly their stuff is written out of their heads and both of them refuse to tackle anything they can't handle easily. Neither of them excel at grammar, style or humour (though it's all acceptable) but they know what people want to read and they know how to put over a concept.

3. Presentation to the magazine. You'll stand a much better chance of getting your material accepted if you present it to us in a nice 'package'!

Choose a title - we don't mind it being smart but the title should say what the article is about - being clever but obscure isn't any good. We may well change your title but we like ideas.

Write a 'run-in'. Those are the words under the title which explain what it's all about and which usually incorporates your name. Some authors offer us a choice of two or three - separate it from the rest of the text.

Your manuscript must be typed, double spaced with a healthy margin on the left. Each page should be numbered. If you make a mistake "XXX" it out - we don't care, nor do we mind hand written amendments afterwards. Avoid characters not on the keyboard - for instance, we prefer "ohms" rather than a greek omega but we know this can't be avoided sometimes. If you have a mathematical formula for heaven's sake get it right and hand write it clearly. The mistakes we get in formulae are amazing and we're not always in a position to sort them out.

Read your manuscript at least twice before you send it. O.K, it sounds obvious but we're not going to put much trust in a article where it obviously has'nt been checked after typing.

Introduce "Sideheads" (also known as subheads). These are the few words introduced every few paragraphs to break up the text. If you're imaginative you can have good fun with these.

There's an old saying about any article - it must have a beginning, a middle and an end. If you do a good beginning and end the middle usually takes care of itself. A good beginning will encourage us to read on - and that's what we want to present to the reader.

Many authors are under the impression that we spend hours and hours going over the manuscript and rewriting big chunks - It's nonsense. We very rarely add to a manuscript unless we know of a tit-bit that's not included. We do strike out stuff but we don't like to. If you put in lots of 'filling' because you think you'll have a longer article and get paid more you're way off the mark.

Cont'd/3.....

Most articles are too long. We've got an in-house rule that 'No article can be longer than five pages unless there's a good reason for it! This forces us to think carefully. The most likely articles to be accepted are those that'll run to one, two or three pages. Because something is interesting, new or advanced doesn't give it a lot of space.

4. Photographs. If it's at all possible, or relevant, include photographs with the article. Nearly all companies are only too pleased to supply photos of their products - so are most Government agencies. If you want a photo, call up the company, ask for the Press Officer and tell him what you're doing. If you really need a photo and can't get an original a brochure cutting may do but be sure it's not copyright.
5. Drawings. We and the readers love drawings and diagrams but they're expensive for us to do so make sure they're relevant.
6. Captions. Take care over writing captions and write these all together on a separate sheet - mark the back of your photos and drawings clearly to identify them.
7. Duplicate. Keep a photocopy of what you send to us. This is important if we have to refer back to you.
8. Our criteria and problems. Even if your article is perfect, we may have to decline it. This is because we may already have something in stock or it may not fit into our plans. We will normally never promise when an article will go in. Balance in an issue is important and this balance can be modified right up to the last minute so although we may plan your feature those plans may have to be changed.

We won't accept an article if we can't see it being used within six months - this is to be fair on the author to give him a chance to place it elsewhere. We'll usually tell you if this is the case.

We're reasonably good at communicating with authors but don't expect an instant reply - if your article arrives during our press week, we won't have time to check it properly but we'll usually acknowledge receipt within a day or two.

We don't want to put you off. What we've said above accounts for only a tiny percentage of rejections.

Please also remember we're not experts in everything - in many, if not most, cases you'll be far better informed about the subject than we are.

9. General matters. Please don't offer us series on your first try. We'll only arrange these with people who we know well. Series and columns have their own rules and problems.

Cont'd/4.....

If you have an idea or several ideas we'll happily advise you about our interest in each + this can save you work but we'll never commit ourselves to accepting anything, until we see it in the final form.

Some potential authors are worried about their ideas, circuits etc being ripped off if they send them in. This just isn't so - we've never done it, nor do we know of any other magazine that's done it - we've all got far too much to lose.

Put your name and address on the manuscript as well as on your letter and preferably a total word count (+ or - 100 words).

10. Payment. We do not have a fixed payment per page - we have a 3:1 range. The payment bears a strong relationship to how good the article is and how well presented it in. We're not going to give the limits for a major reason. We once made the range known but a couple of mediocre authors felt badly insulted that they weren't on the top rate. We normally make an offer at the time of acceptance - if you don't like the offer you can always say no but we don't in fact have much trouble with payments - the only exception was that quoted above. Most people consider our payments very fair.

If the article is one giving publicity to a product with which you're associated, sometimes we don't pay anything but that would be made clear by us early on.

We prefer to pay something even if your motive is totally non-commercial - it makes us feel better and we don't like to take advantage of anyone.

Payment is normally on publication of the article.

Summary

We very much want more good authors. We have a budget on the magazine to pay for good material and the better the material, the more we get for our money.

Writing articles isn't something that everyone can do but a lot of people can. It's rewarding in several ways.

HM/cw

Computing Now!

Canada's Personal Computing Magazine

Dear Prospective Author:

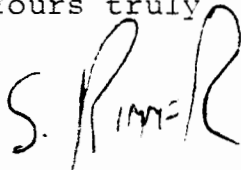
Sorry this has to be a form letter, but in the time since we announced Computing Now! there have been bags of requests for the author's guide... If we get one tenth of those people writing for us our new magazine will be pretty well packed with material.

We hope very much that you will become one of our authors. There is so much happening in the computers right now that the only way we can begin to cover it all is to have input from a variety of writers. No matter what your area of interest in computing is, you have probably got something to contribute to Computing Now!

The enclosed list of article suggestions is the most recent we have produced. Please obtain the updated list every so often. And feel free to develop your own ideas... you'll be far more likely to come up with ones that better suit your area of expertise.

We hope to be hearing from you.

Yours truly



Steve Rimmer
Editor

Computing Now!

A division of Electronics Today International (Canada) Ltd.

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Author's Guide

Computing Now! Magazine

The magazine for people discovering the potential of Microcomputers.

Computing Now! is Canada's first intensive computing publication. While there have been other magazines aimed at this area, they have all been fairly specialized in their readership. While we have deliberately avoided trying to be all things to all people, Computing Now's editorial philosophy avails it of a wide range of interests from neophytes wandering the streets in a daze after having spent three days without sleep in front of their VICs and Sinclairs, through dedicated computer wizards who add their grocery bills in hexadecimal on up into small business applications. This is good for us, as we get to play with a lot of different sorts of computers, and good for you if you are interested in writing for us, as what you have to tell Computing Now's readers will very likely fall into this range.

There are a number of reasons for writing for Computing Now. Here are some of the believable ones.

1. You send us copy, and, if we like it, we send you money. This tradition is one of the leading reasons why people like to write for magazines. We, in fact, pay better than any of the other popular computing publications. The actual amount you get for an article will vary according to long your piece comes out to be, how good we think it is and the level of complexity of your topic. Obviously, someone who writes us an article about how to build a sixteen bit mainframe computer for \$11.62 is going to get more than someone who sends us a BASIC program to play darts. It's not that there's anything wrong with a dart playing program *per se*. . . it's just that the fellow with the computer project has probably worked a lot harder and that article will probably be of greater interest to Computing Now's readers.

If you want an idea of what we pay, our rule of thumb is that anything worth less than five cents per word is probably something better suited to some other magazine. On the average, we pay appreciably more than this.

We also pay for photographs, usually between three and fifteen dollars each for black and white and more for colour.

We reserve the right to edit any article we buy.

On the topic of payment, it will also be useful to note that we pay for stuff on publication. This is a bit of a drag, we realize, as you'd like your money yesterday. However, there is always the temptation, when one is an editor, to buy more stuff than can be used, and this is a very dangerous situation. . . you get very broke after a while.

2. Incentive to get something finished. Committing to write an article is a good way to get your feet off your desk and polish off whatever it is that you're planning to write about. However, please don't offer us any real pies in the sky with the intent of doing up the whole thing just to sell an article about it. We don't pay quite *that* much, and most authors who enter into this sort of soul selling usually fail to get the work together in the end.

Many authors find that writing articles is a good exercise in clearing up the cobwebs of one's mind, as it forces one to finalize a lot of hitherto fairly abstract ideas in order to get them down on paper.

Another useful point to note about this is that we don't actually issue deadlines for most of our casual freelance authors. This is simply because most authors miss them, and, if we have scheduled a piece that fails to show up we wind up in a decent panic. Thus, we will not plan your article into a future issue until we have every last scrap of it in our hands. . . claws, scales, etc.

3. Showing off is another good reason for writing for us. Getting your name in print looks neat, and people will quit calling you a bum in favour of calling you a literary bum, which is unquestionably an improvement.

There are a number of ways you can come to write an article for us. The best way is for you to think up something to write about and submit it to us. This should take the form of a one page outline, typed and in English, giving a synopsis of what you will be doing. This gives us something to pin up and look at when it comes to planning magazines and it shows us that you are at least sufficiently coherent to do one page.

This process actually weeds out about half the people who approach us with article ideas.

The second way you can wind up writing for us is to get our current list of desired articles, called the "editorial budget". This is a flock of topics and brief outlines for stuff we'd like to have for upcoming issues. If you see something on the list you think you could handle we will consider you for the assignment. We *do not* guarantee that you will wind up writing a piece just because you've selected it; there may be someone else better qualified already working on it or we may want to have you do something less demanding as a first piece. However, if you do want to request a topic from our list, you can do so by elaborating our three line description into a one page outline, as above, and sending it to us.

The third approach is for non-writers. If you have something to say but aren't much for words, you can still conceivably get your stuff into Computing Now by having someone else do the writing. If you can't find a collaborator on your own you can tell us what you have in mind and, if it sounds interesting we'll try to find you an author.

The fourth way is for us to request an article from you. In this situation, of course, we won't be asking for an outline in most cases since we will already know enough about what you're up to to want a piece from you.

We won't accept article ideas over the phone from authors unless they are our regular contributors.

One very important thing to remember in trying to sell us articles. Go with what you know. If you can't write it from your head, perhaps with a bit of reference for details, you can't write it. Articles which are, in fact, research papers are boring beyond measure, more work than what we are going to pay you will be worth and frequently contain the sort of errors that come from having only second or third hand acquaintance with a topic. They also lack the real world specific details that make articles interesting.

In planning an article, please keep your first work down to something manageable. We don't tend to accept novellas even from seasoned authors. Articles should run no longer than 3500 words for the average stuff. . . longer if you have either got a lot of diagrams and photos that just *have* to go in or you have written a communications program that lets you exchange files with God. There are almost no other cases.

We virtually *never* run multi-part articles. Well, almost virtually. There is an actual reason for this. The first part of one of these things is usually really interesting and it has a lot of appeal for our readers. The additional installments have no "newness" in them, though, and anyone who wasn't turned on by the first part will feel positively cheated by anything more along those lines.

We buy articles on most areas of computing. Included in these are applications articles, short software reviews, hardware hacking, programs of all types, instructional articles and so on. We don't buy system reviews as a rule, as we do 'em ourselves.

We are frequently forced to turn down articles because they are just too poorly written. This is a hard thing to tell an author, but it should be understood that there are very clever people who just can't write. In this case, we may still offer to buy your article idea if we think it's good enough. If you do not choose to sell it to us you will have that right, and we do not reject articles and then write similar ones ourselves.

We are also frequently forced to turn down articles because we just haven't got space for them. If we tell you this, it is not a "polite put off". If your article is still available in six months, we will probably be most interested in seeing it.

Please note that we will probably not be able to make a decision about your article immediately. We will have to wait until we are planning an issue into which we can schedule it. . . we don't accept stuff until we have space for it as a rule. If you have a deadline by which you require a yea or nay from us, please tell us. If we cannot schedule your piece by this time, we will be pleased to return your manuscript if you wish.

We reserve the right to reject an article right up until the moment it reaches the press, even if we have asked that it be written. This isn't something we do as a rule. . . in fact, it's not something we've had to do even once as yet. It is something we'll only invoke if a manuscript turns out to be very different from what we had in mind, or in some other way unsuitable.

If you submit an article for publication in Computing Now! we expect that it will not be submitted to another publication until we have contacted you.

The style and presentation of a piece is very important. It should be clear and easily readable, comprised of sentences and paragraphs in the usual sense of these words and, please, *typed!*. We aren't too fussy about the width of the margins. We like 'em double spaced on regular 8½ x 11 paper, blank on the back and fairly neat. A few penned in corrections are acceptable. Considering the nature of our magazine we do accept dot matrix printer outputs, but please get a new ribbon before you do up your printout.

We also accept text files at 300 baud over our BBS. These must be sent up under MODEM4/MODEM7/YAM compatible protocol, and you should leave us a message to indicate that the file has been sent. It might also be worthwhile checking that we actually got what you sent.

Please do not "pad" your articles. If we actually decide not to reject a padded article on these grounds, which is unlikely, we will have to go through just as much effort to take the padding out as you went to putting it in, and all to little purpose.

If you can, send lots of photos. Articles that are just walls of text are a drag for readers. Drawings and diagrams are also good. We are prepared to draw up the hand done drawings if they aren't too intense. . . you don't have to be a draftsman. Please include captions for all photos and drawings.

Photos of CRT screens are best done in totally blacked out rooms at very slow shutter speeds. Bracket a lot.

Please put your name and address on your manuscript and keep a photocopy of it. We cannot be responsible for unsolicited material, and we probably could loose the other kind if all the tolerances ganged up on us (we have never actually done so yet). If you have borrowed photos that you want back, please let us know. We will return them to you; you will have to forward them to their rightful homes.

We are most interested in having your stuff. We are pleased to accept an awful lot of what we get submitted to us. We are always after steady contributing authors. If you are good you can probably do quite nicely out of our payments.

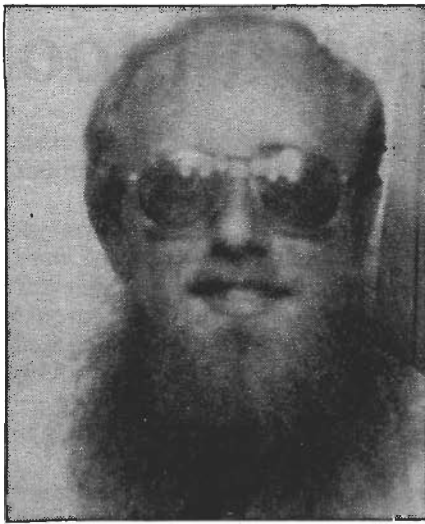
We will be pleased to answer any specific questions you may have concerning articles, either by phone during the day or over our bulletin board system at night. (Or, of course, by mail.)

The printing presses await.

Manuscripts should be addressed to:

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EDUCATION



Business Writing

Semicolons

By John R. Little

One of my favorite quotations from a well-known politician is, "Knowledge without commitment is wasteful; commitment without knowledge is dangerous."

Hubert Humphrey made that statement some time ago, and you can either agree or disagree with the content. The nicest portion of that sentence is the use of the semicolon.

Of the dozens of punctuation marks in the English language (yes, dozens), the semicolon is the mark most often used incorrectly by business writers. Everyone seems to have his or her own particular definition of when a semicolon is called for. "It's for a longer pause than a comma gives," I hear often. "It's like a colon," somebody will tell me. "It's just a period," is another's opinion.

Part of the problem raising this identity crisis is the semicolon's name. There is no relationship at all between it and a colon. It isn't half a colon and it doesn't introduce items the way a colon does.

Neither is the semicolon a comma. This is the most misused form of the semicolon. I quite often see sentences like, "We hope that you accept our proposal; but we are willing to modify it based on your reaction."

There are few lengthy business documents that avoid this type of error.

Okay then, now that we know what it isn't for, what is a semicolon used for?

If you look through any comprehensive grammar reference book, there

will be several different, long-winded ideas of when you should be using a semicolon. Most of these definitions are confusing; don't bother reading them. In business writing, there are only two times you should ever use a semicolon.

Let's look at the easier of the two. Lists of items are normally separated with commas. *The proposal was distributed to our offices in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax.*

However, if the list items have embedded commas, you separate the items with semicolons. *The proposal was distributed to our offices in Vancouver, B.C.; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Toronto, Ontario; and Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

That usage is fairly straightforward.

The second use of the semicolon is also easy, although it sounds paradoxical. Semicolons are used to separate two sentences closely. It's important that there is a complete sentence on each side of the semicolon. The semicolon seems to balance the sentences like the fulcrum of an old-fashioned pair of scales balances the weights on either side.

(Semicolons can also be used to separate other items than sentences, but they are not of concern to most people in the business world.)

Take another look at Humphrey's statement at the top of this column and think about the other ways that

the statement could have been written.

Knowledge without commitment is wasteful, but commitment without knowledge is dangerous. The extra conjunction "but" weakens the sentence.

Knowledge without commitment is wasteful. Commitment without knowledge is dangerous. Now, the two thoughts seem well removed from each other, again weakening the thought.

Ironically, one of the most interesting aspects of Humphrey's quotation is that he may not have had a semicolon in his speech at all. He most likely had a period, but reporters transcribing the speech correctly inserted the semicolon.

The most important rule to remember is that you can't join two sentences with a comma; that's called a "comma splice" which is incorrect grammar and definitely frowned upon.

A semicolon separates (at the same time as connecting) two closely connected thoughts where a period would weaken their effectiveness or keep them too far apart.

Finally, semicolons are as powerful as any other major piece of punctuation and can even affect national security. Notice the difference between the following two sentences:

Seven officials knew the secret all told.

Seven officials knew the secret; all told. ■■

Putting words into print

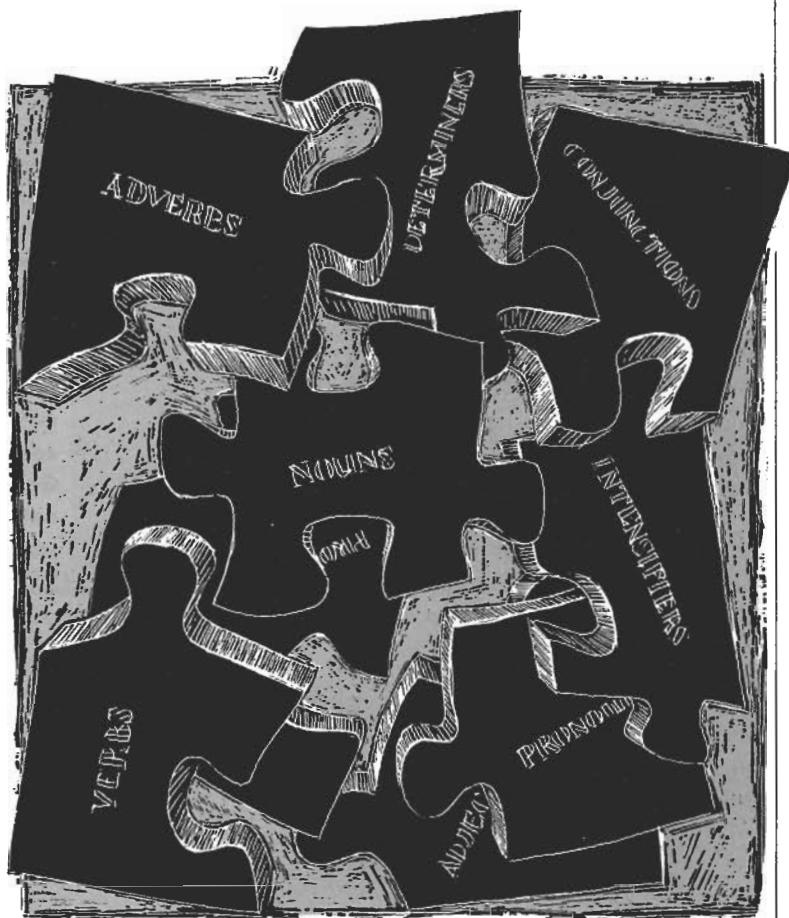
Strategies for generating written reports

By Mar Jean Olson, Assistant Editor

You've heard it before, and we'll say it again, "Information is the currency of the future," and in order to perform efficiently and effectively in the fast-paced world of electronically stored and transmitted information, you must be able to access and relay accurate, up-to-date information. While a lack of writing skills may not have played such a critical role for your predecessors in business and industry, countless surveys show and endless experts exclaim that writing skills are a crucial factor in determining the success or failure of job-related projects. The urgent need for clear communication is underscored by the fact that technical professionals who write obscurely may damage equipment, lose jobs, and even endanger lives.

The common complaint among executives in industry is that writers in technical fields cannot make themselves understood to anyone, and feeling the costly impact of faulty communication, highly decentralized companies such as BT, Plessey, and Marconi have assumed active roles in the education of their employees. Honeywell Bull's director of human resources David Youens explains that the presently employed engineer's writing skills are so poor as to even have affected future hiring procedures, "We look for evidence that graduates can go further than having technical skills. Communication is just as important." Plessey's corporate personnel services executive Stuart Carter concurs, "The ability to communicate is vital because we have to impart specialised knowledge." According to Marconi's assistant personnel manager Ray Leggett, bosses feel that their own status is lowered by the clumsy writing of their employees, and Leggett does not mince words when he argues from business' *raison d'être*, "Industry is all about sharing knowledge to produce a result and selling it."

Scientists and technicians who were once shrouded in white lab coats and hidden in their labs are now expected to step out into the lime-light of the media and actively participate in both public and political sectors of society. Addressing the issue of personal accountability for research funds, Neal Carter of Battelle comments on the immediate need for informed specialists who can quickly disseminate their knowledge: "Scientists must be able to show the benefits of their studies. They will be challenged on the productivity of their results and will be held



accountable for research dollars invested. They must be able to communicate their results to those who are going to be influenced." But Carter admits, "Their communication skills are not adequate for these types of interaction, and furthermore, the public is not a patient listener." Carter, like Leggett, joins in the call for training programs to train those in technical fields to write with commitment and responsibility.

This focus on the need for writing instruction in industry is by no means new. Companies such as McDonnell Douglas, Boeing, GE, Lockheed, Pratt & Whitney, Rolls Royce, Fokker, British Aerospace, Goodyear, and Westinghouse have long-established writing rules and lists of approved words to appear in their publications. GE's manager of support services Al Morin rationalizes this standardization, "The

problems of publishing technical information are probably more diverse than those of any other publishing process, and since the basic purpose of all writing is to get a message across to the reader, it must be capable of being easily read and easily understood." This regressive move to simplify documents by eliminating individuality of expression and reducing

Figure 1.

Clustering, an alternative to traditional outlining, is a very effective pre-writing technique for visually oriented people. It allows you to see the associative train of thought and to recognize the developmental pattern. Begin with a circled nucleus word, and then simply note and circle connections.

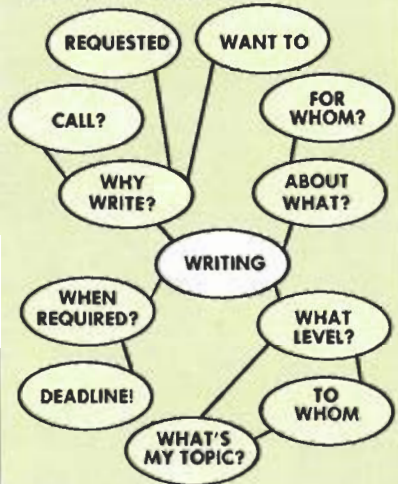


TABLE 1
A sampling of responses by IBM engineers to "State what you remember from a writing course."

- Don't write in the past tense
- Don't condescend
- Don't write over your head
- Don't use "I" too much
- Never use gerunds
- Avoid "which"
- Always say "in conclusion"
- Write like you talk
- Don't write like you talk
- Always write short sentences

TABLE 3
A guide to determine the audience level of receivers

- Expert:** scientist, engineer, or other highly educated person who knows his or her field thoroughly; the expert seldom needs background information, and looks instead for new information, conclusions, or techniques. (Mr. Spock)
- Technician:** someone with training and considerable experience; the technician is uncomfortable with too much theory and is interested in applications. (Scotty)
- Operator:** someone who works with equipment, needs instructions and is expendable. (Sulu, Chekhov, and Ohura)
- Executive:** some have little technical background and are chiefly concerned with practical matters, productivity, results, economic exploitation of expert's knowledge. (Captain Kirk)
- General:** lay persons must be given background material and as much assistance as possible; they are interested in pictures. (Dr. McCoy)

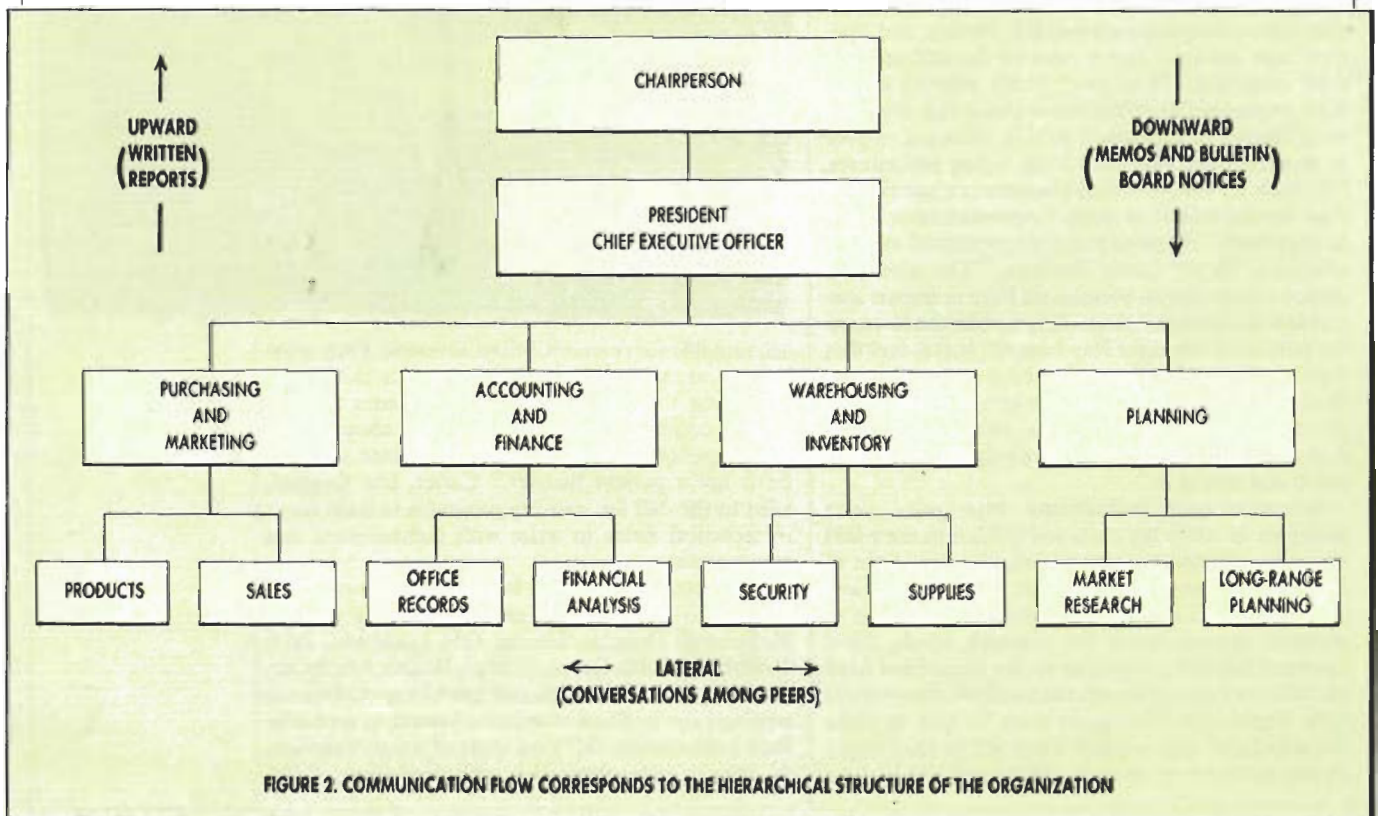


FIGURE 2. COMMUNICATION FLOW CORRESPONDS TO THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

vocabulary to a common denominator is gaining momentum in the business world. After 15 years of struggling with the problems of communicating technical information, Caterpillar Tractor now transmits its messages through the vocabulary of Simplified English. Complete with a video-tape and a dictionary of common mono-syllabic words which as far as possible carry only one meaning, the remedial-level standard rids manuals and reports of nasty nuances and distressing ambiguities, but according to specifi-

cations writer Becky Gingras at McDonnell Douglas who designs programs to limit and assign meanings, "These programs are not a panacea, and clarity of thought will always reside with the individual."

As part of the problem rather than the cure, such "write by rule" remedial programs are bogged down by petty details and autocratic dictates epitomized by IBM's style guide's classic and baffling directive: "Any noun can be verbed." Many professionals feel bewildered at the

prospect of generating a formal report, and inexplicable rules do not indicate which direction to take. The unfortunate but typical results of the dogmatic "science of composition" appear in Table 1 and would be entertaining had the rigid instruction not dealt such weighty blows nor left such deep scars. What do *you* remember from your formal writing instruction?

Although the application of behavioural modification techniques to writing training shows no success, each year thousands of dollars are paid to notorious communications experts who offer such vapid advice as "write shorter sentences," and "write like you talk." The latter command is particularly distressing given the fact that linguistic research repeatedly gives evidence to the contrary. In other words, no matter what the teacher says, the relation between speaking and writing should not be construed too literally; nor should the transfer between the two media be conceived as infallible since very few people, among them radio broadcasters and trained public speakers, produce spoken texts which closely resemble their written texts.

So where does that leave you in your quests to produce the outstanding, prize-winning, written report by Monday morning? Is there a rustless key that will faithfully activate the writing process? As part of my doctoral research into the process—not the event—of generating technical documents, I conducted extensive report writing seminars for industry, and desperation accompanied the anxious IBM engineers who entered the conference rooms. The following brief tutorial derives directly from these IBM seminars, and these practical strategies work if you use them.

WHY AM I WRITING?

Picture this scene: you feel the urge to write to a specific person or group of persons in order to purge yourself of some burning inner issue, to express a heartfelt desire, or to relay a vital piece of information. Such is the fairytale land of Gestalt writing wherein a need is fulfilled and an unfinished situation completed through formation into words. But as you well know, in the workplace, a topic is often assigned or a report requested—by tomorrow 9 o'clock sharp—rather than waiting for these mute inner promptings to emerge and achieve reconciliation through writing.

Now picture this scene: you have been asked at the last minute to produce a progress report for your immediate supervisor in order to pinpoint areas of unnecessary expenditures in your current work. In contrast to propulsive feelings of compulsion and creativity, you may sit—like

TABLE 4

Fog index calculation gives a handy estimate of a text's level of difficulty. Science rates 18; Scientific American reaches 16; Readers' Digest averages 8. Scores over 20 indicate challenging reading indeed!

1. Choose a paragraph from your writing; count the number of its words and of its sentences.
2. Divide the number of words by the number of sentences yielding the average number of words per sentence.
3. Count the number of difficult words—polysyllables, foreign words, chemical formulae, mathematical equations, and technical expressions.
4. Divide the number of difficult words by total of words in passage. Add average number of words per sentence to the percentage of difficult words.
5. Multiply the sum of average words per sentence and percentage of difficult words by .4, a constant.
6. Recognize the result as the fog index of your paragraph.

TABLE 5

Your responses will help you approach a particular writing project and will move you into the writing process.

1. I believe my audience finds my writing easy to read.
2. Thinking of writers in terms of the Japanese "quality circle" I enjoy collaborating with my teammates.
3. I find the process of learning and conveying new information to my audience (a) stimulating and satisfying; (b) a reasonable use of my talents; (c) unrewarding; (d) I never thought about it in those terms.
4. When I edit someone's draft, how do I feel? malicious? impersonal? Do I treat my own sentences as unalterable works of art?
5. My writing contributes to my company's profitability.
6. Picturing my audience would help me to communicate with those in that audience.
7. What words have been used to describe my style? scholarly? pictorial? conversational? abstract? lucid? graphic?
8. What am I being asked to write? Am I requesting money? Can each word serve this purpose? Must my reader see it? do it? What verbs apply in this case?
9. Do I care that my reader understands?

most of those IBM engineers—with a slash of anger across your face, gnawing at a pencil held in your viselike grip, or glaring at the blinking cursor which keeps needing, "What's the delay?" Even veteran professionals resent writing tasks which are artificial—externally applied—and prescribed within a rigid time-frame. But tight deadlines are the only certain cure for Writer's Block, so mobilize your energy for writing by filling in the blank, "I am writing because . . ." Even if only to yourself, admit why you are writing.

WHAT IS MY EXACT TOPIC?

You are not writing a mystery, so do not keep your reader in suspense. Do you know of anyone who would feel spontaneously moved to document his or her programming or to write detailed installation guides? The initial inertia you experience toward similar writing tasks is easily overcome when you approach writing as a problem to be solved. Writing does things: proposals attract money; reports demonstrate projects; training materials increase employee value, instructions explain procedures, press releases praise, and so on. You enter into the process of writing by stating your precise, manageable topic. Thus, the writing itself is seen as the means whereby—the

vehicle that takes you to your destination. What is it that you want to communicate to your reader? What are you being asked to write? What will you explain or solve in your report?

WHO IS MY SPECIFIC AUDIENCE?

The length, tone, and level of your writing relates to its intended reader within or outside of your organization. Are you writing a monologue to yourself, a dialogue with a fellow researcher, or a show-and-tell to a manager in control of the purse strings? Table 2 shows the possible directions of written reports, and if you carry out an audience analysis along the lines of Table 3, you will ascertain the suitable level for your message. In addition, calculating the Fog Index of your writing, as illustrated in Table 4, helps you to determine whether the calibre of your text is appropriate for its chosen target.

HOW CAN I GUIDE MY READER?

Your map—blueprint, skeletal outline, or cluster (See Figure 1)—physically lifts your facts and arranges them in a certain shape. Organize your thoughts by visualizing the line of your argument. Where does it go, and how does it get there? The nature of the information to

be conveyed influences the pattern of development, but consciously select one structure onto which you mold your material. For an analytical report, choose a chronological, spatial, or sequential model; for sales-oriented pieces, work with a problem-solution format to first convince and then motivate your reader to act.

Before taking up your pen or turning on your processor, honestly respond to the prompts in Table 5. We don't need a crystal ball to see the crisis ahead when everyone has a desktop publishing system but has no writing sense, and since companies such as IBM are in the process of eliminating specialized technical writers and replacing them with PCs, and onus is on you to improve the quality of your writing and to establish the unity of your printed product. With information as an industry in today's automated environment, only those with the skills to manipulate words for a purpose and the wisdom to present texts with integrity will meet the challenge. It takes a dedicated writer to convey impressions, opinions, and information through the medium of print, and a good writer is an effective verbal communicator who proves that writing can succeed.

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EDITORIAL

C'mon, you guys!

■ Each month your editor has a series of jobs to do, and one of the toughest of them is picking the articles that will appear in print. We try to select a balance of articles that will appeal to the most interest. And we select these from the articles that are submitted by people just like you. But there are other mitigating factors that you may not know about. Because we are limited in space, smaller articles have a far-better chance. The piece that will fill two or three pages in the magazine is more apt to see the printed page than the one that runs ten or twelve pages and has to be serialized over several issues. And right now there happens to be a shortage in the files of the short articles.

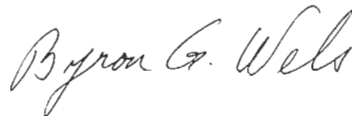
Here are some guidelines: Begin by looking through this issue (and previous issues) to see what sort of thing we publish. Got an idea that seems to fit? Send me a letter and tell me about it. If we haven't just bought an identical story from somebody else, if we haven't just published one like it, You'll probably get a letter back asking you to proceed. Now you write the story, making sure it's double-space typed, with ample borders all around. Be sure your name and address are on the cover sheet. Refer to the figures *sequentially* in the text. In other words, don't talk about Fig. 3 and then Fig. 1.

Your diagrams needn't be perfect, but make 'em legible enough for our artist to re-draw. Use the same format we use in the magazine, and do provide a parts list. We'll need captions as well.

And of course, we need good, clear, black and white photographs. These must be captioned as well, although photographs (as you'll see) do not take figure numbers.

Programs (if they're needed) should be run off on a printer with a new ribbon, as we reproduce yours exactly. Keep the width to three and one-half inches, please, and proofread carefully before sending it in.

After the editors review the article, if you've done a good job, you'll be getting our check in payment for it, and some months later (there's a lot of lead time) you'll be seeing it in print, yes, with *your name* on it! You're an author!



Byron G. Wels
Editor

ComputerDigest is published monthly as an insert in Radio-Electronics magazine by Gernsback Publications, Inc., 500-B Bi-County Blvd., Farmingdale, N.Y. 11735. Second-Class Postage Paid at New York, N.Y. and additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1986 Gernsback Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

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