

## **Suggestions to Editors of AAPG Special Publications**

### **“Helpful hints to accidental editors” prepared by W. D. DeMis**

Congratulations! Your Special Publication has been approved. By virtue of having your proposal approved you have become, perhaps unwittingly, “The Editor” of a volume and must assume the attendant logistical problems. These Suggestions to Editors (STE) are intended to expedite the manufacture of a finished product on time.

Contrary to what you might have thought, most of your time as an editor will not be spent writing scholarly, technical commentary on manuscripts. Without advanced planning, much of your time will be lost “bird-dogging” logistical issues. These STE are intended to anticipate and resolve common problems so you will have more time for science.

These STE do not address rules of grammar. Publications are not delayed because someone missed a declension. These STE are about shepherding people to put ink on paper, and getting a good-quality product to you, the editor, on time. A review of some books on technical writing and editing is included.

### **DELIVERABLE PRODUCT**

As Compilation Editor, your job is to take an active role in your project. You coordinate all aspects of providing finished, technically polished manuscripts to AAPG. “Polished manuscripts” does not mean “Galley Proofs”: there are always little typos or grammatical errors that slip through. The AAPG has copy editors.

Final manuscripts are clean, complete text and figures that you, the editor, have reviewed, refined, and standardized to AAPG’s format. Final manuscripts must be reviewed by at least two technical reviewers, and a big part of your job is to ensure that reviewer’s suggested changes are made, or that the reviewer’s technical protests are addressed and resolved. A final manuscript should be lucidly written and easy for readers to follow. A complete book includes:

**Title, Compilation Editors’ names**  
**Table of contents, chapter titles, authors’ names**  
**Introduction**  
**Chapters and illustrations**

AAPG’s web page gives instructions for preparing a manuscript ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_guidelinetext.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_guidelinetext.cfm)); instructions for preparing electronic manuscript and figures ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_figures.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_figures.cfm)) and instructions for quality control of electronic figures ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_figure\\_quality.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_figure_quality.cfm)).

### **COMMUNICATION**

Early communication will fix little problems before they become big ones. Everything goes through the Compilation Editor. The Compilation Editor needs to clarify manuscript requirements and encourage authors to get their manuscripts in on time. Frequent phone calls are the best communication method. Do not rely on email, even for foreign authors. Call frequently. Remind authors of deadlines using a friendly tone: “Is there anything I can do to help?” Remember, authors are also volunteers.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO AUTHORS**

Take an active role to ensure a quality product by explaining exactly what you expect from authors, and when. Refer authors to the AAPG web page for AAPG’s Instructions to Authors, but write out your own “Suggestions to Authors” that spells out your projects deadlines, first draft manuscript requirements, technical reviewer’s job and timetable, etc. Mail the STA to the authors.

**AAPG's Instructions to Authors are posted at**  
**[http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_guidelinestext.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_guidelinestext.cfm)**

## **ORGANIZATION**

Create a spread sheet including: authors' names, chapter titles, phone and FAX numbers, mailing address, email address, date last contacted, abstract received, first draft and final manuscript received, technical reviewers, extensions granted to individuals, permission to publish, etc. A mock-up of an organizational spreadsheet is included in the Compilation Editor's Tool Kit.

## **BREAK DOWN THE PROCESS INTO SMALLER STEPS**

Require authors to send you:

- Abstract within one month.
- Draft figures with captions in 3 months. (Pencil drawings of figure concepts are ok.)
- Final figures with captions in 4 months.
- First draft in 5 months.
- Final manuscript from authors in 7 months.
- Finished product ready for production 12 months after proposal approval.

Require authors submit an abstract *within one month*. No exceptions. Tell them it is for planning purposes; or for getting bids from publishing companies\_ whatever you like. Make it clear that this abstract will be entirely replaced by their final manuscript. *This is the single most important motivational technique for guaranteeing that authors (1) think about the manuscript they promised, and (2) actually get started.* You can throw away whatever they send you. The abstract is not to inform you. It is to get the authors started.

The same reasoning holds for the figures. By setting early, small deadlines for figures (which always take the most time and effort) you will get authors started on their projects. Check figures for legibility and size, especially those with small or cluttered lettering, and avoid large figures.

Setting small deadlines might not work for you. That is fine. Use what works for your author group. But remember, the Compilation Editor's job (*yours*) is to get the project finished on time. A big part of getting the project finished on time *is getting it started on time.*

**Warning:** Authors that cannot deliver a "throw-away" abstract in 30 days, or conceptual, pencil drawings of figures in 3 months will be your problem writers. Start a list of alternatives. Be prepared to replace recalcitrant authors.

## **USE EXTENSIONS TO YOUR BENEFIT**

Expect 50% of authors to frantically ask for last-minute extensions, irrespective of whatever deadline you set. Plan accordingly. Negotiate deadlines on an author-by-author basis to space out figures and manuscripts and avoid a bottleneck of things all arriving on your desk in one day. Never tell authors your real deadline with AAPG.

## **REVIEW OF FIRST DRAFT**

Require your authors to have a friend review their first draft before sending it to you. The reviewer need not be the world's expert on the paper's topic, *just someone willing to offer suggestions and from whom the author will accept criticism*. The reviewer's job is to: (1) shorten the text, (2) make the text comprehensible, and (3) check for egregious errors (*e.g.*, missing figures, figures upside down, tables missing or incorrectly labeled, missing pages, etc.).

## **FIRST DRAFT: 5 MONTHS**

Require a first draft in 5 months. First draft should include paper copies of text and figures, and a text on diskette. This deadline might seem short, but there is a lot to do in the production

cycle. Also, human nature is such that most authors will not start writing until they have an immediate deadline; irrespective of whatever deadline you set (it could be 3 years from now...).

### **EDITING**

Your job as Compilation Editor is to ensure a lucid, flowing, technically sound book that bespeaks of your artistry as editor. Many first drafts you receive will be long and verbose. There are no hard rules about editing technical writing except for these two: (1) shorten the text, and (2) sacrifice everything for clarity of meaning. Cut whole paragraphs or pages that are redundant. Remove rambling redundancies, passive voice, excessive jargon, and techno buzzwords.

Fix major technical gaffs as you see them, but remember the technical reviewers have a job also.

### **AUTHOR'S APPROVAL**

Mail, email, or FAX your "suggested changes" back to the authors for their approval. Expect very hurt feelings if you do not get author's approval of your changes before you publish them. Expect hurt feeling from some authors even if you do present your changes as "suggestions."

### **TECHNICAL REVIEWERS**

Mail the manuscript (after your changes have been approved) to at least 2 technical reviewers outside your author group, and to the AAPG. The AAPG might help seek reviewers, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the editor to obtain reviews.

Have all reviews sent back to you, the Compilation Editor, so you can referee any technical issues. Then send the reviews and annotated manuscripts back to the authors so they can make any changes.

The final manuscripts will come back to you, the Compilation Editor—not to AAPG. Keep a copy of the reviewer's comments and double-check the author's corrections on the final manuscripts. You, the Compilation Editor, must ensure that the authors have made the reviewer's changes to the manuscript or addressed the reviewer's questions.

Once you are sure the author has made the requested changes, mail the final manuscript to AAPG.

### **ELECTRONIC FIGURES**

([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_figures\\_quality.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_figures_quality.cfm))

Figures will make your book. Figures are also the source of most heartaches. Electronic figures are the biggest problem of all.

Make sure authors follow AAPG software standards. To do this, call the authors in the second month and ask them: "Are you following the AAPG's software standards for figures?" (Expect 50% of the authors will say no even if you have personally mailed the software guidelines to them 3 times.)

**Warning #1:** Complex color figures on a computer screen look very different when printed in a book. Ask authors to print out their computer figures, swallow hard, and look at what they have in their hand. Computer figures printed in a book will not look any better than a hard copy printed from the average HP printer. Sending electronic figures directly to the publisher will not improve the quality.

**Warning #2:** Neither the publisher nor AAPG will fix bad electronic figures. **AAPG's policy is that the publisher will spend no more than 15 minutes formatting each figure.** After 15 minutes of unsuccessfully fiddling with a figure, **the publisher will print the figure *as is* and scan it into the manuscript.**

### **SLOPPY WORK**

About 10 or 20% of the papers you receive will be sloppy—nothing more than a rambling, redundant, rough draft with missing figures and references. It will be obvious that no one, not even the author, so much as skimmed the manuscript before dumping it on you. Call these authors and ask them to clean up the paper. Some authors will refuse. Thank the author for his or her “wonderful contribution.” Spend a sleepless night cleaning it up, or exclude the material and its author from the publication. Ask yourself the eternal editor’s question: “why did I volunteer to do this?”

### **HINTS ON EDITING**

Below are some points to consider:

#### **TECHNICAL CONTENT**

- Do the data and descriptions come before the interpretation? Or are they mixed together?
- Does the writer present a reasonable argument that logically walks the reader to the paper’s conclusion? Or is the reader left to decipher the logic?
- Are interpretations separate from descriptions? **Warning:** almost all sequence stratigraphic terms (*e.g.*, “low-stand fan,” “high-stand systems tract”) are interpretations, *not* descriptions. (It is an interpretation that a fan was deposited during a sealevel “low-stand.”)
- Are any previous papers on the topic not referenced?

#### **THOROUGHNESS**

- Do the headings make sense? Are they consistent with the other chapters?
- Do any of the chapters repeat the same points?
- Are Figures referred to in the body of the paper in correct order (*i.e.*, figure 1 is first, followed by Figure 2, etc.)?

#### **STYLE**

- Make the book readable. Readability does not mean “dumbing down” the science. It means making the text clear. Ersatz writing and obfuscation are not erudition.

#### **FORMAT**

- Make sure the authors follow AAPG format for references and citations ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_guidelinestext.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_guidelinestext.cfm)).

#### **GRAMMAR**

Do not obsess about grammar, but do fix obvious errors to reduce proofreading expenses.

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Books on technical writing and editing are as common as diet books. Most are college textbooks. By time you finish reading them, your deadline will be past. Below are listed a few short books that may be helpful. You might find a better one at your local bookstore.

*The Elements of Style* (3rd ed., by William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White, 1979, McMillan, New York; 85 p.). This little book is ‘the little book.’ It is a must-read. The book’s size underscores a message all authors should memorize: “Be Clear. Be Brief.” Ironically, the book’s chapter on style is its only weak point. Literary devices like ambiguity of meaning work fine for

romance and mystery novels, but are forbidden in scientific writing. The book's audience is College English Composition classes.

*Geowriting* (5th edition, by Robert L. Bates, M.D. Adkins-Heljeson, R. C. Buchanan, 1995; Am. Geol. Institute, Alexandria, Va., 134 p.). A handy book on every aspect of writing and editing for any geoscience journal. A quick read. What the book has in breath, it lacks in depth. It does not spell out the predictable problems and human foibles you will encounter as a Compilation Editor.

*Writing in Earth Science* (by Robert L. Bates, 1988, American Geological Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, 50 p.). A good, short book on technical writing for earth scientists.

*Suggestions to Authors of the Reports of the United States Geological Survey* (7th ed., revised and edited by Wallace R. Hansen, 1991, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 289 p.). You probably read parts of this book when you were in College or Graduate school. The book is a long and exhaustive document (imagine that... for a government publication!). The section on style is the most important, but this is a reference book, and it is dry as dust.

## CHECKLIST

Below is the sequence and approximate deadlines for some important events in the weeks and months after you have received your acceptance notice. Check off items as you go.

### **First week after receiving acceptance letter**

- Call Paula Sillman at AAPG HQ. Find out who is tracking your manuscript.
- Call all contributing authors. Congratulate them. Tell them the clock has started (All contributing authors should be committed in advance.)
- Create the spread sheet including: author's names, contact information, topic or chapter titles, etc. Read the AAPG's "Instructions to Authors" ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs\\_guidelines.cfm](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/pubs_guidelines.cfm))
- Write and mail your own "Suggestions to Authors."

### **First Month**

- Require an abstract from each chapter author *in one month*
- Ask authors start the permission-to-publish process, if needed. Authors can use their "throw-away" abstract for a corporate approval. AAPG has a permission-to-publish form on their web page for permission from Journals. ([http://www.aapg.org/pubs/print\\_permit.pdf](http://www.aapg.org/pubs/print_permit.pdf))

### **Second Month**

- Make sure authors are following the AAPG standards for text and figures. Do this by calling them and asking them: "Are you following the AAPG standards?"

### **Third & Fourth Month**

- Call authors. Check on their progress. Remind them about the up-coming deadline for figures and text.
- Review draft and final figures.

### **Fifth Month: First Draft Due!**

- Expect requests for extensions. Negotiate as needed. Consider dropping authors at this point.
- Edit the manuscripts you get.
- Mail, e-mail, or FAX your "suggested changes" to the author for their approval.
- After author has approved your changes, mail the manuscript to 1 or 2 reviewers outside your author group, and to the AAPG.
- Call reviewers about getting manuscripts back on time.

### **Sixth Month**

- Call reviewers about manuscripts again.
- Receive manuscript reviews. Referee technical issues.
- Mail reviews back to authors for their changes.
- Edit late, first draft manuscripts. Mail suggested changes back to authors, etc.
- Call authors that still have not delivered a first draft. Give recalcitrant authors a final deadline.

### **Seventh Month**

- Receive from the authors their revised, refereed, final manuscripts and figures, and send them to AAPG.
- MAKE SURE THE AUTHORS HAVE MADE THE REQUIRED CHANGES ON THE FINAL MANUSCRIPTS.**

### **Eighth to Twelfth Months**

By now you should be juggling multiple papers, in various stages of preparation. Your Spread Sheet and telephone will save you. You will need the five months because a lot of manuscripts will be late, and a lot of figures will need more work, etc. *This is where anticipating human nature to procrastinate will keep your publication on time.*

- Write an introduction, create table of contents.
- Review galley proofs of chapters and figures by you and your authors.