

# KEEPING IT SIMPLE

I HAVE BEEN WRITING technical research papers long enough for it to be second nature. A few years ago I wrote my first article for *Oceanography*, and I found it difficult. In retrospect, it should have been more difficult. I could have done a better job.

As editor, I have been dealing with colleagues (like me) experienced with writing technical papers, but not *Oceanography* articles. The objective for *Oceanography* is to publish succinct papers that are interesting and comprehensible to a range of ocean scientists. Here are some hints.

**Content**—Anything dealing with the field of oceanography is possibly relevant—science results, new technology, research programs, history of the field, thoughtful opinions. The key is that content be intrinsically interesting to a broad audience. Interdisciplinary science is a relatively easy sell. Disciplinary science should be framed in such a manner that understanding, appreciation, and interest for the article are easily reached by readers from other disciplines.

**Style**—We do not publish technical research papers, so natural instincts of scientific journey(wo)men must be stifled. For most papers, Methods and Results information should be minimized (instead, cite technical research papers). The emphasis should be placed on ideas typically found in Introduction, Background, and Discussion sections. Jargon and acronyms should be infrequent, and explained. The routine formats for article construction (e.g., units, abbreviations, references) are included on the mailing cover of every issue.

**Length**—We expect printed articles to be about seven pages in length. With figures and references, this translates into about 12 pages of DOUBLE-SPACED text. This length must be fully recognized at embryonic stages of article development. Twenty-five-page articles that are cut to 12 pages look like stumps, not well developed ideas. Authors, not reviewers or editors, should make the reductions. The key is to start with a limited number of points that can be properly developed in 12 pages.

**Figures and Tables**—Each of these should have a specific message that is easily recognized. Elaborate and busy presentations of data are not relevant to *Oceanography*. Captions are extremely important, and should tell the full story of the figure or table. Four or five figures/tables are the proper amount for an article. Labeling them as subfigures (e.g., Fig. 2a, 2b, 2c . . .) does not give license for inclusion of infinite figures. More than five is possible, but the final length limit for the article is still seven pages. And remember that color graphics are available for *Oceanography* articles.

The objective should be publication of an interesting and comprehensible article. Give a rough draft to a friend (even a nonscientist) for evaluation. If you get yawns or confused facial expressions, try some revisions. Get to your point quickly and forcefully, and above all else, keep it simple!

—Chuck Nittrouer



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