

Tips for writing *OceanBights* articles

We put much effort into our small magazine, *OceanBights*. We also hope that if your article passes *OceanBight's* muster, it will be republished elsewhere. Here are some tips to make articles more attractive, effective and ease editing. This is also the procedure I use when writing an article and to satisfy the two goals of the magazine described below.

First, realize that the magazine is a tool to promote the Society. We want to attract professional scientists to work with us, increase membership among the general public, and make a good presentation to potential funders. These are sometimes conflicting goals but often complementary. For example, potential funders may rely on the recommendations of scientists.

- Regarding scientists, everything we write about must be factually correct and written with insight and understanding. There can be no hyperbole or guessing if we are to be taken seriously.
- Regarding the general public, the articles must be interesting, substantive, and easy to read and should have a human angle.
- Regarding potential funders, we want to make our name recognizable and show them we have the resources and capabilities to execute projects we propose.

Second, the magazine is where we also document important Society activities in a readable format. In this way, potential auditors can easily verify that the Society follows its charter. This latter goal is accomplished with little effort but is an important aspect of the magazine.

Our articles are to be unique and provide value in that someone should not be able to reproduce the article's intellectual content with a 15-minute web search. To achieve the primary goal, I have developed the following procedure that others may find useful. The procedure involves interviews with people as that provides unique content and creates a close association between CMS and the interviewee.

1. Choose a topic(s) that interests you. This is the most important step!
2. Do a web search to obtain familiarity with the current state of your topic, including people and organizations that are involved and can be talked with.
3. Outline your topic
 - a. Why is it important or interesting?
 - b. What do you want to learn?
 - c. What do you want to inform others about?
4. Choose people to talk with and prepare questions for your interview to address the above.

5. Conduct the interviews. In person is best (with photographs), phone conversation is second best and e-mail is acceptable. Actually meeting someone makes the most indelible impression on them and you.
6. Do further thinking, reading and revisit (3).
7. Clarify and expand your knowledge by revisiting (via e-mail or phone) the interviewees after you have digested the content of the first contact.
8. Outline the article
 - a. Make a logical sequence structure related to (3) above
9. Write the draft.
 - a. Check facts as they are written
 - b. Check concepts by cross-referencing independent information

The finished article should flow smoothly (in both word crafting and substance). A reader's thoughts should not be interrupted with bad grammar, inconsistencies, or implicitly posed and unanswered questions. The article should be coherent and flow seamlessly from one paragraph to the next.

Below are some particular items that will enhance articles.

We like (need) photographs of people, wildlife or interesting scenes and equipment. They brighten the magazine, ease the layout, emphasize points and bring a human touch to the science. Best to take high-resolution images yourself, but if you grab one from the web, make sure you have permission to publish it as well as get the appropriate credit wording.

Using numbers for quantification is usually a good technique but too much detail (as in too much precision, e.g. 7.883308383 vs 8) is bad. Keep numbers simple enough to make your point. Also, do not mix units. For example do not use lbs and later use kg. Mixed units either diverts the reader's attention if he does the conversion; or, he ignores or does not understand what you are trying to communicate. If the facts you obtain are in different units of measure, simply do the conversion for the reader. That adds value to your article.

Avoid controversial science. We only want to report on scientific results that have already been vetted by the science community, i.e., appeared in the conventional scientific literature. Ask your interviewee if the results have been published or read their CV.

Address or avoid the implicitly-posed questions. An implicitly-posed question is a statement, that when read immediately conjures a question in the reader's mind that is not answered, and shifts the reader's attention from the article to the question. Here is a trite example: "He started counting tuna but switched to tagging marlin." The unanswered question is: why did he switch to marlin? This can be handled by avoiding the leading phrase, or answering the question.

Finally, if possible and appropriate, reference other *OceanBights* articles when possible. You should think of all the issues as one living, expanding document. Referencing past articles enables those articles to remain effective and increases their audience long after they were published. Also, one day we hope to concatenate all articles and hyperlink them, using the internal references.