

Writing for Publication — It's Not Rocket Science (Even if You Are Writing About Rocket Science!)

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Abstract

Potential authors have interesting projects or technical expertise to share with other Amateur Radio operators, but they are reluctant to write an article for publication. Some authors may feel intimidated by the prospect of submitting an article, while others see writing as time away from developing another project. Everyone has a story about something they have done, and those stories can be fascinating, but only if they are shared with others.

This presentation describes the basic steps involved in writing an article for publication. With a clear set of guidelines, more authors will be willing to take on the task of writing about their work and sharing their knowledge.

Who Can Write an Article?

Just about anyone can write an article for publication. Most of the material *QST* and *QEX* publish is written by radio amateurs who are not professional writers. In fact, many have never had an article published before! The main qualification we require of authors is that they know their topic.

It's easier to write for us than you might think. While a well-written submission has a better chance for acceptance, your work doesn't have to be letter perfect. Pick a topic about which you're passionate, and start writing.

Authors are compensated for published articles at the rate of \$50.00 per published page or part thereof for *QEX* articles. The rate for *QST* articles is \$65 per published page. The number of magazine pages that your article occupies will depend on such factors as the number of

illustrations, equations, and the space restrictions of each issue. Payment is made on publication. No compensation is given for published letters.

Where Do I Begin?

Well, at the beginning, if possible! In this presentation we will focus on writing about a project of some type, whether it be a piece of station equipment, an accessory, or a circuit that can form the building block of a larger project. Of course there are other types of articles you may want to write. Some are gifted teachers, and they may want to share their knowledge of some technical topic or explain some fine point of theory. You may even have a nontechnical story to tell. I hope many of the suggestions in this presentation will be helpful for those who want to write any kind of article.

When you start designing a new project, you keep a notebook, don't you? Your notebook forms the basis for your design work. Document what works and what doesn't. Document any changes to your plan or changes to the circuit as you go. Document any circuit adjustments and calibration procedures.

Take a few pictures during the construction process, so you will have a photographic record as well as the written record in your notebook. If possible use a digital camera. Set it to the highest resolution possible. We need at least 300 dots per inch at the printed size.

You will probably also want to make some notes about the basic operating procedures for your circuit/project. If you are at all like me, sometime in the future you will need to know this information, and you won't remember.

There are several possible starting points for writing your article. The first one is when you have a working project, and you are ready to share it with your fellow hams. Another possible time to start writing is when you have hit a snag and don't know what else to try. You may have succeeded in getting part of your circuit to work, or in developing a new circuit as part of your project, but now you are stuck. What next? It may be that someone else has been trying a similar circuit, or might know how to go one step farther.

There are many possible ways to publish your article. You may be posting information to a discussion group or e-mail reflector about your project, your progress, problems, or even just describing what didn't work. In this article we will focus on writing for publication in *QST* or *QEX*, although there are other publishers that you might want to consider.

Your notebook now provides the basic information for writing about your project, in any case. Simply "translate" your notes into sentences and paragraphs to explain your main points. Don't worry if you can't string the words in perfect grammatical form. That's why you will have an editor. (More on this later.)

Often, the most difficult step in writing is to put the first paragraph on paper or keyboard. Don't over-think the process. Just follow your notes and describe what you set out to build, what features it will have and why others may be interested. You will come back and revise your text later. For now, just type your story.

When you think you have most of the details documented, it is time to review your work. I find that it is often helpful to read your work out loud. You don't have to be an expert grammarian to notice if a sentence doesn't sound right. Revise the wording when you stumble over something. It can also be helpful to ask a friend to read your work at this stage. It would be helpful if they are familiar with your project, but that isn't critical.

Pay attention to the organization of your

thoughts at this point. Have you introduced the topics in a logical order? Did you add something later that would help your readers' understanding of an earlier point? Perhaps that topic needs to come first. Also pay attention to run-on sentences and the length of your paragraphs. Many writers tend to string several thoughts together into one long sentence. It is nearly always better to break those into two or three shorter sentences. Paragraphs should cover a single point. Again, writers often tend to string sentences together into very long paragraphs. A paragraph break is a time to stop and take a breath. Without giving you a formula, if a paragraph runs to more than 8 or 10 sentences, it is almost certainly too long. There has probably been a shift in thought or topic somewhere in there, and you can use that as a point to break to a new paragraph.

After you think you have completed the article, set it aside for a day or so. Then read over the manuscript one more time, and make any revisions that come to mind. Now is the time to correct errors such as incomplete and run-on sentences, and any other mistakes that you spot. You might even want to ask a ham friend to read the manuscript and comment on it.

The ARRL Publication Process

You may be wondering whether you should write an article for *QST*, or if *QEX* would be a better forum for your ideas. How can you decide on a publication to which you should submit your article? In the case of ARRL publications, let us decide that. Any technical article that is submitted to either *QST* or *QEX* will be reviewed by a team of technical editors and some of our Technical Advisors with expertise in the field your article covers. During this review, we will consider the suitability of your article for any of our publications, including *QST*, *QEX*, *NCJ*, a book, such as *The ARRL Antenna Book* or *The ARRL Handbook*. Sometimes we will even decide that an article would be best presented as a Web story. So, don't worry about selecting the right publication for your article. Our editorial review team will make that decision.

There is one very important point about submitting an article for publication. Do not submit your article to two or three different publishers at the same time. That is a sure way to have your article turned down for publication!

After our editorial review team decides how to best use your article (or in some cases that we cannot use the article) you will be notified. Assuming we accept your article for publication, you will also receive a Publications Release Form. Please complete that release form and sign it as requested and return it to Publications Coordinator, Maty Weinberg, KB1EIB. After Maty has received your release form, she will notify the appropriate editors. When we are able to schedule your article for publication, your assigned editor will contact you.

In the case of a *QEX* article, I will let you know the issue in which I plan to use your article. If there are any questions during the editing process, we will contact you. (I nearly always send a copy of the edited manuscript, and ask my authors to review that manuscript and provide any feedback about errors or necessary corrections and changes. Other editors may or may not do something similar.) If there are complex schematic diagrams or other drawings, we will often send you PDF files of those drawings for review. When the actual page layout work has gone through several revisions, we will send you a PDF file of the "Final" page layout. At that stage you will see the graphics placed on the page, along with the text of your article. We are nearly ready to go to the printer now, but this is an opportunity to correct any errors or other problems that may have crept into the article. Extensive changes are difficult, but we want to correct any errors. That's it. Your article is part of the set of files we send to the printer, and your article shows up in the pages of the next issue of *QST/QEX/NCJ* or other publication!

What Do I Submit?

Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and left-justified (ragged right margin) formatted for 8.5 by 11 inch paper. Leave at least a 0.5 inch

margin at each edge of the paper. Every page should have a page number, and a header at the top. The header should include the author's last name, and the first few words of the title. For example: "Brown: Signals, Samples...."

Use standard abbreviations where possible. Use other abbreviations and acronyms only after they first have been spelled out. For example: infinite impulse response (IIR).

In accordance with the IEEE standard, electrical units are capitalized when abbreviated, and appear in lower case when spelled out. For example: "0.2 F" or "0.2 farads." Notice that there is a space between the number and its unit. Either US Standard or metric length units are acceptable. Just be consistent.

When preparing the manuscript on a computer, use the standard character set. Place any characters unavailable in the character set after a dollar sign. For example: \$lambda. Place footnote references in the text as superscript numerals. Put the footnotes and bibliographical information at the end of the manuscript. Do not "hide" your footnotes by using your word processor's footnote feature. Just insert the reference numbers in the text and place the text of the notes (with numbers) at the end of the file. Double-check all of your references to be sure they are correct. Include complete reference information, such as the author's name, book or article title, publisher's name and address, date of publication and page numbers.

Label all figures with a number and place these at the end of the manuscript. Do not insert them in the text proper, and do not put the captions directly on the figures. Provide a list of figures by number, along with their captions, at the end of the manuscript. Be sure that each figure or table has a text reference, such as "See Figure 4," or "as shown in Table 3."

Sketches or schematic diagrams you supply should be as clear as possible so our technical illustrator can work directly from them. We do not require professional line drawings from you. We can use illustrations that are already in

electronic form, such as .TIFF format. Or, we can redraw your figures, as long as their content is clear. Current issues illustrate the symbols and component identifications used in our drawings.

We prefer to receive submitted articles via e-mail. Send your article to **qex@arrl.org** or **qst@arrl.org**. Attach one or more text files, plus any graphics and photo files. You can ZIP everything into one file, or break it into several pieces. If you are sending one article in several e-mail files, just tell us that in the body of the e-mail message. "Here is file 1 of 3 for How to Smoke an IC" will tell us to expect 2 more files.

If you are unable to submit your article by e-mail, we will accept submissions via US Mail. Please put all of the files associated with your article onto a CD data disk, and mail that with a printed copy of your article, in that case.

We use Microsoft Word for our editing work, so we prefer to receive the text of your article as a Word file. We can, however, deal with files from most Word processors. If in doubt, save your file in .rtf (rich text file) format. Send graphics and photos as .jpg, .gif or .bmp files. We can also generally work with other "standard format" graphics files.

How Can I Help You?

Many authors seem to believe that by formatting the pages of their manuscript to look like a *QST* or *QEX* printed page, they will save us the trouble of having to lay out their article. Nothing could be further from the truth! ARRL's Production Department creates the final layout for our publications using professional page layout software. We currently use Adobe *InDesign* for this work.

When you embed graphics files and other "objects" into your word processor file, we will have to remove those items during the editing process. In addition, when you embed a photo into the document, we cannot create a high resolution image by copying the photo and saving it as a separate file. We really need the highest quality images you can provide for publication, and pulling them out of a Word file

just doesn't work.

Please do not use any special features of your word processor, such as inserting footnotes, automatically numbering Figures, Equations, Tables and so on. While that can be a neat way to keep track of the numbers, and even renumbering when you move text around, it won't be compatible with our page layout process. If you want to use these features to create your article, please replace the "field" information with plain numbers before submitting your article.

I Can't Wait to See My Article in Print!

Now comes the hard part. You have submitted your article for publication, and hope to have an answer later today. We will try to acknowledge receipt of your article the day it arrives, or at least within a couple of days. We won't have an answer for you about acceptance of your article for publication for several weeks.

The anticipation becomes even greater after you receive that acceptance letter and sign and return your Publications Release form. When will my article be scheduled? When will I hear from my editor? What if I don't hear from them for several more weeks? Will they forget about my article?

Briefly, Be patient! I know it can be difficult, but we may have other things going on, other articles to edit, a magazine to produce. Certainly, you should not be afraid to contact us and ask questions.

After all your patience, there doesn't seem to be any way around an absolute panic at the end. As we near the end of the production cycle for the issue that will include your article, expect the number of e-mails or phone calls to increase. Expect to see a PDF of the final page layout and not have nearly enough time in which to reply. Eventually, you will be able to proudly hold up that issue of *QST* or *QEX* and show all your friends the article you wrote!