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## Geoscience Publication: Learning to Write Well is Worth the Effort

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Writing is a critical skill for petroleum geoscientists as the “great crew change” occurs. Information cannot be preserved through oral tradition alone—information must be available indefinitely because of the long shelf life of geologic data. Writing for publication in scientific journals and other media is essential to ensuring that geoscience passes coherently from one generation to the next and that the science itself is preserved.

Geoscientists can publish their scientific work more easily by considering the basic aspects of writing, such as why writing is important, how a manuscript is prepared, and how the publishing process works. Authors can take numerous steps to improve their own writing. Experience and logic suggest that carefully preparing abstracts and outlines makes manuscript development less arduous because the content will be well-organized from the outset. Writing instruction can help inexperienced and insecure writers focus their manuscripts, develop a readable format, adhere to journal practices and guidelines, and optimally present their methods, data, results, and conclusions with appropriate illustrations and references. Practice also helps, and authors who take advantage of reviews by colleagues not involved in their studies receive additional crucial feedback about points of confusion or small errors that could result in a paper’s rejection at peer review. Experienced authors who serve as manuscript reviewers can learn to improve their own writing. As geoscientists find their way to publishing in print and online, the value of impartial reviews remains high. Thorough reviews help authors clarify text, improve organization, and engage readers.

Readers seek the three “Cs” in the written word: clarity, conciseness, and consistency. These elements make a manuscript convincing to reviewers and more likely to be published; good writers build these elements into their work. Even beyond publication, honed communication skills are vital to career success in just about any field. Geoscience students have many academic requirements, so devoting precious time to a writing course might not be a viable proposal. However, taking time to write and learning to write well are essential to becoming a well-rounded geoscientist who can convincingly present and defend his or her work.

The need to write well for publication extends beyond scientific journals. As geoscientists communicate globally using the Internet, communication standards for acceptable writing for the Web will probably change more rapidly than journal standards because of the constantly changing Web environment. Authors will need to consider the newer media and the more varied audiences. Short sentences and use of keywords to improve searchability are crucial to effective writing for the Web. Avoidance of jargon is essential for communicating with readers who might not be native English speakers and who might be reading outside their usual discipline. Language purists might blanch at sentence fragments and bulleted lists, but these are ways to convey information to

readers who might scan a Web page for only a few seconds before moving on to a Web page that is easier to digest.

As both new and experienced geoscientists find their way to publishing in print and online—and readers struggle with the enormous volume of material available to them—it is critical that authors do their utmost to serve readers with excellent writing.