



Geowriting, Fifth Revised Edition, edited by R.L. Bates, M.D. Adkins-Heljeson, and R.C. Buchanan, 2004, American Geological Institute, Alexandria, Virginia, paperback, 100 p., USD 14.95; Member Society Price, USD 11.96, ISBN 0-922152-14-4.

Miguel de Cervantes, a 16th century Spanish writer, once wrote, “The pen is the tongue of the mind.” As the editors of *Geowriting* aptly recognize, this eloquent statement is especially true for scientists—the work of a scientist is not complete until the results have been published. The fifth edition of *Geowriting* has been revised to take into account technological advances in the writing process and is intended to serve as “an introduction to writing, editing, and printing in earth science” (p. vi). It is within this context that I evaluate *Geowriting*.

The guide features 17 short chapters that range in content from writing preparation to editing and printing a manuscript. At the end of each chapter is a succinct, boxed summary of key points covered. Two research tools are appended: a list of references by subject for further information and a guide to the periodicals in the earth sciences. The editors of *Geowriting* are explicit that the guide should serve as a resource for the beginner editor and students writing for publication. Even with this audience in mind, the superficial nature of the manual proved annoyingly vague at times. Rules and regulations for writing and preparing manuscripts vary from subdiscipline to subdiscipline within the earth sciences, and the editors were forced into a perfunctory review of a large and complex field.

The first six chapters focus on the process of writing, in other words, what should be put in a manuscript and how one should begin this process. Chapter Six, “Abstracting the Essence,” delves into the art of writing an abstract, a seemingly simple task but one that is repeatedly performed incorrectly, even by professionals. For instance, many writers mistakenly assert that “so and so will be discussed” in their abstract, instead of summarizing and stating what was actually found. Even if one is familiar with writing for publication, it would serve well to review this chapter.

Preparing graphics for presentation, proofreading, and editing constitute the heart of the remaining chapters. Although *Geowriting* was revised in 2004, Chapter 7, which describes how to create figures, is quite archaic. Programs that now dominate graphic art, such as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, receive no mention. Directions on how to scale images manually and submit hard copies of handmade figures, photographs, and manuscripts are no longer needed in the digital world that now

reigns supreme. Three years have passed since the last revision, which is equivalent to 10 or 20 years in our accelerated digital world, and another revision is needed. While the technological aspects of figure making need updating, the remaining chapters on editing and proofreading provide sound advice (although in future revisions care should be taken to avoid typesetting mistakes). A summary list of proofreading symbols accompanies Chapter 11, “Editing and Proofreading,” and provides a helpful reference for those unfamiliar with this code. Chapter 12, “Editing in Style,” targets those who find themselves, perhaps unwillingly, as new editors. A short list of style questions is included (i.e., do you use an apostrophe in “1970s” or hyphenate “cooperate”? No, to both questions).

Ultimately, writing can only be improved with practice and knowledge, or as Jeffery A. Carver has said, “Practice, practice, practice writing. Writing is a craft that requires both talent and acquired skills. You learn by doing, by making mistakes and then seeing where you went wrong” (<http://www.starrigger.net/advice.htm>). *Geowriting* provides an easily accessible resource to help new science writers practice their craft and avoid common mistakes. The guide succeeds as an introduction to scientific writing; however, if one is even distantly familiar with publishing and writing, *Geowriting* lacks depth. Perhaps the most useful sections for more experienced writers are the Reference Shelf for digging deeper into subjects as varied as copyright laws and scientific names, and the comprehensive list of journals in the earth sciences (beware, however, as this information has likely changed since it was published in 2004). For each journal, a list of relevant information is included, such as the ISSN number, who is currently editing and publishing the journal, address, telephone and circulation numbers, subscription cost, and a blurb on typical journal content. Overall, *Geowriting* is a well-written and well-organized introduction to writing, editing, and printing in the earth sciences.

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