

## Some Gems from Geology

In the spirit of *Science Editor's* continuing expansion into scientific fields other than biology and medicine, I call these items from the earth sciences to your attention.

Hugh Hay-Roe's Geologic Column pieces are to *Geotimes* (the news magazine of the American Geological Institute) what Views Afield and Net Results are to *Science Editor*. Now a senior vice president for exploration and development at a Houston energy firm, Hay-Roe pens six of these columns each year, covering topics ranging from the use of tables and illustrations to improving editor-staff interaction. Each column includes reader-submitted quips and observations in the mailbag section, and the "tip of the month" segment offers useful refresher lessons. Below, just as in rock strata, the most recent items are above the older ones.

### **Hay-Roe H. The thoughtful writer.** **Geotimes 2001 Apr;46(4):52.**

Filled with examples from the geology literature, this is partly a call for precise word choice and partly a reminder to put the reader's needs first. Highly prescriptive, this column explores the concept of information density and its role in conveying knowledge to the reader efficiently. Hay-Roe sums it up nicely: "Geowriters addicted to demonstrating their competence by laying on the technical jargon should *lower* the density of their prose, especially when trying to reach a broad audience." He also lists several Web sites useful in all fields of science editing; editors raised on Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* and "language freaks of all types" will appreciate Hay-Roe's compilation.

### **Hay-Roe H. Before you write—outline!** **Geotimes 2000 Jul;45(7):68.**

From saving time in publication planning to assisting writers in making their copy more editor-friendly, the outline is a valuable tool. Hay-Roe describes the advantages of using both topic and informative expanded outlines. For oral presentations, outlines can remove the temptation to read to (and possibly sedate) audiences. "Skeletal outlines" of proposals can be made more effective and informative by avoiding "clueless headings" that reveal nothing, such as "Introduction", "Background", and "Scope of Proposed Project".

### **Hay-Roe H. Supervisory editing.** **Geotimes 1998 Sep;43(9):52.**

Editors may occasionally agree with Hay-Roe that editing others' writing is not much better than "strolling barefoot on spiky sea urchins". However, he does provide practical recommendations for avoiding some common editor-writer pitfalls. Suggestions include holding planning sessions, putting main ideas first in copy, requesting that writers pre-edit their own work, and making only justifiable style changes.

### **Hay-Roe H. Systematic editing.** **Geotimes 1998 Jan;43(1):52.**

Would waxing your collision-damaged car be your priority, Hay-Roe asks, or would you focus on more critical damage control? Hay-Roe points out the necessity of well-organized text and its precedence over stylebook editing, consistency of format, and simple proofreading. This column presents a series of questions that editors can ask themselves about copy they work on to ensure that meeting the reader's needs is paramount.

### **Bates RL, Adkins-Heljeson MD, Buchanan RC, editors. Geowriting: a guide to writing, editing, and printing in earth science. Fifth ed. Alexandria (VA): American Geological Institute; 1995. 138 p.**

"Read proof as if petting a porcupine: very, very carefully." In geology, just as in other sciences, great care must be taken when editing text. The editors of *Geowriting* emphasize commonly known editing rules—but in an earth-science framework. The "Hyphen Hassles" section is of particular interest: "If the first half of a term such as *dihexagonal-dipyramidal* appears at the end of a line, it may very well show up as *dihexa-gonaldipyramidal*." The book notes that paleontologists can use CSE (*Scientific Style and Format*) style in their work, whereas *Geotimes* uses Associated Press style. To bring points home to readers, the book's editors refer to the process that *Geowriting's* copy went through before publication. Included is a list of style questions the editors used to ensure consistency—worth pondering, regardless of which science you work with.

Like geology, editing rocks—but don't take it for granite.