

The CQ Magazine Writer's Guide

Writing Articles for CQ or Let Your Fingers Do The Talking

BY RICH MOSESON, W2VU

Amateur radio has a rich tradition of hams sharing their knowledge and experience with each other, both on the air and through the pages of ham radio magazines. We invite you to carry on that tradition by writing for CQ.

CQ Mission Statement

When the first issue of CQ magazine was published in January, 1945, the editors set forth a mission statement that remains as valid today as it was more than a half-century ago. Our goal as writers and editors is to produce a magazine each month that hits the target set up by our founders. The original -- and current -- mission statement for CQ follows:

This, then, is the *raison d'être* for CQ -- a magazine for the radio amateur, with a particular invitation to the newcomer. It should not, however, be inferred that we shall confine ourselves to the ABC's of ham radio. We visualize CQ as a magazine that will stick with the ham long after the parts of his first rig are dust-laden in the junk-box, and as a monthly refresher course for the old timer. While placing some emphasis on the elementary, we are still under obligation to carry through with articles on modern techniques and apparatus. Similarly, we shall follow up tradition (with which every ham must be familiar) with all the vital news of amateur radio today and tomorrow.,

In radio transmissions, the letters "CQ" have somewhat different meanings in the commercial and amateur fields. With commercial wireless, "CQ" is the nature of a general call announcing a broadcast. In ham radio, it is most often a friendly invitation to get together and rag-chew. As a publication, CQ will similarly play a dual role -- in the broadcast sense as a disseminator of what one should know to make the most out of ham radio, and in the less formal character as your own magazine, welcoming criticism as well as bouquets, and, above all, the cordial exchange of ideas that is so vital a part of ham radio on the air.

The primary purpose of writing an article is to communicate an idea and to exchange the author's experience or accomplishment for the reader's time. Therefore, whatever is published or written should be worth the time it takes to read it. Every article passes through four very important sets of hands -- the author's, the editor's, the art director's, and -- most importantly -- the reader's. If the first three do their jobs well, then all the reader needs to do is relax, read, enjoy and learn.

Your main job as an author is to write an article that communicates your ideas clearly, concisely, and accurately. You also want to make the article interesting. A magazine isn't a textbook and no article is required reading. So your first job is to capture -- and hold onto -- the reader's attention. Your next challenge is to make sure you're neither talking down to the readers nor writing "over their heads."

Every successful writer knows his/her audience and writes to and for that audience. CQ's audience is a broad spectrum of people with a shared interest in ham radio (see our Mission Statement). They come from all walks of life and have technical knowledge ranging from nearly nothing to leading edge. In addition, ham radio has many specialty areas, so even a longtime ham with significant experience in one area may be a complete "newbie" in another. What this means is that you should not assume that every reader will bring a particular level of prior knowledge to your article's topic. Because of this, you should try to explain all concepts and define all terminology as you write. This will provide a roadmap for the newcomer and assure the old-timer that you know what you're talking about well enough to explain it to someone who doesn't.

Structuring Your Article

While there's no set "formula" for CQ's articles, there is a certain structure that is followed by most successful writers. It's the same basic outline used by teachers in a classroom: "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you've told them."

Let's get more specific. First there is a form of introduction. The introduction is some method of defining the objective or problem to be solved by the article. It establishes the need and the method of satisfying the need. This is also where you need to grab the reader's attention, so it's vital to keep this section interesting. Tell a story that shows why the reader should care about the widget you've written about. Think of yourself sitting around a table at a club meeting, telling a group of fellow hams about your trip, construction project, etc. You've got to keep their interest or they'll go listen to the guy at the next table, telling his own story. If you don't "hook" your readers at the beginning of your article, they'll just turn the page and look for another.

The main body of the article develops the theory, construction techniques, the basic "how-to" information, or "how we did it" type of data. Here you relate how the piece of equipment or gadget is built or how you got to some island and set up that extraordinary station. It's the place for anecdotes, hints and kinks, and the personal touches.

The concluding part gives the reader a summation of what was accomplished. In the case of a piece of equipment or gadget, you would include the results you achieved by using it and how the reader can use it if he /she builds it. A DXpedition concludes with the number of contacts, recapping the adventure, possible plans for another one, and finally the ship or plane departing as the sun sinks on the horizon.

Footnotes, addenda, and "thank-you's" tail-end the manuscript. If everyone does their jobs correctly, the reader has an enjoyable experience. He knows "what it feels like" to build the whatever without actually building it, or has taken the trip with you in spirit.

Please pay particular attention to the "flow" of your article. Does it "travel" in a logical progression from beginning to end? Does the article generally follow a chronological sequence? Or do the paragraphs "bounce around," both in terms of topics and time? This is a very common problem. Please double-check your final copy to make sure it flows smoothly, and that you have good transitions between topics. It's always a good idea to have someone else look it over before you send it in. If he or she gets confused or dozes off, you've got more work ahead of you.

The Manuscript

Before you start to write, please send us a query outlining your proposed article (e-mail will get the quickest response). That way, you'll know whether we're interested and we'll be able to plan for your article. If you've been published before, please let us know where; or please attach a sample of your writing. Please be sure to enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) if you are querying by mail.

Next, be original. We generally publish only original material that has never been published before. We do make occasional exceptions, so if what you're submitting to us has been published elsewhere, you must let us know so that we can arrange all necessary permissions to reprint it. You must also let us know if you are submitting your article to more than one publication at a time (this is generally considered poor practice, by the way), and as soon as one publication accepts it, you must notify all the others to withdraw it from consideration.

Now, let's move on to the manuscript itself. If you think of the manuscript as a term paper, you won't go wrong in terms of structure. Include a title page. The title page simply has on it the title you have selected, your name and call, and your mailing and e-mail addresses. Leave plenty of space between each. (We normally print both mailing and e-mail addresses. If you want us to leave out either one or both, please tell us.) We receive too many manuscripts without the author's name on them. This means that if the manuscript gets separated from its accompanying cover letter/e-mail, then we won't know who wrote it and it will not be published. *Put your name and contact info on your manuscript.*

The main body of the manuscript should be typed (or printed) double-spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Leave considerable side margins. The margins will serve as work space for the editor should your article be accepted for publication. Be sure to leave plenty of room. If you plan to footnote material, indicate the proper reference number by raising it over the word or phrase that is footnoted (for example, Marconi¹).

Spelling and grammar count (just like on a term paper). You won't be graded, but an article that's full of misspelled words or grammatical errors reflects poorly on your credibility. Be sure to spell-check, but don't fully trust the spell-checker. A word that's misspelled into another word won't be caught. Use your eyes, and a dictionary if there's any doubt.

One exception to the term paper analogy: A magazine article should be less formal and more conversational than a term paper. Term papers don't have to be interesting. Magazine articles do (assuming that you actually want people to read them).

CQ Computer File Requirements

Articles and columns via e-mail cq@cq-amateur-radio.com (preferred) or on disk save a lot of grief for everyone. There's no "rekeying" required, so we can't introduce errors in the process, and we can devote our time to better pursuits than repeating the work you've already done. We simply convert the contents of your file to a form with which we can work. And please make sure to put the article's title and your byline at the top of the file, and give it a filename related to its topic, not "cq" or "article."

Please do not embed photos or figures in Word® documents. Not only must we remove them, but we can't pull them out and save them in a usable form. *All artwork* must be separate from the main text.

We use Windows® PCs and Macs in the office. Our preferred file type is Microsoft Word, although we can read most major word processor files (e.g., WordPerfect of OpenOffice). If you cannot produce text in one of these formats, then please save your

work as an ASCII text (.txt) file. Please tell us what format you are using. For ASCII files, please use a format similar to this: single space between lines, double space between paragraphs, no indents, no special layout, text flush left and ragged right (including heads). For tables, please put a tab between each column entry, with no spaces surrounding the tab. For instance, a contest score might look like this:

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WB2D<tab>A<tab>80838<tab>237<tab>162<return>
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If you have any questions regarding format or other programs, please call the office (516-681-2922) or e-mail us cq@cq-amateur-radio.com before you send in your file. Queries should be directed to the Editor, Rich Moseson, W2VU, at w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com.

Illustrations

If you've built something, try to photograph it in its various stages of construction. If it's physically small or unusually shaped, try to have an easily recognizable object of identifiable size photographed with it, so the reader can appreciate its size in relation to something familiar. Photographs can be supplied to *CQ* in the form of digital files or prints (no slides, please). Digital photos are preferred. They should be high resolution (at least 300 dpi/ minimum 100 kb file size) and saved as .TIF, .JPG, or .GIF files. They may be e-mailed or sent on a CD. Prints do not have to be any specific size (and they can be color or black and white), but they should be clear and not too dark. Again, if you have any questions, call us and ask -- before you send your files.

All photographs submitted with an article must be keyed to a caption or some distinct place in the article where all of the pertinent things that are seen are described. This includes names and calls of people, geographic data, technical data on specific components or circuits that are discussed in the text, and so on.

Drawings are a little bit easier to handle. You do have to be a better photographer than an artist. Drawings can be redone by our illustrator, although we sometimes use computer-generated drawings submitted by authors. (Please check with us for preferred formats before submitting computer-generated art. Generally, .BMP or .TIF files are fine; we *cannot* use CAD-generated art.) All drawings, mechanicals, and lettering should be neat and easy to read. As with photographs, drawings should have descriptive captions telling the reader what he/she is seeing.

Drawings are designated by figure numbers and should be keyed to specific text areas where they are discussed. Photos are not keyed by figure numbers unless they happen to have a specific mechanical sequence. Captions for both photos and drawings should be keyed by number on a separate page at the end of the manuscript. This page lists all of the captions in some order and should easily relate to the particular illustrations. Be sure to include the correct filename with each caption to reduce the chance that we'll put the right caption with the wrong picture and vice-versa.

Construction Articles

If you are planning to write a construction article, please consider the reader who may live off the beaten path. Wherever possible, indicate the source, manufacturer, and part number for components that you have used. If it is not especially critical, or if you found the little gem in your junkbox, give an equivalent value or alternative component. Also, please include (at the end) a listing of contact information for all manufacturers, etc., discussed in your article. This should include mailing address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail and web addresses, if possible.

Also, try to remember that we all may not be as smart as you are and may need a little more explanation or just a hint of the theory of why you did what you did. Part of this process involves teaching to some degree and the piquing of the reader's curiosity to find out more.

Size

The basic guideline here is to use as few, and as many, words as you need to tell your story or describe your project clearly. Making your article easy to follow and easy to understand is more important to us than keeping it to a certain arbitrary number of words. Be sure you include all pertinent details but don't ramble on forever. Without illustrations, it normally takes about two double-spaced type-written pages to fill one printed page. Short articles, two or three printed pages, are always in demand. Longer articles are fit in as space permits. The size is really up to you. How much interesting material can you write?

Payment

One of the nice things about writing is that if your article is published, you will be paid for it. Now sometimes it is nice and ego-satisfying to write for the sheer pleasure of it. It is pleasant to see your name in print and to be recognized as an author. It's also a boost to receive reader mail from people who enjoyed your work and appreciated your effort. It is possible to have all of the above and get paid for your work at the same time (Some items, such as "Op-Ed" submissions, are "paid for" in the form of a complimentary subscription; we do not pay for contributions to columns.).

You won't get rich writing for *CQ* or any other magazine for that matter, so give up

those early retirement thoughts. You will, however, make a little extra money to pay for your projects or for some extra goodies for yourself and your family. Please include your Social Security Number on your cover page or at the end of your text. We can't pay you unless we have it.

Can You Write?

Not everyone is a born writer. Most have to work at it quite hard. Not everything you eventually write will sell; that's a fact. You'll never know, though, unless you try. And don't worry -- if you have good information to share with your fellow hams, we'll work with you to make the article work.

The next time you're tempted to write a letter asking why a particular subject you're interested in isn't covered in greater depth in *CQ*, think about writing about it yourself. Give it a shot; it's worth the effort.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Don't write on the backs of pictures with felt-tip pens. Most of the time the ink will either "bleed through" or come off on the picture behind it. It is almost impossible to get the ink off. *Don't* use a ballpoint pen, either. The pressure of the point will mess up the front of the photo. Do write or print descriptions on labels and when you're sure the ink's dry, apply the labels to the backs of the pictures. Better yet, send digital photos.

Do number your manuscript pages consecutively, and if you feel ambitious you can also add a key to each page. For example, you could add a header or type in at the top right-hand corner of each page your name and the page number (i.e., Smith, 2).

Do try to avoid (wherever possible) the excessive use of formulas, exotic math, and esoteric references. Unless the article is in the form of a tutorial, the beauty of an equation is strictly in the eye of the writer.

Don't leave holes in your text for insertion of photos and don't embed diagrams at a specific location in the text. Our art department will take care of layout.

Don't assume that your manuscript will reach print as submitted, including the title. Magazines try to present material to their readers in the best light, and will often change the title and rework the text. You may be asked to supply additional materials as well.

Don't be pompous. Fancy words intended to impress generally don't. Stick to clear, straightforward English.

Don't insult your readers. People don't buy magazines to be told how stupid they are. They buy magazines because they want to learn ... and you're the teacher. Do define and explain.

Don't rest on your laurels. If you can write and have written, write some more. People for the most part are innately curious and like to find out what others are doing. *Don't* keep it a secret.

Do look for interesting topics. If you check the literature and find in the course of a year or so eight articles on logic probes, then it isn't too likely that the world is waiting for the ninth. See what isn't being covered and cover it.

Don't forget to include a SASE with your article with sufficient postage to ensure safe return should your article not be accepted. While an SASE is not mandatory for most magazines, it is a polite consideration. Some authors also tend to include a self-addressed postcard with their manuscript so that the editor can quickly acknowledge the receipt of the article and perhaps inform the author of a quick decision of acceptance. The use of these cards by editors varies; some use them and others don't.

Don't expect an immediate reply to an e-mailed query or article submission. While e-mail will deliver your message/file almost instantly, it doesn't mean the humans at the other end will be able to read/respond to it immediately. We are working with constant deadlines and usually juggling at least two hats, so reading and responding to e-mails must be worked into our daily schedules along with the rest of our work. Impatience will not help your cause. On the other hand, if you haven't heard anything back from us in a week or two, please do "ping" us to make sure your original e-mail arrived. Stuff does get lost in cyberspace.

Don't forget your reader. If your article is published, there is the likelihood of your getting mail from readers. The amount of mail will vary from perhaps one or two letters to scores. Try to answer each letter. Most people who read your work will never write telling you whether they feel positive or negative about your article. *Don't* assume indifference or lack of interest on their part; it's just the way it is. After all, when was the last time you contacted an author?

A Few Notes on Style

Our style is to refer to hams on first reference by full name, a comma, and callsign. For example, "Rich Moseson, W2VU." Please try not to use "W2VU-Rich," "Rich (W2VU)

Moseson," and other variations. Exception: When referring to two hams with the same last name, use parentheses on first reference, e.g., "George (W4AA) and Martha (K4AA) Washington." While we're on the topic, the words "amateur," "ham" and "ham radio" generally are not capitalized. Exceptions: when referring to the Amateur Radio Service (as in the FCC's rules), with or without the word "service." So you'd capitalize "Amateur Radio came to the rescue once again..." but not "...as area hams helped coordinate evacuations." *Never* write HAM in all-caps. The term "ham" is neither an abbreviation nor an acronym.

If you're using metric measurements in an article, please provide English equivalents as well. (Metric equivalents for English measurements will be appreciated by our readers outside North America.)

Please use complete Internet addresses (URLs) and enclose e-mail and World Wide Web addresses in angle brackets, e.g., cq@cq-amateur-radio.com or <http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com> . *If you are using Word, do not embed the URLs as hypertext links. We only have to remove them.*

If you're going to be writing regularly, consider investing in a style manual -- Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* is an industry standard, along with the *Associated Press Style Manual* -- and a good "college" dictionary (such as *Webster's New World*). Oh, and use them.

A final note: if you have any question about anything, anytime, feel free to drop us a note or give us a call. Here's how to get in touch with us:

Mail:

CQ Amateur Radio

17 West John Street

Hicksville, NY 11801 USA

Phone: (516) 681-2922

Fax: (516) 681-2926

E-mail: cq@cq-amateur-radio.com

Web: <http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com>