

Suggestions to Authors  
of the Reports of the  
United States  
Geological Survey

Seventh Edition

*REVISED AND EDITED BY*

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# Preface to the Seventh Edition

THIS SEVENTH EDITION of “Suggestions to Authors of the Reports of the United States Geological Survey” (STA) carries on a long tradition of guidance for writers, reviewers, editors, typists, and other persons helping prepare manuscripts within the Survey. With the advent of “desktop publishing” through the use of word processors and personal computers, moreover, many authors are becoming more involved in publication matters previously handled mostly by editors and typists. When the sixth edition of STA went out of print in 1984, its obsolescence in the light of rapid technological advances in earth science, and of changing publication techniques and requirements, convinced the Survey that a new, completely revised edition would be more appropriate than a reprinting of the old. STA 7 was thus conceived.

Most suggestions in STA 7 are stated in simple declarative sentences written in the third person. Many are offered in the second, and a few are even expressed in the imperative mood. Technical writing seldom has a place for either the second person or the imperative mood, but STA is not a technical report in the sense of a Survey Bulletin or Professional Paper, and its style accordingly is less constrained. Prospective authors should bear this difference in mind when preparing their reports. Many sentences in the paragraph you are now reading are phrased in the passive voice, and could scarcely be stated otherwise, but STA favors the strength and simplicity of the active voice for most expository writing. On the other hand, if the active voice turns the thrust of a sentence away from the true subject of discussion, as sometimes happens, the passive voice may be better. Written English grammar and style have evolved pragmatically through the years from writers’ efforts toward better communication. The same is true of STA, but much usage remains subjective. Some suggestions in STA, or in any style guide, are open to challenge, including such things as the use of the active voice versus the passive, subtle differences in the tenses of verbs, placements of adverbs, uses of relative pronouns and unattached participles, and the meanings of words. Even the use of commas, dashes, and colons can be subjective and arguable. So also can the organization of paragraphs and chapters and the preparation and content of illustrations. The whole point is that the Survey’s attitude toward writing does not support rigid adherence to mindless rules but, rather, urges reportorial flexibility to meet the needs of precision and clarity. Don’t be bound by STA, but ignore it at your peril; experience has shown that attention to the hints and guidelines expressed in STA will enhance the precision and clarity of nearly any Survey report, will yield better prepared manuscript copy, and will hasten processing for publication.

In today's times of technical specialization, and because of the breadth of the subject matter in STA, a book such as this can hardly be the work of one person. Much material that is still relevant has been taken almost verbatim from earlier editions. Many experts from the varied disciplines of earth science, moreover, have contributed their talents toward this book, and all of them have submitted new copy written in their own individual styles. Some stylistic variety therefore is inevitable and appropriate in STA, but to narrow the wide swings and achieve a certain syntactic unity, and to avoid possible inconsistencies, I have freely recast the individual contributions into a tighter idiosyncratic form. For this I apologize to all contributors who thereby may have been dismayed by any perceived highhandedness. The editing process itself introduced inevitable changes. I bear responsibility for the content and flavor of this edition of STA, but the following people helped immeasurably in its preparation, and in the following specialties: Julia E. H. Taylor, manuscript processing; Richard B. Taylor, mineral deposits; Clement T. Shearer, hazards warnings; Diane C. Schnabel, preparing manuscripts, formatting manuscripts and abstracts, preparing abstracts, proofing, instructions to typists, and many other details; David L. Schleicher, back up, ways and means; Anne C. Sangree, references and abbreviations; Edward T. Ruppel, geologic maps and sections; Charles L. Pillmore, plotters and personal computers; Donald J. Orth, geographic names; Harold E. Malde, technical review; Marjorie E. MacLachlan, geologic and stratigraphic names; Solomon M. Lang, metric system; Claire B. Davidson, aquifer nomenclature; Robert L. Laney, aquifer nomenclature; Donovan B. Kelly, news releases; Diane N. Jones, illustrations; Helen E. Hodgson, grammar, punctuation, and style; Jack E. Harrison, geologic maps and sections; Eugene R. Hampton, water resources reports; Elizabeth E. Good, tables and leaderwork; Joan J. Fitzpatrick, chemical, mineralogic, and petrologic terminology; J. Thomas Dutro, Jr., paleontologic terminology; Charlotte D. Densmore, manuscript keyboarding; Carol Waite Connor, poster sessions; Elizabeth D. Koozmin, page-size maps; Arlene B. Compher, graphics; Ann Coe Christiansen, maps and other illustrations; Marjorie J. Cater, manuscript keyboarding.

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*W.R.H.*

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