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Writing For Publication

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WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

An article

by

Mr. Roger C. Taylor

In writing an unsatisfactory fitness report on Alfred Thayer Mahan, a critical senior used this blunt statement: "It is not the business of naval officers to write books." Yet today there are numerous reasons why naval officers should write for publication. Perhaps the most important is the preservation of one's knowledge and wisdom in a particular area.

Consider Mahan, and contrast him, if you will, with Adm. Raymond Spruance. Here are two men with obviously great strategic acumen—men with great knowledge and wisdom in strategic affairs. Mahan recorded his knowledge. Spruance, unfortunately, has not, and we who study naval strategy are the poorer for not having his great knowledge available.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Mr. Roger C. Taylor did his undergraduate work at Harvard University and holds a masters degree in journalism from Boston University. He served on active duty as a naval officer in both destroyers and submarines from 1953 to 1957, and since 1959 has been on the United States Naval Institute staff. He recently took leave of his position as Editorial Director of the U.S. Naval Institute and is now affiliated with International Marine Publishing Company of Camden, Me.

There are many kinds of professional naval writing, of course. There is the article; the essay; the book; the monograph; the book review; the letter to the editor; the humble, enjoyable sea story. Seagoing officers sometimes underestimate a publisher's desire for simply a good sea story from which lessons may be learned and which will give shore-bound readers just pure enjoyment. The editors are always trying, for example, to get more salt water on the pages of the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*.

Many officers are doubtless deterred from writing by a pessimistic prognosis of their chances for publication. To many, the editor is stereotyped as a critical and merciless evaluator, prejudiced in favor of those authors whose

names are already well established. In reality, an editor approaches each manuscript with an optimistic attitude. Certainly there are manuscripts that must be rejected—because the author missed his target, was too careless with his gunnery, or perhaps failed to set his sights properly. However, as a rule, except for a few acknowledged lapses of editorial judgment, good writing is published, and bad writing isn't.

When any author writes for publication, he must have a specific audience in mind. Consideration of the readership of the applicable publication is mandatory, and the only way to discover their interests and, hence, those of the editor is to read the publication.

Beginning writers often find themselves in a quandary over the choice of a subject, for they often wonder what subjects will find approval in the eyes of editors. Yet we find that officers in the fleet, being naval professionals, are much better at creating article ideas than are editors. My advice is simply to write about your own ideas and experiences that will add to the body of professional knowledge. Far from being presumptuous, this is just common sense.

If you're going to write for publication in a professional sense, obviously there is research involved. The tape recorder is a useful research tool that can lighten considerably the burden of taking notes. It is my firm belief that every naval officer should own a tape recorder, and every naval officer's wife should be able to transcribe from the tape onto paper via the typewriter accurately, quickly, and cheerfully. There are tape recorders on the market today which have amplification adequate to record a voice so low it would not raise a librarian's eyebrow. Notes can be taken in this manner and transcribed with a minimum of effort. They should be placed on index cards, one note per card, to facilitate organization later.

The tape recorder has other advantages as a research tool. It often happens in this day of telephone calls that an important phone call leads to an important decision. In many cases the only way to get the information is to interview the man or men who were immediately involved, and the best way to do that is with a tape recorder. It is also profitable for you to record your own experiences before they are lost forever. When you go through an important operation or participate in making an important decision, you should sit down afterwards and record your observations in some detail. That record may become the basis for important writing later on.

The single most important quality in writing is clarity. As you write on a professional subject, you should think of yourself as leading a reader through new country. You know the significant landmarks, and you find your way around the subject area very easily because you are the expert. The reader is like a man coming into new terrain for the first time, and you must lead him clearly and logically through your subject area.

Two other qualities publishable writing should possess are precision and accuracy. If there's anything an editor doesn't like, it's a manuscript filled with generalities. Give the details of your research, and put a little color into them. Lead up to your generalities with specifics or, if you prefer, back up your generalities with specifics. Assure the accuracy of your statements by careful research and rechecking. Joseph Pulitzer, the famous editor of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, had a large sign on the wall for his reporters: "Accuracy! Accuracy! Accuracy!"

I recommend to you four particular books as tools for better writing. One is *Language in Action* by S.I. Hayakawa, who has put into a small book some good advice about the use of the English language. *A Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press, can

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solve many problems of literary style. Its best feature is a complete index. A good guide to the uses of naval English is found in an article by Samuel Eliot Morison that was published in *The American Neptune* in January 1949. And, finally there is *Roget's Thesaurus*. It is less sporting, perhaps, to look up a word rather than think it up, but it is certainly no less effective.

When you finish a manuscript you must become your own editor and critique the work. Before beginning this process, I strongly recommend that you lay the manuscript aside for a week or two and forget about it. When you return to it later, those great ringing phrases may not stand up to your skeptical analysis. For organization and clarity, a good test for your own writing is to read it aloud. If a manuscript is easily read aloud and makes sense aloud, it is well written.

As we write, it is inevitable that we will use the ideas, facts, and words of others. The proper way to do this is to document the ideas and facts of others via the footnote and to document the exact words of others that you may want to use with quotation marks and a footnote. Footnotes should be sent in with the manuscript that you are submitting for publication, whether or not the publication has a policy of printing footnotes. Editors like to have documentation to know where the ideas and the words came from. It is also the writer's responsibility to obtain permission to quote more than 300 words of another man's work, and this can be accomplished by writing to the author of that work and asking his permission.

Another important form of documentation is the bibliography, and here again the author must visualize himself as the guide. The reader, being unfamiliar with the sources which are used in the work, needs enlightenment. The author, who knows the quality of the sources, should share that knowledge with the reader in an annotated

bibliography. Brief comments about illustrations, the writing style, or the availability of certain otherwise unpublished information in the work referenced are examples of the kind of information that may be extremely helpful to the reader.

The subject of libel should perhaps be mentioned here. Professional naval writing is highly unlikely to be libelous, for three conditions are necessary to have a libelous statement: (1) the person or persons libeled must be identifiable in the piece of writing; (2) the writing must be published, that is, distributed to readers; (3) the writing must hold the person or persons up to ridicule or contempt. You are well advised to consult a copyright attorney if you have any doubt as to whether a statement in a manuscript is libelous.

When you are ready to submit your manuscript, you need send the editor only an original. The typewriting should be double spaced, and the pages should be numbered; but the manuscript need have no staples or binding. An editor will be so interested to see if you have anything of value to say about the Navy that he'll probably read your manuscript in almost any form, but these details do make the job easier for him. They have, however, absolutely nothing to do with whether or not your writing will be published.

Detailed instructions on clearing writing for publication are found in *U.S. Navy Public Affairs Regulations*, section D, 1703. A naval officer or other person working for the executive branch of the Federal Government must submit for clearance a manuscript that deals with national security policy if he plans to submit that manuscript to an outside, nonofficial publication. If he is writing for an inside, official publication, he should file a copy of the manuscript with the Chief of Information. The definition of an inside, official publication includes all Government publications, service journals (such as the

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United States Naval Institute Proceedings and the *Marine Corps Gazette*), scientific and technical journals, and encyclopedias. The author has the responsibility of eliminating classified material from his manuscript, but at the Naval Institute, for example, the editors protect authors by submitting for clearance any manuscript which they think might inadvertently include classified material. Navy regulations also require a disclaimer with an author's published writings which identify them as his own opinions and not those of the Navy Department.

One quality a writer needs to have when he finishes his work is patience. However, should you submit a manuscript to an editor and fail to get an acknowledgment back in 10 days or so, you might write to determine if your manuscript was received. If there has been no decision whether or not to publish within a matter of several weeks, you are quite justified in writing the editor a letter and asking for a prediction as to when a decision will be made. In cases where the editor has decided to publish your writing but has not published it after several months, you should seek confirmation on a publishing date.

Naval officers are sometimes unaware of the financial aspects of writing for publication. Magazines usually pay on acceptance, but some of the smaller journals pay on publication. The word rates are to be found in a book called *The Writer's Market* published by *The Writer's Digest* at 22 East 12th Street in Cincinnati, Ohio 45210. A contract for a book should allow you at least a 10 percent royalty on the list price of every copy sold. A book is sometimes sold for paperback or foreign language editions, and your contract should allow you three-quarters of any income from the resale of such secondary rights. The publisher will arrange for any such sale, and for this service he receives the remainder of the profits. He should also

be willing to agree to advance you \$500 or \$1,000 against your royalties.

Often the question comes up as to the propriety of an officer on active duty writing about his profession, having that writing copyrighted, and taking money for it. If you write on your own initiative, rather than as part of your official duties, and if you write on your own time, rather than on the Navy's time, then legally, and ethically it seems to me, you are writing as is any private citizen, except for the clearance restrictions cited earlier.

The writer and the publisher each have definite responsibilities when a piece of writing is accepted for publication. The publisher is responsible for protecting the writer's and his investment by copyrighting the manuscript, and he is also responsible for obtaining any photographs that might be required to illustrate the writing. He may ask your assistance in locating such photographs, but any fees should be borne by him. The writer may also be asked to provide a rough sketch of any reference art that is required.

I believe that the title of a piece of writing, whether it's an article or a book, should be left to the publisher. This can be difficult where the writer has already taken the step of titling the work with words that might have special meaning to him; however, the writer should leave this decision to the publisher as the expert on the impact of words on the reader.

One of the publisher's chief responsibilities is editing. The purpose of the editing process is not just the elimination of grammatical errors; it involves a thorough rethinking of every aspect of the writing. The publisher should help the writer with his facts, his logic, his conclusions, his syntax, and the questions he raises in the minds of the readers. The purpose is to improve the work by drawing on the editor's mental efforts to reinforce those of the writer.

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The editor, of course, hopes the writer will take his editorial advice, but inevitably there are disagreements. Such disagreements can almost always be settled by mutual discussion, and even this is rarely necessary. If it should happen that the editor cannot convince the writer of the wisdom of his editing, he should really publish the writing as the writer wants it or not at all, for it is the writer's name that will appear on the finished product.

The publisher should show the writer galley proof of exactly how the writer's words will appear in print. This is the time for the writer to correct the proof; this is not the time for the writer to

decide how the article should have been written in the first place.

Let me record one final thought. As we study naval warfare, we read the writing of those who have gone before us. We reap a harvest produced by people who have taken the trouble to record their wisdom and their knowledge on paper. Each of us has some knowledge, and each of us has some wisdom, and it seems to me that each of us has the responsibility as a student and as a reader to perform a like service for students who will follow in our wake. The responsibility is clear—to record our knowledge and our wisdom for the use of others.



Information is power.

*Arthur Sylvester: Remarks at
Sigma Delta Chi dinner, New York, 1962*



THE BAROMETER

(The following, from a letter received from a reader, comments on Captain Godfrey's article, "Mahan: the Man, His Writings and Philosophy," in the March *Naval War College Review*.)

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[This] article well summarizes the essence of Mahan for those who must read him quickly; and it identifies Mahan's concepts that are still valid. (When in doubt, assume that more, not less, of Mahan is valid.)

About 15 years ago—when the Armed Forces were being organized and reorganized again and again—I took several pages of Mahan's *Principles of Naval Administration* and, without iden-

tifying them, read them aloud to a group of officers and civilian employees in one of the Navy Department buildings.

One of the officers said, "You better watch it, . . . that kind of talk can get you in trouble with the higher ups."

A civilian asked, "Is that an advance copy of some military or political prize essay?"

All thought the words were contemporary—yet Mahan had been writing before 1900.

Incidents like this indicate the continuing basic validity of Mahan the prophet.

Frederick C. Dyer



National strength lies only in the hearts and spirits of men.

S. L. A. Marshall: Men Against Fire, 1947