EDITORIAL

So You Want to Write for *Sound & Vibration*?

George Fox Lang, Associate Editor

From time-to-time, a reader will ask me about writing an article for *Sound & Vibration*. Sometimes the query will include some detailed questions or a request for topic guidance. The general answer is that we welcome all types of articles relating to sound and vibration and that we have an audience with a broad range of topic interests. If a work-related matter is of interest to you, it is likely to be of interest to others in our field, so we want to disseminate that information.

We are only too happy to have the contribution of a new author and are eager to help you succeed in your first publishing effort. The *S&V* staff will help a new author to refine a manuscript and its graphic exhibits – we've been doing this for a long time now. Give us your interesting original manuscript and we will showcase it in the pages of *Sound & Vibration* magazine and on our website, www.SandV.com. You'll also receive a high-quality PDF file of your article as it appears in the magazine for use on your company's website or your own.

Publishing a technical article in an internationally distributed magazine sets you notably apart from the herd. Nothing says "competent professional" like a constantly growing bibliography of published work. Writing for a well-recognized, business-to-business magazine such as ours gives your company (and you) a free advertisement.

While your marketing department may spend more than $4,600 to place a four-color, full page ad in *S&V*, your work is printed here without cost, because it adds value to our book. But don't let anyone kid you; a well-crafted application article is a much more effective selling tool than even the most expensive advertisement. When you write for our pages, your worth increases, your company profits and we do too. This is a genuine all around "win-win" situation.

Now consider the details of creating a manuscript for *S&V*. Typical articles range from two to eight finished pages, with a typical page containing about 1,200 words and two figures. In addition to your article file, we will require a short (6-8 sentence) author's biography. Take a look at a few recent issues of the magazine to see examples of articles and biographies before writing yours.

Your ultimate objective here is to send a Microsoft Word file (we can actually work with almost any commercial word processor known to the Western World) with embedded figures to sv@mindspring.com as an E-mail attachment. This will put your work right on publisher Jack Mowry's desk and really get our production process rolling. Recognize that we love illustration-rich articles. High-resolution photographs in JPG of TIF format are preferred, as are graphs and plots drawn in Microsoft Excel. Vector-based graphics from almost any source can eventually be used, but you may be required to aid us in the translation of exhibits from esoteric software.

Please bear in mind that we always seek technical articles that truly inform and instruct. Thinly disguised "sales pitches" are routinely rejected as are "look how smart we are" pieces that pretend to explain a new technology but withhold a significant piece of the explanation. Our readers are engineers, technicians and managers looking for factual information they can use profitably in their practice. It is our business obligation to make certain they get exactly that in every one of our feature articles, and we adhere rigidly to this policy.

However, we understand marketing imperatives – after all, we are in the advertising business. We also understand that many of our best past authors have been entrepreneurs, marketers and application specialists. Accordingly, we allow our instructive articles to contain a subtle sales message, but we insist that you isolate it to a clearly identified part of the article. To this end, we encourage the inclusion of a single product *sidebar* or "boxed" story to laud the virtues of something you want to sell that was used to solve the technical problem described in your article. Plan to respect this separation in your manuscript – spend the bulk of your writing to teach our readers something interesting, and then include a clearly isolated short "free advertisement" of the product you hope to promote by your effort.

Sales and publicity oriented pieces that do not meet our high-technical-content standards for feature articles may be submitted for possible use as an *Observer* column. This front-of-book feature runs occasionally when space is available. We normally have a backlog of these low-key articles and do not solicit them.

Assuming this is your first publishing experience; let me suggest a few things to make your writing more interesting:

• Write about *a lot less than what you know*. You are going to have many other chances to express yourself in your professional writing. Please don't try to commit everything you've ever learned to paper in your first effort. Instead, pick a very specific subset of your knowledge and focus your writing on it. After all, many of us share your background. Tell us about something new to your experience and include only as much background as absolutely necessary to introduce the topic.

• *Be scrupulously honest* in your writing. Be careful not to claim or imply an invention or discovery accomplished by someone else; instead, give credit where it is due. Don't overstate the results of your findings – politics have no place in science. Report negative results as clearly as those that support your thesis. Fearlessly discuss questions that arose from your work as well as the answers it provided. Your conclusions should follow directly from what you have discovered analytically or disclosed experimentally without marketing embellishment.

• Assume *you are your own audience* and direct your teaching to that audience. Our readership is comprised of people with both more and less experience/education/insight/interest in any given topic than you possess. Just pretend all your readers are your classmates or colleagues, and set the level of your presentation to best educate and inform them efficiently.

• *Be generous in your use of figures*. Good supporting artwork makes an article easier to read and often lets a skimming reader decide if he wants to spend the time to read your work. Clear and well-chosen photographs of your test apparatus or plots of your analytic results help you tell your story clearly and efficiently.

• *Minimize the use of acronyms*. There is nothing more disconcerting to a reader than being set awash in a sea of unfamiliar multi-letter abbreviations. The inclusion of too many acronyms won't make your article read like the "salty" prose of an old hand; it will simply mark you as an amateurish writer. Use two or three if you must, and define each parenthetically at its first appearance; for example, degree of freedom (DOF).

• *Use humor cautiously*. Few among us have a universal sense of humor. A small joke that brings a smile to your lips may simply earn a sneer from someone else reading it (and may even cause him to stop reading). Be very careful about using humor in a technical article – it's like salt in cooking – use it very sparingly, if at all.

• *Don't be a bore*. I understand and believe in the ancient dictum: "Repetition is good pedagogy – tell them what you're going to tell them – then tell them – then tell them what you told them," But I also think this must be done with some kindness and a bit of élan. Surely you can find at least three different phrases that convey exactly the same thought – please seek them out and use them, rather than spewing exactly the same phrase (regardless of its precision or eloquence) three times or more.

• *Write as though you were creating a fine*

painting. Start your masterpiece with broad-brush wording to provide an overview. Then continue on to fill in the technical details of your word picture with finer brushes after the scope and intent of the article have been laid to canvas. Don't just dive in and swamp your reader with detail – give him the "big picture" first and then flesh it out with the necessary minutiae. Readers love to learn throughout the course of an article; pace your teaching and the introduction of details accordingly.

Sometimes you need to provide a small body of support or background information to make the thrust of presentation clearer, but you can't seem to find the right place to include this. Consider placing this ancillary information in a *sidebar*, a short "boxed story" outside the story flow of your main text. Sidebars are typically a few paragraphs to about half a page long and may have an illustration or two. Each sidebar is a short (separately read) stand-alone story that supports your article without being a direct part of it. It's not unusual to see a complex topic supported by two or three sidebars. Segregating ancillary information in this manner prevents interrupting the thought flow of the main text. We encourage the use of sidebars and insist on one when you include product information in your article.

Most people find it is easier to write a "how to" article from some form of outline. But, frequently they find that outline difficult to construct. I often rely on a simple trick – I gather the article's illustrations first, arrange them in sequence, and use them as a graphic outline. As I begin to write to this outline, I sometimes find myself becoming "wordy" in places. This is generally an indication that I really need *another* figure, rather than more words in that section of the manuscript. Every time I encounter one of these situations, I gain new respect for the old saw, "a picture is worth a thousand words." *Sound & Vibration* uses numbered figures, each with a description (caption). This allows you to refer to any figure in your text, regardless of the physical layout of the article (which we will determine). Captions are also a good place to bring in added detail; they need not simply echo the article's body text, but they can contain unique and additional information.

Sound & Vibration is distributed worldwide, but only in the English language. We appreciate the extraordinary effort made by off-shore authors whose first language is not English and always make every effort to carefully polish their work's grammar and idiomatic phrasing. We also recognize that very few English-speaking engineers are teachers, photographers, graphic illustrators, or experienced technical writers. But in the course of publishing your first piece, we will try to make a little of each out of each of you. Sometimes our edits may seem a bit severe or our comments on a piece of art may be harsh. We are only trying to do what is necessary to make the most of your good work – and we will!

I hope you will choose to become a *Sound & Vibration* author. While the ultimate choice of a topic is yours, I'd be happy to help with your initial planning. Drop me a line at George@LangsLair.com or call me at (215) 723-7975 if you want to discuss the content of a potential article. When you're ready, commit your thoughts to electronic "paper" and e-mail them to SV@mindspring.com.

You'll get a polite reply within a few days, either an acceptance for publication, a request for a revised manuscript or an outright rejection. Stay the course and you will receive an edited draft of your article for your final approval. Then it's just a matter of waiting patiently for the postman to deliver your favorite magazine *with your article in it*. SV