



Newsletter Editor's Handbook



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Foreword

This handbook is designed to help club officers, club members, and future editors understand how the NVMC newsletter (*The Mineral Newsletter*) works. Although the club federations have guidelines for what club newsletters should have in them, nothing is set in stone. In general, it is up to the editor to decide what the newsletter should contain and look like.

However, *The Mineral Newsletter* has won awards based on the prescriptions in this handbook, so it might be a helpful place to start. You can find past issues of the newsletter [here](#).

Features of the Newsletter

Some of the material in the newsletter is submitted by club members on an ad hoc basis. However, most of it constitutes regular features. Some features are by club officers and members and some the editor finds or creates. They generally appear in the order shown below.

Front Matter

Page 1 (not paginated) contains a cover photo of the Mineral of the Month (such as the smithsonite shown at right). Page 1 also contains essential information:

- the masthead (containing or based on the club logo);
- the newsletter title;
- the next club meeting date, time, and location;
- newsletter volume information and the club website link;
- the upcoming program topic; and
- a list of contents.



All pages after page 1 are paginated, with a footer showing page number as well as the newsletter title and the month and year of the issue. Page 2 contains more front matter: seasonal greetings and a sidebar with the name of the guest speaker, along with an invitation to the club officer dinner before the next meeting.



Mineral of the Month

Page 2 starts the article about the Mineral of the Month shown on the cover. For this monthly series, the editor finds a spectacular cover photo of an interesting mineral. It has to be a photo that can be used without having to pay and without violating copyrights. Wikipedia is one source; the [Smithsonian Mineral Gallery](#) is another.

Club members often have their own high-quality photos of minerals (such as Tom Tucker's cover photo of smithsonite, shown above). I prefer to use them if I can get them, not only because they are free but also because they give club member collectors/photographers visibility.

I ask a club member (usually Sue Marcus) to write an accompanying article. Rarely, I write the article myself.

Program Description

The club's vice-president plans the program for each club meeting, usually by soliciting guest speakers and asking them to submit short descriptions of their planned presentations. The editor formats the program description, sometimes finding an illustration for it online.

Twice a year (in March and September), the program is a club auction. The program description can be cut and pasted from past issues, along with bid slips and the summary sheet for submitted auction items.

Similarly, information on the annual Holiday Party can be largely cut and pasted from previous years.

Prez Sez

The club's president submits a short article each month imparting club-related information and/or containing his or her hobby-related thoughts and reflections.

Meeting Minutes

The club's secretary submits the club meeting minutes. The club's photographer (if there is one) typically sends photos from the meeting; the editor can also take photos, or sometimes other club members do. The editor tailors the minutes and illustrates them with selected photos.

Program Report

The club's secretary sometimes summarizes the program presentation from a previous meeting. The editor uses the summary and related photos as the basis for an article.

Annual Club Show

The annual club show usually happens in November. The show chair submits related materials, typically a description of the show and its location, a solicitation for volunteers, a list of vendors attending the show, and a flyer advertising the show. The materials go into both the October and the November issues of the newsletter.

Federation News

The editor searches the federation newsletters for items to reprint, always edited and occasionally abridged. For one item, I always choose a safety message. For the other, I take Wildacres course listings twice a year and other things appropriate for our club, including newsletter contest results and (once a year) the AFMS code of conduct.



Articles From Other Newsletters

I periodically peruse other newsletters online, typically newsletter contest winners but also ones I find while surfing the [AFMS webpage with newsletter links](#). If I find a good article, I simply reprint it with a note giving appropriate credit. I have at least one such article per issue.

Field Trip Opportunities

Field trip opportunities include local geology classes, visits to mineral museums, and organized trips to collecting sites. I take them in part from NOVA's [GOL 135 website](#). I keep a running list of opportunities several months out.

Book/Website Reviews

Book or website reviews can be short—half a page. The editor typically writes them. They are nice to have but not necessary.

Bench Tips

Brad Smith (you can get on his email list) makes short pieces available to editors, usually with an illustration. They make good short articles, and I try to have one in every issue. I usually put them in a colored sidebar (typically blue).



GeoWord of the Day

You can sign up online to get these, and they make good short pieces. I try to have one in every issue in a colored sidebar (typically pink).

News Snippets

Some club members routinely surf the web for news related to our hobby and submit stories they find for possible inclusion in the newsletter. The stories make good short articles. As appropriate, the editor writes a brief introduction or summary. I typically give a credit line, an illustration, and a link for reading more.



Articles From Club Members

Club members occasionally submit articles. Whenever they do, the editor puts them into the next available issue. I always put at least one article submitted by a club member into every issue. Often, the submissions come from me.

In addition to *Mineral of the Month*, I have created a series of articles called *The Rocks Beneath Our Feet*. These include any submissions related to the geology of our area (mostly my own). Another series is *Story of Geology*, with articles about the evolution of the science of geology (all my own, so far). The articles are nice to have but not necessary.

Illustrations

In addition to the cover photo, articles typically need at least one illustration, but they don't always come with one. Part of the editor's job is to search the web for appropriate images. A discussion of appropriate sources is in the [August 2015 issue](#), page 15.

Upcoming Events

The next-to-last page of each issue lists upcoming events of possible interest to club members during the month ahead, including shows, field trips, and club meetings in our area. The editor posts a calendar followed by brief descriptions of the events. Sources for shows include the [EFMLS Calendar](#) and sometimes [Rock & Gem Magazine](#).

Back Cover

The last page of every issue is in a standard format designed for mailing the newsletter to club members. It contains a return address and essential club information not found on page 1, including a list of club officers, the club purpose, and information about club meetings and dues.

Newsletter Format

The editor chooses the newsletter format (the writing style as well as design and layout).

The writing style is arbitrary, but consistency is important. I follow the Government Printing Office style, the one used for federal publications (GPO 2016). There are also other styles, such as the Associated Press style used by journalists (AP 2017). You can find them online.

I liberally edit and abridge, and sometimes I rewrite for clarity because if the reader can't understand an article, then the writer's effort is wasted. In editing submitted articles, I work with the authors. For already published materials, I preface a piece with a note to the effect that the article is "adapted"—a disclaimer allowing me to edit and abridge.

For design and layout, plenty of white (blank) space is important. White space rests the eye; it is never wasted. In addition, I have chosen Word formats that are standard for desktop publishing, shown below. (**Note:** The default Word settings are *not* appropriate for print publications.)

Page Setup

- Orientation: portrait
- Margins: top/bottom—1 inch; right/left—0.69 inch
- Columns: two
- Justification: full, hyphenated
- Printing: front and back



Fonts

- Articles:
 - Body: Times New Roman 11 pt, regular, black
 - First letter: **C**entury Schoolbook 16 pt, bold/italics, blue
 - Titles: **Times New Roman 14 pt, bold, red**
 - Bylines: *Times New Roman 11 pt, italics, black*
 - Intertitles: **Times New Roman 12 pt, bold, red**
- Boxes/Sidebars:
 - Body: Calibri 11 pt, regular, black
 - Titles: **Calibri 14 pt, bold, red**
 - Bylines: *Calibri 11 pt, italics, black*
 - Fill: blue or pink; box shaded
- Footer: Cambria 10 pt
- Captions:
 - Illustrations: *Calibri 10 pt, italic, centered*
 - Figures: *Calibri 10 pt, italic, flush left*; “**Figure X—**” boldface, regular

Spacing

- Line spacing (for the entire issue): single line spacing, 0 spacing before/after
- Widow/orphan control
- After periods: single space
- Between articles: double line space, 14 pt
- Between paragraphs: 6 pt
- After article title: 6 pt
- After byline: 12 pt

Plain Writing

In 2010, Congress passed the Plain Writing Act requiring federal agencies to use plain language in their publications. It makes sense for newsletters as well. The federal government has created websites with guidelines for plain writing (see, for example, plainlanguage.gov and plainwriting.gov). Eight corresponding principles are summarized below.



Source: U.S. National Regulatory Commission.

1. Minimize the use of acronyms. Spell out terms unless:
 - the acronym is widely understood (for example, AFMS and EFMLS); or
 - a term is used so much that the acronym makes the text easier to read.
2. In editing articles, help the author get to the main message right away, focusing on what the user is looking for. For example:
 - *Before:* The Coast Guard has conducted an investigation to determine what carbon monoxide (CO) detection devices are available to recreational boaters, such that, when installed and activated, could reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO—**THAT SILENT KILLER.** A variety of technologies is available for detecting the presence of CO on boats and should be considered by recreational boaters to reduce their risk of injury or death while boating. (72 words)
 - *After:* Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. The Coast Guard urges you to use a carbon monoxide detection device on your boat to reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO. You can choose from various devices. (33 words)
3. Choose language that is clear, concise, and direct. For example:
 - *Before:* When the process of freeing a vehicle that has been stuck results in ruts or holes, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before removing the vehicle from the immediate area.
 - *After:* If you make a hole while freeing a stuck vehicle, fill the hole before you drive away.
4. Change passive voice to active voice (it’s okay to keep some passive voice, but minimize its use). For example:
 - *Before:* Bison were found by early English explorers in what came to be known as the Commonwealth of Virginia.
 - *After:* Early English explorers found bison in what is now Virginia.
5. Use personal pronouns (especially “you”—but avoid the term “we,” which easily becomes ambiguous). For example:
 - *Before:* Trout can be found in these clear, fast-flowing waters. Being quiet in crossing the creek on the bridge and looking down can bring the reward of seeing trout.
 - *After:* If you’re quiet on the bridge, you might look down and see trout.
6. Use simple language, including everyday words.¹ For example:

Instead of:

an abundance of
anticipate
assist
attempt/endeavor
cease
commence

Consider using:

a lot of/plenty of
expect
help
try
stop
begin

“As to the adjective,
when in doubt, strike
it out.”

–Mark Twain

¹ See [Simple Words and Phrases](#) at plainlanguage.gov.

consequence
demonstrate
determine
etc.
e.g.
i.e.
generate
modify
numerous
obtain
previously
procure

result
show
decide/find out/figure out
and so forth
for example
that is
make
change
many
get
before
buy

“The letter I have written today is longer than usual because I lacked the time to make it shorter.”
—Blaise Pascal

7. Avoid bureaucratese, including the following terms:²
advancing (use *working for/toward*)
combating (use *working against* or *fighting*)
commit/pledge (be more specific—you’re either doing something or you’re not)
countering
deploy (unless you’re talking about the military or software)
dialogue (people speak to people)
disincentivize (and incentivize)
empower
facilitate (instead, say something specific about *how* you are helping)
focusing
foster (unless it’s children)
impact (as a verb)
initiate
innovative (use words that describe the positive outcome of the innovation)
leverage (unless you use it in the financial sense)
promote (unless you are talking about an ad campaign or some other marketing promotion)
robust
streamline
thought leader (refer to a person’s accomplishments)
transforming (what are you actually doing to change it?)
utilize
8. Avoid the use of figurative language, including the following terms:³
drive (you can only drive vehicles, not schemes or people)

² From the GSA’s [18F Content Guide](#).

³ From the GSA’s [18F Content Guide](#).

drive out (unless it's cattle)
going forward (unless you're giving directions)
in order to (superfluous—don't use it)

Finalizing the Newsletter

The number of pages should be a multiple of 2 so that no pages are blank when the newsletter is printed. If necessary (and it usually is), I manipulate the contents to reach the right issue length, typically 16 to 22 pages. I size illustrations and add or subtract pieces, including short ones, to balance the columns, fill out each page, and bring the issue overall to an appropriate length.

I aim for distribution of the newsletter somewhere between the first and the tenth of each month. After proofreading myself and running spellcheck, I submit the newsletter for review to the president, vice-president, and club member Sue Marcus (who does a voluntary proofread). I also submit it to everyone who has a piece in it, including the secretary and every other contributor. After making whatever changes are needed, I finalize the newsletter in Word.

Mailing the Newsletter

Electronic Files

Most club members get the newsletter by email as a pdf file. For the editor, that means:

- finalizing the newsletter as a pdf file;
- checking the file to make sure everything is in place; and
- emailing the pdf file to the communications officer or (if the position is vacant) the president.

The person in charge of distributing the newsletter emails it to club members. The editor should refer all questions to that person.

Paper Copies

Club members can choose to receive paper copies by regular mail. For the editor or a club member volunteer, that means:

- maintaining an up-to-date list of addresses for club members who get the newsletter by mail;
- taking each issue on a flash drive to Staples or a similar store;
- printing out the needed number of issues on regular paper, double-sided, black and white, and stapled in the upper left corner;
- folding each copy and sealing it with five small round paper or plastic adhesive seals, which have to be bought separately;
- buying sheets of printable labels and printing out the mailing addresses;



- peeling off the labels and attaching one to each folded, mail-ready newsletter copy;
- buying the right kind and number of stamps at the post office;
- attaching the stamps; and
- mailing the newsletters.

Newsletter Contest



The federations judge newsletters in an annual contest conducted by the Bulletin Editors Advisory Committee (BEAC). The regional federation does the first round of judging, then submits the top three regional winners in each category to the national federation for a followup contest. Directions for participating in the regional contest are on the [EFMLS BEAC Website](#).

The contest has two parts. One part pits club newsletters against each other in four categories: mini (5 pages or less); small (6 to 11 pages); large (12 pages or more); and “new editor.” In each category, the judges use a standard list of 29 [evaluation criteria](#), with a maximum of 100 points. The newsletter with the most points wins.

The other part of the contest is for individual articles in six categories. We haven’t had items to choose from in three contest categories (Poetry, Juniors, and Drawn Features). But we have had articles in the three remaining categories: Educational/Technical Articles (which give historical, geological, or other technical information); Nontechnical Articles (which are informational rather than technical in nature); and Written Features (which “add spice” to a newsletter). Judges use scoring sheets tailored to each category. Again, the articles with the most points win.

For the newsletter part of the contest, editors submit two issues from the calendar year.

The part for individual articles is more complicated. Each club is limited to three articles per category, three per author, and two per author in any given category. We typically submit nine articles (three each in the categories Educational/Technical, Nontechnical, and Written).

The editor decides whether to participate in the contest at all or maybe just in one part. In the past, we have participated in both parts. For the editor, that means:

- choosing two issues to submit;
- printing out each in triplicate in color, front and back, stapled;
- completing cover sheets for each;
- printing out each cover sheet in triplicate;
- choosing nine articles to submit;
- printing out each in triplicate in color, front and back;
- completing cover sheets for each;
- printing out the cover sheets in triplicate;

- collating the cover sheets and submissions;
- buying mailing materials; and
- packaging and mailing the submissions.

References

AP (Associated Press). 2017. AP stylebook. New York: Associated Press.

GPO (Government Printing Office). 2016. Style manual. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Acknowledgment

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