

Editorial

Well written and well read articles: a challenge for authors, editors and readers

It is obvious that journal articles differ, like all other products of society, in quality. The quality can be judged on the basis of two aspects: scientific contents and presentation. If one of these two aspects is not optimum, the envisaged transfer of scientific information will not be as effective as possible. It is therefore of utmost importance that authors are challenged to submit manuscripts that are both valuable from a scientific point of view and attractive with regard to their form of presentation.

We, as editors of this journal, want to challenge our authors to deliver manuscripts that fulfil both requirements, and we will help them in doing so in whatever reasonable way possible. This help is already provided in the form of peer review (which should result in optimization of the scientific contents), editing of the text (including language correction) and the offer to include – after consultation – a full page in full colour free of charge (which can make figures both more clear and more attractive). But we can, obviously, not take over the responsibility of the authors themselves to submit manuscripts that actually reflect the highest level that they can achieve. In order to encourage authors to do their utmost best, we now have decided to take a step that has proven successful in other journals.

A prize for the best article

Starting with the current volume (16), a prize will be awarded to the author (or, in the case of a multi-author article, to the corresponding author) for the best article published in *Geologos* during this year. The prize will consist of a diploma, a 1-year free subscription to *Geologos* and a surprising small present. In addition, the article will be clearly indicated on our website. Moreover, attention to the winning article and

its author(s) will be paid in the first issue of the 2011 volume.

Any judgement about quality is, by definition, subjective. We will take measures, however, to ensure a fair judgement procedure. The ‘committee’ responsible for choosing the winning publication will be formed by the Editors of the journal and all members of the Editorial Board. None of them will be allowed to vote for articles that deal with a topic belonging to their own discipline, so as to avoid biased votes. Obviously, articles authored or co-authored by the Editors or members of the Editorial Board will be excluded from the contest.

Any author can thus be sure that his/her/their manuscript will have an equal chance, and that the quality of the article will be decisive. As mentioned above, both the scientific value and the presentation will be taken into account. But how can authors improve the quality of their contributions?

Scientific quality

Numerous books have been written about how to write a scientific paper. It would, of course, be ideal if each author would read such a book before starting to write. But common sense is at least equally important. Just a few aspects are to be considered: (1) the manuscript should have a logical structure (no new data in the conclusions section!), (2) the article should be concise (no irrelevant data!), (3) the article should be as short as possible (no duplications!), (4) figures should be used instead of long descriptions wherever useful (thus saving space; being more accurate than descriptions), (5) reference lists should be consistent with the references in the text, and they should not be unduly long to ‘impress’ the readers by the authors’ knowledge of the literature (a journal

publication is not a thesis!), (6) correct terminology and symbols should be used (for instance, not Km but km for a kilometre!), etc.

In fact, it is one of the tasks of the peer reviewers to comment if such 'common sense' rules are not followed, but it is, obviously, much better to avoid such comments. Reading articles in good international journals will certainly help to increase the insight into the characteristics of high-quality contributions.

Presentation quality

This topic, too, has been dealt with extensively in many books, but common sense (once more) is a good guideline. Text filling an entire page (or even two pages beside one another), for instance, is unpleasant to read. On the other hand, a concentration of figures ("see Figs. 3-12") forces a reader to turn pages to find the correct figure if a reference to one of these figures is made in the text, and this is also unpleasant for the reader. Therefore, try to find a balance between text and figures.

If long texts without figures are unavoidable (which can be the case in some types of articles), take care that logical headings give some resting points for the reader. If a reader becomes tired by an optically unfortunate presentation, he will give up further reading!

Write an important article!

It may be frustrating to be confronted with negative feed-back, but few articles turn out to be truly important. Editorial research has shown that only some 5% of all published journal articles are ever referred to in other articles, apart from articles that are (co)authored by the same author. This is reflected in the citation frequency of individual articles (which is something else than the impact factor of a journal). We, as the Editors of *Geologos*, hope that you, as readers and as potential authors, will be convinced of the fact that a journal that is frequently cited is most interesting. But a journal can increase the number of such citations only if good articles are published. *Geologos* is well on its way, considering the increase in the number of citations in the international literature. We hope that our initiative to award a prize for the best 2010 article will result in a continuation of this trend, but for the purpose an increasing number of high-quality manuscripts is needed. Try therefore to write an important article for our journal, win the 2010 award, and become internationally cited. We challenge you!

The Editors