



AMATEUR AUTHORSHIP

Developing and Submitting an Article for Publication
Presented at the May 2017 Meet - Sierra Division, PCR-NMRA
Chip Meriam

Why Bother?

There are several reasons to consider preparing and submitting articles:

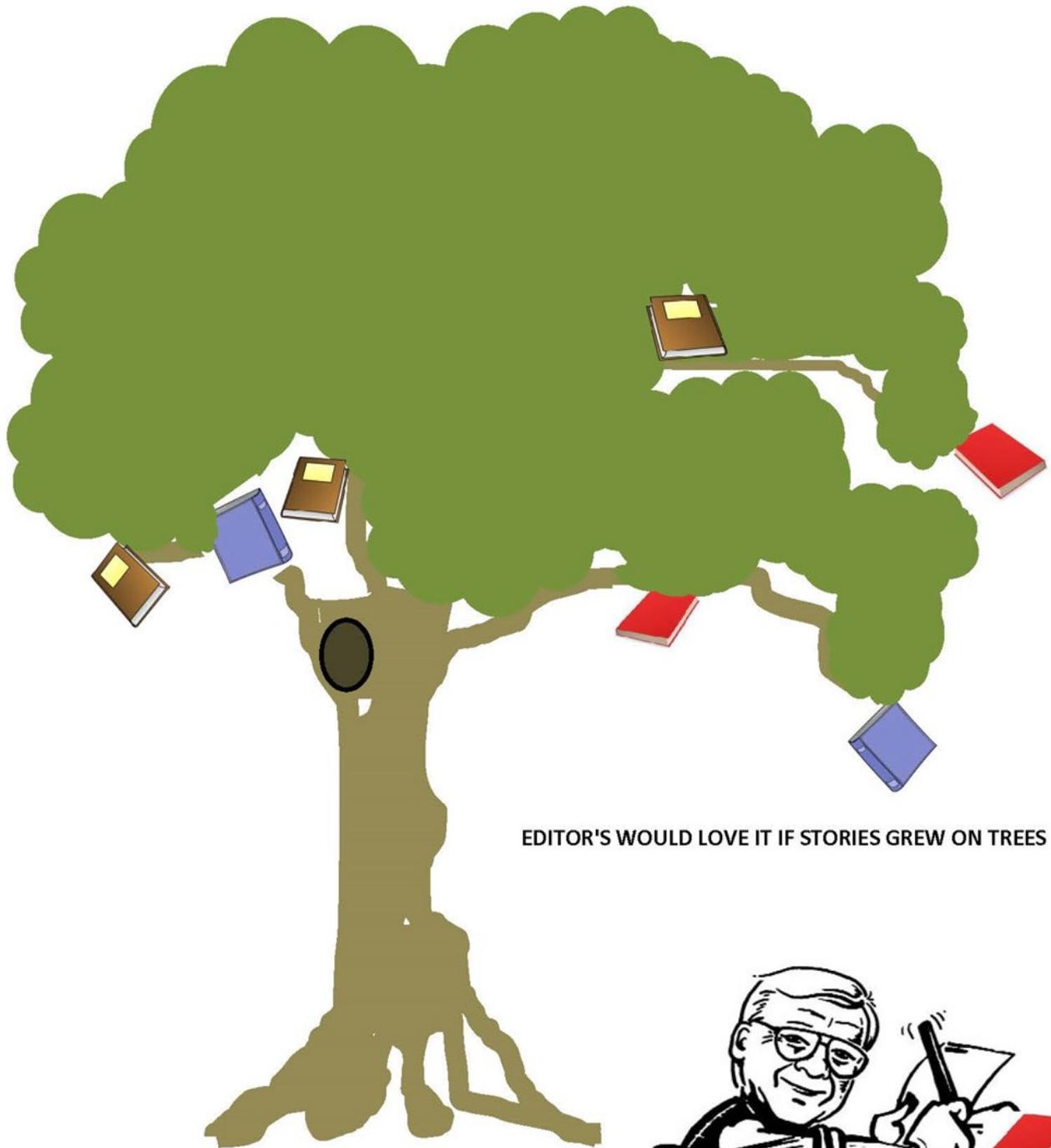
1.) It's fun and gratifying. Whether you're aware of it or not, probably one of the reasons your hobby is model railroading is because you are a creative person. Clearly, creating an article for publication is a creative endeavor. So doing so is a gratifying activity.

2.) You really learn your subject. The best way to sharpen your understanding or expertise is to explain a process to others. "How To" articles are just that – explaining to your audience what you did and how they can do the same thing themselves.

3.) Writing serves your chosen hobby. One of the greatest resources we enjoy as modelers is the wealth of knowledge shared in the hobby press. That knowledge doesn't just materialize on its own. Somebody has to expend the effort to communicate their knowledge – through printed media or otherwise.

4.) You gain the recognition of others in the hobby. If you're prolific enough, the NMRA will recognize your work with an Achievement Program Certificate, Model Railroad Author.

PLUS.....



EDITOR'S WOULD LOVE IT IF STORIES GREW ON TREES

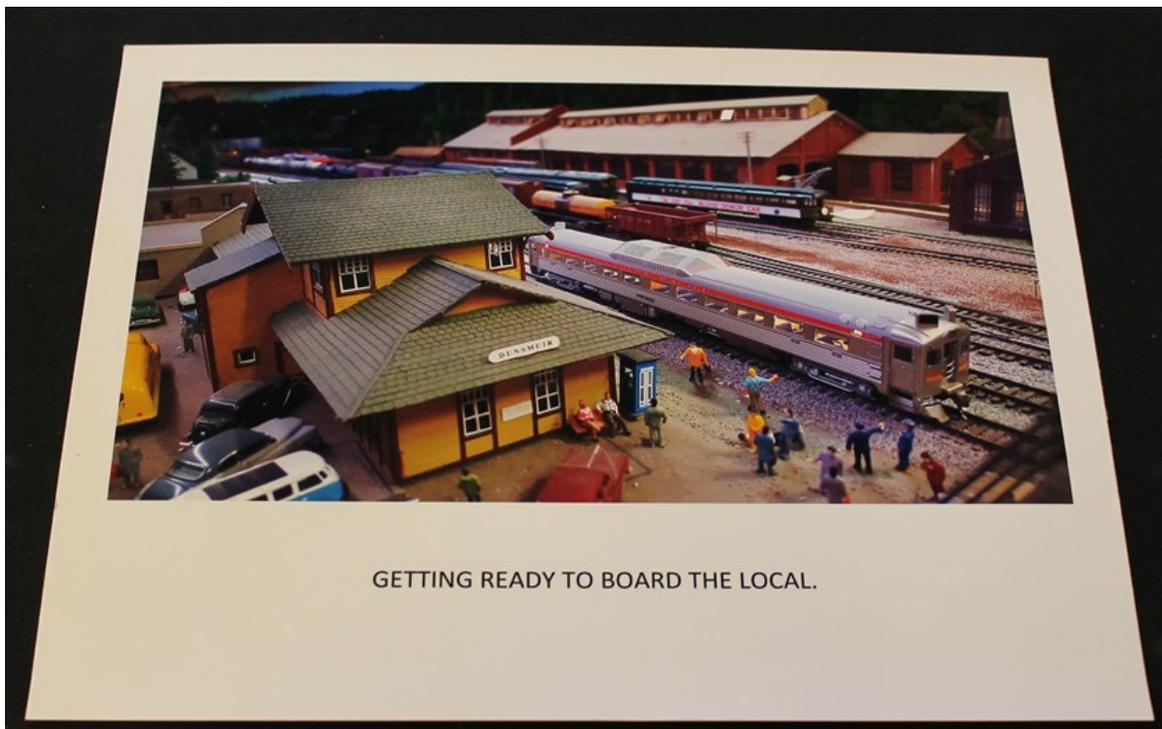


Ideas – Ideas – Ideas

What is there to write about?

“Writing something new and original is like staring at a blank piece of paper until your brain bleeds)” (*anonymous*)

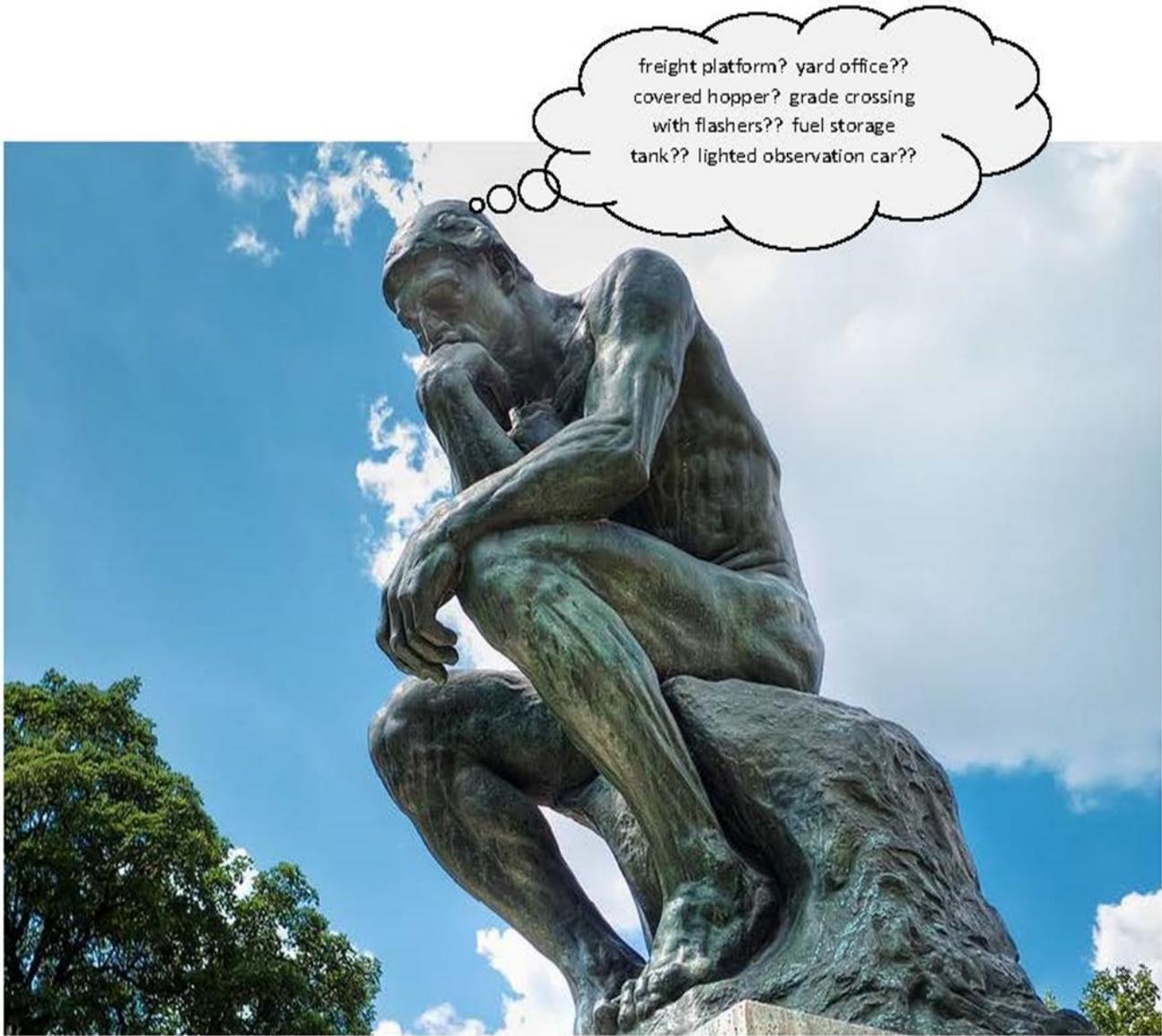
Look around your layout for a scene or vignette. Often times a single picture with a short caption tells a story – or creates a story within the reader.



Here is an excellent example from Walt Schedler. This is a single scene with a five word caption. It tells a story about what is presumed to be a routine station stop by a SP Budd RDC.

The story it created within me, the reader, is how did SP 10 end up in Dunsmuir? SP 10, the only RDC that SP had on their roster, traversed the NWP line running along US 101 from the Bay Area up to Willits. A stop in Dunsmuir??? There must be a story here.....

That’s a LOT of work being done by only one picture and five words!!



THINK.....

**about what you're planning to build or
model.**

If you're in the process of building a model railroad, finishing a scene, developing an industrial spur, or a bazillion other things, there is likely a small project that you can incorporate into an article as you build.

“OUTSIDE THE BOX” TOOLS



Every so often we stumble upon an innovative use for a tool that was designed for another purpose. One such idea I encountered in the pages of some model railroad oriented publication was the use of a combination square fitted with two sliding parts – one having been pirated from another. The result of the, ahem – combined combination squares was a square clamp that was quite suitable for holding the walls of a scale model structure together during construction.

Another clever idea came from Gary Ray when he described chucking PVC pipe in a lathe to fashion bezels for his layout fascia-mounted turnout controls.



If you read the pages of [Model Railroader](#), [Railroad Model Craftsman](#), or [Railroad Hobbyist](#), you’ve, no doubt, seen similar ideas featured. Perhaps you can be the author of the next such article!

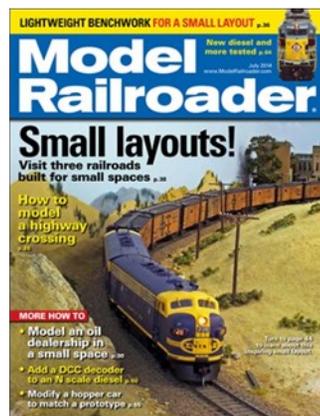
HAVE YOU BEEN CLEVER LATELY?

READ



Read everything and read often. Consider this: Is it possible to learn a language, say, German if you've never listened to it? Well, it may be impossible to learn how to write an article if you never read any. There is no shortage of excellent hobby publications from which to choose. And, don't limit yourself to a certain topic or a specific scale. Articles of all kinds can offer good (and poor) writing examples.

Read And Re-Read The Submission Guidelines From Your Target Publication





“Photography makes or breaks most of the articles we see. If your photo quality is not well above average, it will hurt your submission chances more than poor text. It is very worth it for you to make sure your photos are as clear and well lit as possible. If you have any weak photos in your submission, considering redoing them (if you don’t redo them, we will ask you to redo them before we will take your submission).

Do NOT cut corners on the photos that go with your article. The highest rated articles in our publications are almost always the ones with the best photos.” (Model Railroad Hobbyist Submission Guidelines)



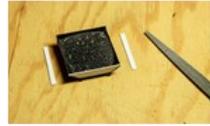
Point and shoot cameras or smart phone cameras are generally adequate for photos to be published in newsletter formats such as the **Short Line** or the **Branch Line**.



Quality photos shot with a DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera are a must for articles submitted for publication in magazines.



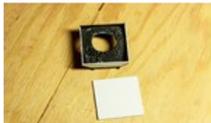
TELL THE STORY WITH YOUR PHOTOS



Here's an example from an article by Jim Collins about converting a coal tender to an oil tender. October 2014 Short Line



Note how you can follow the photos in order to see how the conversion was accomplished.



From start to finish, the story is told with the photos. No words needed.



Here's an excellent guide for the novice photographer. This is referenced in the Model Railroader submission guidelines.

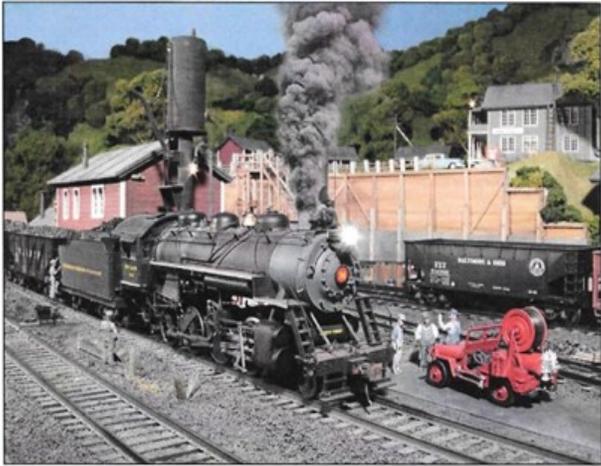
(reference courtesy of Brooks Stover)

<http://mrr.trains.com/-/media/Files/PDF/2013/MODELERSGUIDETODIGITALPHOTOGRAPHY1.pdf>

**A MODEL RAILROADER'S GUIDE
TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY**
By Brooks Stover, MMR

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Crew members talk among themselves as final preparations are made on BC&G #14. The train will soon depart from Widen on a clear summer day in WV.

A search of the internet or a visit to the local public library should also render a myriad of photography advice.



Of course, you can also enlist the services of a professional photographer.....

Write the Article



OK. You've developed the idea. You have a pretty clear picture of what photos you're going to take and in what sequence. Now what?

Well, as we suggested earlier, you can stare at the blank page until your brain bleeds – or you can just start jotting down thoughts. They need not be in any particular order, and they do not need to be complete thoughts. Just digging the words out of your mind and throwing them down on paper will get the process started.

Here's a list of thoughts for a "how to" article about building bench work in a layout room:

assemble the bench work in modules

use carriage bolts *paired terminal strips*

ask Ralph to explain the difference between poplar and clear pine

label and/or color code joints

Phillips head screws

1/2 inch holes for running wires

white glue or wood glue?

transfer track plan to corrugated cardboard

yard stick trammel

laminate or hardboard for fascia

table saw

carpenter's level

maximum grade vertical curves?

Get as much written down as possible. Then take a break and come back to your "list". Add other thoughts as you look over what you've already written

ideal height

aisle width?

prime all painted surfaces before using

color coat

finish layout room walls before starting bench work.

Once you think you have all your thoughts and tidbits jotted down, organize them into an outline. This may seem about as simple as herding cats, but once you get started it goes fairly easily.

Planning Considerations

- Ideal viewing height
- Aisle width
- Maximum Grade
- Minimizing vertical curves

Construction Ideas

- Finish layout room walls before starting bench work
- Assemble bench work in modules
- Use carriage bolts to connect modules
- Drill ½ inch holes in cross members for ease of wiring
- Transfer track plan to corrugated cardboard pattern
- Prime painted surfaces before applying color coat

Materials

- Poplar or clear pine?
- Laminate or hardboard for fascia
- Phillips head screws
- White glue or wood glue?

Portability Considerations

- Paired terminal strips
- Label and/or color code module joints

Tools

- Trammel made from yard stick
- Carpenter's level
- Table saw

If you miss something, you can add it later.

With your outline as a guide, you can begin “fleshing” out the article.

Building Your Bench Work

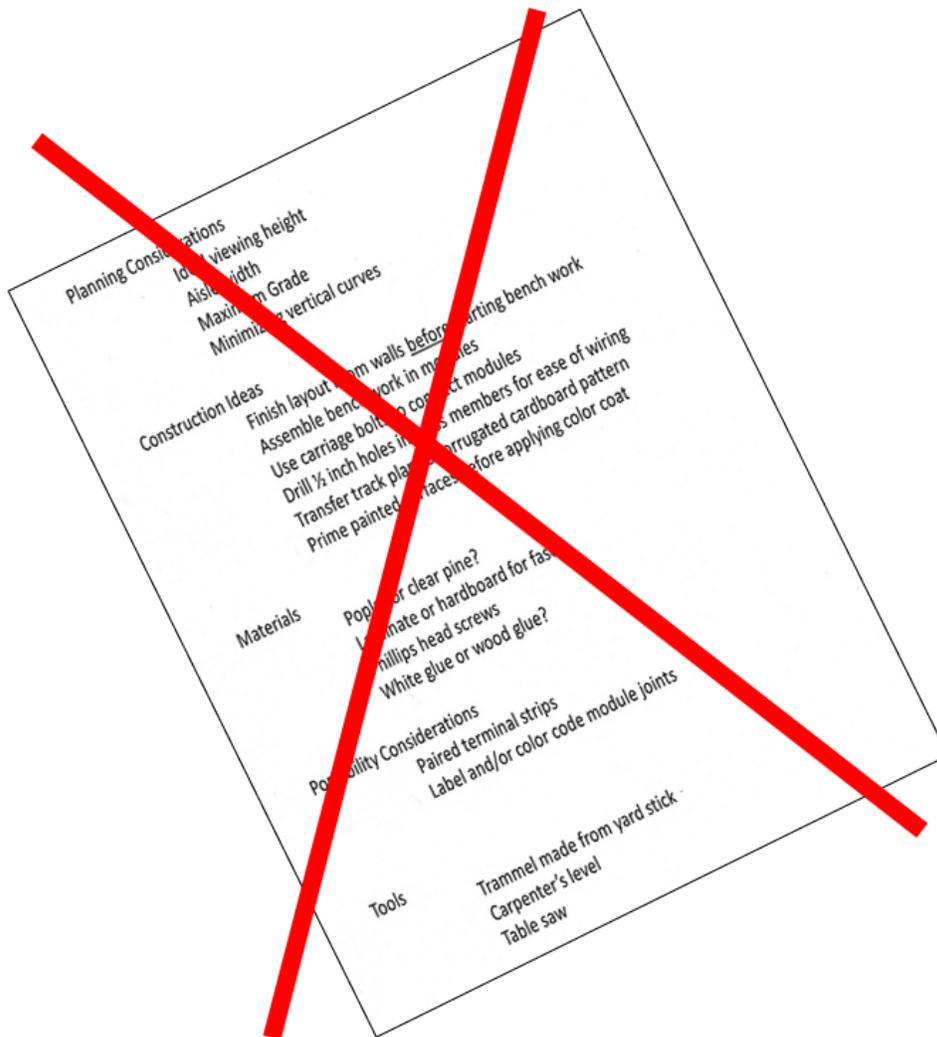
Proper planning is key to the success of a layout track plan and the bench work that will support it. Clearly, it’s best to have a fairly well conceived track plan before you begin, but that is a topic for another time.

Some of the factors that should guide you in construction of the bench work are the ideal viewing height, the maximum grade your trains will have to negotiate, the minimization of vertical curves, and adequate aisle width for mobility and ease of operation.

The ideal viewing height is dependent upon several variables. Obviously, your height will come in to play. Perhaps you were a center on your high school basketball team. Or maybe you are shorter than most people by comparison. Or, perhaps you spend most of your time in a wheel chair. Any number of personal preferences can affect what YOUR ideal viewing height may be.

Closely related to the viewing height is the maximum grade of any track that rises above (of below) the ideal viewing height. The primary consideration here is.....





An outline may not be necessary at all if your article is a short story such as an action photo with a caption or a scene from your layout with a brief description of what it depicts.



The **SHORT LINE**

Here at the Short Line, we'll be happy to work with you to put together an article. Even if all you have is an outline – or even just an idea!

Advice from a Professional

An interview with Jim Collins, Technical Writer

As noted, Jim Collins is self employed as a technical writer. Jim has a military background with a specialty in electronics. Following his career in the military, Jim worked in related fields until 2005 when he picked up the writing craft. In 2008, Jim hung out his own shingle and has been gainfully employed as a freelance technical writer ever since. Jim describes his writing as 100% non-fiction with applications in writing for web sites, advertising, market communications, and instructions of every stripe. I was under the impression that, with an electronics background, Jim's primary writing topic would be technological in nature – which it may be. But I was amused to learn that one of his past contracts was an instruction manual for corporations seeking to qualify for research and development tax credits, a topic that encompasses accounting principles and interpretation of the Internal Revenue Code – not quite the same as what's needed to design an integrated circuit to control a robot!

In preparation and research for this clinic, I decided to “interview” Mr. Collins to seek his advice on preparing an article for publication. I asked Jim to describe his writing approach including comments on use of outlines, general editing, and proof reading.

Jim's use of outlines is largely dependent upon the scope of the project. A simple, straight-forward set of instructions would probably not require an outline, but a larger, complex set of construction procedures involving multiple subassemblies, and assemblies would probably require a detailed outline.

Once the outline has been arranged, if there is one, Jim prefers to start at the beginning and write through to the end without stopping to revise or make corrections. Jim prefers to “get it all on the page” before shaping and polishing. Then he'll make a pass through his work with a view to arrange the first draft in the proper order. He may decide that a concept introduced early in the first draft might work better if it was placed closer to the middle or even the end. Once he has everything in order, he takes a second pass through to correct spelling errors, a third pass through to find and correct grammar errors, a fourth pass through to check for punctuation errors, and so on.

With the editing complete, the manuscript is ready for proof reading. I asked Jim who, if anyone, was his proof reader. His humorous, yet honest response was, “Usually me or the client.”

As you might imagine, illustrations are an important part of technical writing work. As such, I asked Jim to share some photo tips.

Jim noted that for newsletter formats such as the Short Line and the Branch Line, a point-and-shoot digital camera is usually fine. Even cell phone cameras take some excellent photographs. Of course a digital SLR camera is capable of shooting successfully in a much broader spectrum of conditions.

Regardless of your camera equipment, Jim emphasizes two very important elements of good model photography: Always use a tripod or other steadying device, and use ample lighting. Hand-held camera shots are always susceptible to blurriness, and what may seem like adequate light to a human eye, is not likely to be adequate for a camera lens. Jim also recommends taking lots of shots from various angles, varying light, and multiple distances. This greatly increases the opportunity to capture “just the right shot.”

If you are using a camera with interchangeable lenses, such as a digital SLR, consider using extension tubes to enhance the camera’s close-up capabilities. This is a much less expensive alternative to using a macro lens.

Jim suggests that you should read one or more articles on model photography. (I make reference to one excellent article elsewhere in this handout)

Finally, Jim touts the principle of “telling the story with the photos.” A well planned sequence of photos can illustrate a step-by-step procedure without the need for words.

Advice for the novice? Jim gave us five little gems:

Start small with a small article of a single page (or less) and maybe two or three photos.

Always use the “active voice” and avoid the “passive voice”. Here’s an example of active versus passive: Active – “The janitor turned on the closet light.” Passive – “The closet light was turned on by the janitor.”

Consider your audience first. You’re writing for the audience, not for yourself.

Always use a proof reader. (umm.....good idea, Jim.)

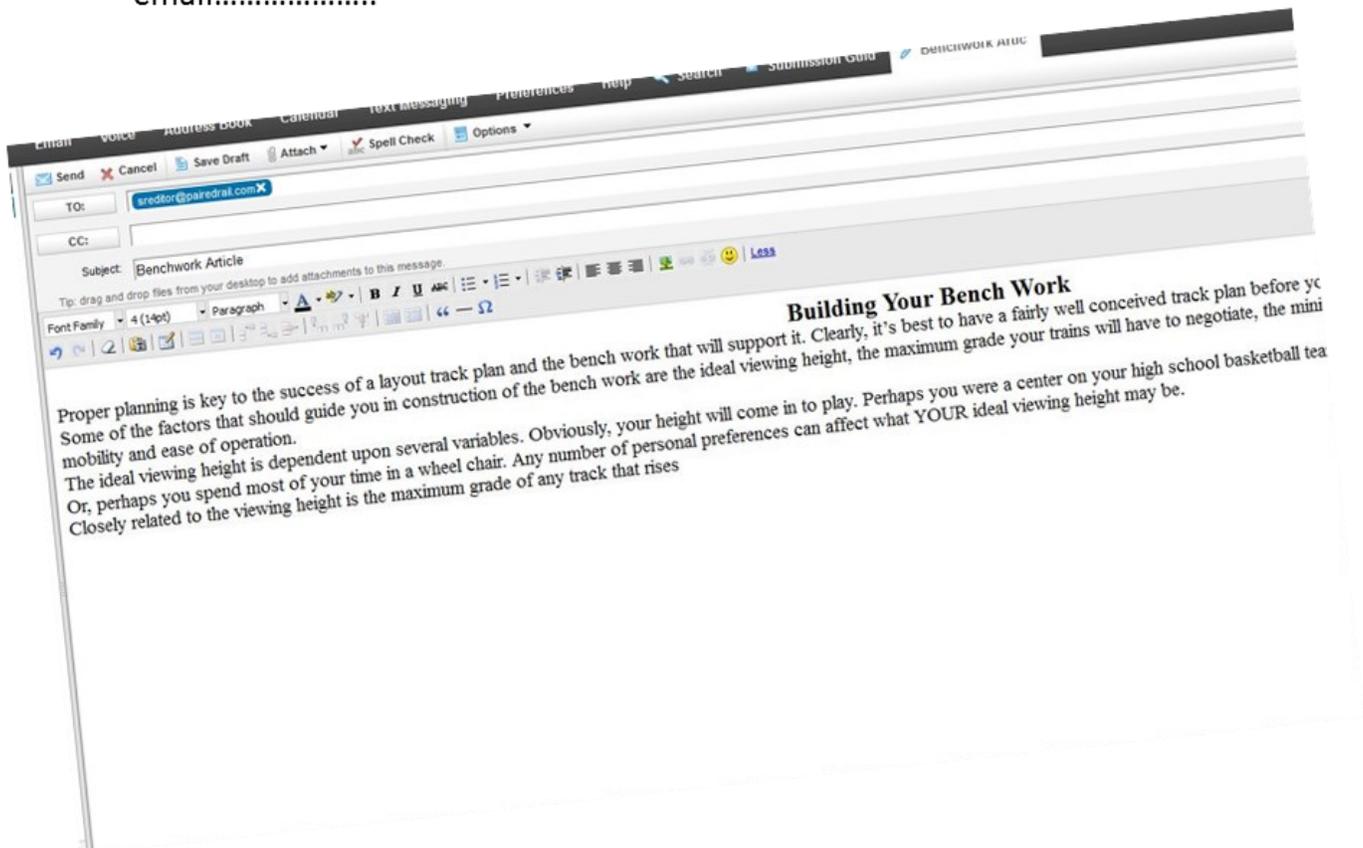
If you’re writing a “how to” article, follow your own instructions to see if they make sense and to insure you didn’t miss something.

My sincere thanks to Jim for investing his time in this interview. I think you’ll agree, Jim gives us some good advice.



ASSEMBLE YOUR SUBMISSION

Some publications prefer the text to be submitted in the body of an email.....



Others (most) prefer a specific format such as Word® or WordPerfect®.



WordPerfect®



LARGE FILES NEED HELP MOVING



Plan on using a file transfer site such as DropSend® or enlist the good 'ol snail mail to send your photos on a thumb drive.



Be Sure To Include Captions So Your Editor Will Know Where To Place Your Photos

The Sierra Division Fall meet took place Saturday, October 8 in Chico. Approximately 30 members made the trip north for a tour of a prototype rail facility, an open house, and a meeting with two presentations in addition to the modeling and photo contests. Following the Chico event, there were two layouts open for visit on the return trip.

The first stop of the morning was James Railcar Service Company. James Railcar is in the business of refurbishing, repairing, and painting freight cars (primarily covered hoppers) between revenue trips. According to our host, Ken Kappenman, the company has been in operation north of Chico since the mid 1960's. They receive freight cars from all over the nation via the Union Pacific (former SP) main north-south line. They have an on-site capacity of 30 to 40 rail cars and, at peak times, can receive and turn around 30 to 35 cars per week.

[INSERT PHOTOS Our Host Explains, On Top of a Covered Hopper, A Cut Awaits Pick-Up – caption as noted here]

The second stop was a visit to Chip Meriam's HO scale "SP & WP Somewhere in No. California". Members could see, first-hand, the wigwam sawdust burner featured in the June 2014 NMRA Magazine and the circa 1929 pumping station presented at a PCR Convention workshop in Modesto this past April.

[INSERT PHOTOS Visitors, Wigwam, Pump House - caption as noted here]

After lunch, a division meeting was held at the Chico Grange Hall. The membership voted to retain Jim Collins as Division Superintendent and to install Chip Meriam as Division Clerk. Our thanks to Jim Firehock for serving as clerk for so many of the past years.

[INSERT PHOTOS Collins, Meriam, Firehock – caption as noted here]

Contest themes for the October meet were Modeling – Any Equipment or Structure, and Photography – Any Railroad Subject. Between the two categories there were a total of fifteen entries.

In the Modeling Contest, First Place went to Walt Schedler for his SP work train.

Second Place went to Klaus Keil for European Scrap Load display.

Third Place went to Jim Collins for his REA refer.

[INSERT PHOTOS SP Work Train, European Scrap Load, REA refer – caption as noted here]

In the Photo Contest, First Place went to Chip Meriam for his Wigwam Sawdust Burner.

Second Place was a tie between Chip Meriam's BNSF at 7th Street, and Tom Van Horn's Sierra #50.

Third Place also had two winners with Tom Callan's Snow Scene and Walt Schedler's American #22.

[INSERT PHOTOS Burner at Midnight, BNSF at 7th Street, Sierra #50, Snow Scene, American #22 – caption as noted here]

While the contest votes were being tallied, Klaus Keil provided a short presentation on modeling a scrap load made from the tops of spent K-Cup® coffee pods.

[INSERT PHOTO Klaus on Scrap Loads – caption the same]

Following Klaus, Gary Ray gave an update on progress on his HO Scale Gerber Subdivision.

[INSERT PHOTO An Update from Gary Ray – caption the same]

Business concluded at about 3:00PM and the southbound members had the opportunity to visit two layouts on their way home: Walt Schedler in Colusa and Michael Andrews in Yuba City.

The next Sierra Division meet will be in Modesto on February 4, 2017.

Contest categories will be Modeling – Steam, Traction, Self-propelled Cars; Photos – Trains In Action.

Send A File Of Thumbnails So Your Editor Can "Get The Picture"



A Cut Awaits Pick-Up



American #22



An Update from Gary Ray



BNSF at 7th Street



Burner at Midnight



Collins



European Scrap Load



Firehock

Achievement Program



Author

Author

Achievement Program

Author

Although the category title is Model Railroad Author, it may just as well be Model Railroad Media Specialist. All fields may be used to earn points.

To qualify for this certificate, you must:

1. Prepare and submit material on any of the following subjects:

Model Railroading.

Prototype Railroading, Applicable to Modeling.

NMRA Administration (e.g. Officers or Committee Reports)

The material being claimed must be the work of the author, photographer, artist, draftsman, etc. applying for the certificate. A total of forty-two (42) points must be earned from a combination of material in the following areas:

A. Published Articles

This is material that appears in printed media, such as magazines or newsletters and may include text, photographs, drawings, etc. Material that has been published or accepted for publication, may be claimed. A copy of the published material or of the acceptance receipt from the publication, must be submitted as proof. Points are awarded regardless of size or number of features appearing in any particular issue.

Item	Points Earned Per Full Page			
	National Publication	NMRA National	NMRA Region	NMRA Division & SIGs
Article or Column	3	3	2	1
Photos or Art Work	3	3	2	1
Scale Drawing of Prototype	6	6	4	2
Scale Drawing of Track Plan	3	3	2	1
NMRA Data/RP Sheet-One Subject	-	6	-	-

A "page" is approximately 1200 words. Credit may be claimed for partial pages down to quarter pages.

NMRA Publications (including SIG publications) with a circulation of more than 2000 may be considered National Publications; those with a circulation of more than 1000 may be considered Region Publications

Material published in 100% NMRA Club publications earns half the number of points as for an NMRA Division publication.

No more than half of the total required points (21) may be claimed for Division or 100% NMRA Club publications.

B. Live Clinics

These are live presentations given at conventions, Division meetings, etc. In order to be eligible for credit, the clinic must be prepared and presented by the member applying for the certificate, it must be at least 30 minutes in length, and it must include a handout (a copy of the handout must be included with the certificate application.)

Points Earned For Live Clinics			
Item	National	Region	Division
Given At NMRA Sponsored Events	6	4	2
Given at NON-NMRA Sponsored Events	3	2	1

A live clinic can only be claimed for Model Railroad Author points once, even if it presented more than once. Additional presentations of a clinic earn credit towards Association Volunteer.

Points Earned For Live Clinics			
Item	National	Region	Division
Assoc. Volunteer Points	3	2	1

C. Instructional Video Tapes and Multi-Media

These are presentations that are specifically created by the member applying for the certificate using video tape or other multi-media. This production process will generally involve such things as preparing a shooting script or story board. Creating close up shots to illustrate the material, etc. Simply having a live clinic video taped is not acceptable. If the presentation is not interactive (for example, a video tape), then it earns credit at the rate of 1/2 point per minute of the presentation. If the presentation is interactive (requiring input from the viewer as it goes), then it earns credit as an "Electronic Publication", described below. To earn credit for an Instructional Video Tape or Multi-Media Presentation, it must be submitted directly to the AP Executive Vice Manager for evaluation. Include his/her analysis and determination of credits with the Author certificate application.

D. Electronic Publications

This is for material published on a public electronic forum, such as the Internet. This material earns credit at the same rate as Published Articles in Region publications. (See above) All photos, drawings, etc. are treated as 1/3 of a page.

Material that is published in more than one place or way (for example, both in a magazine and electronically, or in multiple electronic formats) can only earn credit once.

The address (URL) of the material must be included with the certificate application. If the material is published on a non-publicly accessible forum (e.g. a private BBS), it is not eligible for credit.

No more than half of the total required points (21) may be claimed for Electronic Publications. General:

Final determination of what material is acceptable for credit, and how much credit it earns, lies with the AP Department Executive Vice Manager.

For all material that is the work of more than one person, each person may claim 1/2 of the applicable points, provided that they did at least 40% of the work involved.

Material that is electronically published and has a formal editor is credited at the same rate as printed material. This would include the publications of Historical Societies, NMRA organizations, and others who have a formal editor to manage content and have moved to electronic publishing in addition to or in lieu of print publication. The AP Executive Vice Manager will make final determinations of credits for electronic publications.

2. Submit a completed: Statement of Qualifications (see SOQ below) which shall include a list of all material claimed giving the subject matter, name of the publication or place of presentation, the dates, and the handouts. The number of points claimed for each item must be shown.

Further Information:

Contact National Achievement Program General Manager, Paul Richardson, MMR achiev@nmra.org, or your [Region or Division Achievement Program Manager](#) for more information.

Also refer to the NMRA AP regulations (1992), the AP Handbook (1991), and the articles "[Model Railroad Author](#)" and "Helpful Hints for Authors", NMRA Bulletin, June, 1992.

