

DOS & DON'TS

These tips are designed to guide you through the writing process—and help you avoid problems that make an article less effective.

Dos

- Select a subject that hasn't been covered in the journal (or similar publications) in some time—or present a unique perspective on a topic that is covered frequently. Avoid shopworn topics and a rehash of fundamentals.
- Write about an emerging topic that will be of importance and interest to SH&E professionals who are responsible for safety program strategic planning.
- Write about a topic that provokes self-examination and challenges the status quo of many safety programs.
- Consider and discuss practical applications of the information you are presenting.
- Ensure that your thoughts and points are well-organized and on-point and that your writing has good flow. Focus on the topic and try not to cover too broad an area, which can result in glossing over key subjects.
- Let the reader know in the first paragraph what the main topic will be.
- Create a strong “hook” to gain the reader’s interest and attention.
- Limit use of jargon and define it where it is needed.
- Provide diagrams and tables that are clear and easy to understand.
- Write in third-person rather than first-person.
- Use active voice rather than passive voice.
- Conclude with a strong closing paragraph that gives a brief synopsis of the key points and/or desired actions and that has a good tie-in to the opening of the article.
- Use good sentence structure and proper grammar. Ensure that sentences are properly punctuated and do not run-on; that the subject and verb agree (use grammar checker in Word). Use spell checker functions of software as well.
- Proofread and edit frequently. Skipping these important steps detracts from the overall presentation and can undermine an author’s credibility.
- Demonstrate that you have identified an issue/finding that is of value and important to SH&E professionals. Answer the “so what” test by taking the time to consider the value and importance to the reader.
- Explain why the issue/finding is valuable and important. While this may be obvious in some cases, in many others it may be difficult for readers to determine your point.
- Support claims or statements made with sound evidence.

After you've written the article, review it and ask yourself these questions:

- Does the article get the reader’s attention and interest?
- What facts are presented and are they substantiated?
- What benefits of these facts are communicated to the reader?
- What does this article mean to the readers?
- Are useful resources provided—such as case studies, lessons learned, sources of additional information, charts/graphics?

Don'ts

- Don't provide misleading or poorly written introductions or article abstracts.
- Don't provide weak logical arguments, write in a disorganized fashion, or discuss nonrelated topics and side issues that don't aid understanding.
- Don't turn nouns into verbs (e.g., "interface" used to be a noun and now people use it as a verb).
- Don't use current buzzwords just to use them. Use them only if they advance your presentation.
- Don't use personal examples that reveal too much about the author or his/her company.
- Don't lapse into personal opinion in an article that supposedly makes a scientific case for something.
- Don't submit an article that contains poor grammar/syntax, run-on sentences, spelling errors and errors of fact. Use spell-checker and/or grammar check functions. Even simple typos will make you look sloppy and damage your professional credibility.
- Don't use too much jargon.
- Don't introduce acronyms without first defining them.
- Don't present detailed formulas and equations that are difficult to understand and apply.
- Don't use clichéd phrases and examples.
- Don't bad-mouth anyone or another person's idea or approach.
- Don't write an article that is an advertisement for some product or service.
- Don't make unsubstantiated claims.
- Don't generalize study results when the sample size is too small or nonrepresentative.
- Don't conclude with a weak closing paragraph or paragraphs that do not summarize key points and do not tie back to the opening paragraphs.

PS Mentors

These individuals—all of them ASSE Fellows and published *PS* authors—have volunteered to mentor prospective authors. Please feel free to contact them with your questions. You may also contact *PS* staff at any time.

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