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PASS IT ALONG

Alexander T. Wells, Ed.D.

Among the growing number of aviation educators in this country is the know-how and the background of skills needed to cope with the multiplicity of problems faced by less experienced professors of aviation education. This know-how had its genesis applied to solving problems during the emerging years of aviation education at the collegiate level. It hasn't been too many years ago that I can remember developing handout materials to be used by students in several of my specialized aviation management courses because of the lack of an adequate textbook.

In a growing and maturing discipline such as aviation education, it is incumbent upon those with the background and experience to share their knowledge with those who are just entering the field. Too often we in aviation education have been looked upon by our fellow academicians as vocational educators in a field not worthy of true scholarship and research. Nothing could be further from the truth when you consider the wide range of technical and non-technical subjects being studied today in collegiate aviation programs across the country.

Scholarship includes such activities as developing innovative teaching materials and methods; writing articles, monographs, book reviews and textbooks; delivering papers, colloquia and lectures; creating case studies, computer programs and films; writing impact studies, grants and reports.

The pursuit of scholarly inquiry can be a means of rejuvenation and academic enhancement. I do not think aviation can reach its full potential as a discipline and acceptance by our academic colleagues until scholarship occupies a prominent place in our philosophy. The failure to include scholarship as an important element in aviation education is a flaw that erodes the image, indeed erodes the status, of aviation programs among other academic disciplines.

Scholarly inquiry, more than any other characteristic, is the base on which academia is built. When aviation administrators choose not to

encourage and promote scholarship, the foundation upon which their programs are built is severely shaken. Scholarship should be viewed as an obligation to your profession. Pass it along!

GETTING STARTED

One of the most difficult steps in any written assignment is getting started. This task can be made simpler by following some tried and proved rules of written communications.

Rule 1

Write about a subject that you are intimately involved with. This involvement, ideally, should include both teaching and practical experience. For example, I write about air transportation management. I have taught courses in this area for 20 years and have worked in the industry for another 12 years.

Rule 2

Work with others when appropriate. In developing *General Aviation Marketing* (1987, Krieger Publishing Co.), I enlisted the aid of Dr. Bruce Chadbourne from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University who has a strong background in the area of marketing. The result is certainly a far better textbook than I could have produced alone.

Rule 3

Learn as much as you can about the market for your product. In the case of a textbook, you must determine the primary and secondary courses for which your book is intended. Using the University Aviation Association (UAA) directory and other guides to identify collegiate aviation programs, I have reviewed numerous course descriptions in the college catalog microfiche. On many occasions I have written to the schools and requested course outlines and the name of the text used. Any other information about the course, including grade level of the students taking it, their major, and background of professors teaching it, is helpful in designing your product. I have always found it helpful to develop a list of the strengths and weaknesses of competing texts.

Rule 4

Research, organize, and reorganize before you write a single word. In addition to file drawers crammed with clippings, reports and studies on various topics, when I carry out research, I test the opinions of other educators and industry personnel. I find out what they think is essential and what is nice to know but not essential. You may be surprised by what you will learn. As far as organization is concerned, I prefer using outlines that show the content of each chapter by major topics and subtopics. I normally change the outline several times before I start writing, then several times after starting.

Rule 5

Get involved with a publisher. Do not invest hundreds of hours and then learn that Vanity Press is the only outlet for your work. A publisher will normally want to see one or two completed chapters of your manuscript. They will also require a complete marketing information report. These guidelines are available from all of the major publishers and can be a big help in structuring your proposal. Remember that you have to sell the publisher on the idea that your project is economically viable. The acquisitions editor is going to want to know the primary and secondary courses which might use your text or learning aid, any professional or trade markets, the expected market potential, the approach you expect to use--broad-brush or comprehensive, applied or theoretical, and how your work will most clearly distinguish your book from others currently available. You must also consider at this point whether your text will include exercises, review questions, objectives, summaries, annotated bibliography, glossary and so forth. The publisher will want to know the approximate length of the book and whether you plan to include illustrations and/or pictures. Finally, the publisher will want to know when you expect to have your manuscript completed in first draft form and what support materials such as a study guide or instructor's manual will accompany the text.

This process may prove to be discouraging, and it may demand more changes than you are willing to make. But remember that a book can be

rejected by one publisher and develop a tremendous success with another one. I once received 76 rejection letters before finding a willing publisher.

The publisher will normally assign four or five reviewers to evaluate your project. If you have any suggestions for reviewers, this is the time to get their names to your acquisitions editor. Don't become overly defensive. Editors and reviewers often make excellent suggestions. Use them when appropriate. I have completely rewritten entire chapters based on their feedback, and I know the published work is better because of it.

Rule 6

Write for students and be practical. A technical book should not look like an engineering book or a novel. Write at an appropriate reading level. Do not make the mistake of trying to impress your colleagues. Work hard to make everything as logical and as easy to understand as possible. Even with the mechanical aspects of motivational appeal and structural organization well taken care of, writing can still fall short unless the proper seasoning is mixed in to make the written words tasty and easy to digest. Nothing can fall flatter than a cold collection of generalized statements unsupported by facts and figures. When a point is made, give an example. When a reference is made, use a comparison to something with which the reader is already familiar. In other words, illuminate the unknown by moving to it from the known. It has been said that the most difficult task of an author is making new things familiar and familiar things new.

Quantitative measures are good if not overdone. It is difficult to hold an audience with tomes of statistics but good, round numbers, used properly, will give graphic dimensions to the written word.

Illustrations must not be an afterthought. Many technical authors design most or all of the illustrations for a section or a chapter before writing a single word. You may be amazed at how easy writing becomes after you have a stack of logically sequenced illustrations on your desk. Writing then becomes a simple matter of describing and elaborating on the illustrations.

Produce a smooth transition from topic to topic and chapter to chapter. This is extremely important with subjects that are somewhat abstract. Also,

include a lot of student material: chapter objectives, a review of key terms or important facts, laws and equations if appropriate, review questions and self tests.

Many authors are concerned about the length of a topic or chapter. I once spent a day with an airline scheduler learning the intricacies of this difficult process. The individual could very well have filled several books on the subject. I needed only a chapter. An informative topic, section or chapter, like a mini skirt, should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be interesting. The story should be told in as few words as needed to cover the subject and to establish a case.

The same holds true for journal and magazine articles. Only enough verbiage is needed in any of the three mechanical parts of the structure to meet the need. Usually, the introduction can be handled in from 200 to 400 words. The bulk of the wordage is found in the body or text. Using the limits of 2,000 to 3,200 words for the total effort, the body or text would average from 1,600 to 2,400 words. The conclusion normally is about as long as the introduction, running from 200 to 400 words. The need dictates the length. Too little might miss some points. Too many will lose the reader.

Rule 7

Don't be overly concerned about your writing style. Publishers have a competent staff of copy editors who will review your manuscript page by page. They know what is good; they know what is wanted; they know what is readable. They will make minor changes to the manuscript, eliminating needless repetition, poor choice of words or verbosity, but they do not want to do our writing job for us. Concentrate on the content and structure. Before putting the piece into its final form, read it aloud. A true test of readability is often found in hearing the word since many readers verbalize inaudibly when they read. Reading aloud permits us to evaluate smoothness of flow.

Rule 8

Allow a cooling-off period. I usually write a section or more and then not look at the material for a week or so. Needed improvements are more

obvious when you read the material later. Word processors make this easy to do. Diskettes are inexpensive, so it is prudent to make backups of all your files.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY IT

We may never write the great American novel or compete with Sinclair Lewis as the country's most prolific producer of prose, but any of us with a message to share can share, and share effectively, through the medium of the written word. It requires planning, hard work and adherence to simple, workable rules. Nobody is more obliged to share his or her knowledge and background with others than the experienced aviation educator. Nobody needs it more than the less-experienced educators entering our profession.

An honest effort to make this contribution should be made by all of us to tell our stories in such a way that they will be both heard and heeded.

The need exists. The experienced aviation educator has the answers to fill the need. The challenge prevails. Failure to sit down and pass on our knowledge and experience is tantamount to something more than non-feasance. It borders on malfeasance, a willful and wanton non-performance of a task that we know is our responsibility to perform.

Dr. Alexander T. Wells is a senior professor of aviation management at Broward Community College in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He is the author of several aviation related textbooks. Dr. Wells has held several management positions in the aviation industry for 12 years prior to starting his full-time teaching career in 1972.