



Yes, You CAN Write for THST! Tips and Strategies to Make Submitting Articles Simpler

Tom J. McConnell

Have you thought about writing for *The Hoosier Science Teacher*, but the thought of writing for a publication makes you break out in a sweat? It turns out that what editors want may actually make the process easier than you think! This article has tips and strategies learned by an experienced teacher, author, reviewer, and editor.

Keywords: Professional writing, Submitting manuscripts

My first professional publication was an article in *The Hoosier Science Teacher* a couple of decades ago. I wrote that article during my doctoral program, and it was an eye-opener on the realities of an editor's pen. Had I written a manuscript when I was teaching high school biology, I might have been successful, but I am absolutely certain I would have made a lot of mistakes that might have prevented it from being accepted.

Since then, I have spent a lot of time writing, editing and reviewing articles and books for a variety of publications. I kept working at this part of my professional life is because I learned some lessons that make writing easier for me. The bonus is that these lessons also increase the chances my work will be accepted.

For the last six or seven years, I have taken on the role of an editor. My first work in that area involved books, and I learned how professional publishers do their jobs. Now, as part of HASTI's Publications Committee, one of my roles is to help convert manuscripts into the finished articles you see here in this journal.

One lesson I learned is that most teachers are a bit intimidated by the thought of writing an article for publication. I get that! Remember, I waited until late in my doctoral program to even try. So this manuscript is my attempt to help make that process a bit less intimidating. If you follow the tips I am sharing with you here, I can't guarantee that everything you write will get published, but it will help. The more important part, for me, is that I think it will make it easier for you!

Full listing of authors and contacts can be found at the end of this article.

Why You Should Write for THST

The Hoosier Science Teacher is an ideal first place to dip your toes in the pool of writing for publication. Your colleagues are genuinely interested in what you have to say, and there are people available to help you refine your article. What you write does not have to be long. The journal is open to a wide range of articles, from research about science and teaching to stories, opinions, book reviews, poetry and puzzles.

You can also reap some real benefits by writing for THST or other journals. Indiana's license renewal and teacher evaluation systems reward teachers for writing professional articles. The PGP points from one article can go a long way toward meeting your 6-year goals, and principals will value the publications in your annual review. Highlight the articles you write in your CV and evaluation portfolio!

So here are tips and hints. I hope you'll give these ideas some thought.. and then I hope you'll write a manuscript for THST.

Put Some Thought In It... But Not Too Much!

There are two ways to reduce the chances of a manuscript being accepted: 1) Not planning the article well, and 2) Overthinking the contents and layout of the article. OK, I admit it! That may not be the most helpful piece of advice. It makes more sense as you go on.

When I review articles for professional journals, I occasionally get a manuscript that does not address important information. In a research journal, not explaining methods or data analysis is the kiss of death for an



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article. For a teaching journal like THST, the most important task is to explain how your work is relevant for real teachers. Have you aligned a lesson to standards? Have you mentioned all the resources you need? What

Article Outline – Food web lesson plan	
1)	Title Page
2)	Abstract
3)	Introduction
	a) <i>Featured concept</i>
	b) <i>Challenges to teaching this topic</i>
4)	Activity Plan
	a) <i>Driving Question</i>
	b) <i>Objectives</i>
	c) <i>IDOE Standards</i>
	d) <i>Materials</i>
	e) <i>Procedures</i>
5)	Assessment plan
6)	Samples of student work
7)	Impact on student learning
8)	References

about safe science teaching and citations for your sources? These are all very important. Plan them out! Do what your middle school, high school and college writing teachers told you to do; Make an outline (Figure 1). It IS helpful, no matter how much you hated that assignment in school.

Figure 1. Sample outline

But reviewers are just as quick to reject articles that have too much detail. I once reviewed an article for a research journal that was 90 pages long! It had an extensive literature review, enormous tables of data and statistical analysis, and very specific and wordy commentary on every aspect of the study. The article never had a chance. Your article needs to carve out one specific idea to present, get to the point, and present the results that are relevant to the main message. And the rest can wait for another article. Be concise! It shortens the work for you, and makes reviewers and editors happy.

Make the Editors Happy!

I usually tell my students that when I grade their final papers, they want to make me feel happy, and that following the guidelines and the rubrics makes me happy. You can apply that same approach to the editors of a journal when you submit an article.

The best way to make the editors happy is to follow the guidelines published on the journal’s website. If they say no more than 8000 words, don’t submit something with 12,000 words. If they want the article uploaded as a Word file, don’t send a PDF. If they say images must be in .jpg format, don’t send .gif or .png files. It’s really just like following the rubric for an assignment at school.

View [THST’s Author Guidelines here](#).

Don’t Over-Format!

Overthinking an article can also mean over-formatting your work. I know you want your article to look sharp. Early in my writing career, I spent hours trying to make the text look the way I thought it should look on the page. It is natural that you want your work to look polished and professional, but the time you put into formatting will be undone by editors.

The turning point for me was working with editors at NSTA Press. I was working on a book, and over-formatting was my thing until I had a phone conversation with the editor who was managing the project. She told it to me bluntly. “Don’t do ANYTHING with the format. Make it very plain!”

She explained that every bit of formatting I do beyond the returns at the end of a paragraph is likely to be deleted by the editors and pressmen, and they will reformat it the way they want it. It turns out I was wasting a lot of time and energy. When I started doing the editing I learned that over-formatting makes it extremely hard on the editors.

My suggestion: Format the title page with the information the journal needs, centered on the page. For EVERYTHING else, make it simple.

- Use the tools in the “Format>Paragraphs” menu to indent the first line of each paragraph. Then do NOT hit Tab to indent (see Figure 2)
- Do not add a return or extra space between paragraphs, except where you put a new header.
- If you need to make bulleted or numbered lists, use the tools within Word. Do not type the bullets or numbers or align text using space and tab keys. (Figure 3)
- It is good to boldface headers, but follow the journal’s format like for alignment of the headers.
- Use italics for book titles, emphasis, and maybe excerpts of interviews, but not much else.
- NEVER EVER use the space bar and the return key to move text on the page.

Remember, this will feel weird to you at first, but trust me, it is easier! It also increases the chances you’ll get published, because the editor who looks at your submission first is the one you want to make happy.



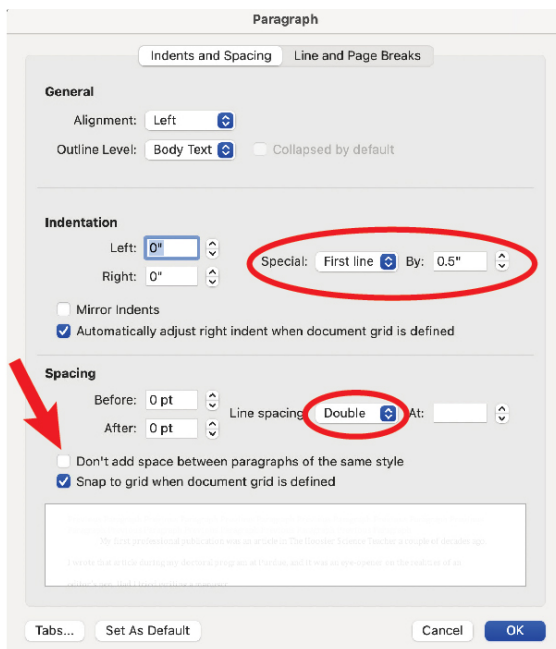


Figure 2. Use tools to set indentations and spacing

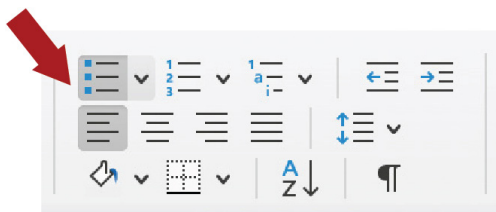


Figure 3. Tools for bullet and numbered lists.

Inserting Images Made Easy

One thing that make an editor’s job harder is the way authors submit images with their articles. Most of simply copy and paste or insert an image into the text. But then we add “text wrap” features, or we put a frame around the photo. Many authors also don’t think about the format or resolution of a photo.

The NSTA editors set me straight about this. “You can put a photo in the text if you want, but we are probably going to move it.” In other words, don’t spend a lot of time tinkering with the position of your image. If you want the image there, just insert the image, and let the editors take it from there.

You also need to reference the figure in the text. For instance, you can write “(See Figure X)” when you first write about that figure. On the page with the image, you also need include a caption. The caption should say “Figure X. Short description here.” You write the description, but the emphasis is on “short.” Each figure or

table should have a caption, and should be mentioned in the text. If you look through articles that have been published in the journal, you’ll see examples. It’s ok to use those as a model for how to write your captions.

The image you paste into the text really needs to be high quality. Until recently, most cell phone images have been 72 dots per inch (dpi), and that resolution is so low that enlarging an image makes it very grainy or “pixely.” The best images for an online journal should be 140 dpi or more. Use a large file. It is easier for editors to shrink the image than enlarging, and this makes high quality images easier. If you create an image on the computer, like a graph or a diagram, check your software’s settings. It should allow you to start with high resolutions, often at 300 dpi. (See Figure 4).

In the production process, the editors will place the image in a layout that works for them, and they will place it in a spot that makes sense. Trust them to do it



Figure 4. Comparing high and low resolution images

Cite Your Sources

Here is another thing my students hear from me all too often. THST is a professional journal, and teachers are professionals. It is very important that when you refer to someone else’s work, you cite the source.

You need to cite in the body of the text, even if you did not quote the source directly. It is simple to do. In parentheses, put the authors’ last names and the year, or maybe names and page number, or maybe names, year and page number. (Check the format preferred by the journal – “make the editors happy!”) For instance, you can just put “(McConnell, 2006)” or maybe “(Aurah & McConnell, 2014, 25).” If you use a direct quote, make sure you include the page number. That will cover almost any citation format.

Remember, anything you cite in the text must appear in a References list at the end, and vice versa. Some journals call it “References,” and others call it



“Bibliography,” or “References Cited,” but you should expect to include this. (Check the format preferred by the journal... again!)

THST guidelines ask you to use APA 6th edition. View [Purdue’s OWL website](#) for examples.

Proofreading

One of the last steps will be proofreading your work. Do a thorough job, and better yet, ask a good writer to help proofread it for you! You will always miss typos in your own work that others will notice. It’s human nature.

But keep in mind that reviewers and editors will also proofread your work. The more I write, the better I am at proofreading, and the less I worry about it. But I have also grown “author’s callouses.” You need to have thick skin when you view your first few responses from a journal with reviewers’ comments. They WILL catch typos you missed, and they WILL suggest changes that you may not agree with. Most of the time, they are right.

So be aware that you will be the one on the receiving end of the proofreader’s red pen, like being the student in your class after you correct their papers. It’s all part of the process. Be prepared, and don’t take it personally.

Don’t Be Afraid To Try!

One last tip... Don’t let the fear of the process stop you from writing. Take the leap and give it a try! I think this is especially true for a practitioner journal like *The Hoosier Science Teacher*. The editors, reviewers and readers are a lot like you, and we want to help you get your work ready for the public. The feedback we offer is meant to help you.

Even more importantly, the people who create and read THST want to read your article. We depend on each other find new ideas. That’s why we go to HASTI Conferences and PD workshops. Your articles are just another way to share the good work you are doing.

It’s also part of being a professional educator. If your school is like most, there is language in your evaluation policy that gives you Professional Growth Points for authoring an article, and it looks good on your evaluations.

Summary

The goal of this list of tips is to show how writing for THST can be easier than you may think. For the graduate student or college professor, writing can be a bit more elaborate than what I’ve described, but I would contend that many of the tips still apply.

To summarize my points, writing for a practitioner’s journal is easy if you start by planning what you want to say, and be concise in your writing. Keep your formatting very simple, and take the easiest route to inserting figures and tables by letting the editors handle placement of the image. Then proofread well and be ready for constructive criticism.

But remember, HASTI is here to help, and we want to include your best lesson ideas, stories about science and teaching, reviews of resources, poetry or puzzles, and more! Without submissions from members and other readers, there is no THST. We invite you to write. We KNOW you can do it!

To submit a manuscript or cover photo for consideration by *The Hoosier Science Teacher*, we invite you to [visit the Submissions Page](#) (Figure 5)

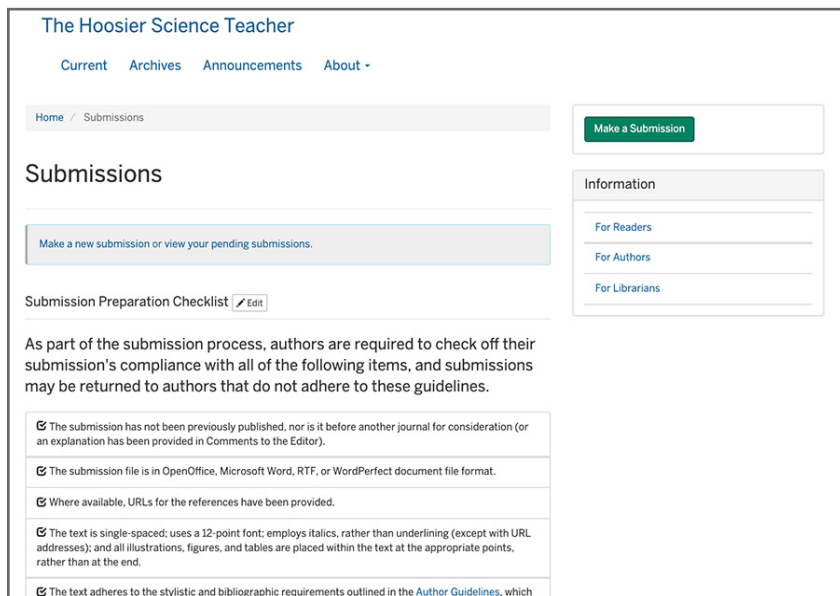


Figure 5. To submit an article to THST, visit the Submissions page

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