

Writing Papers for the Juried Section of *Theatre Design & Technology*

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By Willard F. Bellman

Careful readers of this journal might be aware of a new feature known as the juried section (see p. 6 of each issue). This article is offered to assist those wishing to submit papers for possible publication in the juried section of *TD&T*.

The juried section was added for the benefit of those college or university-based members who are working their way up the academic ladder. Although design and other production-related activities are now more likely to be accepted to satisfy the nearly universal requirement for significant scholarship, there is still a powerful tendency to give more credence to scholarly papers. This tendency is usually supported by those who work in traditional academic disciplines in which the scholarly paper is the only option available and where there is a long-standing tradition of written scholarship. Since people from these traditional disciplines often serve on retention-promotion-tenure (RPT) committees, frequently as a majority, many junior theatre faculty members still must face the fact that the only way they are going to be retained and promoted is to write such papers in spite of the fact that they also submit creative work.

While the appearance of any article in a respected journal constitutes “publication,” juried papers have special significance and are often the deciding factor in a promotion decision. “Juried” means that the paper has been submitted “blind” (i.e., without any identification of the author) to a panel of academic peers, including specialists in the field of the paper. The panel weighs the paper against a set of standards. If it meets those standards, it will be published. This jurying process is normally carried out only by “scholarly journals,” such as *TD&T*’s juried papers section, whose rules for evaluation follow the traditions of academic scholarship. Acceptance by such a journal can often result in acceptance of the papers as a major piece of evidence favoring promotion without local review of the paper. Of course, if the candidate’s school happens to have a specialist in the area of the paper, the candidate had best be sure that the paper he or she wrote will also satisfy that specialist.

The traditions of scholarship are much the same throughout the academic world and scholarly papers in theatre are no exception. Here is a list of commonly applied criteria. Note that a major flaw in any one of these is likely to doom the paper. They are in no particular order of importance:

1. The paper must advance knowledge in the field.
2. It should demonstrate a broad knowledge of the field.
3. It should demonstrate a high level of the use of the English language.
4. It should follow academically accepted standards of documentation.
5. Illustrations should be carefully related to the text and explicate it effectively making it easy for an informed reader to replicate its procedure or process.
6. The content should satisfy the requirements of the specialists on the jury.

1. The paper must advance knowledge in the field. This is often misconstrued to mean a major advance in knowledge. But, fortunately for most academic writers, “advance” can be a relative term. It is not necessary to have discovered a new light source or created a completely revolutionary method of play directing to make an original contribution. Knowledge usually progresses in tiny increments. Many a successful doctoral thesis (the ultimate in scholarly writing!) has been built on a tiny addition to the knowledge of, say Shakespeare’s use of language. Therefore, an article on lighting control technology whose thesis (the core idea of the paper) builds on the present computer-assisted control methods and adds but one new twist can satisfy the requirement. The advance, although it may be small, must be clear and be well defended against any hint of copying from others or repetition of past work. Evidence of the originality of its thesis must be clearly provided in the paper itself. Additionally, references to other works and data must make it easy for readers to check further if they wish. The writer must be certain to

recognize the work of those who come before (footnotes or in-text references) and then modestly claim only that addition which is clearly provable as new.

Note that an “advancement of knowledge” must by definition have never before been published. A previously published “discovery” by the writer cannot be “new” again for a second publication. Of course, if you build on what you previously published coming to a genuinely new insight or conclusion, the standard is met. Many scientists follow this procedure over and over.

2. It should demonstrate a broad knowledge of the field. This comes almost automatically as the author establishes the originality of his or her work. Such a demonstration usually consists of a survey of the field noting all close resemblances to the author’s work and making clear why they aren’t the same as the author’s. In many cases this also includes a refutation of previously established positions. Indeed the field of philosophy is almost entirely built upon the tradition of showing how previous thinkers’ work is found wanting, leaving the way open for the present writer to develop a new, more comprehensive concept.

Argument: Structurally, the treatment of items 1 and 2 often takes the form of an “argument”; the writer builds a case showing the need for the development which he or she is about to present by citing the way in which the problem or process is inadequately treated in current practice or literature. This procedure requires careful use of evidence (citing works and practices or others with proper references) and then develops an argument from this evidence leading to the conclusion that the author’s solution to the problem is necessary, applicable, and effective. This calls for careful, clear writing and skillful use of citations.

3. It should demonstrate a high level of the use of the English language. Although scholarly writing has a reputation for being intentionally dull, this need not be the case. It must, however, be very clear and accurately express what the author wants to say. This can mean long sentences with dependent clauses if these are what it takes to do the job. It also means a certain amount of repetition. Scholarly concepts are often complex and the old adage “Tell them what you are going to say, say it, and then tell them what you said” may be a necessary procedure. Although holding the reader’s attention and even entertaining him or her is desirable and will add to the effectiveness of the paper, crystal clarity must come first. This usually rules out colloquialisms and casual sentence structures.

Vocabulary can be a problem. Short words make for easy reading, but they may not be precise enough. The writer must seek out the exact wording that expresses his or her concept completely and accurately. If the material is technical, jargon may enter the picture. Jargon, a set of specialized terms and phrases, develops because it makes it easier to express certain things within the “in” group. Then its use may spread because it casts the aura of superiority over the discussion, even if some readers have doubts about what is being said. This, of course, is where jargon fails to meet the test of clarity. Therefore, specialized terms or special use of generally known terms requires careful definition. Then the terms must be used consistently within the definitions or they must be redefined and the new definition consistently followed. Failure to handle terms clearly is almost always fatal to a scholarly paper.

4. It should follow academically accepted standards of documentation. Footnotes and bibliographical entries (documentation) are the nightmare of any term paper writer where they seem more of an exercise than a necessity. However, in scholarly writing for journals their purpose is real. As stated above, clarity and originality are essential. A paper’s in-text references, footnotes, and bibliography are concrete evidence that the necessary research has been done. If members of the jury wish to check any of the paper’s sources, the proper information should be at hand. In the interest of consistency, editors, of scholarly journals insist that a “style sheet” be followed. Since there are variations between accepted style sheets, the writer should make sure that he or she is using the proper style sheet for the publication. In the case of *TD&T*, this means the Chicago Manual of Style. It is also a good idea to look through already-published articles to see how editors have applied the style sheet.

5. Illustrations should be carefully related to the text and explicate it effectively making it easy for an informed reader to replicate its procedure or process. Papers on theatre technology are as dependent on illustrations as papers on chemistry are dependent on formulae and papers on mathematics on equations.

However, many scholarly journals are published without illustrations or with only a few rather primitively reproduced graphs. This was one of the main reasons for establishing the juried paper section of *TD&T* which will endeavor to provide the highest possible reproduction quality.

When a paper depends heavily on illustrations for its very meaning, these must be exceptionally clear, easy to read, and accurate in detail. The author must make sure that the exact relationship between the illustration and the text repeats what is shown in the illustration or vice-verse. Technically, authors are reminded that their illustrations will usually be much reduced in size during the printing process. They must remain readable. Note that the editors of *TD&T* will offer special assistance to authors after they have passed the jury process; however, the original submission must convince the jury that a high level of illustration quality will be forthcoming.

The essence of Item 5 is that the paper, with its illustrations, must make it possible for an informed reader to check its research and, if it deals with a process, to replicate the process and test the product.

6. The content should satisfy the requirements of the specialists on the jury. The writer must assume that every jury will include at least one specialist in the area of the paper. Specialists are charged with the duty of determining whether the facts of the paper are correct. If, for example, the text purports to deal with the commercial theatre, an expert in that type of theatre would be expected to determine whether the paper deals with it accurately and realistically. No matter how stylistically correct the paper is and how deeply it is has been researched, if it is deemed wrong in its assumptions or conclusions, it will be rejected.

GETTING HELP

Juries for the Juried Papers Section are urged to make brief comments concerning papers they find marginally acceptable and which they feel can be improved by the author. The jury chair will then send these comments, along with the paper, back to the author for revision. After revision, the paper may be again submitted to a jury.

However, this assistance will be quite limited and it will only apply to papers which are likely to be salvageable. No extended discourse will be carried on. Therefore, novice authors of scholarly papers should early on find a mentor to serve as editor/advisor. If possible, the mentor should be familiar with the area of the paper, but is even more essential that he or she be familiar with the processes of scholarly writing and RPT procedures. Obviously, it would be unethical for a mentor to ghost-write a paper. Any hint of this kind of collusion could end a candidate's chances for future progress in the academic world, but this does not rule out editorial advice providing the paper is clearly the work of the candidate.

WILLARD F. BELLMAN is a noted author, emeritus faculty member of the Department of Theatre at University of California-Northridge, and a long-time member of USITT.