

GEOLOGIC REPORT WRITING

GL201 -- Bedrock Geology of Vermont

The Crown Point Field Problem report is your first attempt at scientific writing in this course. The purpose of scientific writing is to communicate your data and their implication in a way that *cannot be misunderstood*. New scientific principles are difficult enough to understand without fuzzy writing getting in the way. To limit the confusion, scientific writers follow certain conventions and rules. You will learn these rules and follow them in this course. Keep in mind that although formats and methods of citing references vary between as well as within scientific disciplines, your assignment here is to stick to the style required by the scientific journal in which you hope to publish your results. In your case, the journal of choice for geologic reports in this class is the American Journal of Science. You should look at a recent paper from the AJS (available in the Science Library, Bicentennial Hall) to serve as a guide. Refer also to Baldwin's *Guides for Spelling and Style* (713).

There will be lots of instructions and they may be difficult to follow, especially on your first paper when you are trying to figure out the science as well as the writing style. Realize, however, that all your subsequent reports will have basically the same format and outline, freeing you to concentrate on the science and the communication of the science in the clearest possible way.

Here are some suggestions for scientific writing:

Use the present tense in descriptions-- The Crown Point Limestone is gray-blue and thinly bedded. Using past tense would mean that the color changed since last observed: it was gray-blue but now is white.

Keep yourself out of the report for the most part -- avoid sentences that begin with "I interpret" or "The fossils we saw include...". You may use "I" or "we" sparingly and in special situations: "Our results differ greatly from those of Coish (1999) because he missed a critical exposure" or "I measured 75 meters of section in the Crown Point Limestone".

Separate data from interpretation in your report. The data you collect today (thickness of beds, lithologies, types of fossils present, etc.) should be correct forever, but interpretations inevitably change as geologic thinking evolves. If your data are carefully collected your grandchildren should be able to use them to their advantage when they take this class in 2041. Make it easy on future generations (as well as your peer audience) and present data in the data section; interpret data in the interpretation section.

Refer to published sources for correct formation names and capitalization: in your case use the Double Columnar Section pasted in your notebook (Glens Falls Limestone, Valcour Formation, etc.)