others, for whom writing is a requirement, important information, based on the author's knowledge and experience gained from more than 40 years of writing and editing. The book evolved from a monthly column in the Agronomy News and articles later published in the Fine-Tuning Your Writing newsletter, which is merely a compilation of old columns. Each column was reviewed, updated, and grouped by subject matter. New information was added wherever needed and brief comments were inserted before, after, or within columns as appropriate. The result is a very practical book providing the best information from the original columns, the new newsletter, and many other sources. The book is easy to read, logical in its organization, and appropriate for undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate readers—anyone who wants to improve their writing and communication skills. The author states one person cannot teach another how to write. “One person can teach another about writing, but the only way to learn how to write is to write.”

The first four chapters are devoted to the basics of writing, but not the usual grammar and spelling that characterizes many writing books. Instead, emphasis is placed on understanding the reader. Who will it be, what does he or she already know, what do you as a writer know, and what do you know that the reader needs to know? The author stresses that in addition to the traditional three Cs of writing: clear, concise, and correct, each article must also be complete. Include whatever is needed to help the reader understand, but delete any irrelevant and unnecessary information. The goal is to write a paper that people will read, i.e., to take an idea from the writer’s mind and insert it, as intact as possible, into the reader’s mind. The author provides numerous tips such as “if you can’t state your main topic in one short sentence, you haven’t defined your main topic.” Others include the effect of using in-vogue phrases, flowery language, and the art of throwing words away to be sure that only the essential information is included.

Chapters 5 through 13 are devoted to technical information that every author needs to know. This includes punctuation and grammar, word selection, crafting meaningful titles, writing complete but concise abstracts, preparing clear tables and useful figures, including only pertinent references, making appropriate statistical inferences, and avoiding passive voice. The author stresses that written communication involves a minimum of four aspects: (i) what the writer means, (ii) what the writer writes, (iii) how the reader reads or listener hears, and (iv) how the reader or listener interprets what has been written or said. He also states that “science is a complicated subject, but it need not be described in complicated sentences.” Describing it simply and logically may actually be more important. Throughout these chapters, the author stresses that writing in an accurate, unbiased, and non-awkward manner is clearly a goal worth striving for. Numerous examples and anecdotes based on experience are used to help the reader grasp both obvious and subtle points that will inevitably help improve one’s writing.

The final four chapters address plagiarism, reviewing and reviewers, electronic publishing, and development of effective poster presentations. The author states explicitly that with regard to plagiarism, he is not an attorney and his opinions should not be considered as legal advice. The problem, with the advent of computers, appears to be growing. The critical questions appear to focus on whether the amount of information was “substantial” and if the accused had an opportunity to read the work from which the material was allegedly taken. With regard to reviews and reviewing, the author cites the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) Reviewer’s Guide that lists the eight qualities of an excellent review. These are:

- objectivity, accuracy, relevance, thoughtfulness, explicitness, helpfulness, courtesy, and promptness. The author acknowledges that electronic publishing is evolving rapidly but provides useful insight regarding the electronics associated with the software used to prepare, edit, and publish. Finally, with regard to poster presentations, the author provides five valuable suggestions: keep text to a minimum, make the poster physically attractive, have something to catch the eye of people walking by, make it easy to read and follow, and be sure it’s understandable in a single reading. The book also has a detailed index that helps the reader find precise information quickly and with minimum effort.

This book is a very up-to-date, easy-to-read reference on the subject of writing, especially the American version of scientific and technical English. Reading it will be very enjoyable and educational for anyone associated with the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), or SSSA because of his/her familiarity with the author as a mentor, colleague, and friend. For others, the examples and anecdotes may seem to be too closely tied to the tri-society journals, but the author clearly states that these are examples and that the readers’ specific journals must be considered the final authority for some questions. I fully recommend this book to my colleagues in crop and soil science, students in any discipline requiring technical writing skills, and others who want to improve their writing and communication skills.

Douglas L. Karlen
USDA-Agricultural Research Service
National Soil Tilth Laboratory
2150 Pammel Drive
Ames, IA 50011-4420
(karlen@nstl.gov)


This book is a natural extension of the book, Economic Thresholds for Integrated Pest Management, edited by L.G. Higley and L.P. Pedigo. Where that book focused on economic decision levels for management of crop pests (insects, weeds, and diseases), this book presents a unique collection of topics relating to plant physiological, developmental, growth, and yield responses to biotic stress. One theme that emerges is the need to regard biotic stress as a general phenomenon affecting plants and exploiting the commonalities, rather than focusing on the differences, in works presented by both basic and applied scientists. Peterson and Higley stress that understanding the impact of plant stressors on plant fitness and yield is critical for moving forward in development of better pest management systems. This is a fitting text, indeed prerequisite reading, for any scientist or graduate student needing to develop an improved understanding of the relationship of crop pests, their interactions with and impact upon agricultural crops.

Important concepts and topics presented in this book include: (i) experimental approaches for quantifying the relationships between insect numbers or populations and crop loss; (ii) limiting factors to maximum crop yield potential; (iii) studies which have alleged plant responses to diverse biotic and abiotic stresses; (iv) the importance of phenological delay as a critical response to plant stress, especially as it relates to crop maturity, yield, and harvest practices; (v) why plant gas exchange pro-