Submission guidelines for writing a how-to article for *Automata Magazine*

If you have any questions about any of what's below, please drop us an e-mail at *automatamag@comcast.net* We look forward to hearing from you.

One of the great joys of automata construction is learning how other people accomplish the things that they do. People's ingenuity is wonderful. There's joy on the other end of the process, too—sharing what you've done with others. Writing a detailed how-to article is one of the best ways to share.

Writing a really good how-to story—one that will truly benefit the reader—is satisfying work that can really help your fellow automatists.

Planning the story

The time to start planning your story is before you begin the project. I have received any number of articles that were written after the project was finished. These usually take the form of "how I did it." stories. While these are always of interest and are certainly welcome, a more useful "how you can do it" format is what's covered here.

Consider the probable experience level of your intended reader. If you are writing for beginners, assume no knowledge or experience. Explain everything. For more intermediate or advanced readers, a lot of basic information can be left out. If your knowledge is highly specialized, then the inclusion of some background information may be in order before you progress to the main body of the article.

The story itself

The best how-to stories describe every step. Written steps should be numbered and the numbers should correspond with photos. Photo numbers should also be referred to in the body text. When I write a how-to story, I find it useful to do the writing as I do the project. That way, less is lost through memory lapse. Granted, it does slow down the work time some but that's part of the process of writing a good story.

Include a tool list, a materials list, and, if appropriate, a parts list. If you found some unusual tool or material at some place most of us aren't familiar with, include that as well, with contact information.

When you prepare your work space for the commencement of a project, prepare a place for photography, too. You can always take pictures on your work bench—many people do. However, the lighting is not always ideal and background clutter sometimes distracts from the subject.

It is sometimes useful to include callouts, or words, on top of the photos. If you do this, please send two copies of the picture—one with callouts and one without. We'll add the callouts in the style that we use for all our articles.

Take a picture of *every single step* of the process. It's far easier to eliminate redundant photos than to have to try to recreate a photo after the fact. Don't worry about sending too many pictures—it's not a problem. Some authors even take multiple pictures of each step from slightly different angles.

Number your photos—not only in the text but on the actual photo files—so that we can find the right pictures quickly and easily. If you take more than one picture of something for us to choose from, number them 3a, 3b, 3c, etc. Each photo should also have a brief caption.

Drawings are frequently useful. These can be submitted in just about any readable format. They may or may not be redrawn here. Hand-drawn sketches are fine. If they are nicely drawn and lettered, we may publish them as is. Otherwise, they may be redrawn here. What's important is that they be understandable.

That's the basics of writing a good how-to story. Before you get started, though, please send me a query letter describing the project. Also, please have

a look at our **General submission guidelines**.

Things to send with each article

Please send the following with your article:

• Your complete postal address and e-mail address (for our records only—will not be published unless you request it)

• A photo of yourself that we can run small with your story. We'll publish it along with your city and country. It's nice to know who's writing

• Your website URL, if you have one