

By Peggy Herring

I am a biologist and I want to learn to write.

I believe that the privilege of doing research carries with it a responsibility for interpreting technical ideas for the interested public who may be footing the bill.

Scientific research too often is a facts-and-figures account of research and management. This is useful for people who already are specialists in the field, but it

does not inspire those who have no confidence in themselves to understand scientific concepts. Scientific policy affects all citizens, and we should have access to these ideas. We need this information to help us make decisions and understand their consequences.

Topics of science can be presented clearly and simply without losing their accuracy. *Precision is relative to the needs of the audience. With modified precision* (NOT compromised accuracy), the most obscure technical idea can become readable, understandable, to a non-scientific audience.

Also, there is an added value in viewing research in less detail. Focus is broadened so that trends in thought and relationships to other work become clearer.

I have one more personal reason to want to learn to write well. The commitment to interpret a certain topic of science is a demanding and effective way of *learning* about the subject. To collect the small puzzle pieces of research and organize ideas into a larger design is to experience the joy of discovery. This organizational process would be the same if the product were to be a written article, a videotape, or an illustrated display. I am sometimes more fluent in drawing a picture than I am in composing the thousand words it represents. But to write clearly is to think clearly, and so interpretation becomes discovery.