

Getting Your Model Railroad Author Certificate

&

hints and tips on being a successful
Model Railroad Author.

Requirements & Rules

Prepare and submit material (*for publication*)
on any of the following subjects:

Model Railroading;

Prototype Railroading, Applicable to Modeling;

NMRA Administration (*e.g.* Officers or Committee Reports);

The material being claimed must be the work of the author,
photographer, artist, draftsman, etc. applying for the certificate.

A total of forty-two (42) points must be earned.....

IS THE 42 ANSWER

Formal Publications

This is material that appears in printed or electronic media, such as magazines or newsletters.

Includes → and may include text, photographs, drawings, etc.

A key requirement is that the publication must have an editor and that the author works with that editor to refine the material for publication.

Material that has been published or accepted for publication, may be claimed.

A copy of the published material or of the acceptance receipt from the publication or the URL for electronic media must be submitted as proof.

Points are awarded regardless of size or number of features appearing in any particular issue.

Points Earned Per Full Page

Item	National Publication	NMRA National	NMRA Region	NMRA Division & SIGs
Article or Column	3	3	2	1
Photos or Art Work	3	3	2	1
Scale Drawing of Prototype	6	6	4	2
Scale Drawing of Track Plan	3	3	2	1
NMRA Data/RP Sheet-One Subject	-	6	-	-

More Rules.....

A "page" is approximately 800 words.

Credit may be claimed for partial pages down to 1/4 page units.

NMRA Publications (including SIG publications) with a circulation >2000 may be considered National Publications

NMRA Publications with a circulation of >1000 may be considered Region Publications.

Material published in 100% NMRA Club publications earns 1/2 the # of points as for an NMRA Division publication.

No more than 1/2 of your total required points (21) may be claimed for Division or 100% NMRA Club publications.

Live Clinics

These are live, streamed, or pre-recorded presentations given at conventions or other NMRA live or virtual events.

In order to be eligible for credit:

- 1) It must be prepared and presented by the member applying for the certificate;
- 2) It must be at least 30 minutes in length;
- 3) It must include a handout or other record of the presented material
- 4) A copy of this handout or other record must be included with the certificate application.)

Points Earned For Live Clinics

Item	National	Region	Division
Given At NMRA Sponsored Events	6	4	2
Given at non- NMRA Sponsored Events	3	2	1

A live clinic can only be claimed for Model Railroad Author points 1 time, even if it presented more than once.

Additional presentations of a clinic earn credit towards Association Volunteer!

Informal Publications

This is for material that does not go through a formal publication process with an Editor and is most likely published on the Internet. Includes self-published books.

Key requirements are that material must be educational in nature and applicable to model railroading.

No more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total required points (21) for the Author certificate may be claimed for Informal Publications.

Written material on a blog, website, or online magazine meeting the requirements earns credit at the same rate as Published Articles in Region publications.

All photos, drawings, etc. are treated as $\frac{1}{3}$ of a page.

Material that is published in more than one place or way (for example, both in a magazine and electronically, or in multiple electronic formats) can only earn credit once. No double-dipping!

The address (URL) of the material must be included with the certificate application.

Informal Publications - Audio/Visual

Audio/Visual material such as online videos earns credit at the same rate as Clinics in Non-NMRA National Sponsored Events.

Credit earned is for each hour of completed production time (e.g., a 1 hour video earns 3 points).

Material presented via NMRAx or the NMRA YouTube channel earns credit at the same rate as Clinics in NMRA National Sponsored Events if not claimed as a Live Clinic.

Material that is published in more than one place can only earn credit once.

The address (URL) of the material must be included with the certificate application.

Informal Publications - Podcasts

Podcasts earn credit at the same rate as Clinics in Non-NMRA Region Sponsored Events.

Credit earned is for each hour of completed production time (e.g., a 1 hour podcast earns 2 points).

Material that is published in more than one place can only earn credit once.

The address (URL) of the material must be included with the certificate application.

General:

Material claimed must be documented in a Record and Validation form and be reviewed by an NMRA member who must ensure the following:

- Material covers model railroading; prototype railroading applicable to modeling or NMRA administration

- Material is educational in nature

- Accessible on a public forum; not behind a paywall

- URL provided and functional

- Is original work of author, with appropriate citations or credit given to materially fairly included in the publication or presentation

Regional AP Managers are authorized to evaluate work for credit for both printed and electronically published work. Final determination of what material is acceptable for credit, and how much credit it earns, lies with the National AP Manager.

For all material that is the work of more than one person, each person may claim 1/2 of the applicable points, provided that they did at least 40% of the work involved.

General:

Finally!

Submit a completed Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) which shall include:

A Record and Validation listing of all material claimed:
giving the subject matter;
name of the publication or place of presentation
the dates, and the handouts or other documentation

The Record and Validation listing for informally published material must include an affirmation of an NMRA member who attests that the submitted material meets the standards above.

The number of points claimed for each item must be shown.

When in doubt:

Contact your Division AP Manager!!!

Or your Region AP Manager:

Kurt Thompson, MMR
apchair@mer-nmra.com

Getting Started

- 1: You need to have an idea, process, action, project, activity that you think would be of interest to others...
- 2: You need to decide how you want to communicate this to others...
- 3: Can you do it as a clinic? Essentially teach others what you know.... Remember → A hand-out is $\frac{1}{2}$ way to an article...and counts towards your 42 points!
- 4: Can you make an article out of that handout?

Suggested Starting Point #1

Start by going to clinics and seeing what others are presenting AND how other folks are presenting their clinic.

Slides	- tour of the upper lower eastern branch of...
Movies	- history of trolley operations in Richmond, etc.
“What I did & what I got...”	- How I make trees, do scenery, lay switches...
Live demonstrations	- using an Airbrush, sandblasting, soldering
Hands-on demonstrations	- sandblasting, using a torch for working brass
Construction Clinics	- building the Upper Northern SW Yard office...
Technical issues	- installing DCC, integrating your iPhone into Ops
Hands-on make & take	- make trees, build a car, hand lay track, animation

While you are watching & learning from their clinic, learn how to give a clinic!

What works, doesn't work, what you like and don't like.....

Next:

Present a clinic, make up a handout for credit (get those points!!).

Use your neat idea, process, etc. pertaining to model railroading... work from your strengths!

Suggested Starting Point #2

Writing an article for your Division or Region publication about some neat trick or model railroad problem that you solved; write social or historical information in these publications....work from your strengths! Everybody does something well!

Your Divisional Publication Regional Publication – The Local

Start by reading both & the model RR magazine literature (what's left of it...)

Pay attention to how other folks are presenting their ideas.

Look at other articles in the model railroad magazines for ideas.

Find the articles you like best and try to do yours similarly.

Again, while you are reading, learn what works, doesn't work,
what you like & don't like!

Suggested Starting Point #3

Merge #1 & #2!!!

These two areas completely overlap & they are all you really actually need to get to your Authors certificate!!!

This is exactly where I got started...

Gave a clinic w/ handout at the Regional MER Convention

Revised handout became an article in The Local (Regional NMRA Pub)

That article was “noticed” and kicked up to Scale Rails (National NMRA Pub)

(Take the higher point publication!)

That's 3 points for a 1 page article & 4 points for the clinic w/ handout !

That's 9 points for a 3 page article & 4 points for the clinic w/ handout !

Suggested Starting Point #4

Work with your Strength Areas!

Complement your other MRR Achievement areas!

Not everything has to be the Great American Model RR article

Remember, none of your points have to come from National Publications!!

Remember!

$\frac{1}{2}$ your points can come from Division Pub's

$\frac{1}{2}$ your points can be electronic Pub's

All of your points can be from doing a lot of clinics!!!

Not Suggested Starting Point (a)

Writing the Great American Model RR article...

But, if you must..... or if you decide it's necessary.....

- 1) Do find past articles in model RRing magazines - find what you like & try to do yours similarly – organizational, style, flow – But → make it your own!
- 2) Do check with the targeted publication!
 - a) Know not only the field, but what your target publication publishes
 - b) Contact the Editorial office – are they interested – send a 2-3 page outline/sample
 - a) Communicate!
 - a) Find & Follow their guidelines / formatting / software / photos requirements

- 3) It's not the Great American novel.... Relax & be conversational when you write. Try to emulate as if you're talking to a friend. Just describe what you did, how you made it, what you have discovered, etc. But, be concise & understandable.
- 4) Pictures and/or drawings are a must! Ask friends for help or better yet – learn this yourself – or team up with a friend and split the points!!! Drawings & photography quality must be good! Sharp focus, good detail, no distracting backgrounds.
- 5) Is it understandable, clear, convey the information, & make sense.... Get some one other than yourself to read it. “Fresh eyes”... Don't be afraid to ask a model RR friend to edit it & make suggestions. (Ok, maybe that's a good way to lose friends, wife, etc.)
- 6) Do not commit plagiarism!
- 7) Do not submit your article to multiple publications at the same time!
- 8) Do not violate copyright!

So, what did I do.....(1)

- 1) Gave a clinic w/handout at the Regional MER Convention – building a Flatcar

Revised handout became an article in The Local (Regional NMRA Pub)
That article was “noticed” and kicked up to Scale Rails (National NMRA Pub)
- 2) Followed with converting the flatcar to a gondola in The Local (Regional NMRA Pub)
- 3) Gave a new clinic w/handout at the Regional MER Convention – building a Freight station

Revised handout became an article in The Local (Regional NMRA Pub)
That article was again “noticed” and kicked up to Scale Rails (National NMRA Pub)
- 4) Wrote several smaller articles of hints, ideas, suggestions, etc. for both the Potomac Flyer(Divisional Pub) and The Local (Regional NMRA Pub)

So, what did I do.....(2)

- 5) Wrote my 1st non-NMRA Nat'l article – Building a Heinz Vinegar Tank Car – O Scale Trains
- 6) Wrote my 2nd non-NMRA Nat'l article – Building Lauthers' Perfect Pickles - Parts 1 & 2 – O Scale Trains (14 magazine pages & Cover) – (42 points)
- 7) Other “small” articles scattered throughout.
- 8) Wrote my 3rd non-NMRA Nat'l article – Building Clugston's Store - Parts 1 & 2 – O Scale Trains
- 9) Wrote my 4th non-NMRA Nat'l article – Building Johnson's Small Engine Repair & Welding – Railroad Model Craftsman

And, there's been a lot more since then.....

Once you start, you may find you like it!!!

Remuneration!

So, what did I do.....(3)

2009 -- Took over as MER Contest Chair – 3-5 articles in The Local every year

2009 -- Took over as the Traction Action Columnist for O Scale Trains
1 page every issue of the magazine

2015 -- Became Associate Editor of O Scale Trains
Generate content, product reviews, represent magazine at meets, shows & conventions.

2018 -- Became Editor of O Scale Trains. Ended in 2024

2018 -- Became Editor-in-Chief of Cancer, Biotherapy, and Radiopharmaceuticals
Ended in 2025

Once you start, you may find you like it!!!

Remuneration!

Did I mention you can even get paid?

How do I plan / write an Article?

I start with a “Project”

I’m a “builder”, so rolling stock or a structure...

- 1) Cross-pollinate this category with your other Achievement award categories!!!
- 2) Plans --- I may or may not have plans to work from & I may or may not make them in advance or even afterwards – generally I do...something.
- 3) I take a lot of notes as I build anything --- I also take a lot of photos!
 - a. Record what you’re doing as you do it – don’t rely on your memory
 - b. Save the photos!! The photos can be used for the article!!!

How do I plan / write an Article?

4. I transfer those notes into text on the computer periodically → 1st rough draft!
 - a. Helps to fill in the gaps on note taking
 - b. Translation from pencil to computer - translational
 - c. That 1st draft that tells you what you forgot to do....
 - d. Looking at your photos will aid and correct – harshest critic ever!
5. I save everything in multiple places!!! – Hard drives / external hard drive / thumb drive – hard copy!
6. Proof reading – every draft incarnation until I can't stand to look at it!
7. Integrate photos & line drawings (call outs) – where should they go?
8. Final proof reading -- Wife, son, some one else.....

My Writing Tools --- Stage 1

Note pad and 0.5 mm mechanical pencils



My Writing Tools --- Stage 2

Personal Computer – Text & Drawings – Word & ChemDraw



My Writing Tools --- Stage 3

Photography & Software

Photoshop



A decent tripod is highly recommended

A convenient backdrop – tri-fold foamboard

Neutral color surface – pause periodically and take photos!

If you need help.....

Improving your writing skill:

Books on this topic in libraries in the 808 section

- *GETTING PUBLISHED* by Belkin
- *HOW TO WRITE & SELL THE 8 EASIEST ARTICLE TYPES* by Barnhard
- *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE* by Strunk & White.

→ Ask for help from some one that has gotten their Author's Certificate!

“...I will agree to assist other members in this subject whenever possible, whether or not they are participants in the Achievement Program.”

Writing may be intimidating to
many folks,
but it does not have to be so....