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Key Words or Keywords

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KEY WORDS or KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

Keywords are words or phrases which describe content. With the emergence of computerized data bases, keywords are important research tools for search engines, such as *GeoRef*¹. Keywords help to ‘tag’ relevant information within an article, and provide a researcher with useful clues to potential important and useful information.

KEYWORDS: writing in geology, literature search, GeoRef

How important are words? Think for a minute. How do you find information in the system that you need or want? You do it by key words. Those words may occur in the title or more recently, articles may have key words in addition to the title so when you search, you find what you want or need. If you are looking for a particular subject and you do not know the title or author, then key words can be used, for example in a search in *GeoRef*.

Most research rests on a foundation of previous knowledge and research. Each contribution is like a brick placed by a stone mason when building a wall – ‘the wall’ is dependent on the previous bricks for its stability. Also, by knowing the literature,

new approaches or ideas may be formulated. Consequently, key words are important to quickly and completely determine what, if anything, has been done on the subject at hand.

When perusing the literature what is it that gives a hint of interest? The title obviously is the most important. The title should succinctly state the topic of the article. Key words provide additional information on the subject material. If the title and key words indicate a potential resource, one then reads the abstract and checks the references and illustrations. At this point in the literature review, one decides whether or not to read the article. This sequence in finding pertinent material in the literature gives a hint as to the importance of the title and key words.

The construction of a title and development of a list of key words should be done carefully in order to provide future researchers with the greatest opportunity for locating your work. Key words should not repeat those in the title but give added insight into the subject, thus assuring the article can be located by anyone searching the subject in a database.

An untold number of ideas have been lost because they were obscured by an article with a general title and no key words. Two examples are Johann Udden’s (1912) concept of cyclic sedimentation discussed in a paper on geology of the Peoria, Illinois Quadrangle and R.C. Moore’s (1936) idea of genetic stratigraphy included in his definitive work on the Pennsylvanian strata of Kansas. Neither one of these works were followed up with details and a title indicating that subject; thus, discovered later accidentally by other workers interested in the more general subject indicated in the title. Neither of these works included key words.

Had the work of Udden (1912) and Moore (1936) been known before and recognized for its importance, the development of the subject probably would have been different and certainly developed earlier. Another missed opportunity for the lack of the concise title and key words.

I think this short exposé sufficiently emphasizes the importance of a title representing the content of the paper and in addition proper key words to give an idea of content. Make your title informative and chose descriptive key words. Remember those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it!

References Cited

Moore, R.C., 1936. Stratigraphic classification of the Pennsylvanian rocks of Kansas. *Kansas Geological Survey Bulletin* 22, 256 p.

Udden, J.A., 1912. Geology and mineral resources of the Peoria Quadrangle, Illinois. *U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin* 506, 103 p.

¹ *GeoRef* is a database containing over 3.4 million references to geoscience journal articles, books, maps, conference papers, reports and theses. The *GeoRef* database covers the geology of North America from 1669 to the present and the geology of the rest of the world from 1933 to the present.