

Quick Guide: Writing for the Journal of the National Academy of Forensic Engineers (JotNAFE)

This supplements the detailed guidance in "JournalContents.pdf" and "JournalGuidelines.pdf"

Guidance from the NAFE Bylaws, Operating Procedure 9

- The purpose of JotNAFE, or the Journal, and associated presentation is to inform, educate and elevate the membership and affiliates of the Academy regarding the practice of forensic engineering and encourage competent, objective and non-biased professional practice.
- This is done by focusing on the application of a particular technology in the context of the legal system, together with one or more cases within the experience of the author illustrating the subject matter, to provide valuable insight in methodologies and procedures that benefit the members.
- Ad hominem writings in the articles or commentary will not be accepted, nor will writings that reflect on the integrity or public image of any group of persons in or out of the profession of engineering.

Writing and presenting for the Journal

1. The goal is to produce a citable, peer-reviewed document that provides useful information to a forensic engineer, focused on the "science" rather than the art, and be consistent with a Rule 702 citation.
2. The abstract (150-word maximum) should include the challenge or problem, a short description of the subject matter used to address the challenge or problem, and a conclusion regarding the subject matter.
3. The subject matter should show sufficient detail, such as equations, data sources, code citations, or incident examples, that another professional with similar background would be able to understand and apply it.
4. Examples of JotNAFE subject matter includes (but not limited to): a novel use of technology; a specific method for determining an outcome; a useful adaptation of existing engineering methods; overcoming prior rulings or barriers regarding the method or technology; or a method to predict a risk to compare to a baseline. A key aspect is whether the product of the subject matter is quantifiable and repeatable, which, in turn, can be reviewed by peers.
5. While the subject being used in court is a factor considered, a Journal paper does not require the case to have gone to court. Effective forensic engineering often causes a case to settle.
6. The subject matter does not have to be novel, but it should represent an advance, refinement, or detailed example with forensic engineering. Documenting a technology or technique established in other fields or even similar cases being accepted by the court is an example of this. Documenting shortfalls or gaps in existing techniques is another example.
7. The author must provide citation for the engineering principles, data and examples used to support the author's presented work. Examples include other papers, engineering books, safety codes, published case law, or news events. Previously published work of the author may be cited, such as a new method based on previously published analysis.
8. Due to the multi-discipline nature of the Journal, the author should use a broader introduction to the engineering theory applied in the paper and provide more context than one would in a discipline-specific publication.

Pitfalls to avoid

1. Do not present the paper as an engineering report. The specificity of the details of equipment, people, places and organization that is critical in a legal context is not appropriate for the Journal. The paper is about the method, technology or technique itself. "File off the serial numbers" to give the broadest applicable context and still be valid from a technical perspective. If illustrating court acceptance is part of the paper, you can use case citations for trials to avoid recapping particulars, thereby focusing on the subject matter.
2. Do not present the paper in the format of an expert opinion. There is no cross-examination or discovery, nor is the expertise of the author presented. The conclusions must stand on presented work and citation without regard to the author's background or expertise.
3. Avoid unnecessary gore or other graphic content. While such images are part of the profession, the intent is to focus on the key engineering aspects under discussion.
4. Avoid unneeded addressing winning or losing a case, assigning liability regarding outcome, or emotional appeals and other forms of advocacy. Winning a case does not mean the engineering was correct. While the paper may illustrate a method of determining hazard using results of unacceptable levels of risk, the focus is the method. Warning of a risk without providing the means to independently determine the risk is insufficient for the Journal.
5. Avoid presenting a paper or case study without explicitly defining the subject matter, conclusion, and applicable significances. Sometimes, those who live the case feel these items are obvious. If there is not a clear, explicitly stated objective throughout the paper, the reader (and reviewers) may not understand what it is the author is attempting to show. At the end of the paper, the author should tie the analysis in with the original objective. The author should ask: "What am I attempting to show?" At the end of the paper, the author should be able to answer: "How did I show it?" and "So what?" (the significance to the case, to professional practice, and/or to public safety.)