

Guidelines for the production of *DataBits*, an Information Management Newsletter of the Long-Term Ecological Research Network

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INTRODUCTION

DataBits, a semi-annual newsletter, is published on the LTER Network website at http://lternet-183.lternet.edu/doc_archive/newsletters/databits/. The publication timing is set prior to the LTER Network Spring and Fall Science Coordinating Committee (CC) Meetings each year. *DataBits* purpose is to circulate information relevant to data management between the data managers, LTER community participants, and broader ecological community members. The online community newsletter was first implemented (as a "Data Management Newsletter") in 1989 as a response to a mandate which came from the 1989 LTER Information Managers Meeting (http://intranet.lternet.edu/archives/documents/reports/committee_reports/Data-management-committee/1989-DM-committee-report/im_1989_report.pdf). *DataBits* was originally created to provide a timely online resource for research information managers and was published for a number of years by John Porter (VCR). In a recent recollection of its history and mission, Porter wrote:

"As with several of the other activities initiated that year (1989) (developing a file of materials for new data managers and instituting DataTask, which later became IMEXEC), DataBits was aimed at community building within the nascent IM group and for outreach to interested PI's. The premier issue in Fall 1989 stated: "This is the premier issue of an LTER-wide version of DATABITS. Its purpose is to disseminate information relevant to data management between data managers and PI's within the LTER network." As a newsletter "for data managers by data managers" DataBits was always free-wheeling, with room for fact-based and opinion-based articles, and even some humor.

One of the needs DataBits sought to meet was to facilitate in the exchange of information and experience between data managers in the times between meetings. To this end, it included "site bytes" and longer features on new technologies being used by LTER data managers. The initial 1989-1994 ten issue series of DataBits was designed for email distribution (to those information managers that HAD email back then!). These issues are available online at: <http://www.vcr.lter.virginia.edu/gopher/Publications/Newsletters/Databits/>.

As I see it, the "mission" for DataBits has not changed very much. There are still timely discoveries and experiences (good and bad) that we need to share with one another, and DataBits is a good way to do it! (John Porter (VCR) personal email correspondence to Linda Powell (FCE), January 2004) "

In July 1998 at the Baltimore Information Managers meeting, James Brunt (LNO) invited Karen Baker (PAL) to lead the newsletter's redesign so that it could continue to facilitate LTER IM communications and introduced the idea of rotating editorship to alleviate the problems of having a single person responsible for the effort. LTER Network office (LNO) support via a site work project fellowship supported Karen Baker's (PAL) visit to the LTER Network Office in 1999. During this visit, a 'redesigned' *DataBits* issue was planned as a web posted communication in

coordination with web support personnel from the LNO. The first redesigned issue was published online in the spring of 1999. This issue colorized but preserved the original logo that spells out LTER in binary code. The initial guiding principles and procedures for the newsletter are described in a newsletter article coauthored by Karen Baker (PAL) and Marshall White (LNO) (Spring, 1999) (<http://intranet.lternet.edu/archives/documents/Newsletters/DataBits/99spring/>). The rotating editorship continued from this point forward and has been a real success. Some recent thoughts about the *DataBits* redesign are captured in the following email exchange:

"In the redesign we tried to keep to the original spirit of a purposefully informal 'within community' forum with low barriers for submission so diverse voices could be heard. We focused on both encouraging those who may lack traditional opportunities to synthesize and articulate issues as 'submitters' as well as opportunities to mediate and negotiate as editors. This means creating a sheltered arena where errors are acceptable and serve as prompts for dialogue, i.e. a learning environment (Karen Baker (PAL) personal email correspondence to Linda Powell (FCE), January 2004). "

DataBits remains an effective mechanism for communications for the LTER community, as well as, for the broader ecological community. In the spring of 2004, the LTER Information Managers' Executive Committee discussed the issue of appropriate contributions and considered instituting a formal review process. After discussion, this idea was seen to carry too much administrative overhead and as inappropriate for an informal publication. Instead, it was proposed to restructure the newsletter's content by adding an 'Editorial' section. This change provides categories that mean contributions are distinguished as either technical informatics articles or as those articles that are more experience and opinion based. Consideration was given to the need for more formal informatics publications, but this was recognized as an issue separate from the role played by *Databits*.

DATABITS EDITORSHIP AND AUTHORSHIP

A rotating editorship engages a variety of members of the LTER Information Management community. Each issue has a lead editor and a co-editor. Each editor has a two issue minimum commitment first as co-editor and subsequently as the lead. The lead editor is responsible for finding and training a co-editor. The rotation of roles is staggered to facilitate transition: issue one has lead-editor A and co-editor B. The next issue has co-editor A rotate off while B becomes lead editor and has a new co-editor C join. Issue three will have B rotate off and C transitioning to the position of lead editor with a new co-editor D. The rotating editorship is designed to promote sustainability by distributing the publication responsibility and by providing training through editorship overlap. Some may measure the success of an editor by the number of articles or the number of pages published; another measure is to ask how successfully a coeditor is mentored and trained. Further, editorship rotation empowers and entrains a variety of individuals to add their views and skills, providing a method for publication evolution. The informality of the editorship lowers perceived leadership barriers to a position requiring community, communication and organizational skill.

***DataBits* Editor Characteristics**

Skills needed include some basic web experience and attendance at the annual summer Information Managers' meeting. An editor gathers delegates and/or writes. Be forewarned, once you start thinking about this forum, article possibilities pop-up everywhere. There are no stated page numbers or size thus ensuring flexibility and minimizing pressures. Time commitment depends on how much is delegated versus written personally. Interactions between editor and co-editor facilitate the process of planning, storing and editing articles.

Value of DataBits Editorship Position

Why take on the editorship responsibility when you have enough to do at the site already? The editorship responsibility and tasks give an opportunity to learn and broaden as well as deepen information management understandings. On the grand scale, it helps make more robust our information management committee communications; on the site scale, it provides a visibility and publication recognition; on a personal scale, it provides a dynamic and safe learning environment as well as a real opportunity to influence the direction things might develop or the issues that may be highlighted.

An example citation capturing editorship for a site bibliography or an Information Manager's resume:

Powell, L. and K. Vanderbilt (2002), LTER *DataBits* Newsletter (editors) Spring, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Long-Term Ecological Network Office, University of New Mexico.

Value of DataBits Authorship

DataBits creates a forum for authors to share topics of particular individual interest and also provides a prompt to conceptualize and articulate issues.

The following is an example of a *DataBits* article citation:

Baker, K. S. and M. White (1999), LTER Newsletter *DataBits* New Design, LTER *DataBits* Newsletter, Spring. Albuquerque, New Mexico, Long-Term Ecological Network Office, University of New Mexico.

Past DataBits Editors

The following are the LTER Information Managers who have taken on the challenge of editorship of a community Newsletter:

Spring99 (May):	Karen Baker/PAL and James Brunt (NET)	(09pp)
Fall99 (Sep):	Karen Baker/PAL and Denise Steigerwald (MCM)	(14pp)
Spring00 (Apr):	Denise Steigerwald (MCM) and Ned Gardner (CWT)	(17pp)
Fall00 (Oct):	Ned Gardner (CWT) and Brent Brock (KNZ)	(16pp)
Spring01 (Apr):	Brent Brock (KNZ) and Wade Sheldon (GCE)	(10pp)
Fall01 (Oct):	Wade Sheldon (GCE) and Linda Powell (FCE)	(19pp)
Spring02 (Apr):	Linda Powell (FCE) and Kristin Vanderbilt (SEV)	(25pp)
Fall02 (Oct):	Kristin Vanderbilt (SEV) and Tim Bergsma (KBS)	(17pp)
Spring03 (Apr):	Tim Bergsma (KBS) and Todd Ackerman (NWT)	(28pp)
Fall03 (Sep):	Todd Ackerman (NWT) and Chi Yang (MCM)	(14pp)
Spring04 (Apr):	Chi Yang (MCM) and Jonathan Walsh (BES)	(06pp)

DATABITS PROCEDURES

DataBits Content Structure

DataBits newsletter section categories include the following:

- 1) **Feature Articles:** Each issue of the newsletter consists of 2 to 3 main feature articles. Each feature article is roughly between 4 to 8 paragraphs in length.
- 2) **Editorials:** This is an 'optional' section added to *DataBits* in 2004. Articles which are opinion-based or experience-based could be placed in this section. There may be no such articles submitted whereby this section would be completely omitted from the content structure.
- 3) **News Bits:** There are roughly 2 to 8 short (1-2 paragraphs) articles per issue. These articles have included brief synopses of past workshops, meetings, and conferences.
- 4) **Good Reads:** Brief synopses of pertinent 'informatics' books and journal articles.
- 5) **Frequently Asked Questions:** An 'optional' section which contains frequently asked informatics-type questions. This section usually contains 1 to 2 questions with answers.
- 6) **Calendar:** 1 to 4 important upcoming events, such as workshops and meetings.

The *DataBits* editor and co-editor do have some flexibility with regard to the number of articles and the length of each section. For example, in the spring 2002 issue (<http://intranet.lternet.edu/archives/documents/Newsletters/DataBits/02spring/>), the 'Feature Article' section consisted of six (6) long, articles.

DataBits Editor Article Solicitations

Article submissions are open to anyone who wishes to contribute to *DataBits*. Past editors have had unsolicited articles submitted but generally the editor and co-editor of an upcoming *DataBits* issue actively have to invite and/or encourage authors to send in articles. Often a first step in gathering articles is to send out a general email to the Information Management community (im@lternet.edu) asking for article submissions or for a reference for someone in the 'informatics' community who may have something interesting to contribute.

DataBits Editorial Review Process

Once an article is submitted to *DataBits*, it undergoes a two-step editorial review process:

1. The editor and co-editor examine the article to determine whether it is appropriate for *DataBits*. 'Appropriate' is defined by whether the article adheres to the *DataBits* 'mission statement'. If not appropriate, the article may be declined for publication. In other words, the editors are looking for articles dealing with data management and informatics so if they receive an article on the best methods for cleaning lab beakers they will reject the article.

The editor and co-editor will review the article using the following three categories of organization, content and technical aspects as guidelines:

Organization	Content	Overall Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‡ Clarity of Purpose ‡ Logical Ordering of Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‡ <i>DataBits</i> 'mission' addressed ‡ Approaches or exchange of practical experiences. ‡ Technical Correctness ‡ Use of Technical Terms (if any) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‡ Professional Appearance ‡ Good Grammar/Sentence Structure ‡ Clarity of Figures and Tables (if any) ‡ Insightful or mindful Conclusions/Recommendations

2. If the decision is to accept, the article is in press and to appear in the upcoming edition of *DataBits*.

DataBits Production Mechanics

1) As the Editorship rotates, the Lead editor must identify a new co-editor. Editors may privately invite a colleague to act as co-editor (for either the spring or fall issues) or may publicly ask for a co-editor volunteer during the annual information managers meeting (fall issue only as the information manager's meeting typically occurs in late summer). It is imperative that all editors and co-editors receive a copy of the *DataBits* guideline paper AND the HTML template created by Wade Sheldon (GCE). ***It is the responsibility of the acting editor to pass on the paper and HTML template to their co-editor.*** A copy of the guideline paper and HTML template will be archived at the LTER Network Office (LNO). Contact Michelle Murillo (LNO) at mmurillo@lternet.edu or Marshall White (LNO) at marsh@lternet.edu for information about procuring a copy of these items stored in the LNO document archive.

2) Once a new co-editor has been identified, the editor may email support@lternet.edu or Michelle Murillo (LNO) at mmurillo@lternet.edu regarding changing the editor alias for databits-ed@lternet.edu. This is a listserv for those involved with the *DataBits* editorship. Use of this listserv is optional as the editor and co-editor may wish to correspond via personal email accounts.

3) At the annual Information Managers' (IM) meeting, the lead editor is on the agenda to speak about their experiences with *DataBits*, solicit for a co-editor (if necessary), and to invite personally the general audience to contribute articles for the upcoming issue. The meeting provides a good opportunity for the editor and co-editor to personally speak with other IMs regarding some interesting applications they may be working on at their individual sites or gather referrals for relevant work by other individuals.

4) It is suggested that during the annual IM meeting, that the editor and co-editor meet in order to discuss ideas about the feature articles and other sections of *DataBits* and to divide up their follow-up assignments and contacts.

5) After the IM meeting, follow-up the editor's personal initiation to the meeting participants with an email to the members of the im@lternet listserv, inviting contributions to the upcoming *DataBits* issue.

6) As the feature articles, editorial, new bits, and calendar items are collected, both the editor and co-editor review the material using the categories outlined in the '*DataBits* Editorial Review

Process' section of this guideline paper. This could be an iterative process, where several emails are exchanged between the editor and co-editor for each article submitted.

7) Once an article, editorial, news bit, or calendar item has been approved for the upcoming *DataBits* issue the editor may paste the information into the *DataBits* HTML template.

The *DataBits* HTML template is packaged in a ZIP folder called 'databits_template.zip'. There are 7 items within the ZIP folder:

- A) 01fall.html- a html copy of the Fall 2001 *DataBits* issue,
- B) databits.html- an empty *DataBits* html template,
- C) DATABITS.GIF- an image of the *DataBits* Logo,
- D) DIAMOND.GIF- an image of the diamond bullets used in *DataBits*,
- E) lterlogo3.gif- and image of the LTER Network Logo,
- F) RAINBAN.GIF- an image of the rainbow band section divider used in *DataBits* and
- G) gce_logo_sm.tif- image of the Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Logo (used in the 01fall.html file).

Basic steps for using the HTML Template:

- 1) Unzip folder called 'databits_template.zip' into a new local directory.
- 2) Open the databits.html file with a HTML editor such as 'Dreamweaver', 'Frontpage' or a simple text editor like 'Notepad'. Insert the approved upcoming *DataBits* material into their appropriate sections. For example: The 1st Feature Article has 3 separate insertion points labeled [Feature 1 Title], [Feature 1 Authors, Site Affiliations], and [Feature 1 Text]. This is where the editor would paste the feature title, authors (with site affiliations), and the article text. Using HTML editors makes the editing job easier (especially for those individuals who have no HTML experience) as they allow the user to view both the HTML and the source code at the same time. As the user clicks on the HTML view, the cursor is automatically moved to the same spot in the source code view. This allows for easy HTML editing because the user doesn't need to be familiar with HTML coding. As a special note, please make sure that all the links to images are 'relative' links.

If the editor doesn't use an HTML editor but uses a standard text editor, the [Feature 1 Title], [Feature 1 Authors, Site Affiliations], and [Feature 1 Text] sections would have the following source code mark up tags within the *DataBits* template. The information would be pasted between the brackets []:

- a) [Feature 1 Title]: `<h2>[Feature 1 Title]</h2>`
- b) [Feature 1 Authors, Site Affiliations]: `p><i> [Feature 1 Authors, Site Affiliations]</i></p>`
- c) [Feature 1 Text]: `<p>[Feature 1 Text]</p>`

NOTE: Editors may use the '01fall.html' instead of the blank 'databits.html' if they find it is easier to have a previous example to work from. The editors would still need to open the 01fall.html file in a HTML editor or Notepad and would need to replace existing information with the new information.

For those editors and co-editors who do not have a HTML editor the following is a link to an open source HTML editor: <http://www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html> (free). A short list of available HTML editors includes 1) Macromedia Dreamweaver MX, 2) Microsoft Frontpage, 3) Netscape Composer (free) and 4) Web Notepad (free).

- 3) Verify that all hyperlinks are working and that there are no insertion errors in the final HTML draft.
- 4) When the *DataBits* issue is ready to publish to the Web, zip all the appropriate files (images, documents, main template (now completed), logos) into new folder labeled with the corresponding *DataBits* issue name (i.e. DataBits_Spring2004) and email to Marshall White (marsh@lternet.edu) at the LNO, with the subject heading of *DataBits* Web Posting.
- 5) Announce via email that the new issue of *DataBits* is available.

See Below for email example:

To: databits@lternet.edu,

Cc: pi@lternet.edu

Subject: *DataBits*, Spring 2002, LTER Information Management Newsletter

The Spring 2002 issue of *DataBits*, an electronic newsletter for Information Managers, is now available at <http://www.lternet.edu/databits/>.

Featured in this issue: Ecological Metadata Language (EML): Augmenting Research Tools and Capabilities, a quick introduction to Extensible Stylesheet Language Transformations (XSLT), a review of software tools for working with Extensible Markup Language (XML), an article on metadata management and what role Morpho and Metacat could play in an overall information management strategy at a LTER site, a review of several Email client applications, and an article about using the LTER LDAP Server.

Many thanks to all who contributed articles and advice.

Co-editors: Linda Powell(FCE), Kristin Vanderbilt(SEV)

- 6) The editor makes hardcopies of *DataBits* and gives them to their LTER Site PI to pass out at the next CCM. The number of hardcopies is based on number of people estimated to attend CCM. The LNO staff can help with CCM participant numbers. For example, the Spring 2002 Issue was published on April 15, 2002 and Linda Powell (FCE) made hardcopies for Dan Childers (Lead PI, FCE) to hand out during the Spring CCM on April 18, 2002.
- 7) Forward those articles not used in the upcoming *DataBits* issue, but worth carrying forward, to co-editor for the next *DataBits* issue. In most cases, there is not unused material but the editor may have personal knowledge of an article in the 'works' that would benefit from encouragement.