

OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK EDITOR — DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES

Prepared by Rajiv Gupta, Jan. 11, 2006

Overview

The Observer's Handbook Editor is responsible for producing each summer the following year's edition of the *RASC Observer's Handbook*. This concise and informative 300-page annual publication, which is nearing its 100th year of publication, is the best publication of its type. It is widely regarded as the most useful sky almanac for the serious North-American amateur astronomer. In addition, it is used by students and teachers at schools and universities. Although most of its sales are in Canada and the United States, it is distributed worldwide, and copies may be found in most major professional observatories.

The *Observer's Handbook* is the major source of revenue for the RASC and is the vehicle by which the Society is most widely known throughout the world. Thus the position of Editor involves considerable responsibility, perhaps the greatest among all member-occupied positions within the RASC. There have to date been only five editors, each of whom happened at some point to have also been President of the RASC. Like other member positions within the RASC, the editor is a volunteer and receives no remuneration, other than for documented expenses associated with the position. Previous editors have found the position most rewarding, educational, and satisfying, and well worth the time and effort required.

The editor must have a broad knowledge of astronomy, both observational and scientific. Excellent organizational, management, and interpersonal skills are necessary in order to oversee approximately 50 contributors and editorial assistants. Good writing ability is essential, both in order to evaluate and edit contributor-supplied material and to produce editor-supplied content. Considerable free time and commitment are required, likely the equivalent of one or two months of (unpaid) full-time labour. Contributors should be contacted no later than May and the Handbook must be ready for printing by early September; thus most of the editor's time commitment occurs between May and August.

The Observer's Handbook Editor is appointed by the National Council of the RASC. The initial term is five years, with renewal for an additional unspecified term possible.

Expressions of interest should be sent by email to Rajiv Gupta (rgupta@telus.net), Chair of the Nominating Committee, no later than 2006 Jan. 20.

Specific Duties

Each of the five items below requires the involvement of the editor.

1. *Contributed continuing content*: Most contributor-supplied text, generally in the form of Word files, is processed in tandem by members of the Handbook editorial team (editor, copy editor, editor's assistant). Much of the content received from contributors is in the form of tables and graphics, some of which requires considerable preprocessing. External assistance, either paid or volunteer, will be contracted as required for this tabular/graphical formatting.

2. *New contributor-supplied content:* The Handbook is an evolving publication; it is expected that new articles will occasionally be incorporated and that existing articles will be updated and revised. The editor is responsible for arranging the necessary external reviews of new articles and exercising editorial judgement over new and changing content.
3. *Internally supplied content:* Most of this content is tabular or graphical. The outgoing editor, who has been generating this content, has mostly automated its generation. Considerable technical skills (knowledge of PostScript, Fortran, and Excel) are necessary in order to take advantage of the existing programming, which will be made available to the new editor. External technical assistance, either paid or volunteer, will be contracted as necessary.
4. *Production:* The close-to-200 elements that comprise the *Observer's Handbook* are assembled using desktop-publishing software. Application of style consistency, fitting of content (which often requires editing), and design are all performed using this software. This work has been performed by the outgoing editor, but it is expected that a paid production company will be contracted instead in the future.
5. *Proofreading:* The *Observer's Handbook* is a highly complex publication, in which errors easily arise. After elements have been imported into the desktop-publishing software, many iterations of careful proofreading of exported pdf files are required. Members of the Handbook editorial team assist the editor here.

The outgoing editor will supply to the new editor step-by-step detail for each of these tasks.