

## **Tips for Earning an American Meteorological Society (AMS) TV Weather Seal of Approval**

*Based on Notes Taken by Jon Ahlquist.*

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The following notes were taken at the 27-th AMS Conference on Broadcast Meteorology held in Saint Louis, Missouri, on 16-20 June 1998. These notes represent a summary of the session titled "Tips for AMS Seal Applicants" scheduled for 4 PM on Thursday, 18 June. The chief presenters were Tammy Garrison (WDRB-TV, Louisville, KY), who just finished a 3-year term on the AMS Broadcast Meteorology Board, and Tom Loffman (KQVR-TV, Sacramento, CA), who was an earlier board member. Former Board member Mike Graham (WAFB-TV, Baton Rouge, LA) and Don Paul also made comments. While these notes represent my best efforts to capture the words and spirit of the various comments and suggestions, there may be errors for which only I (Jon Ahlquist) am responsible. Some material is organized slightly differently than as it was presented at the conference.

### **AMS Seal Do's**

Give yourself time to develop, typically on the order of two years on air, before applying for the AMS Seal.

Before submitting a tape to the AMS, have your tape evaluated by a few people who do not know you. Friends may not make good reviewers because they may hesitate to be sufficiently blunt about what you need to improve.

Make sure your tape answers "yes" to every question on the AMS Seal evaluation form. The evaluation form can be seen at [www.ametsoc.org](http://www.ametsoc.org) and a copy will be included when you receive your Seal application package from the AMS.

Always prepare for your show by planning the weather story you want to tell. Your graphics should proceed in a logical order to help you tell this story. Whenever possible and appropriate, relate features in one graphic to features in the next graphic.

Place watches, warnings, and advisories first in your show. That is, get the crucial information out first.

Include climatology data (max, min, and normals).

Label everything on your maps. Every city that has a temperature on it should also have a city identifier typed by it. Label fronts, highs, lows, troughs, jets, etc., not only on maps but on satellite pictures as well. If you show a loop of radar or satellite pictures or time

lapse sky photos, be sure to identify the beginning and ending times of the pictures. Label the various pictures with their times if possible.

Explain everything you say. For example, don't just say, "There is high pressure here." You might say, "High pressure is here, which is associated with sinking air. That means few clouds and little rain." Don't just say, "Here is a jet." You might say, "Here is a jet, which is a rapid current of air that lies above temperature contrasts, like the cold front we see here on the surface map."

#### AMS Seal Don'ts

Don't hurry to put together your weather shows or your tape for an AMS Seal application.

Don't cram too many maps into a show.

Don't stay on a map or animation too long.

Don't use a map without a purpose, such as a radar image that does not show precipitation. Also, most "fly throughs" have too little content to justify showing them. If your station requires that you show radar without precipitation or "fly throughs," make sure that you list that as a station mandate in your cover letter.

Don't let news anchors do your job during the tosses. You should be the one to present watches, warnings, advisories, and forecasts.

Don't have more "whats" than "whys" on your tape!

Don't use non-conversational terminology. If you feel that a technical word is necessary, be sure to give a simple explanation. Better yet, use the words of your explanation instead of the word itself.

Don't cram your application tape with lots of extra weather explanations that you do not normally include in your weathercasts. The Board members can tell when you do that, because your presentation does not seem natural. Your every-day weathercasts should include solid information and clear explanations so that your application tape will be a natural reflection of the way that you normally do things.

#### Comments by Tammy Garrison (WDRB-TV):

After receiving membership status, an applicant must send a VHS tape to each of 5 reviewers containing 3 consecutive days of broadcast appearances, such as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or, for a weekend meteorologist, Saturday, Sunday, Saturday.

Tapes should be live shows, of reasonable length, and containing no promos or commercials. Do include the tosses at the beginning and end of the weathercast. Make sure you review each copy of your tape for quality of video and audio. If you are not currently on air, produce as realistic a tape as you can.

Each tape should be labeled on its top and spine. Each tape box should be labeled on its spine. Labels should include your name, station, address, phone number, and the dates and times of each show.

Along with each tape, send an extensive cover letter listing any restrictions and/or mandates imposed by your station. For example, station management may require that you always show radar, even if there is no precipitation, or they may not allow you to show a national map. In some cases, these restrictions can be so extensive that it may be difficult if not impossible to present the kind of content necessary to earn an AMS Seal. In case you face extensive restrictions, try to convince station management to let you have the flexibility to include the kind of material you will need to earn a Seal. Let them know the advantages to the station if you have AMS certification. You may be able to work around some of the restrictions. For example, your station may not allow you to show a national map, but they may allow you to show a national satellite picture, which you can discuss as a national map, especially if you label features on the picture.

Reviewers do not know you except by your tape. You are graded solely on your tape. Board members often review tapes without looking at the candidate's educational background until after seeing the tape.

It is your choice which weathercasts go on the tape, so make sure you choose your very best material.

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Wait at least six months after submitting your tapes before you contact the AMS to check on the status of your application. Board members review tapes for the AMS in their spare time as a voluntary service. They have a large number of tapes to review, and it takes time.

Over the last 7 years, about 60% of the first-time applicants have been approved for the AMS Seal.

Comments by Tom Loffman (KQVR-TV):

Most people who fail to earn the AMS Seal submit tapes that do not demonstrate knowledge of meteorology. They just read the weather maps without explaining what is there and what it means. Their presentations lack organization and information content. The various graphics appear to be independent of each other.

Everything needs to flow as part of a story line. Just as a good story includes foreshadowing, your discussion should give hints of what is to come and point the way toward the forecast.

Include a map or two that has good content but which may not be common. For example, in the right situation, a map of dew point temperatures with proper explanation can highlight where moisture is. Show an upper-air map and explain it. After all, that is where the clouds are.

Tom Loffman chooses airline hub cities to feature on his national map to help travelers.

Label everything, but don't clutter.

Enunciate clearly, and use correct grammar.

Consultants and general managers at TV stations hate national maps, but they are good tools to introduce information.

Include regional weather information involving elevation differences, coastal/inland differences, etc. Volunteer weather observers are a great help in this regard.

Comments from Mike Graham (WAFB-TV, Baton Rouge, LA):

Use simple declarative sentences.

Pronounce words (including place names) correctly.

Don't speak too rapidly.

Most AMS Seal failures occur because of insufficient explanation.

Comments from Don Paul:

In the last 3 years, at least 15 applicants omitted climatology from their weathercasts.

Include wind information throughout your weathercast.

Include wind chill or heat index information.

Consider agricultural and other interests in your region.

For warm areas, give information about humidity