



# THE OFFICIAL STYLE GUIDE



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## A Note to Readers:

This style guide is a work in progress. As this is the first year that we will be returning to a newspaper format in some time, we hope that you will take as much a sense of ownership and responsibility for the quality of the writing as the Editorial Board.

As you can see, our guide is somewhat sparse. Moving forward, we hope that you will contribute to it any practical advice that you acquire over the next year as a staff writer. We will be receptive, and quite pleased, with any further contributions that you might care to make to this guide.

All the best,  
Simon Bredin  
Managing Editor

# Letter from the Editorial Board

# An Introduction

What follows assumes its readers are familiar with the conventions and rules of the English language. The purpose of this guide is to inform you of your editors' expectations when those exceed or otherwise differ from a minimum standard of cogency, not to provide a tutorial for grammatical or elegant prose. You will be expected to supply the latter qualities yourself. Do not emulate any deviations appearing in this guide from the instructions it contains.

## **Word Choice**

- Do not use any word you had to look up in the dictionary to verify its meaning.
- Never use a thesaurus.
- Do not use words you might plausibly encounter in the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, e.g. epithelial.
- Never use superlatives e.g. 'the most,' 'the best,' 'the worst.'

## **Punctuation**

- Never use exclamation points; no one is excited, esp. not the editors.
- Use ellipses (i.e. '...') sparingly. Barring exceptional cases, they tend to obfuscate your intended meaning.
- Use em dashes — like this — instead of parentheses. To create the em dash in Word, enter 'space,' 'hyphen,' 'hyphen,' 'space.' Do not conflate the em dash and the hyphen.
- Use the semi-colon to join to independent, but related clauses in a single sentence. Do not use the comma for this purpose.
- The period is the only approved way to end a sentence. Periods should also follow abbreviations.
- Never omit the Oxford comma, which follows 'and' in any list or conjunction.

## **Figures of Speech and Literary Devices**

- Never begin your submission with an epigraph.
- Never quote anyone famous.
- Never ask rhetorical questions.
- Do not record imaginary conversations, with real or invented persons, in your submission.

- Never use metaphors; use similes parsimoniously.
- Never use irony.

### **Sui Generis**

- If you *will* write your submission drunk, you must proofread it sober.
- Never include any information that requires a citation in your submission.
- Do not use bold or italic type.
- Spelling, vocabulary, and pronunciation in the Salterae follow the conventions of British English. Consult the Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition for details.
- Do not confuse abbreviations and acronyms. Acronyms represent a set of words with their first letters; abbreviations condense a single word.
- Do not split infinitive. An adverb should never appear inside verbs of the form 'to [verb].'
- Prefer the active to the passive voice except when to do so is 'outright barbarous.'

# News Articles

## Final Cause:

News articles should communicate information, and only information. They are not vehicles for the opinions of the authors, and you must suspend your own opinion to write them.

Providing information is the sole objective of news articles, so it is imperative that you be able to prove any contentious claim that appears in your articles. News articles do not contain citations, but you should behave as if they were mandatory. Verification of facts is the responsibility of the authors, not the editors.

Always attempt to corroborate facts with multiple sources. Generally, the evidence for a claim should be in direct proportion to its contentiousness.

Formal Cause: Articles should use the pyramid structure typical of journalistic writing.

## Material Cause:

Write using primarily short, declarative sentences. For examples, see the prose of Ernest Hemmingway.

News articles should not include pronouns in the first or second person, except inside of quotations. No sentence in a news article should take the imperative mood.

Quote only to illustrate the opinion of an individual, or to provide colour. Quotation should not be used to describe events unless the description is itself remarkable. Always obtain the permission of person to be quoted if his statement is made in private. If it is public, no such permission is necessary. Prefer the statements of those connected to the relevant event.

Do not submit headlines for your articles. The editors will write headlines.

# Reviews and Cultural Writing

## Final Cause

- A review should communicate information about its subject (a film, album, concert, etc.), and the reviewer's critical opinion.
- Reviews should help their audience form a preliminary opinion of the subject, not dictate that opinion. It is important to achieve a comfortable balance between description and prescription.
- While subjectivity is inevitable in reviews, your perspective must reflect the sensibilities of your audience if they are to find your reviews useful.
- Do not provide numerical ratings e.g. 4/5, two 'thumbs,' etc., however, ensure that your reaction to the subject, whether favourable or unfavourable, is always apparent.
- Conversely, you should not merely classify your subject dichotomously as good or bad. It is unusual that a subject lacks entirely in either merits or faults. However, should this be the case, you should still explain your conclusions.

## Formal Cause

There are no special formal constraints on reviews. You should adopt whatever structure you believe most appropriate to the subject. The examples below may be helpful, but are not exhaustive:

1. Begin by describing the subject of the review; proceed to your impressions of the subject. Conclude by summarizing its contents and its good and bad qualities.
2. Divide the subject into chronological or thematic sections. Describe and criticize each section separately. Conclude with a general assessment of the subject.
3. Give a narrative account of your experience of the subject, combining criticism and description. Conclude with a summary of this experience.

## Material Cause

- Never use the word 'genius,' as either an adjective or noun.

- Maintain a moderate tone: if your review is favourable, it should not be obsequious; if it is unfavourable, it should not be contemptuous.
- Do not exhaustively describe the particulars of the subject. Concentrate on its general character, and its distinctive or exemplary elements. This extends to avoiding spoiling significant or surprising plot elements.
- Do not assign the subject to a genre e.g. action for film, conceptual for art without further explanation.

# Writing Op-Eds and Opinion Pieces

## Theory:

The object of an opinion piece is to convey a particular viewpoint, and provide reasons to hold it. In doing so you must:

- Provide a brief summary of the issues concerned. If you expect your readers will be familiar with them, it need only be a sentence or two. This will also improve your article by clarifying the terms of the debate: in addition to your position, readers should know what you oppose.
- It is absolutely necessary to justify your opinion in an op-ed piece: the point is not merely to expound an opinion, but to show readers why it is a reasonable one.
- Anticipate objections and respond to them, whether this be implicitly or explicitly. Your audience will not ignore weakness in your argument and neither should you.

## Practice:

- You may structure your article in one of two ways:
  - Present your final opinion near the beginning of the piece, and then explain what supports that conclusion. This structure is similar to that of an essay, in which you provide a thesis statement and then several lines of justification.
  - The reverse: begin by outlining the issue, and then conclude with the opinion you endorse.
- You should ensure that your arguments are clear, and organized so that readers can follow them easily. It is not necessary to explicitly outline your arguments in advance, but you should deal with them systematically.

## Further Advice:

- Do not disparage your opponents; this reduces your credibility.
- Do not caricature the opinions of your opponents; attacking a straw man is a waste of your time and your audience's.
- Do not hyperbolize; your audience will recognize exaggeration.
- Do not make arguments solely on the basis of your personal experience. Statements such as, 'I feel...', 'My experience is...', etc. may explain your perspective, but do not justify it with sufficient rigor.

- Rhetoric can be persuasive, provided what you say actually has substance.
- Humor can be persuasive, provided what you say is actually funny.