



THE LINK PUBLICATION SOCIETY
CONTRIBUTOR HANDBOOK
— FEATURE WRITING —



Special thanks to Laura Beeston
who collected and put together
the entirety of this handbook.

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WELCOME

TO THE LINK!

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We hope this handbook will provide useful information about *The Link* and help you get the most out of your experience at the student press.

History

The Link Publication Society (TLPS) is an independent, student-run, not-for-profit multi-media publication at Concordia University in Montréal, Québec. It was founded in 1980, as a merger of university papers between the *Loyola News* (est. 1924) from Loyola College and *The Georgian* (est. 1936) from Sir George Williams University.

The Link has put decades of history on the record. We encourage contributors to explore *The Link*'s archives at thelinknewspaper.ca/back-issues (there is an anniversary issue online: [Vol. 30, Issue 30](#)) and to look through the physical archives in *The Link*'s office (there is a 22-page special issue and timeline of *Link* history in the [Oct. 25, 2005 issue](#)).

Other notable moments can be found on *The Link*'s Wikipedia page: [wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Link_\(newspaper\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Link_(newspaper)).

By volunteering at *The Link*, you are part of a long and phenomenal history.

Thank you for your time, interest and effort!

Purpose + Principles

The Link collects, writes and edits news from campus and provides a forum for student opinion, publishing editorials about the university and all areas of interest to the Concordia community. Contributors cover stories relative to student life, as well as local, national and international issues of interest to the wider communities in Montréal.

The Link aims to publish stories not usually covered by mainstream media, with a focus on advocacy journalism. *The Link* has a tradition of platforming people and groups who are marginalized, oppressed or simply rendered invisible because of the nature of their situation. There has long been a commitment to sharing stories that might not otherwise be told publicly.

The Link is a learning space and a venue for writers, reporters, photographers, videographers, designers and artists to hone their skills and gain experience. Everyone is a volunteer who learned about the publication and its practices from another volunteer and everyone has a responsibility to pass along their knowledge.

***The Link* aims to publish stories not usually covered by mainstream media, with a focus on advocacy journalism.**

Audience

Learn more about the Concordia University student body at concordia.ca/about/fast-facts.html, the Student life website concordia.ca/students/life.html, the Concordia news page concordia.ca/news.html and events calendar concordia.ca/events.html

Contribute

We are always looking for contributors. Gain valuable media skills by writing, reporting, editing, taking photos and videos, creating graphics and visuals or contributing digitally. There are a few easy ways to join *The Link*:

1. Come to the weekly pitch meeting on Tuesdays at 5 p.m. in *The Link* office - Hall Building, H645.
2. Email a Section Editor. Introduce yourself, let them know what your interests are and give them your availabilities. Stories may be assigned to you, or you can pitch one of your own (we love that).
3. Come by the office to help us edit flats on production days. Production days happen on Sundays (biweekly) and Mondays (weekly).
4. Attend Link workshops.

Honorarium Policy:

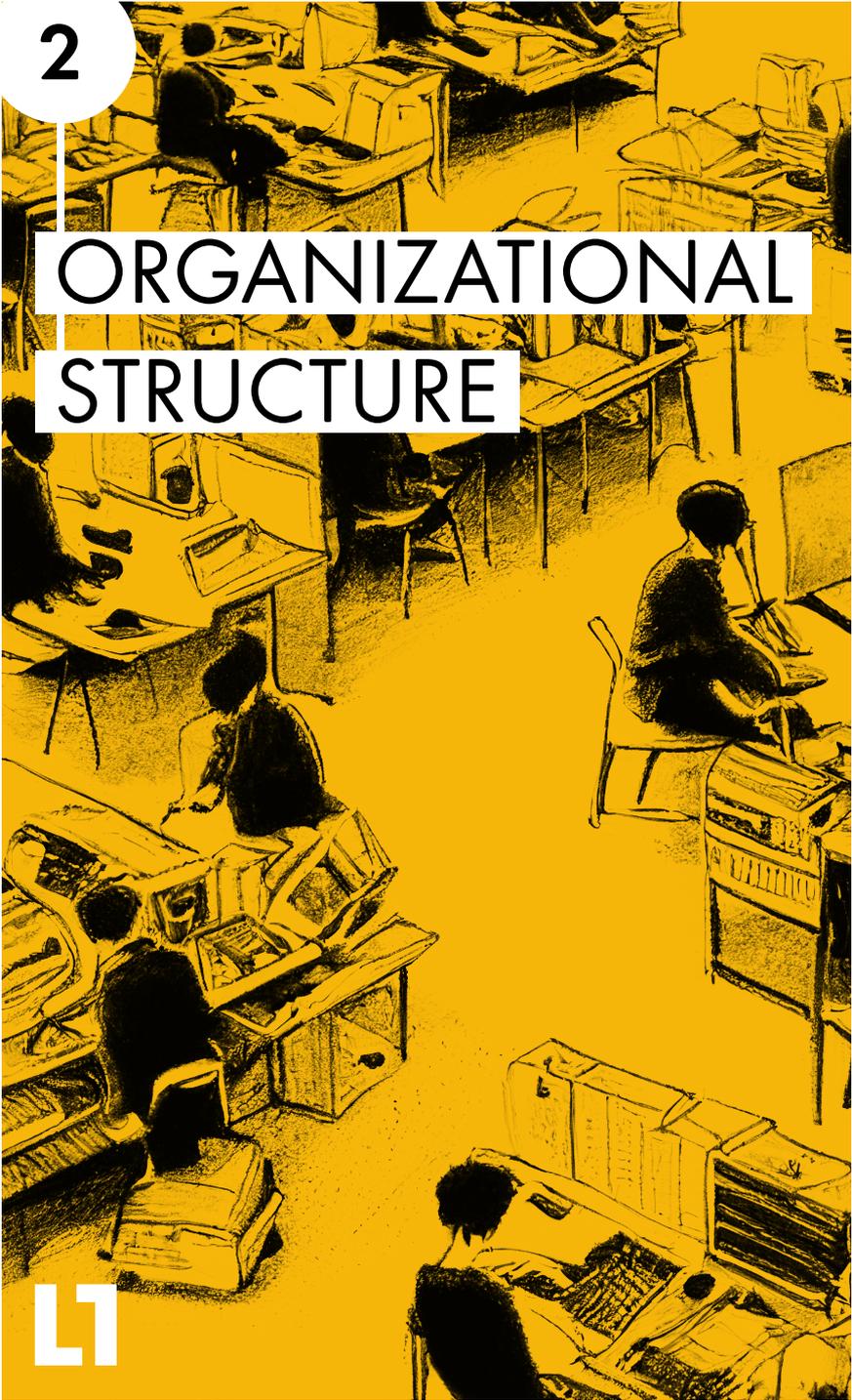
Contributions to *The Link* are made on a volunteer basis, however TLPS allocates money for volunteers as a token of appreciation for fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. Funds allocated to these honorariums each year always depend on *The Link*'s financial situation and are outlined in the annual budget. The Editor-in-Chief (EIC), with input of Masthead members, distributes honorariums to Staff in the contributor pool once per month.

Gain valuable media skills by writing, reporting, editing, taking photos and videos, creating graphics and visuals or contributing digitally.

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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

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Board of Directors

The Link Publication Society (TLPS) is governed by a Board of Directors (BoD). The purpose of the BoD is to ensure the proper fiscal management of the Society's budget and ensure the by-laws are honoured. The BoD does not have control over editorial content of *The Link*, except where content violates an article of the Society by-laws.

Comprised of nine members, it is made up of two (2) Staff Members who do not hold editorial positions, one (1) Member at Large of the Society, two (2) members of the community who have been Staff within the past three years, two (2) non-voting members who are Link alumni, the Business Manager, who is a non-voting member, and the EIC of *The Link*. For more information on BoD terms and functions, please refer to By-Law Four, which can be found at thelinknewspaper.ca/about.

Masthead

The Link's Masthead consists of those members who hold editorial positions in the publication. Editorial positions at *The Link* are elected by Staff Members. Regular elections are held no less than three weeks before the last issue of the volume and by-elections may be called by the EIC at any time during the publishing year if a position is vacant. Notice of elections are advertised and published 21 calendar days prior to the elections. For more information on eligibility and how to run for a Masthead position, please refer to By-Law Six, which can be found at thelinknewspaper.ca/about.

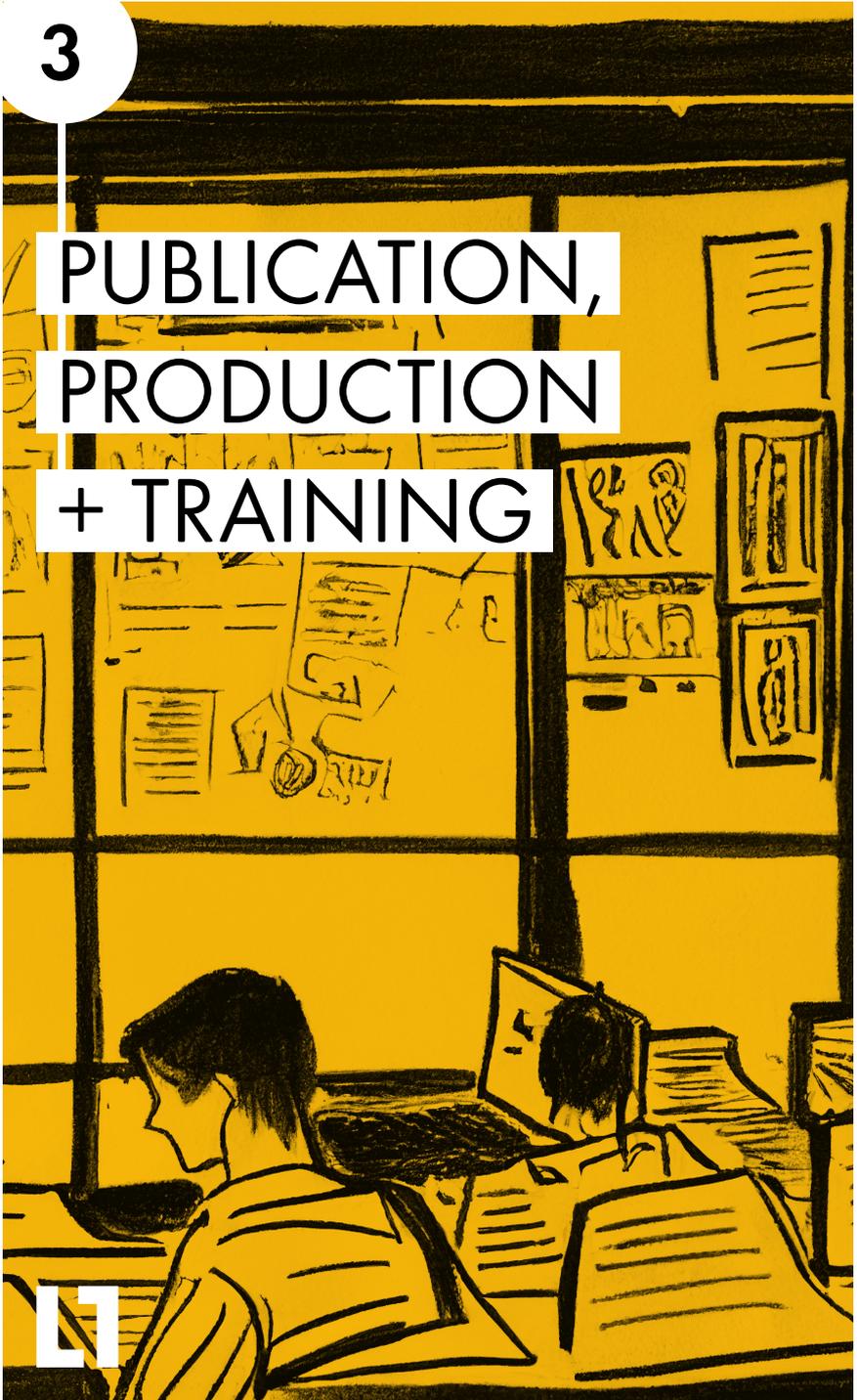
Society + Staff

Staff membership is open to all members of the Society, who have paid *The Link's* student levy.

Anyone who has contributed three (3) hours of production work or who has had an article, video, photo or graphic published either in print or online shall be deemed to have made one (1) contribution to *The Link*. A member of the Society attains Staff status for an academic term by making a contribution to four (4) publications of *The Link* during that term. Staff status carries over to the next term and is maintained if three (3) new contributions are made within six (6) publishing weeks. For more information, please refer to By-Law Five, which can be found at thelinknewspaper.ca/about.

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PUBLICATION,
PRODUCTION
+ TRAINING



Publication Calendar

The Link's publishing year consists of the period from June 1 to May 31 of the following year. It publishes across two academic terms: The period between June 1 and December 31 (fall term) and the period between January 1 and May 31 (winter term).

Throughout its history, *The Link* has published biweekly, weekly, daily (online) and monthly issues. *The Link* decides its own publishing dates and copy deadlines, as well as the number of issues in a volume.

The Link is renowned for its Special Issues, which dedicate extra space in the issue to tackle a specific topic. Past issues include The Media Democracy Issue, The Queer Issue, The Mental Health Issue and The Orientation Issue, which is traditionally published at the beginning of the fall semester. Special Issues and their publication dates for each volume are decided by Masthead.

Production

When you submit an article, it will go through a five-stage edit: two content edits (ED1, ED2), a copy edit and three proofs once it is laid out on a “flat.” Stories are edited for several reasons, chiefly size and clarity. We suggest that all writers contribute to at least one production day at *The Link* to familiarize themselves with the editorial and production processes. Please note: an article that is not pressing, like a book review, might be bumped online or to the next week's issue, as timely news stories take priority in the paper.

We suggest that all writers contribute to at least one production day at The Link to familiarize themselves with the editorial and production processes.

The Link holds weekly production days, pitch meetings and recurring opportunities for social activities and training opportunities.

Production takes place on **Sundays and Mondays**, when the office is open for Contributors, Staff, Masthead and Editors to finish weekly assignments and deliver the paper. These times are dedicated to reporting,

writing, editing, layout and creative execution of content, including on-line packages, photos and videos.

On **Tuesdays**, Masthead sends out new pitches to contributors, holds open story meetings and prepares for the next production cycle.

On **Fridays**, Masthead finalizes stories for the upcoming production days, does a page count, creates a dummy (a visual mock-up of editorial and advertising pages) and hosts workshops.

Training opportunities

The Link is a learning space. Everyone is a volunteer who learned from another volunteer and everyone has a responsibility to pass along their knowledge. There are a number of ways to gain skills and learn about student journalism:

1. **Pitch or pick up assignments** from a *Link* editor, who will guide you.
2. **Drop in during production days** on Sunday and Monday to edit and check flats.
3. **Participate in journalism workshops.** *The Link* hosts a number of workshops each semester that feature Editors, Alumni and industry professionals. Everyone in the Society is welcome to workshops, which are free to join. Ask an Editor for more info!
4. **Submit your candidacy to NASH.** Each year, *The Link* sends a number of delegates to a national student journalism conference called NASH. *The Link* assumes the cost of transportation to and from the conference as well as the delegate fees.

To learn more about submitting your letter of intent to NASH, please refer to thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/policies/National_Conference_Delegates_Policy_Mar2019.pdf

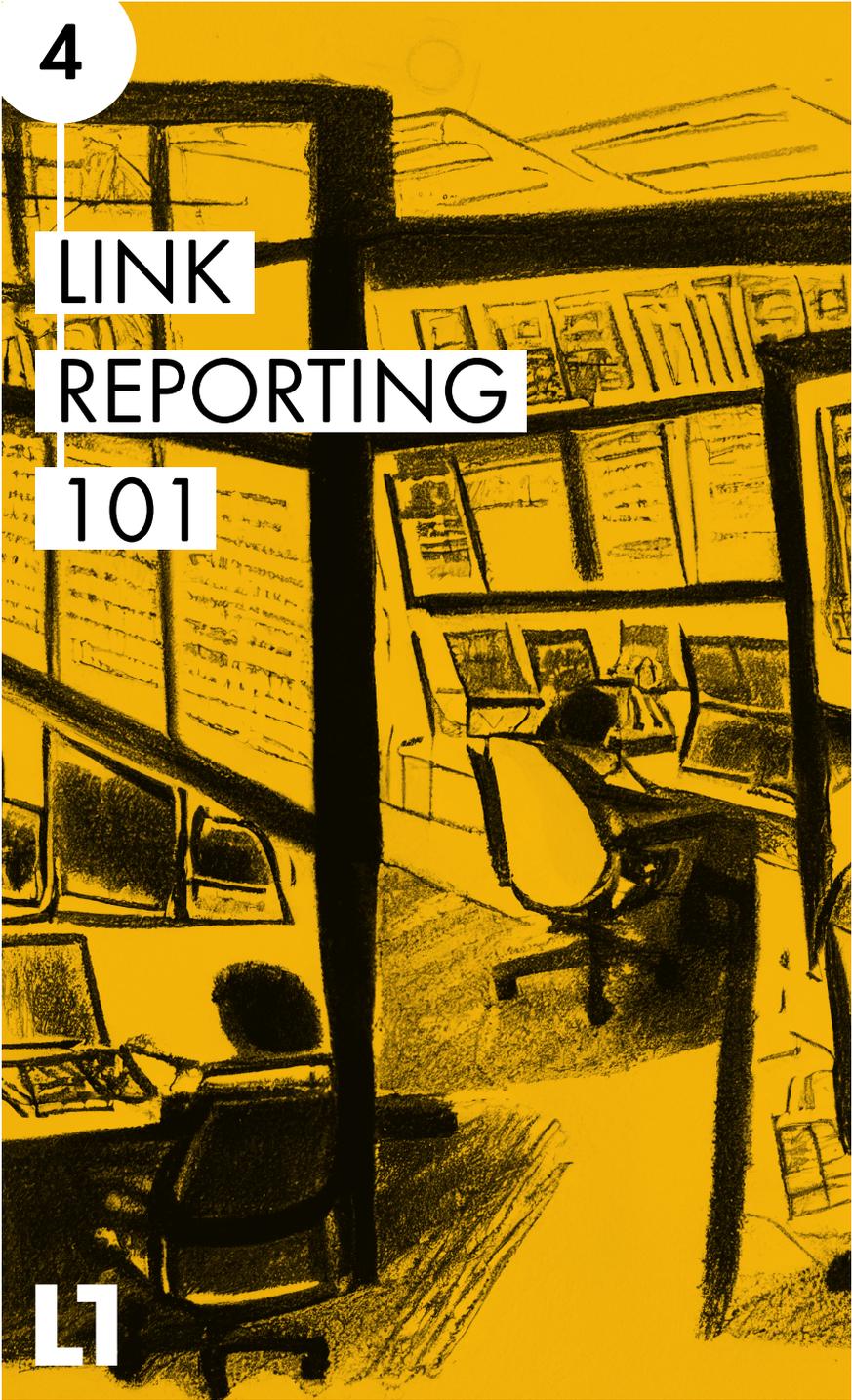
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LINK

REPORTING

101

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JOURNALISM ETHICS

Can journalists be objective?

Of course not. How can we be? We choose to cover certain events and not others. We choose who to interview and not to interview. We choose what to highlight and what not to highlight in our stories. All these choices are governed by our writers' opinions and backgrounds.

Let's not pretend to be above the prejudices and distortions of personal feelings and experience.

That said, *integrity* and *ethical behaviour* are cornerstones of a journalist's credibility. Reporters should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Reporters should:

- Identify themselves and their affiliations before conducting an interview.
- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid error.
- Seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity and talk ahead of time about it to your Editor!
- Ensure headlines, news teases, promo, photos, videos, audio, graphics, sound bytes and quotations do not misrepresent, oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never plagiarize.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

- Support the open exchange of views.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be clearly labeled and not misrepresent fact nor context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that administrative records are open to inspection.
- Act independently: free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- Avoid conflict of interest, real or perceived; remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility. Refuse gifts, favours, free travel and special treatment to maintain journalistic integrity. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be accountable to their readers and each other.

For more information about *The Link's* Code of Ethics, please consult: thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/policies/The_Link_CodeofEthics_April_2019.pdf

Minimizing harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

- Journalists should always respect the dignity, privacy, freedoms and well-being of the people encountered while gathering and presenting information.
- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects. Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by systemic injustice, tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort.

- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious of identifying juvenile suspects or victims of crimes. Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges. Balance a criminal suspect’s fair trial rights with the public’s right to be informed.

Holding our journalism accountable

Reporters should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogues with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
 - In the event of a factual mistake, *The Link* shall correct the online edition as soon as the mistake has been discovered and place a correction in the subsequent print edition.
 - For more information about The Link’s Corrections Policy, please refer to thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/policies/The_Link_Corrections.September2018.pdf
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.
- Demand verification: A reporter’s most important question is “*How do you know that?*” Ask about the motivations of sources. If you don’t know how your story is benefitting the source, you may not know the full story.
- Be skeptical. Do the math. If something seems too good to be true, ask for proof.

With files from the Society of Professional Journalists

Choosing words wisely

The Link strives to print progressive material and it's important to realize that the words you choose for your stories are as important as the subjects you discuss.

The careful choice of words should not be mistaken as political correctness or dismissed as semantics. The words you use make a difference. Just as we aim to raise people's consciousness with the stories we publish, we have a responsibility to do the same with the language we use as writers and editors.

It's easy to think we're doing a good enough job by including stories in the paper that most other papers wouldn't even write. But part of writing progressive material is using language that is inclusive and sensitive.

Think about the connotations of referring to a *sexual abuse victim* versus a *survivor of sexual abuse*, for example. The word 'victim' serves to further marginalize a subject in the coverage of an often-ignored group. Words should empower, not victimize.

FIND AND PITCH A STORY

What should *The Link* cover?

As a university publication, we owe it to our readers to inform them about the university and what's happening in the community. At the same time, as an alternative to the mainstream media, *The Link* should aim to provide our readers with a student perspective of off-campus events and activities.

Our goal is to publish information and critical analysis bypassed by bigger media.

The Link is a tool. It serves to help students and the community-at-large view their current situation or experience within a wider context of social and political issues. This publication strives to serve its public by providing a fair and comprehensive account of Concordia events and issues.

Developing Story Ideas

Contributors and editors are partners in developing story ideas. Contributors should present editors with thoughtful, detailed proposals. Editors should help contributors focus and deliver these stories.

Before anyone invests their time, space and money into a story, the idea needs development.

Here's how to start:

- **Put your idea in writing:** Write a detailed proposal. This gives your editor something substantive to consider and show other editors. Writing also starts you on the exercise of focusing your work or story. Sometimes, a well-written pitch can become the framework for the reporting or the lede. Putting your idea into writing always helps!
- **Propose timely stories:** Editors are interested in newsy, timely stories. So answer the question, *why now?* Address the **news peg** that your story would have. Should it run before, during or after an upcoming event? Is it attached to an anniversary or holiday? Has a recent report or decision given new urgency to an issue?
 - If your story is **'evergreen'** (not time sensitive), be sure to tell your editor why it is timely today. If you are dusting off an old proposal, look for a news angle and explain why now is the time to do the story.
- **Propose specific ideas:** Broad and unfocused topics are not stories. A specific focus helps the editor get a feel for a story right away and start sharing in the reporter's excitement.
- **Propose relevant ideas:** Why will this story matter to readers? Even if you think the relevance is self-evident, explain why this story matters and how you will make that relevance clear.
- **Consider national comparisons:** If you are examining a local issue, find out how the local situation compares to national averages or extremes. Take a look at what is happening at Canadian and international universities and their students as well.
- **Consider local impact:** How does the issue affect Concordia students and the wider Montreal community? Who here is involved? Who here is an expert? Are members of your local community dealing with the issue?

- **Consider previous coverage:** If *The Link* or other media covered this issue in the past, demonstrate how the situation has changed or how this story will be different. Examine the issues that previous reporting missed. Look for holes and new angles in previous coverage.
- **Consider usefulness:** Think of ways that this story would be useful to your readers and explain how you plan to make the finished product easy for readers to use.
- **Consider photos, graphics and digital or multimedia elements:** Visuals need to be part of your plan from the very first. Think about statistics, infographics, maps, polls, illustrations, photographs, video interviews or packages and social media amplification.

*Files from Steve Buttry,
Writing Coach/National Correspondent, Omaha World Herald.*

INTERVIEWS

Preparation

Do your research. The worst thing a reporter can do is be unprepared for an interview. It puts your mind at ease, establishes trust, informs you about the interview subject and topics at hand, helps you prepare and eliminates the need to ask unnecessary questions. Read everything you can get your hands on about this person/subject, as a start.

Doing research will lead to better interviews. Start writing your questions down in this step.

Determine your angles — also known as a focus, hook or purpose. Whenever possible, discuss objectives of your story and interviews with your Editor ahead of time.

Map out your questions — especially the opening question. It will help set the tone. Mapping also allows you to become familiar with the subject and topics. Remember the conversation should flow from point to point and transitions should be logical.

Q&A time

STFU. Actually listening during an interview may seem obvious, but it's a must. Take notes and mark down timestamps from your recorder to refer to later. Let your guest talk.

Mix preparation with spontaneity. Listening carefully while your interviewee is talking also allows you to know where to follow up. Take mental notes to revisit topics and tidbits they mention that you didn't expect. Use your available information (research) as well as your intuition.

Ask short, clear direct questions. The longer and more convoluted the question, the easier it is for your guest to avoid answering it. Work on the wording of difficult or sensitive questions beforehand. Don't be afraid to ask "simple" questions or admit that you don't understand something before you move forward. Don't move on until you have a straight answer.

Ask stimulating questions. To bring out the best in people, you have to spark their interests. Creative questions separate the special and memorable interviews from the dull and predictable ones. Making the interview a conversation helps sources feel at ease. Try to make the conversation sparkle. This isn't an interrogation.

Hold your breath! Don't say "okay" or "right" or "uh-huh" after each answer — *this is very important if you are recording for video or radio!* — just smile and nod encouragingly, so they know you are listening and can continue.

- Important: don't be too quick to jump in with your next question. Having the discipline to remain silent, even for a beat, can bring many rewards and deeper reflections (and also confirm if it's time to move along).

Follow up: Always end interviews by asking for further contact information and tell them ahead of time it is likely you will be in touch for follow up questions, to clarify quotes and that your editor could reach out for a fact-check.

If you don't know, ask! Never be afraid to get a source to explain something you don't understand immediately. Examples include asking how something works, for definitions, or to confirm your understanding about the topic. This is much better than getting it wrong.

Quick interview tips

- **Record your interview.** If you have it on the record, sources can't claim you've misquoted them. Trust us when we say recording the interview will save you a lot of stress and can be used to back up your story, if any quotes are disputed.
- **Be prepared,** as much as possible, through research and mapping questions.
- **Be persistent** and don't move on to the next Q until you're satisfied with the previous answer.
- **Listen deeply.** It will help you ask the next question and establishes rapport and trust.
- **Let the interviewee do the talking.** This is why they are here. Let them shine!
- **Don't read your questions.** Your interview should, ideally, seem like a lively conversation. (But of course you can glance at your notes from time to time.)
- **Be interesting, bring energy.** It is your job to stimulate. Be aware of your body language.

And here's how to (politely) interrupt someone: If a person rambles on and time/patience is running out, say something like, "I'm sorry to interrupt but because there's so much I want to ask you I wonder if I could direct my next question to..." (or something to this effect).

Set goals

1. Determine the major issues you want to cover.
2. Consider when you will ask tough or sensitive questions (and prepare them accordingly).
3. Try to maintain a structure to the interview — great interviews seem like a natural progression of ideas. *Think about what you want your audience to learn from it.*
4. Challenge people a little bit — ask them to explain reasons behind an answer.
5. Don't rush. Take your time. Win their trust. You got this.

And some final advice

- Remember “why” and “how” questions are more interesting, in general.
- **Be attentive to what is *not* said, too:** nonverbal communications are telling. Cues come from the way our guest is seated, what their hands are doing and through eye contact.
- **Don’t gush or grovel.** That imbalance makes it difficult for you and your hero to perform.
- **Get in your element, try to get them in their element.**
- **Be creative and curious.**
- **HAVE FUN!** 😊

EDITING & FACT CHECKING

One of our most important jobs is ensuring the accuracy and integrity of *The Link*’s content. Trust needs to be an important part of the editor-reporter-reader relationship.

At *The Link*, we edit for:

- Accuracy
- Trimming unnecessary words
- Protecting and polishing the language
- Correcting inconsistencies
- Making a story conform to style (please refer to *The Link*’s Style Guide and CP Style)
- Eliminating libelous statements
 - **Libel** is any statement that damages or diminishes someone’s reputation.
- Eliminating instances of editorializing and passages in poor taste
- Making certain the story is readable and complete

- Ensuring fairness

The characteristics of good writing are:

- Precision and accuracy
- Clarity of understanding
- Pace and rhythm
- Use of transitional devices or bridges that lead the reader from one thought to the next
- Audience appeal (would a Concordia community member care about this story?)

The standards of accuracy:

1. Ask effective questions.
2. Take accurate notes.
3. Gather source documents.
4. Question the information.
5. Verify the information.
6. Fact check your story.

Editing tips

- **Shorten sentences** by taking out unnecessary words, adjectives and simplifying concepts. If a point can be made in one sentence, edit the point to make it one sentence.
- **Order paragraphs according to what is important and recent.** When editing, analyze whether the article would read better if information was ordered another way, with the understanding that readers might miss out on important information if they don't read until the end of the article. Ideas and information you want to see emphasized need to be placed higher up.
- Ensure the **headline, subhead, lede and first few paragraphs are most heavily analyzed** for accuracy and style. If these elements don't hook readers, the article won't get read.

- Headlines: Would it make you click? Is it vague or informative? Is it accurate? Does it sum up the whole article or only a part of it?
- **Avoid repetition.** Make a point once. This also goes for quotes. Often, writers will write a sentence and follow it with a quote that essentially says the same idea. Get your point across more quickly by paraphrasing or simply quoting.
- **Shorten long quotes.** And reduce the overall number of quotes in an article. A general rule of thumb is to give each source one to three quotes, depending on their stake in a story.
- **Cut facts that aren't of interest.** Sources and documents can give a lot of information that isn't that important. Trim what's unnecessary while keeping things factual.
- **Fact-check spellings** of sources names, the names of streets, locations, parks, companies, etc. You'll save yourself the embarrassment of issuing a correction.
 - People's **names are given in full on first reference** to them in the article. Last names alone represent them in all subsequent references.
 - **Names of organizations are spelled out in full on first references.** Acronyms, if used by the group, are used in subsequent references.
- **Get rid of jargon.** Think of yourself as a translator and cut out highly technical language. You lose readers when you don't do this.
- **Ensure that your tense of attribution is uniform** throughout your article. Features can use present tense (*says*) if necessary, but news quotes generally use past tense (*said*).
- **Use spell check!** Copy edits should not be the first stage at which articles receive spell checks. Make it a habit to run a spell check.

Copy editing basics

- **Punctuation:** Goes inside quotations, like so: “Some people don’t like bananas?” but outside parentheses (like so). Hyphens are used to bridge words and dashes are used to bridge phrases. Don’t overuse commas. Read a sentence aloud to see where you naturally pause. If you don’t pause, a comma is probably unnecessary.
- **Numbers:** Write out numbers one through nine. Use digits for 10 and up, except when the number starts a sentence. Numerals are used for any decimal figure or figure with units (dollars, km, etc.) Thousands are spelled with a comma, not a space. (\$25,000)
- **Homonyms:** Beware! It’s vs its. Too vs to. Your vs you’re. Keep an eye out.
- **Italicization:** Used for book titles, play titles, movie titles, album titles. Band names, song names, authors, etc. are not italicized.
- **Dates:** Months longer than six letters are shortened (Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb.) and the rest are spelled out in full when referring to dates (March, April, May, June, July, August). Do not use st, nd, or th in dates. **Times:** a.m. and p.m. are spelled as such.

The most effective edits are not brutal rewrites. They are:

1. **The come-down-and-sit-with-me approach.** The reporter is present when the editor gets down to close editing, which turns into a negotiation process with the reporter having an important say in the changes and learning from the editor’s experience. Ask your editor to be there when they review your ED1!
2. **The pre-edit.** This is how you save time and tears. Talk to your editor before the story is written, even before it is reported. Ideas and suggestions are more effective when the writer knows about them in advance, rather than having to chase you down for questions later.

Files from Peter Cooney, J-School Professor

News Editing Checklist

Step 1: The Pre-Edit Discuss the angle, scope, sources, key questions to answer and digital plan with your Editor before the assignment starts.

Step 2: The Ear Edit Read your story out loud before you send it in to your editor.

Step 3: Structural and Line Edits What works well? What needs work? Go line by line for structure, word choices, and clarity.

Step 4: The Liability Edit Fact check each line with/for your editor. Make sure you've reached out to anyone who is criticized or affected by name for comment.

Step 5: Delivery Check the quality of the layout, art, photos and visuals on the flat, once your story has gone through the production cycle.

Files from Emily Siner, News Director at WPLN Public Radio

Becoming a pro

Becoming a pro editor takes luck, practice and the help of many others. Every person will take a different path to being an editor, but these principles will guide you through the turbulent waters that every editor must travel on...

1. **Figure out your deadlines and work backwards.** This may seem easy but most people do the reverse and have to work twice as hard to get where they're going. Figure a date and go backwards with key dates for different stages of completion, and write down these goals and benchmarks.
2. **Build in FUTs.** These are built in f*** up times, say an extra half day on a week schedule, just in case something goes wrong (and it will). Apply to any situation when necessary.
3. **Remember the elephant.** Three blind people approach an elephant. One grabs the trunk, one the tail and one pats its side. They all have a different perception and experiences, yet they're touching the same animal. People on your team (Contributors, salespeople and operations, Editors, BoD) have a hand in the publication. The job is to make sure everyone sees the big picture and not just the piece of the elephant they are in contact with. Vocalize your plans.

4. **CANI: Constant and Never ending Improvement.** Constantly try to improve your knowledge base and skill set. The more you can do, the more valuable you become to any organization and the more you can justify what you want and deserve.
5. **Be on time.** If you do this, you'll be ahead of 90% of the competition. If you are going to be late, call ahead. Showing up for your team is what matters most.

Files from Leo Gervais, J-School Professor

Fact-Checking

The most important thing for a fact-checker to remember is that you are doing the writer, the source and the publication a huge service. You are protecting every interested party from being misrepresented, or misrepresenting the truth.

We can't stress enough the importance of this work!

Here's how to do it.

1. Read through the entire piece once.
2. Make a list of sources (people and/or documents referenced).
3. Read through the piece and make a list of facts attributed to each source.
4. Look for what's missing and validate the facts that are presented with the original source and/or secondary reference.
5. Call the sources to verify.
 - a. Be shameless about getting it right.
 - b. Follow up and ask if you are not sure. You can say "*I thought this is what you said, but just wanted to be sure.*" Allow your source to confirm, correct or elaborate on their quotes.
 - c. Save tough fact-checking questions for the end and prepare two ways to ask a tough question in case you don't get a straight answer the first time.
 - d. Do not phrase things as questions, but as facts. Do the same for

facts that come from documents is: “You are the associate editor of *Maisonneuve Magazine*?” and not “Are you the associate editor of *Maisonneuve Magazine*?”

- e. Never quote directly from the piece.
- f. Don’t rush this process.

Fact checking a paper source

1. Find the primary source. This means, if a paper cites a study, find the study.
2. If there is no way around using a news source, find three reputable sources confirming the same information.
3. It can be hard to distinguish credible sources online, ask your Editor if you are unsure about anything!

Verify using other sources

- **Who else knows?** Seek other people who are knowledgeable about this situation. Can they confirm or refute what you’ve been told? Can they fill in the gaps? Resolve differences? Ask them how they know.
- **Seek documentation and recordings.** Find official data, records and reports that can confirm or refute what you’ve been told, or fill in the gaps.
- **Go online.** But be as wary of information you find on the internet as you would any other source.

Files from Cynthia Brouse, After the Fact

'Regret the Error' Accuracy Checklist

Story: _____

Sources:

While Reporting:

- Ask source to spell name and title
- Record or transcribe interviews
- Verify claims with reliable sources
- Save links and other research
- Ask sources what other reports got wrong

Final Checks Before Submission:

- Numbers & Math
- Names
- Titles (people, books, etc.)
- Locations
- Compare quotes to notes/recording
- Quote attribution
- Definitions
- URLs
- Spelling & Grammar
- Spellcheck errors

Story Specific Items:

- _____
- _____
- _____

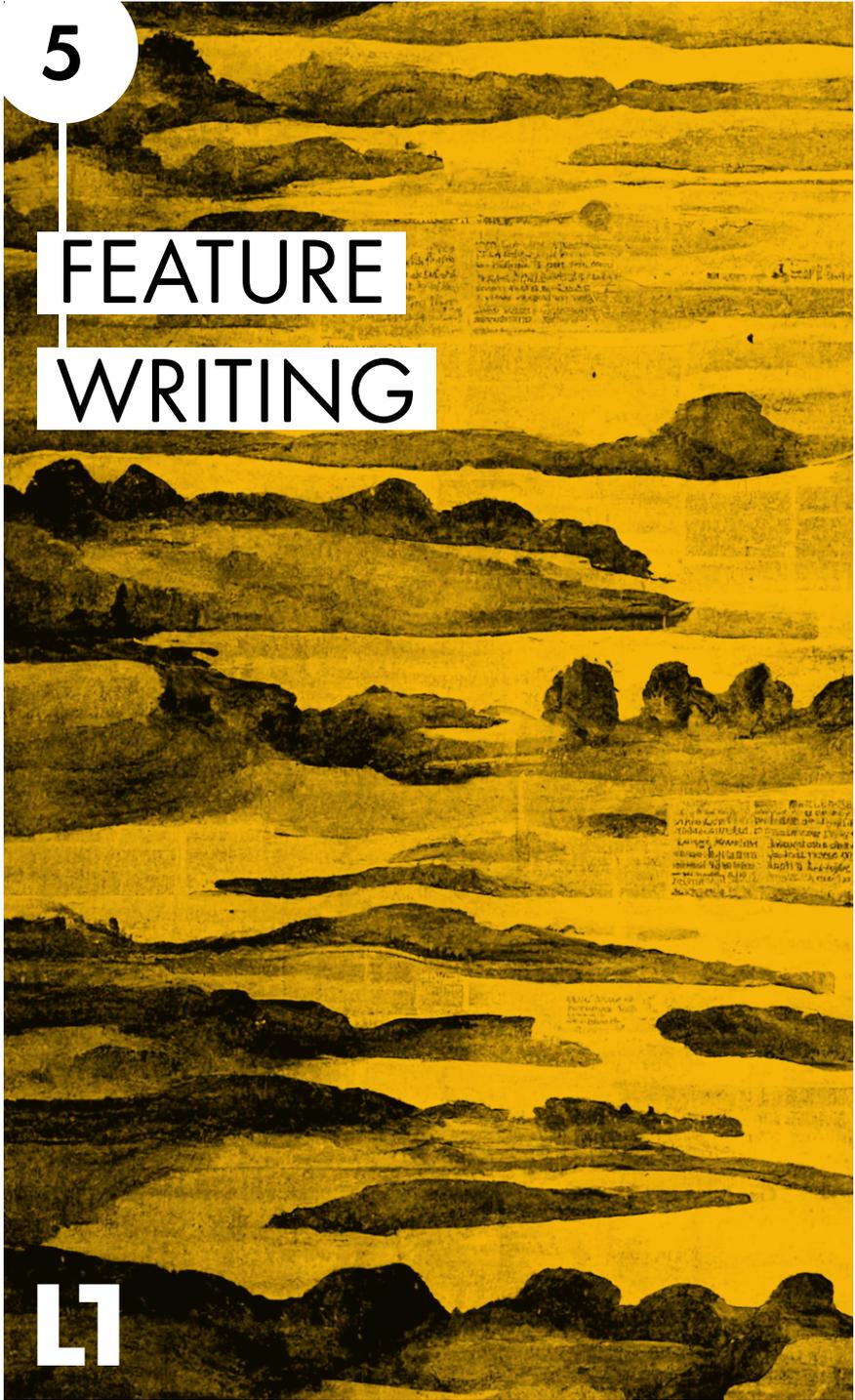
Files from Craig Silverman, Journalist, Author, Fake-News Expert

5

FEATURE

WRITING

L1



Is this a feature?

Is your topic interesting? Is your topic pertinent? Can you tell the full story in 500 words? If you answered ‘yes’ to the first two questions and ‘no’ to the third, then proceed writing your feature.

Unburdened by the press release, feature stories are unique, creative and about many different topics. Features can be profiles, analyses or investigative reports. They can be hard hitting or light and amusing. Whatever the format, features are an opportunity to be creative and maybe even a little unorthodox.

The strength of a feature is its ability to explore a given topic at greater depth.

So think small, think big, but please, think! *The Link* aims to publish well-written, intelligent pieces, as well as funny, quirky and shocking ones.

Finding a feature

Features are unique since they are bound by neither the law of space nor the law of time: they don’t have to be about something happening ‘right now’ and are allotted more space and are less rigorously structured than news articles.

“A person who comes late to a story can often break new ground. While competition is clustered around a main development, [they] can move on to some of the impacts they haven’t had the time or vision to cover...”

- William Blundell, author of *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing*

The strength of a feature is its ability to explore a given topic at greater depth. Even things that seem mundane can turn out to be great features – a personal account of your night in a drunk tank, a student who’s getting worked over by their student loans... features are everywhere, all around you. There’s always more going on underneath the surface, so DIG! Your goal is to tell people something that they don’t already know or make them look at a topic in an unexpected manner.

If you ask the question “how and why” things happen, then you probably like reading feature stories. But writing features is another story altogether. Lots of research and numerous interviews can be involved in feature writing, so it is easy to get overwhelmed. Taking the time to map out where you may be heading beforehand can make life for the writer, and the editor, a whole lot easier.

If you have an idea but it’s a little vague, bring it to *The Link* and talk it through with an Editor, who can help you develop it! This can give you focus and perspective if you hit a roadblock.

Elements of a feature

According to Blundell, here is the Feature Structure in a nutshell:

1. **Stage 1: Tease me, you devil.** Intrigue the reader. Get the reader to invest time in reading the lead. You don’t necessarily need a lead before you can start writing. Try organizing your stories around a “main theme statement” that may or may not later turn out to be the lead.
2. **Stage 2: Tell me what you’re up to.** Enough teasing. I’m here, now what is the story really about? This should be a simple statement to let the reader know exactly that.
3. **Stage 3: Prove that what you’ve said is true.** Show me. This is a collection of powerful quotes, carefully placed facts and figures, plus a transition to tie them all together.
4. **Stage 4: I’ll buy it.** Put an ending on your feature that will nail it into your readers’ memory. Make it forceful. Often, the end ties back to the beginning. It can also be an impressive quote.

Features are generally 1,000 to 1,500 words. Added length allows you to develop your story but can lead to difficulty to maintain reader interest. Use gripping images, salient anecdotes or teasing lines to keep the reader hooked, and then develop the topic with well-researched facts and figures to illustrate your point. Be creative. Be provocative. People should be informed or entertained by your piece (ideally both).

Though the writing is very important, you **MUST** do the research. You’re getting more time to write your feature piece so be thorough and do it right.

Blundell's Tips for great features

Step 1: Build a Story Map Consider the potential action and reaction on a given topic and use this to physically map out your story on a piece of paper. This can help you define an area to focus on, and helps you decide in advance what to include.

Step 2: Decide on a Theme Decide on a focus before you start interviewing. This can always change if you discover something new and important, but having an idea before you jump into a feature helps tremendously. Express your main theme statement in a couple of simple, tightly written active sentences. Let this be your guide. You can also use this to pitch an editor.

Step 3: Reporting Figure out who you need to talk to first, who are the people who can give you more accurate information on the subject, as well as other sources to talk to later for direction and further insights. Who is doing research in this area? Gather more research and sources than you will need in the reporting stage, and writing will be easier.

Step 4: Writing See some helpful tips below!

Step 6: Self Editing If you can, put your finished feature aside for a couple days (or at least hours) and allow yourself to become less attached to it. Give it another critical re-read for content, making sure everything that's there is clear and convincing, and for pace and precision, too: go through to eliminate unnecessary words.

Does it make sense? Is there anything you can cut? Have you checked for spelling mistakes? Is this something you'd want your mom to read? If so, send in your ED1!

The feature writing process

1. Write a great lede.

Start with a lede that captures attention. Your opening is the readers' investment in the piece, meant to engage their attention and force them into what follows. Mystery that leaves the reader dangling with unanswered questions on their mind is good. So is controversy. ("She said WHAT?!") Consider what would keep you reading.

- It can be an **anecdote** you heard during the course of research
 - Three tests for an anecdotal lede: Is it simple and good by itself? Does it have relevance to the story? Does it have intrinsic interest?
- It can be a **description** of a person, place, or thing that draws the reader in and sets a scene.
- It could be a **newsy lede** that highlights the point of the story.
- It could be a **quote lede** (although it's not always considered a good way to begin). Here's an acceptable example: "I have the worst job in the Army." (since it makes the reader ask, "What could that possibly be?")

2. Develop the body

Organize all details from your notes. Examine each and review which parts will best convey what you want to stress in your feature story. Once you've set the scene, set the stage: think of your descriptive eye as a camera that can zoom in for a tight focus, then pan back for a sweeping view. Avoid judgments in the descriptive process. Show, don't tell. Avoid describing physical characteristics of your setting or subject with vague modifiers, such as "he was tall." Strive to describe in absolute terms. Choose your verbs carefully. Instead of using modifiers for weak words, search for strong precise words.

Other writing tips include:

- **Simplicity:** Make sure the story is clear and immediately understandable.
- **Find a flow:** Use good transitional phrases to bridge subject changes in your piece.

- **Handle your numbers:** Too many numbers is intimidating and confusing. Don't bog things down and, if possible, break down numbers in a sidebar or infographic.
- **Handle your quotes:** Avoid clutter, be selective, and know when to paraphrase. Just because you don't use an interview or quote doesn't mean it was a waste. Overuse takes away from the piece. Make sure your quotes add something that drives the narrative forward. Use quotes that are relevant, powerful and emotional. A good writer is merciless in deciding who gets into his article. Each person must have a story purpose. Quotes are better pruned and pared down.

“Favour the short and sharp over the long and dull, and trim the statement down to its nubbin of meaning.”

- **Handle yourself:** “When there's too much reporter, there's not enough story.” Remember that whatever you write should be backed up with facts, experiences or quotes. If it comes out of the blue, it comes off as opinion.
- **Play a little.** Why not take advantage of the freedom to tantalize and amaze your readers? Some ideas:
 - **Variety:** Find a diversity of sources, from the person on top to the person at the bottom. Carefully consider who you could talk to about a specific topic, and who might have the most interesting or important stories to tell. Consider who is always quoted and who you've never heard anything from. Mix it up. Surprise us.
 - **(Skilled) Repetition:** “Repetition is the hammer in the writer's toolbox, but used clumsily it only flattens interest.” You want the reader to remember what you've written. Don't be shy to repeat your important points but do it with care or you'll come off simply as a bad writer who forgot what they already wrote.

- **Movement:** Readers love action. Feature writers can't invent it, however, they can enhance what's already there through literary means. Other examples of movement include adding colour (description), moving from general terms to the highly specific, or from the concrete to the abstract. Just make sure it still makes sense.
- **Personality:** Every good writer has a bit of their personality in their writing but this doesn't mean writing about yourself or going off on tangents.

3. Ending with a kicker.

Wrap things up with a powerful quote and/or information that helps the reader remember and tie in the theme. Though it isn't necessary to have an ending for your article, you should find an effective way to complete the cycle of information – summing up everything you've already said doesn't count.

Some ideas to drive it home include:

- **Circling back:** Remind the reader of the central message of the story and key elements. This can be done directly or indirectly through symbols, emotional responses or observations.
- **Looking ahead:** If this works for your piece, here may be a place to do it.
- **Spreading out:** Open the gate right at the end, and make the story bigger for impact. Show how important this special topic really is.

Sidebars and you

Sometimes the extra depth you go into when writing your feature expresses itself in the form of a ton of statistics. These numbers, while interesting and informative, can be unwieldy and hard to fit into your article without killing the reader's interest. If the numbers can't be peppered throughout your article in an unobtrusive manner, condense them into a sidebar. Sidebars allow you to keep your well-researched facts and the reader's attention.

And before you submit your feature, remember:

- **CHECK ALL FACTS and the SPELLING of names.**
- **Make a plan for PHOTOS / VISUALS / GRAPHICS with your Editor ahead of time.**
- **Discuss SIDEBARS, VIDEOS + MULTIMEDIA PACKAGING ahead of time.**

6

GET IN TOUCH!



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THE LINK

