



THE LINK PUBLICATION SOCIETY  
**CONTRIBUTOR HANDBOOK**  
—— SPORTS REPORTING ——



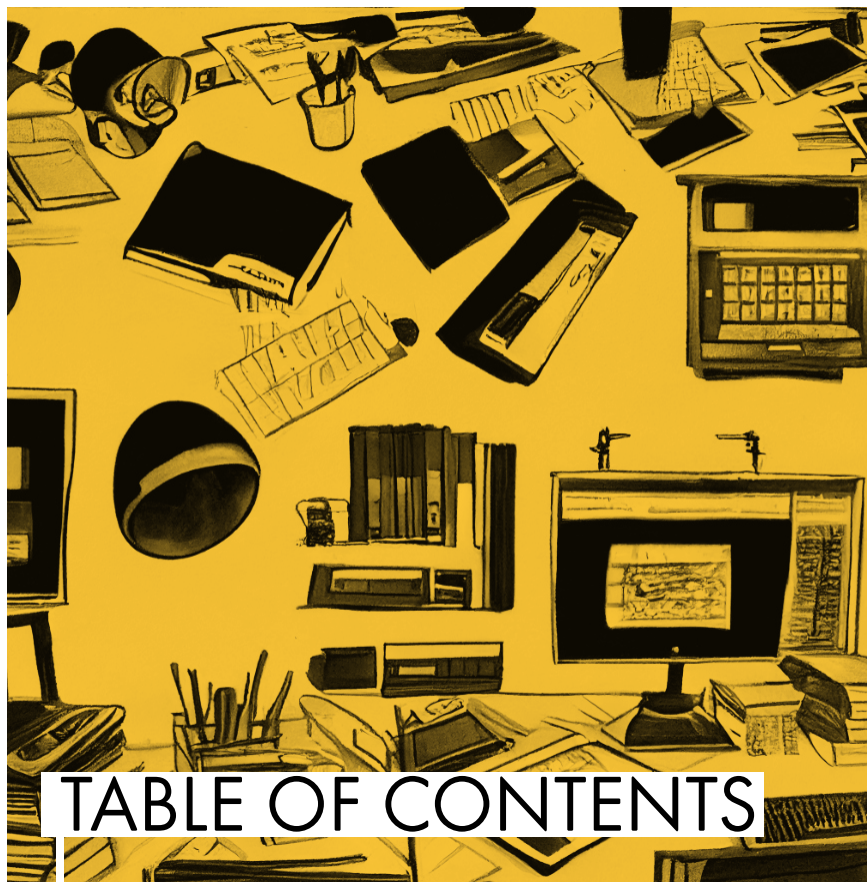
Special thanks to Laura Beeston  
who collected and put together  
the entirety of this handbook.

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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](http://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](http://concordia.ca/about/fast-facts.html), the Student life website [concordia.ca/students/life.html](http://concordia.ca/students/life.html), the Concordia news page [concordia.ca/news.html](http://concordia.ca/news.html) and events calendar [concordia.ca/events.html](http://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:

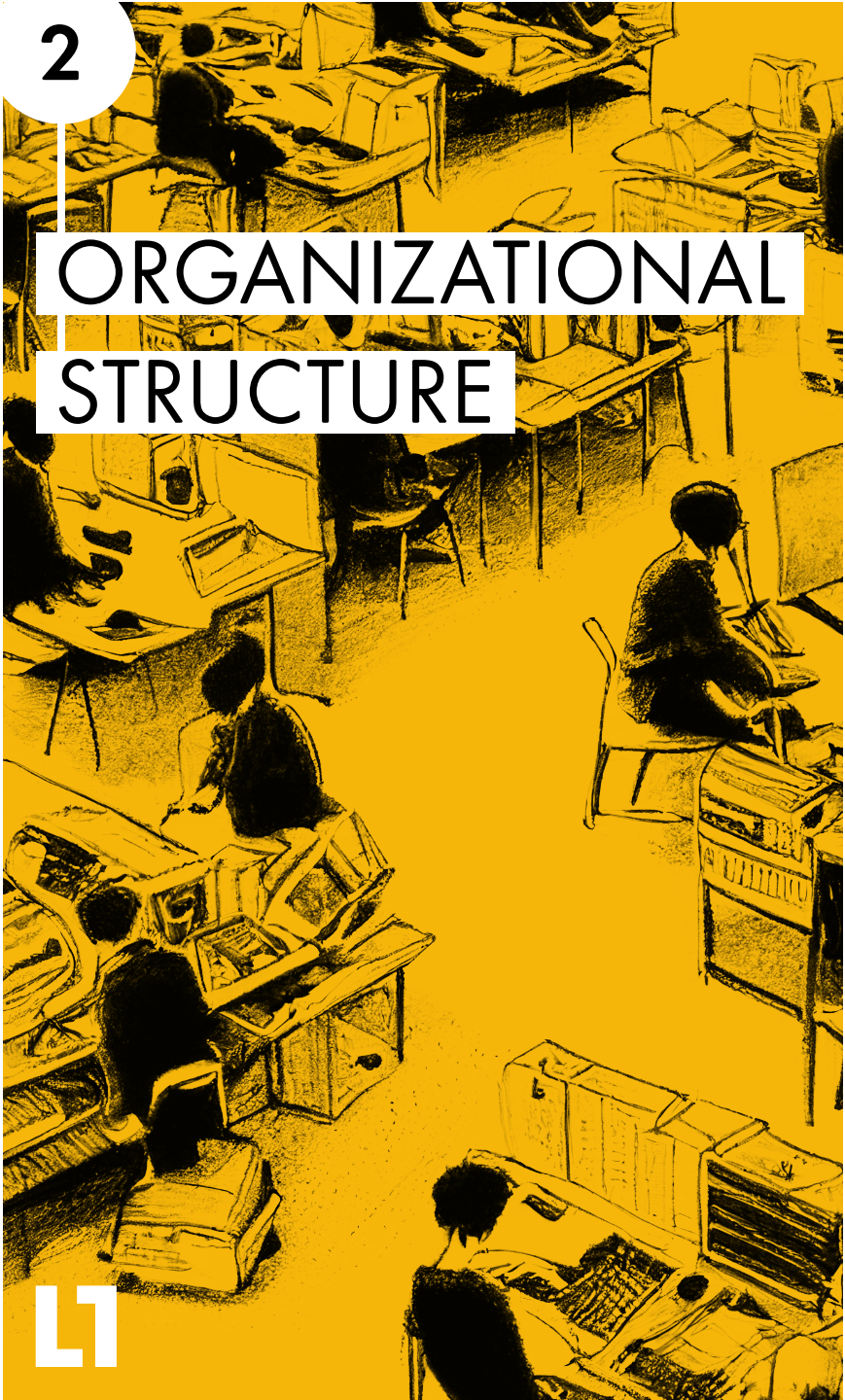
Contributions to *The Link* are made on a volunteer basis, however TLPS allocates money for volunteers as a token of appreciation for fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. Funds allocated to these honorariums each year always depend on *The Link*'s financial situation and are outlined in the 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](http://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](http://thelinknewspaper.ca/about).

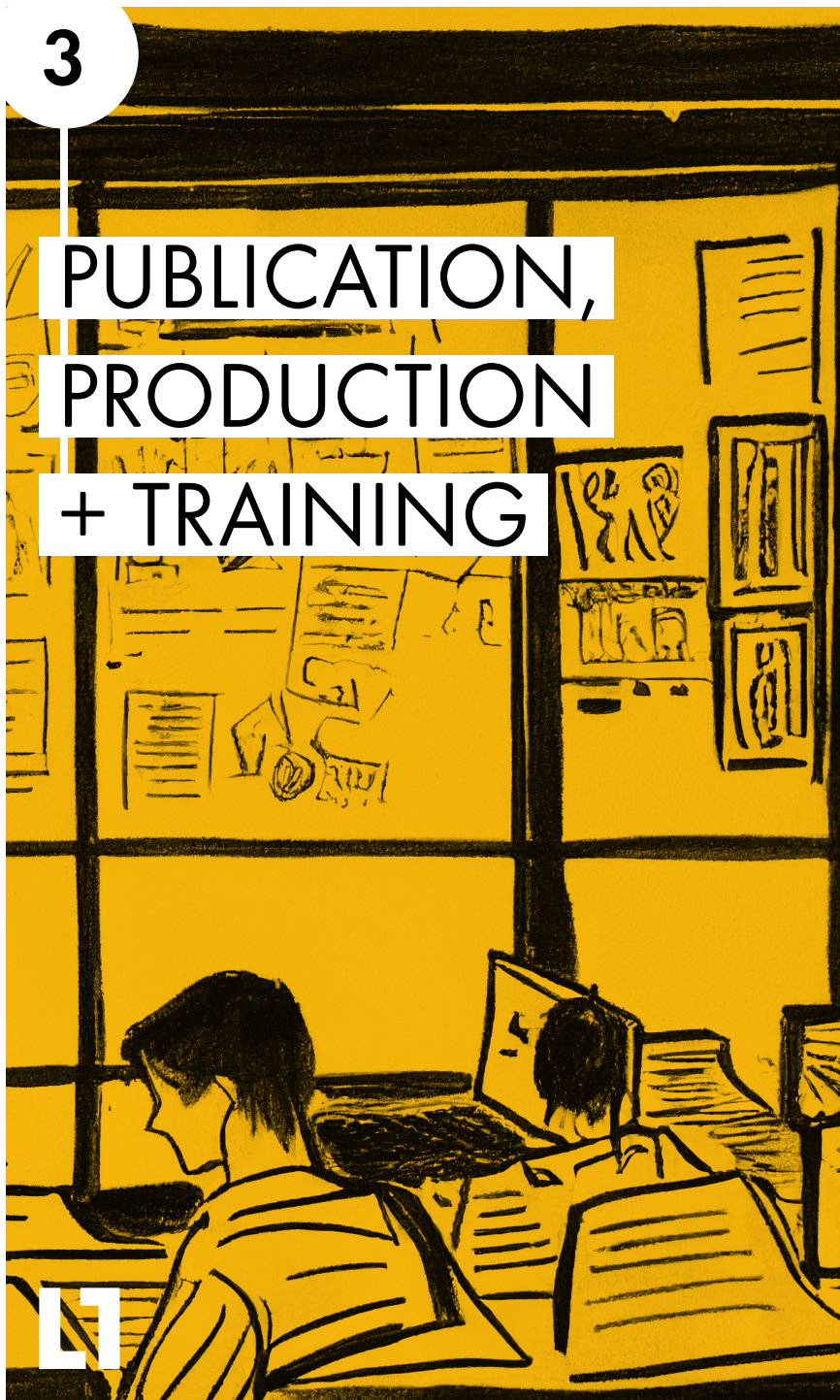
## Society + Staff

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](http://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.

*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,

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

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](http://thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/policies/National_Conference_Delegates_Policy_Mar2019.pdf)



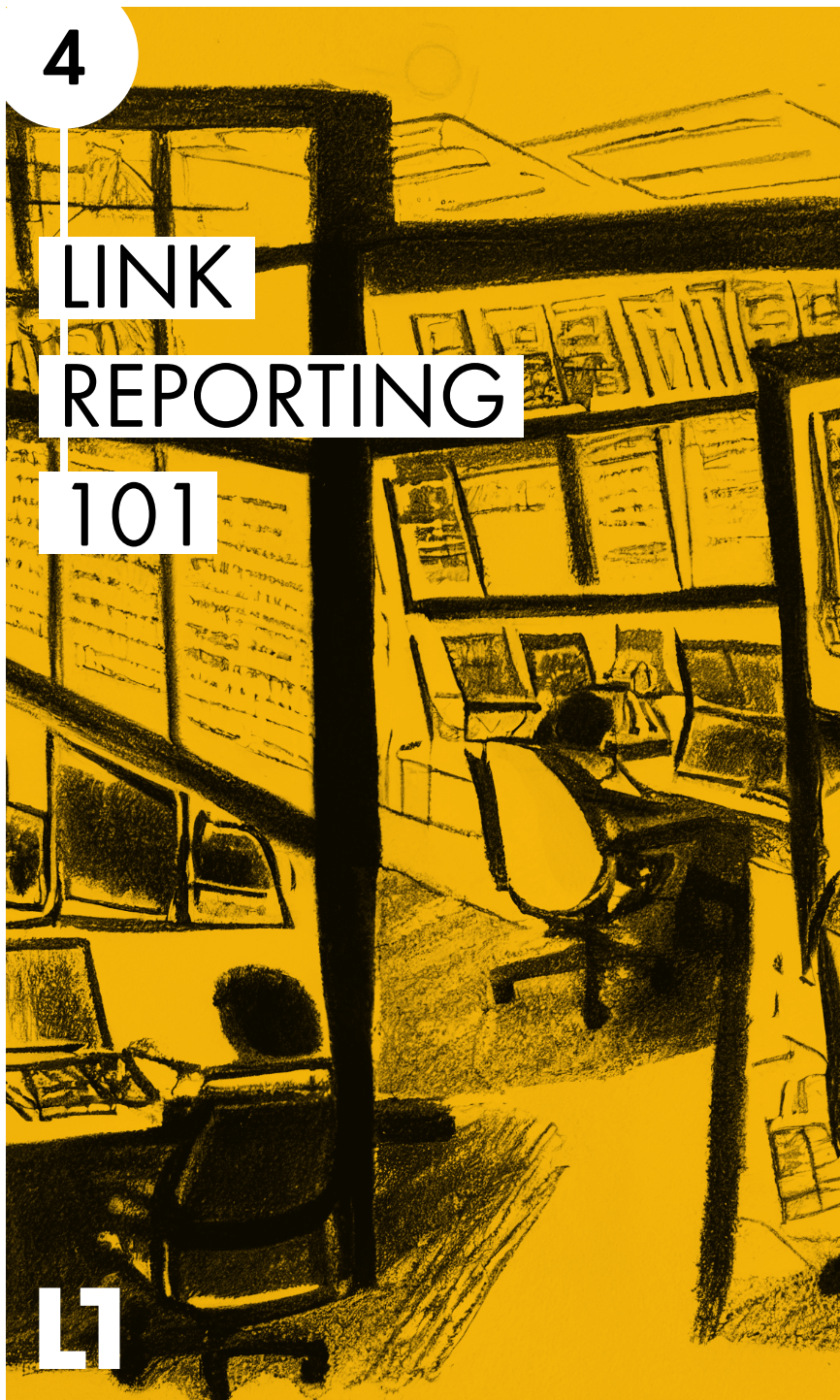
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LINK

REPORTING

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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](http://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](http://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 ie: “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:

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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*

# SPORTS REPORTING

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The world of sports reporting: full of clichés, bad metaphors and meaningless statistics, right? Wrong. Sports journalism can be dynamic, interesting, informative and original. University and collegiate athletics provide an excellent opportunity to develop reporting and writing skills by covering organized, high-level sports.

Good sports reporters at student newspapers can become authorities in the sports they cover, which can be a distinct advantage when they want to sell their work on a freelance basis. But even if you only want to contribute one or two articles it is important to get a handle on the basics of sports writing.

The main elements of a good sports story are **a catchy lede**, **clear focus** and lots of **quotes**. Good sports stories combine background and statistical information, paraphrasing and quotes in a seamless fashion. Keep your paragraphs short. And, like every other kind of reporting, the story should always be more prominent than the person who wrote it.

Sports coverage can be divided into four kinds of stories: sports news, game results, profiles and opinion pieces.

1. **Sports news articles.** These stories are news articles about sports. They should be balanced and written ‘inverted pyramid’ style: the important info at the front of the article and the less important background material at the bottom.
  - **The lede:** gets your readers’ attention and answers the 5Ws (who, what, where, when, why)
  - **The body:** is the meat of the story, which flows via transitions and quotes. Aim for clarity
  - **Conclusion:** Do not editorialize or sum up the article. End with the least important fact or an interesting quote.
  - *For more tips: see Find and Pitch a Story in the News Reporting Handbook*
2. **Game results articles.** Sports reporting is unique from other sections of a student publication since you will end up meeting with the same people, like coaches and players, on a regular basis. These relationships are good for game result stories. This type of article summarizes a game and gives a few post-game quotes. They are very time sensitive. If this article is not run immediately after the game, it is old news. Write and submit these stories to your editor ASAP, so they may be read in a timely manner online.

3. **Profiles and features:** Profiles are feature articles that highlight the story or achievements of a particular athlete, coach or team. Features could also be in-depth investigative reports, which can be hard-hitting or relatively light in tone. They tend to be longer than regular sports stories, somewhere between 700 and 900 words, and require more research than sports news stories. Profiles/Features should be creative, provocative, informative and stimulating. Readers should learn something or be entertained (or both!). Use a gripping image, salient anecdote or an intriguing first line to hook your audience, then develop the topic with well-researched facts and figures to illustrate your point.

In the 90s, *Stinger Spotlight* became a regular column in *The Link's* sports section. Writers sought to profile acclaimed members of the Stinger community to shed light on amazing athletes and support staff who don't usually grab the headlines.

In more recent years, the paper has run features about a midnight basketball league, a swimming program for kids with disabilities, a basketball coach on his way to the Olympics, etcetera. Find compelling, human stories and they are sure to be a hit! *The Link* is always open to ideas for the sports section.

- *For more tips: check out Feature Writing*

4. **Opinion pieces.** Some newspapers have sports columnists, while others accept submissions from writers-at-large. Opinions are a great way to inject colour and life into a sports section. If you get called to write an opinion piece, it should be between 400 and 600 words long, focused on a specific issue relevant to the athletics that *The Link* covers.

- *For more tips: check out Opinion Writing*

## Using quotes

Quotes should add to the story. Do not use a quote that can be turned into a text, like a coach saying what their team's record is. Avoid anything that remotely smells like, "We gave 110 percent," or "We will fight to the end." If it is cliché, discard it.

# Grammar

There are two very common errors that sports reporters make:

1. **Capitalization:** According to the CP stylebook, you can only capitalize formal titles when they directly precede the name. So you write “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau” but DO NOT write “Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister.” Rather, you would write “Justin Trudeau, prime minister.” Occupational titles and descriptions -- such as the name of company officials, unions and sports teams -- are lower case. This means that you write “head coach” and not “Head Coach.”
2. **Possessives:** Do not use “mens” or “womens” when writing a phrase like “the women’s soccer team at the University of Lethbridge.” Men is a plural of man, women a plural of woman. There are no mens - a plural of a plural - or womens. Use women’s or men’s when you are dealing with possessives.

## Research and Interviews

You will need to go through a series of steps before typing out any sports article. These steps are: research, interviewing, outline and writing.

1. **Research:** Begin by discussing your article with the Sports Editor. This person will give you a deadline and suggest a story length, who to talk to, and what angle to take. After talking with your editor, be prepared to investigate your topic. In some cases, that’s as easy as reviewing news releases, game results and statistics the editor may have handy or that can be found online.

Websites are an indispensable resource for research, contain in-depth stats and large archives of information. Look for websites with athlete, team and league information. Another good source during the research stage is Concordia’s Athletics Department and/or the sports information director. This person should be able to give you all the basic facts about your varsity sports topics, such as athlete bios, team stats and schedules. Archives and back issues are another source of useful facts and background.

2. **Interviews:** You can sometimes get more background information about a subject in the interview, but by then you should know a good deal about your subject anyway. The main purpose of the interview is to obtain quotes that legitimize and backup the story you are telling in the article. Remember, unless it's an opinion piece, the reader is more interested in what the athletes and coaches have to say than what some student journalist thinks. Talk to at least two but no more than five people for a sports article, including players and their family members, coaches, athlete directors or other executives.

If you are new to covering a team or sport, stay in contact with the coach or a few of the athletes, just to keep up on new developments you might not get from official channels. Athletes are generally more willing to tell you what they really think and describe how things really are in the locker room.

The best interviews are casual and conversational. Go into an interview with a short list of five or six open-ended questions to get your subjects talking. If you ask the right questions, people will usually provide lots of quotes without much provocation.

Stay on your toes and take notes so you can ask follow-up questions. Check your tape recorder often for time codes and take notes just in case. Save your tougher interviews/questions for last, when you are best informed. Another good trick is to ask the person you are interviewing who they would talk to if they were researching the same topic, and call that person right away.

3. **Outline:** After you've gathered the facts and transcribed the interviews, look over what you have and make sure you still want to approach the story from the same angle. If you don't, think about what the new angle could be and see if you have enough info. If not, go back to your sources for follow-up questions or more comments and do more research. Write a loose outline for the story so you know what the main points are.

The outline doesn't work for everyone but try using it for your first few articles to keep you organized and on track. It can help focus your writing and keep it concise, which is important when you only have 500 words to tell the story!

## Checklist for sports interviews

- ✓ Ask open ended questions – questions that demand more than a yes/no answer – as often as possible.
- ✓ Ask the coach at least three questions and search for in-depth information.
- ✓ Ask team members to describe important parts in the match. This way you can write with authority how the team(s) reacted at crucial moments.
- ✓ Question the coaches of both teams after a game.
- ✓ Try to question two home team players and one or two away team players after each game. If a two-night series is going on, question one away player each night.
- ✓ Do not keep a player or a coach occupied for a long period of time after a game. What can be an eager interview subject can quickly turn into a tired, annoyed person after 15 minutes.
- ✓ Question the away team first. They are more likely to depart quickly after a game than the home team.
- ✓ If you are doing a profile, set an interview time with the subject and have a minimum of 10 questions prepared. Break the ice by asking the player how they would describe themselves.
- ✓ Ask questions in a conversational way. Make sure your interview flows logically. Listen carefully as an interviewee may take you in a different direction than you expect.

## Do's and don't's of sports writing

- **Don't** front-end load titles (example: Concordia University's director of athletics Michael Smith.)
- **Do** pick one focus and make it evident in the lede.
- **Don't** parrot or paraphrase the quote you're about to use in the set-up.
- **Do** have a consistent style.
- **Do** introduce your sources, first and last name and appropriate title, but **don't** continue to introduce them throughout the article. Their last name is used for the remainder of the article.
- **Don't** read minds or make assumptions. Example: "Susan Horwood thinks the team has what it takes to go all the way." If she said this, quote her. If she didn't, don't assume what she thinks.
- **Don't** editorialize. Example: "Without player X, the Stingers are in big trouble."
- **Don't** write in blocks. Mix short sentences with longer ones. The same with paragraphs.
- **Do** break up a long string of quotes with a paraphrased comment.
- **Don't** use loaded or distracting terms instead of the words "said" or "says." (Examples: claimed, accused, stated.)
- **Do** add colour. Describe the atmosphere and action.
- **Do** cut unnecessary words. Your Editor will thank you.

*Files from Darren Steinke and Mason Wright, CUP*



## NOTES

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# GET IN TOUCH!



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