The Diplomatic Envoy

Writing & Style Guide
2020 Edition

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long should my article be?

A: For normal print or web edition articles, we expect anywhere from 500-700 words. However, different section editors may have their own expectations for writers, so be sure to check with them first for print editions. Word count may different for special/summer editions.

Q: How many sources should I use?

A: Generally, we like to see 5-7 *different* sources minimum on a normal-length article. More is always better, however, so feel free to go beyond this. A list of appropriate news sources can be found below.

Q: What if I want to write about something that isn't on the budget?

A: Pitch your idea to us! We always encourage self-pitches for writers wanting to cover topics they are passionate about. To make a self-pitch, please reach out to an editor (or the specific section editor if you want to self-pitch for a print edition) and explain what you want to write about and provide a few sources.

Q: Who should I send my article to when I'm done writing?

A: For weekly web articles, please send them to the Associate Editor and CC the Editor-on-Duty (EOD). The EOD will be listed on the pitch doc. For print editions, please send your articles to the section editor (i.e. Opinion Editor, International News, etc.)

Q: Where and when will my articles be published?

A: Weekly web articles go up on our website on Mondays at 8:00 a.m. Print editions are posted on the website about 4-7 days after writers submit articles. Newspapers come out around 2 weeks after writers submit their articles and are distributed across campus.

Q: How do I access sources with paywalls if I don't have a subscription?

A: Seton Hall provides FREE access to many paid newspapers and journals through the Library. To access these articles, go to library.shu.edu/news/home and select the newspaper under "Major Newspapers: Library Subscriptions." From here, you can search for a specific article or topic of your choosing. Seton Hall also provides free access to Foriegn Affairs and Foreign Policy.

Basics of News Writing

When writing for news.
News writing follows a very distinct format; it is very different from academic/scholarly writing.
　　　Remember that **news is generally written in the present tense.**

Article vs. Essay

Articles are short, descriptive accounts.	*Essays* are long, conceptual papers.
Articles are written for the public.	*Essays* are written for professors.

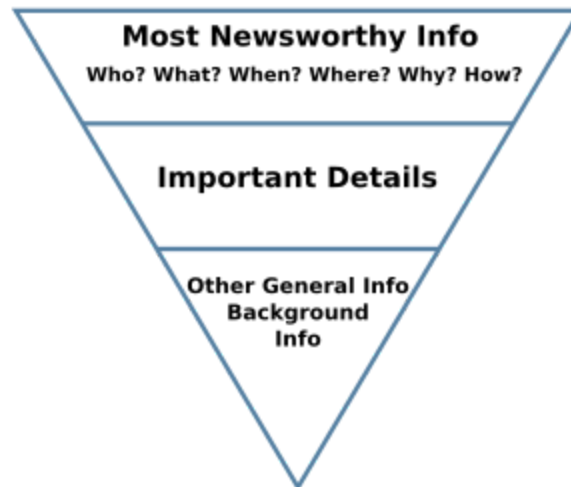*Articles* are straight to the point.   *Essays* are fully developed.

Articles have a main idea.   *Essays* have a main objective.

Using the inverted pyramid.

The inverted pyramid is the structure on which journalists base their stories. Writing in this format forces journalists to **triage** quotes, data, and other information into what is most pertinent.

Readers begin reading articles and judge within the first three sentences whether the rest of the article is worthy of close reading. Otherwise, they either skim the rest of the article or flip/navigate to another.

Updated or new information is at the forefront because it is what the reader is looking for. The middle of the article is where new information is further explained or broken down, as well as where it is put into context.

This format also forces the writer to assume their reader is informed of the situation. Therefore, general information that sets the article in context with the broader picture of what is going on is left to the end.

News vs. Opinion

News informs.   *Opinion* persuades.

News is based on multiple viewpoints.   *Opinion* is based on singular viewpoints.

News believes the facts speak for themselves.   *Opinion* believes in informed argument.

News is objective and impersonal.   *Opinion* is subjective and personal.

News uses facts.   *Opinion* builds on facts

Article Structure

Consider the paragraph, or graf, the unit of composition in your piece. In news writing, a paragraph is typically determined by its subject. A good rule of thumb is to look at your current text and determine if it could be improved by dividing it further. If the subject changes, it should become its own paragraph.

Typically, single sentences are not paragraphs unless they are transitional, indicating the relation between parts of an exposition. Dialogue can also be considered transitional in which case the quote and its description stand alone. Begin each paragraph with a sentence that suggests the topic or with a sentence that helps in transition.

Remember, paragraph format takes a good eye and a logical mind. If you think your paragraph is too long, it probably is. Enormous blocks of text can appear intimidating to readers. However, too many short paragraphs in quick succession can become distracting. Moderation and a sense of order are the main ingredients of paragraph formatting.

Know when to break a paragraph.
To avoid having a massive block of text, use the acronym TIP TOP, which will tell you when to create a new paragraph.

> **TI**me
> **P**lace
> **TO**pic
> **P**erson

Develop a great headline.
Effective headlines are an honest summary of the story, written in the active voice, and have strong, present-tense verbs. Small words such as *the*, *a, an* may be omitted from headlines.

Use definite, specific, and concrete language.
Because line space is limited in newspapers, do your best to find the most concise way to convey your message. Rather than write many sentences on the dreariness of the sky and the wetness of the ground, tell your readers that it is raining.

Omit needless words.
Common superfluous phrases include "the reason why is that" (because), "the question as to whether" (whether), "whether or not" (whether), "THE FACT THAT," and "who is, which is" (who, which).

Avoid fancy words, but err on the side of formal language.
The *Envoy* relies on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

More verbs, less adjectives.
In newspapers, verbs are preferable to adjectives – especially in headlines.

Active over passive.
The active voice is more direct and vigorous than the passive voice.
Ex. *I* will always remember my first trip to Boston.
NOT My first trip to Boston will always be remembered *by me*.

Put statements in positive form.
Make definite assertions. Only express uncertainty if it is being stressed with would, could, should, etc.
> **Ex.** She *thought* Latin was a waste of time.
> **NOT** She *did not think* Latin was a good use of one's time.

Style and Usage

- Dates are spelled out in the first mention then later abbreviated.
    Ex. September *29*; Sept. *29*
    NOT September *29th*

- "United Nations" in first reference, and subsequently "UN."
- "United States" in first reference, and subsequently "U.S."
    NOT "USA" referring to a specific brand or body, such as "Team USA"

- Diplomacy is not capitalized unless it is used in reference to the School of Diplomacy.
    Ex. John Smith, a sophomore <u>Diplomacy</u> student, said he was excited.
    NOT Sophomore <u>Diplomacy</u> student John Smith said he was excited.

- Use Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations. (NOT Diplomacy School, unless in headlines).

- Use the full name upon first mention (ex: Federal Bureau of Investigation), and use the acronym on all subsequent mentions (ex: FBI).

- Academic degrees
    a. Capitalize the formal name of a degree (Master of Arts in Education), but lowercase the informal and less precise name (master's degree in education).
    b. When abbreviating a degree after a person's last name, use letters and periods with no intervening spaces (B.A., M.A., M.B.A., Ed.D., Ph.D., etc.). In general, offset the degree with commas, i.e. Paul Kozakski, B.S., Sharon Abelard, Ph.D.

- Alumnus, alumna, alumni, alumnae
    a. Alumna is feminine singular.
    b. Alumnae is feminine plural.
    c. Alumnus is masculine singular.
    d. Alumni is masculine or mixed-gender plural.
    e. **Note**: Alum is not variation of this word

- Spell units out.
For the *Envoy*, temperature should always be converted to "*degrees Fahrenheit*."

Percent, not *%,* nor *per cent*. But the preceding number is always a figure (e.g., 15 percent).

$500, not *500 dollars* and never *$500 dollars*. But non-U.S. currencies are spelled out:
50 *euros*, 500 *yen*, 5000 *pesos*.

- Terrorist organizations
    o **al-Qaeda**, not Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda, or any other variant. Al-Shabab follows this style.
    o The **Islamic State of Iraq and Syria**, or the **self-proclaimed Islamic State** on first reference; subsequently, **ISIS,** or the **Islamic State**.
        ▪ Avoid using ISIS in the possessive case (the **Islamic State's losses** is a smoother read than **ISIS's losses**).

Common Grammatical Errors

1. The *Envoy* subscribes to the **Oxford comma**. In a series of three or more items with a single conjunction, put a comma after each item except for the last.
    Ex. "The girl owned many boots, hats, and scarves."

2. Enclose parenthetic expressions in commas. This is difficult to master, but the easiest way to know if you need them is to say the sentence allowed and notice natural pauses in the flow of a sentence.
Ex. "Governor Christie, a Cowboys fan, may encounter issues in the election based on his personal preferences."
Ex. "Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, will face an issue Christie does not: gender."

3. Form the possessive singular of a noun by adding 's to the end. Additionally, do not confuse the possessive "its" and the contraction "it's," which stands for "it is."

Ex. *Charles's* friend and *Burns's* poems, but *workers'* union
Ex. The *boy's* dog wagged *its* tail.
Ex. "*It's* a beautiful day to save lives," Dr. Shepherd said.

4. When two or more words are combined to create a compound adjective, a hyphen is usually required. The hyphen is unnecessary, however, when an adjective is preceded by a *–ly* adverb.

Ex. He belonged to the leisure class and enjoyed leisure-class pursuits.
Ex. Even more people arrived at the *heavily crowded* arena.

5. Past participles are the form of a verb, typically ending in *-ed*, that is used in forming perfect and passive tenses and sometimes as an adjective.

    Ex. He *had gone* to sleep before I arrived home.
    NOT He *had went* to sleep before I arrived home.

6. Dangling modifiers are words or phrases that modify a word not clearly stated in the sentence.

    Ex. I was late for school again. *Running for the bus*, **I** dropped my book the in the mud.
    NOT *Running for the bus*, **my book** fell in the mud.

In the incorrect sentence, you leave your reader asking, "Was the *book* running for the bus?" because it immediately follows the modifier.

7. There is only one space after the period.

Quoting and Citing Sources

Writers should use at least five to six credible sources for information gathering. Writers are expected to cite, as well as **hyperlink**, these sources throughout their article. Do not list them at the end. Therefore, sources must be woven into the piece.

If a sourced article is being referenced twice, the second reference does not need to be hyperlinked. If the same source (i.e. The New York Times) is being referenced twice but the references are from two different articles, both citations need to be hyperlinked.

Ex. According to [The New York Times](#) violence was at the lowest it has been in years, which gave U.S. officials the impression that it would continue. However, since the signing of the agreement and the U.S. airstrike, there were 76 attacks across Afghanistan, reports The New York Times.

How to Hyperlink:
1. Highlight the link in the search bar from the article that is being used.
2. Copy the link.
3. To hyperlink into the document, highlight the word that you want hyperlink, i.e. The New York Times, and right click. Under the menu bar go to "link" and click on it. Insert the link you copied in Step 2 and click "OK"/"Apply".

● These steps are applicable to Microsoft Word and Google Docs

Ex. "According to The New York Times…"
Ex. "The Washington Post reports…"
Ex. "…Reuters says."

When quoting individuals, be sure to supply as much background for the quote as possible, when and where the quotation takes place, what is being discussed, and with whom. Be sure to double-check the spelling and specificity of names and titles. Note: Be careful when dealing with Asian, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese last names.

Ex. The Minister of Finance, Joe Wau, yesterday attacked laziness in the public service. "Government employees must get off their backsides and work," he told a lunchtime meeting of senior department heads.
Ex. President Xi Jinping of China and President Joko Widodo of Indonesia will arrive in Tokyo tomorrow, where they will be welcomed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan. ***Mr. Xi, Mr. Joko,*** and ***Mr. Abe*** will then proceed to lunch.
       NOT Mr. Jinping, Mr. Widodo, or Mr. Shinzo.

● News organizations: The rule of thumb is to use the trademark name.
  o **Al Jazeera**, not Al-Jazeera, al Jazeera, or any other variant.
  o **The New York Times**, with a capitalized **The**, not the New York Times, NY Times, or NYT.
  o **The Washington Post**, with a capitalized **The**, not the Washington Post, or WaPo, or the Post.
  o **BBC** for the division of the British Broadcasting Corporation that actually disseminates news, not **BBC,** or **the BBC.**

News Source Examples

This is not an exhaustive list. Writers are encouraged to use these sources and any others that they judge to be reliable.

Wire Sources (most reliable)
Wires are basically the 'news sources for news sources'. They usually get stories the earliest and are based on on-the-ground reporting.
Associated Press (apnews.com)
Reuters (reuters.com)
AFP (afp.com/en)

Reliable Sources (U.S.)
As a general rule, any major news network is a good source (NBC, ABC, CBS). Public sources like NPR, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America are also good.
NBC News (nbcnews.com)
ABC News (abcnews.go.com)
CBS News (cbsnews.com)
NPR (npr.org)
Politico (politico.com)
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (rferl.org)
Voice of America (voanews.com)
Bloomberg (bloomberg.com)

Major newspapers are also generally reliable and are good sources.
USA Today (usatoday.com)
The New York Times (nytimes.com)
Wall Street Journal (wsj.com)
LA Times (latimes.com)
The Washington Post (wapo.com)
Financial Times (ft.com)

Academic/professional journals and magazines are great sources for in-depth analysis of an issue but be wary of opinionated pieces.
Foreign Affairs (foreignaffairs.com)
The Economist (economist.com)
Council on Foreign Relations (cfr.org)
Foreign Policy (foreignpolicy.com)
The Atlantic (theatlantic.com)

Reliable Sources (International)
Major foreign news channels are reliable and can be great sources for coverage on issues not U.S.-centric.
BBC News (bbc.com/news)
Al Jazeera (aljazeera.com)
France24 (france24.com/en)
The Guardian (theguardian.com)

*NOTE: Social media sites like Twitter can be great sources for breaking news or quotes. When using these sources, make sure that it is by a reputable news source, public figure, or journalist.

Biased Sources
Be careful when using overtly partisan or politically opinionated domestic news sources. While these sources have accurate and legitimate reporting, they often use loaded language and spin issues in a certain way.
CNN (cnn.com)
Vox (vox.com)
MSNBC (msnbc.com)
New York Post (nypost.com)
National Review (nationalreview.com)
Vice News (vice.com/en_us/section/news)
Washington Examiner (washingtonexaminer.com)

Unreliable Sources
These types of sources are often extremely partisan and offer mixed to low amounts of reputable reporting. Do not use them when writing for the Envoy.
Fox News (foxnews.com)
Mother Jones (motherjones.com)
Buzzfeed News (buzzfeednews.com)
Huffington Post (huffpost.com)
Breitbart (breitbart.com)

Some international news sources are state-sponsored and should not be used.
RT – Russia (rt.com)
Sputnik – Russia (sputniknews.com)
Xinhua – China (xinhuanet.com)
People's Daily – China (en.people.cn)
Anadolu Agency – Turkey (aa.com.tr/en)