

PRINT MATTERS

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EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

Make your editors happy

Depending on the size and resources of your publication, you may have days when it feels like a victory simply to get writers to provide you with copy, period. Editorial guidelines, you may think, make more sense for larger magazines. But for busy editors, receiving work from writers that doesn't need hours of editing before it is usable is something worth striving for. That's why establishing editorial guidelines — even at a minimum level — really *is* worth your time and effort.

Custom made

The key here is to understand that your editorial policies can be as elaborate or as simple as you want. Your policy document is aimed at your writers and will help them create work that is (almost) ready for publication.

It is useful to answer both big picture questions as well as the nitty-gritties. In the big picture, give writers a word count and a sense of the format of their piece, i.e. if it's a feature, a column, a news brief, etc. Next, go over the scope of the article. What is the topic and do



Exceeding our customers' expectations for more than 60 years...

you have a particular angle they should pursue? Who should they interview? Must writers include ideas that readers can put into practice immediately? Should the piece present two opposing points of view? The more information you give them, the more likely it is that you'll get what you want.

More detailed guidelines can refer to things like how you want writers to handle citations, or that you require articles to be written with active, rather than passive, verb tenses. Think about things that you encounter and change often when editing submissions. Which of these can go into the editorial guidelines as rules that writers should follow? Make notes in a Word document as you edit. In a short time, you will have a style guide that you can give out to your contributors.

Other possible areas to cover include:

- conflicts of interest;
- verifying facts;
- quality and quantity of cited sources;
- policies for missed deadlines or unusable articles;
- your approach to editing;
- author rights; and
- word limits.

If you've been in print for a while, chances are that you already have opinions and preferences for the submissions you receive. Your guidelines just make them official and give you a way to communicate those preferences.

In practice

A short, simple editorial guideline list has been working well for *NorthWestern Financial Review*, said Editor and Publisher Tom Bengtson.

"We can do this because we use a small number of freelancers, with whom we already have a relationship,"

Bengtson said. "For example, our three main freelance writers are all former employees."

However, for new writers, Bengtson puts in the time to make his expectations clear at the beginning. "When we do hire new freelancers, we typically agree on the story idea and word count ahead of time. We have a discussion about our audience so we are all clear about who we are writing for."

Jane Swanson, founder and owner of Creative Communications, has her own particular preferences when she reviews submissions to the dog-related publications she handles, which include *Saber Tails*, *Pinscher Patter*, and *Papillon Revue*, among others.

"Anything sarcastic or negative is eliminated," Swanson said. "If there is anything, even a sentence I'm uncomfortable with, I'll re-write it. Also, I edit all articles for readability and so they conform to Associated Press style. Most people don't know what AP style is if they don't have a background in journalism."

Swanson said she does make her expectations clear to writers. The publications also state that they have the right to edit or not publish everything they receive.

Receiving articles that are written perfectly would be nice, she said, but it's not a major concern. Her top editorial priority is to present readers with accurate, educational articles. And because she is well-connected with knowledgeable people in the dog world, her writers usually deliver.

Celeste Richard is the executive



director of the American Camellia Society and helps with the advertising and editorial duties of its quarterly publication, *Camellia Journal*, and the society's annual yearbook. For Richard, it is deadline expectations that she makes clear to her writers, and though she works with volunteers, they generally meet them. Writers are also familiar with policies for the content and photos they submit.

Helpful tool

If you make your expectations clear and reasonable, your writers will probably see your guidelines as a helpful tool, not a burden. Writers want to know what you want, and they want their articles to resemble what they submitted when they appear in print, as opposed to finding that their pieces have been changed significantly. Making sure that everyone is on the same page at the start greatly increases the chances of that outcome, and most importantly for small publications, saves time.

Richard said she does believe her publications' editorial policies are worthwhile, and she's open to building upon them going forward. She also sees them in a larger context. "Your rules and procedures are very important," she said. "We always want to grow. We want to promote ourselves and to be relevant."

One on one

JPA profile: Tim Scarbrough, sales representative

Number of years with JPA: Almost two months

Why he loves JPA: "I've really enjoyed the people I've met; they're great," said Scarbrough, who came to JPA after 41 years at Michigan-based book printer Malloy Inc. "To get into what JPA does — a lot of color printing — is a lot of fun and different."

Family life: Scarbrough and his wife, Georgianna, will celebrate their 31st wedding anniversary this May. Their oldest daughter, Casey, 26, works for the Secretary of State in Michigan and is married to John Roberts. Her sister, Carly, 18, is in her first year at Eastern Michigan University. The Scarbroughs live in Grass Lake, Mich., near Ann Arbor.



Tim and wife Georgianna



Carly, Tim, Casey, John and Georgianna

Hobbies: Scarbrough, a two-time cancer survivor, has been passionate about marathon walking since completing chemotherapy and radiation treatment for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2000. Scarbrough got involved with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team in Training program, and by June of that year he completed the Midnight Sun marathon in Anchorage, Alaska, and raised \$6,000 for the LLS. He went on to complete similar marathons, including one in Ireland, and volunteered for five years as a walking coach. "It was amazing. Mentally and physically it saved me as much as the chemotherapy did." In 2007, the cancer

returned, this time more aggressively, and Scarbrough underwent a stem cell transplant. He won the battle again and returned to walking as founder of Relay for Life of Grass Lake. He remains active with Relay for Life today.

One cool fact: In the fall of 2012, Scarbrough completed a 280-mile walk from Frankfort, Mich., where he was born, to Grass Lake and raised \$7,000 for the American Cancer Society. "It was the year I turned 60, after five years of being cancer free," Scarbrough said. "It represented the journey cancer patients take. You know you'll have good days and bad days, and you focus on the goal of getting well." 📷



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RECIPE

Chocolate Cherry Cake (A Scarbrough family favorite)

1 box chocolate- or fudge-flavored cake	2 eggs, beaten
21-ounce can cherry pie filling	1 teaspoon almond extract

Combine all ingredients by hand until mixed well. Pour into a greased 9x13 inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

Frosting

1 cup sugar	5 tablespoons margarine
1/3 cup milk	

Combine all ingredients in a medium saucepan. Boil one minute and then remove from heat. Stir in 1 cup of chocolate chips, and when they're melted, pour the frosting over the cake.

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