

Writer's Block Style Guide



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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help in-house *Writer's Block* (WB) staff and outside contributors prepare articles for publication in *WB*. This guide provides content guidelines and style conventions to be applied to articles published in the magazine.

1.2. About Writer's Block

Writer's Block is the only Canadian web magazine that explores ideas that matter most to Canadians in the writing trade. Each issue of *WB* offers information, insight, and opinions that help define the environment in which we work, learn, and create. *WB* has the following objectives:

- ◆ Inform about issues and trends in the Canadian writing trade;
- ◆ Help define the Canadian writing industry;
- ◆ Promote discussion on the topics addressed in each issue;
- ◆ Support and promote excellence in the Canadian writing trade;
- ◆ Entertain through witty and thought-provoking articles; and
- ◆ Educate through writing-related tips.

WB welcomes submissions from new and established writers.

1.3. Target Audience

The target audiences for *WB* consist of the following groups of Canadians:

- ◆ Literary and non-literary writers;
- ◆ Literary and non-literary editors;
- ◆ Publishers, book publicists, and literary agents;
- ◆ Book consumers;
- ◆ Librarians;
- ◆ Cultural heritage organizations that pertain to this industry;
- ◆ Special interest groups (e.g., censorship, literacy); and

- ◆ Educators in related fields (e.g., English, communications, journalism, Canadian studies).

While *WB* is aimed at Canadians, subject matter may have broader appeal and be relevant to other readers in other English-speaking countries, especially the United States.

2. Content Guidelines

2.1. Introductory Text for Articles

Introductory text for articles appears on the main page and is written by in-house staff. The “blurbs,” as they are affectionately called, should summarize the article and entice the reader to read the remainder of the text.

2.2. WB Sections

2.2.1. General

In general, *WB* does not publish articles about writing markets or how to get published. We usually do not consider previously published material and we never publish material that can be considered one of the following:

- ◆ Hate literature;
- ◆ Overtly religious;
- ◆ Offensive on the basis of sex, gender, or religion; and
- ◆ Advertising.

2.2.2. Feature

Articles selected for our Feature section must address the issue’s theme and provide a unique and engaging perspective on the topic at hand. The article should be informative, reflecting careful research of appropriate resources, and also be entertaining. Features should be written in the third person and should include descriptive subheadings. Sidebars may be included, where appropriate.

2.2.3. Essay

Articles selected for our Essays section include editorials, testimonials, and humour pieces. Essays should relate to the issue’s theme and should be original, engaging, and reflect a unique point of view. Essays should not include subheadings and can be written in the first person.

2.2.4. Interview

Articles selected for our Interviews section include discussions with interesting Canadians who fall under the categories described in Section 1.3, “Target Audience.” Interviews should present answers to unique questions and uncover new information of interest to our target audiences.

2.2.5. Business Word

Business Word is a quarterly column written by in-house staff. The column focuses on various business aspects and trends in the Canadian writing trade and does not necessarily have to reflect the issue's theme. Suggestions on topics are welcome.

2.2.6. Origins

Origins is a quarterly column written by in-house staff. The column is based on the antics of two (not so) fictional characters: Miss Hoopty and Delilah. Each column presents several words and phrases used in context; an explanation of the origin and meaning of the words is presented at the end of the column. Where possible, Canadian words and phrases are used. Suggestions on topics are welcome.

2.2.7. Book Review

Book reviews selected for our Book Review section should be reviews of non-fiction books on topics of interest to Canadians in the writing trade. Reviews should discuss the stated goals of a book and whether the author succeeded in achieving them. Reviews should include comments about the author's approach, style, and examples or analogies used, and who would benefit from reading the book. Book reviews can be written in the first person. The books reviewed need not be written by a Canadian author.

2.2.8. Figments

Fiction and poetry selected for our Figments section must be high-quality writing that displays a keen attention to language, form, and style. Poems should display an exceptionally unique perspective or voice. Stories and poetry that explore highly original subject matter are preferred. Flash fiction submissions are welcome.

2.2.9. Letters

Letters submitted to the Managing Editor may be published in *WB* without notice to the author.

2.3. Keywords

Keywords should be provided for each article submitted to *WB* for publication. They should reflect the subject of the article and the key discussions that it presents. Keywords should include the author's name, the title of the article, the words *Writer's Block*, and relevant words and text strings that appear in the article. The number of keywords is unlimited.

2.4. Length

Articles should not exceed 2,500 words.

2.5. Rights

Writer's Block acquires one-time rights on accepted pieces. Simultaneous submissions are accepted, as long as we are notified. Published articles remain in our archives.

2.6. Linking and Republishing

Links to *Writer's Block* from other web sites are permitted. *Writer's Block* articles may not be republished without the express permission of the author. Such permission may be sought by contacting the Managing Editor of *Writer's Block*. Articles that are republished with the permission of the author must be attributed to the issue of *Writer's Block* in which it was published along with a link to the *Writer's Block* web site (for online sources) or a URL reference (for print sources).

Example for online sources:

This article originally appeared in the spring 2002 issue of [Writer's Block](#). Reprinted with permission.

Example for print sources:

This article originally appeared in the spring 2002 issue of *Writer's Block* (www.writersblock.ca). Reprinted with permission.

3. Style Conventions

3.1. Spelling and Word Presentation

3.1.1. Spelling

In general, Canadian spelling, as dictated by *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, should be used throughout *WB*. Exceptions may include words in fiction or poetry that, for reasons of plot, context, and effect, should be preserved in their original spelling.

Use	Do not use
centre	center (unless it appears in the official name of an organization)
colour	color
cooperate	co-operate
coordinate	co-ordinate
database	data base
e-mail	email
focussed	focused
harbour	harbor
Internet	internet
online	on-line
percent	per cent
web	Web
web site	website

3.1.2. Capitalization

1. Capitalize all proper nouns and place names.
Example: Peter Zvalo, Montréal
2. Use title case in article titles and subheadings (i.e., capitalize all nouns, verbs, adjectives). Do not capitalize prepositions, regardless of length.
Example: Ad Blimp over Ottawa
3. Capitalize poems, titles of documents, articles, legislation, and TV shows.
Example: Deconstructing the Author Photo

4. Do not capitalize words to give them importance.

3.1.3. Italics

1. Use italics for emphasis in the following situations:

- ◆ When two words are contrasted.

Example: She said she *wanted* it, not that she *needed* it.

- ◆ When the writer wants to stress a word that would not normally be stressed.

Example: That was the *best* she could do?

2. Italicize foreign words that have not been assimilated into English.

Example: *caveat emptor*

3. Italicize titles of publications including books, plays, poems, reports, paintings, newspapers, and periodicals.

Example: *A Fine Balance*

4. Italicize legal references.

Example: *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, Weiner v. the Queen*

5. Italicize letters and words referred to as such.

Example: There is no *i* in *teamwork*.

6. Italicize names of ships and aircraft.

Example: HMC *Okanagan*

7. Italicize bylines and biographies.

Examples:

by Lorie Boucher

Lorie Boucher lives and writes in the other Big O. She is a Contributing Editor for Writer's Block.

3.1.4. Boldface

1. Do not use boldface.

3.2. Acronyms and Initialisms

1. Spell out the first instance of an acronym or initialism; use the acronym or initialism in the second and subsequent instances.
2. When abbreviating the United States, Use "US" not "U.S."

3.3. Punctuation

3.3.1. Commas

1. Use the series comma.

3.3.2. Quotation Marks

1. Use double quotation marks around quoted text; use single quotation marks *only* for quoted material that appears inside another quotation.
Example: The woman testified, "I heard her ask the man 'How much is it?' before she picked it up and ran."
2. When quoting material, keep commas and periods within the quotation marks. Keep all other punctuation within quotation marks only when they belong to the quoted material.
Example: An image can elicit a strong emotional response. Looking at a graphic representation of your nation's flag, for example, is generally more stirring than seeing the words "my nation's flag."
3. Do not use quotation marks with block quotations.

3.3.3. Em and En Dashes

1. Use em dashes parenthetically for interruptions, pauses, afterthoughts, clarifications, and emphasis. Insert a space on either side of the em dash.
Example: For example, the process of reading or listening to a person speak is sequential — occurring one word at a time — and though these words comprise a series of symbols, each letter-symbol does not represent a physical object.
2. In an address, separate apartment or suite numbers from building numbers with an en dash.
Example: 300–30 Murray Street
3. Use an en dash to express negative values.
Example: It was –28°C today!
4. Use an en dash to join names of two or more places.
Example: Québec–Windsor corridor.
5. Do not use an en dash to separate inclusive dates in narrative text; instead, use the word *to*.
Example: He was president of the company from 1997 to 2002.

3.3.4. Colons

1. Do not separate a verb or preposition from its object or complement in narrative text or lists.

Example:

Not Test findings identified: heat damage on several wires.

But Test findings identified heat damage on several wires.

3.3.5. Vertical Lists

1. Punctuate all vertical lists.
2. Introduce lists with an independent clause concluding with a colon; begin each list item with a capital letter. Use the word *and* at the end of the second-last list item.

Example:

The following genres were excluded from the contest:

- ◆ Science fiction;
- ◆ Romance; and
- ◆ Mystery.

3.3.6. Ellipsis Points

1. Use a space before and after ellipsis points that do not end with a period.

Example: “Like all consumers ... book buyers make purchasing decisions based on their estimation of value.”

3.4. Contractions

1. Do not use contractions in feature stories.
2. Contractions may be used in stories for all other *WB* sections.

3.5. Numbers

1. Never begin a sentence with a figure; write the number out in words or rewrite the sentence.
2. Separate triads of figures that are quantities with a comma.

Example: 1,000 participants, 200,000 copies

3. Use commas with dollar amounts.

Example: The author received his first royalty cheque for \$2,000.00.

4. In general, express numbers under 10 in words.

Example: She received five requests for her autograph.

5. In general, express numbers between 10 and 999,999 as figures.

Example: The publisher ordered a print run of 5,000 books.

6. Express very large round numbers and units of millions or billions in figures.

Example: The research centre was given a grant of \$1.5 billion.

7. Express physical quantities such as distances, lengths, volumes, pressures and so on in figures.

Example: She jogged 12 km.

8. When a number immediately precedes a compound modifier containing another number, express the smaller number in words.

Example: 12 ten-foot poles, five 15-year-old boys

9. When two or more numbers that refer to the same thing and to which different rules apply occur, use the rule applying to the highest number for all.

Example: Of the 150 people in the audience, only 4 asked questions.

3.6. Use of Profanity

In general, the use of profanity is not permitted in *WB* articles. Exceptions may include direct quotations in interviews, and words spoken by a character in fiction or used for effect in poetry. In all cases the use of profanity must be shown to directly contribute to the story or be necessary to a specific discussion.

3.7. Bylines and Bios

1. Each article should include a byline that includes the author's first and last names.
2. The word *by* in the byline should be lower case.
3. Bios should not exceed 30 words in length. Bios can be humorous and include a link to a web site or an e-mail address.

3.8. Attributing Sources

Ideas must be attributed to their originator. This may be accomplished in several ways:

1. Inserting the attribution in the narrative text.

Example: The concept that animates Rand's work is that writing is a logical, objective process. "Contrary to all schools of art and esthetics, writing is something one can learn," she maintains.

Example: Carefully devised ad campaigns support a climate of unconscious consuming, says Klein.

2. Linking to the web site that contains the source information.

Example:

For web documents that have a title

Nancy Weston Ph.D. of St. Cloud State University echoes this concern when she says that the Holocaust is "exploited and desecrated by commercial representations" (retrieved 5 July 2000 from "[How Can We Remember](#)").

For web documents that do not have a title

The controversy with Jonathan Franzen and Oprah's book club prompted me to do some serious soul-searching (see http://www.mobylikes.com/Oprah_v_Franzen.html for a summary of their dispute). Has the once prestigious "O" become a scarlet letter?

3. Providing a list of sources from which information was drawn.

Example:

Sources: *Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins*, 1997 by Robert Hendrikson

3.9. Dead Links

Over time, hyperlinks to other web sites may no longer function. In such cases, the article must be altered to identify the URL and indicate to the reader that the link no longer works.

Example:

Nancy Weston Ph.D. of St. Cloud State University echoes this concern when she says that the Holocaust is "exploited and desecrated by commercial representations" (retrieved 5 July 2000 from "How Can We Remember." [link to http://www.chgs.umn.edu/Visual__Artistic_Resources/Absence_Presence/How_Can_We_Remember/_how_can_we_remember_.html no longer functions])

3.10. Other References

1. Where this style guide cannot provide direction on how to address a style issue, please refer to *The Canadian Style*.