
The Varsity Writer's Handbook & Style Guide



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

- 3/4 Why we're here/General guidelines
- 5 Statement of Policies and Code of Journalistic Ethics
- 7 "The Start"-From The Varsity, October 7, 1880

WRITER'S GUIDE

- 9 News
- 11 Comment
- 14 Arts
- 18 Features
- 20 Science
- 23 Sports
- 26 VARSITY STYLE GUIDE

Contact Information

Editor-in-Chief: editor@thevarsity.ca
Production Manager: production@thevarsity.ca
Design Editor: design@thevarsity.ca
Photo Editor: photo@thevarsity.ca
News Editor: news@thevarsity.ca
Comment Editor: comment@thevarsity.ca
Science Editor: science@thevarsity.ca
Arts and Entertainment Editor: arts@thevarsity.ca
Sports Editor: sports@thevarsity.ca
Features Editor: features@thevarsity.ca
Online Editor: online@thevarsity.ca
Senior Copy Editor: copy@thevarsity.ca
Illustrations Editor: illustrations@thevarsity.ca
Director of Recruitment and Training: recruitment@thevarsity.ca
Listings Editor: listings@thevarsity.ca

Why We're Here

So you want to write for *The Varsity*, one of Canada's oldest and largest student newspapers and U of T's unofficial journalism school? Perhaps you've written for other publications, either in high school or university, or perhaps you're entirely new to the journalism game. In either case, *The Varsity Writer's Handbook and Style Guide* is designed to introduce you to our writing, reporting, and editing practices, and to help you decide which of our sections you would like to write for.

The University of Toronto is a big place by any standard, and has many of the characteristics of a small country. It has tens of thousands of graduates and undergraduates, many in permanent residence; three campuses, a legislature, ongoing political debate and controversy, strikes, clubs, arts and culture, official sports teams, and digital and print media. While students are actively encouraged to get involved in all of the above, it would be virtually impossible for even the most diligent and engaged among us to participate in, or even be aware of, everything the university has to offer. *The Varsity* attempts to bridge this gap by providing comprehensive coverage of all three campuses to all of those who are enrolled or employed at them.

Inside this booklet you'll find a guide to each section, as well as a style guide to help you properly place your commas and periods, so as not to incur the wrath of your editors. We hope that you find this guide as instructive and helpful as possible, and we look forward to seeing you in print.

Good luck!

Luke Savage

Editor-in-Chief, 2010-2011

General Guidelines

- The Varsity does not accept unsolicited submissions from individuals or organizations. Make sure you get the go-ahead from your editor before you start writing.
- Even if you're a member of The Varsity staff, do not represent yourself as a spokesperson for the paper unless you've been given an assignment. This includes trying to get interviews, at events, etc.
- Always check the style guide before you submit an article. The cleaner your copy is, the better your communication as a writer.
- Communicate regularly with your editors both when working on a story and during the editing process itself. Remember that editing is part of the process and just because your work is being edited doesn't mean we think you're a bad writer! If you're unhappy with how your work has been edited, sit down with your editor and discuss ways the two of you could communicate better.
- Use of correct tense is very important to good writing. Don't use the present tense when you're reporting on something that's already happened.
- When conducting interviews, be sure to arrange them well in advance.
- Always, always, always make your deadlines. There's a reason we call them deadlines.
- Read over your work before you submit it and always consult the style guide found later in this volume. If your copy is clean upon submission, we'll love you to death.

SCHEDULE "A"

VARSITY PUBLICATIONS STATEMENT OF POLICIES

1. The Corporation shall offer to the entire University community comprehensive, fair and accurate coverage of its political, cultural, intellectual, and athletic affairs. The Corporation shall give coverage to the affairs of the full-time undergraduate community on all three campuses and in every college and faculty of the University. In addition, the Corporation's publications shall strive to interpret and offer opinions on the events of the day to the best of their ability.
2. The Corporation shall promote the study of journalism at the University and provide opportunities for the Staff of all Varsity publications and other members of the University community to learn the principles and practice of responsible journalism.
3. The Corporation shall offer all interested and capable members of the Corporation an opportunity to participate in all aspects of the production of its publications without regard to their sex, race, culture, sexual orientation and their philosophic, religious or political beliefs or affiliations.
4. The Corporation shall provide a forum for all members of the University community to exchange information and opinion. The Corporation shall strive to provide in all its publications for the expression of disparate and conflicting views on the issues of the day.
5. The Corporation shall protect the editorial autonomy and freedom of all Varsity publications from all undue external influences. The Corporation shall maintain and nourish the fundamental principle of freedom of the press and of the University.

SCHEDULE "B"

VARSITY PUBLICATIONS CODE OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

1. **Accuracy and Fairness**
Varsity Publications shall keep faith with its readers by presenting its news (which includes sports and features) and expressions of opinion (which include reviews and interpretations of the news) comprehensively, accurately and fairly and by acknowledging error promptly.

-
2. Fairness is a balanced and impartial presentation of all the relevant facts in a news report, and of all substantial opinions in a matter of controversy. It precludes inaccuracies such as distortion of meaning by over- or underemphasis, by placing facts or quotations out of context, by headlines not warranted by the text, invading privacy with insufficient justification, condemning persons or groups by innuendo or hearsay, reporting conjecture or unsubstantiated opinions as fact, libel, ignoring commonly-accepted ethical standards, ignoring or omitting crucial facts or by failing to acknowledge error, whether of omission or commission, promptly.
 3. Fairness demands that inaccurate or misleading public statements be placed in factual perspective.
 4. When statements are made that are critical of an individual or organization, those affected should be given the earliest possible opportunity to reply.
 5. Fairness requires that in the reporting of news, the right of every person to a fair court trial or hearing and the presumption of innocence thereof should be respected.

From The Varsity – Vol. 1 No. 1 – October. 7, 1880 “The Start”

A few years ago, a series of brilliant essays appeared in the New York Times, which enhanced the reputation at once of the writer and the paper. They were subsequently collected and published together in a single volume with the remarkable preface – “I have been urged to unite these dissertations in book form by the wishes of numerous and malignant enemies.” By contrast are we reminded of this literary incident. The Varsity starts upon its career unattended by malevolence, and amid the hearty “God speed you!” of friends. The chief incentive however, has not been encouragement, but the consciousness of a capability to supply what is beginning to be looked upon as a trustworthy indication of vigor and intensity of life in a university. We lay bare the spring of action with a reluctant hand, because exposition of motives is, not infrequently, mistaken for indulgence in an apologetic strain. An appeal to charitable forbearance would be sinister to any statement regarding the opportuneness of The Varsity’s appearance. If there is conviction as to such a statement having foundation in fact, then all color of extenuation should be bleached from the above given exposition. Indifference to the misapprehension we have anticipated might also be taken to argue against adequacy of conception with respect to our proper sphere of employment. The present undertaking is meant to serve advantageously the general good of a community whose professed passport to consideration is intellectuality of character. The first impression conveyed by this declaration may be, that the claim advanced is pre-eminently arrogant; that the implied assumption of competence to act efficiently in this field of operation is destitute of any responsible warrant. We hasten with the corrective. The justness of the impression would be unimpeachable if The Varsity presumed to pose as the guiding star, as the interpreter even, of a Canadian school board, or of graduate and undergraduate humanity. In reality our intentions are very demure: not a guiding star, not an interpreter, but a register of opinion in and out of the University in matters of education as unbiased annalist of University life; and, in this last connexion, a strenuous advocate of what constitutes individual wellbeing. Efficiency from each of these points of view will demand from the undergraduates intellectual effort of no small significance. The maintenance also of a passable standard of excellence is not to be reasonably expected unless such effort is supplemented by highly participative exertion on the part of the graduates. Finally, there is needed the moral accessory of strongly-expressed sanction from the generation whose recollections of academic life have become gilded athwart the distance of many intervening years. Few will be disposed to detect extravagance in these stipulations; a close spirit of exaction would be inconsistent with the enlightenment of an auditory gathered round a prominent seat of learning. As

most, insistence will be laid on the conventional engagements of full liberty of discussion and fair play – engagements which are entered upon in an earnest spirit of determination to abide by in these columns. At the same time we decline to offer a field for the exhibition of religious proclivities, and to afford an outlet to the ardency of useful political partisans.

Set phrases and popular formulas, however acceptable to the multitude, act as irritants when appealing exclusively to an educated audience of men and women. Hence, in forecasting the course of *The Varsity*, the affection of very precise language has been discarded. Yet we have an avowal to make which barely escapes the stereotyped form: Whatever element of ambition or audacity lies latent in our programme, is it wholly bound up in the desire that the University of Toronto shall possess the best university paper in [North] America and an unrivalled index of the progress of educational systems.

Writing for NEWS

News@thevarsity.ca

THE GOLDEN RULE — BE IMPARTIAL

Varsity News provides fair and neutral coverage on issues that are relevant and important to students and faculty at the three campuses of the University of Toronto.

It is crucial that all writers appear fair and neutral in the stories they write. Barriers that prevent a writer from appearing fair and impartial can range from conflicts of interest (actual or apparent), to simply being viewed as having an opinion or bias in favour of a particular side.

When on assignment with The Varsity it is crucial to be neutral. Treat all sources and sides of an issue with dignity and respect. Do not express any personal opinions or biases that might limit your ability to fairly cover a story. If there is any chance that you may be viewed as having a conflict of interest on a story, immediately contact the News Editor for advice.

Writing your story

The inverted pyramid

- News stories should be written in inverted pyramid style. The most important information should be at the beginning of the story and less important information should follow.
- The best way to get a sense of The Varsity style is to read previous stories on thevarsity.ca or in print and emulate the style and format that you see. Reading stories written by the Associate News Editors is a particularly good way to get an idea of the style the News section looks for.
- Writing in inverted pyramid allows readers to get the gist of an article without reading the entire story. It also allows a story to be quickly shortened during production if there is too much content for the issue.

The importance of quotations

- Quotations are the bread and butter of a news story. Every story, unless otherwise stated, should interview at least three sources. Quotations should be used to move the story forward. As a news writer your job is to conduct interviews and weave quotations together to make a story.
- A News assignment will often include a list of sources to interview for the story. Don't feel limited by this list! You should talk to anyone you feel

is important in building your story. Email sources introducing yourself as a writer with The Varsity — do this as soon as you receive your story assignment. If you do not hear back from the source within a reasonable amount of time, call the source. If you are interviewing a source outside of the GTA contact the News Editor who will arrange for you to use a phone at The Varsity to make the call.

- When you quote a person you need to use the exact words the source originally used when speaking to you. When conducting interviews, use a voice recorder – if you don't have one email or call the News Editor, who will be able to lend you one from the office.

Short paragraphs

- Use short paragraphs when writing for The Varsity. Three or four sentences is the longest a paragraph should get. Keep sentences short. Like this.

Keep is simple

- Don't use "exacerbated" when you can use "worsened." Save the fancy words for writing the GRE – always ask if there is a more straightforward way to write your story. In fact, when you edit your story before submitting it, read through it once asking, "What information is repetitive in my story?"
- Remember that simple doesn't always mean short. Sometimes a story needs to be longer in order to explain background or context.

Word counts and deadlines

- Word counts and deadlines are firm. If you have any issues with word counts or deadlines talk to the News Editor ASAP.

Pitching stories

- The Varsity is always looking for story ideas for upcoming issues. If you have an idea, email it to news@thevarsity.ca. A pitch can be anything you feel is important to students who attend U of T. When pitching please provide as much detail about the story as possible, who you think should be interviewed, and why you think it is a good fit for The Varsity. The Varsity News Team is always happy to discuss potential news on campus! Please avoid pitching a story about a group or organization you're involved in. A club you run is not an appropriate topic for you to pitch.

Writing for COMMENT

Comment@thevarsity.ca

What is Comment?

- Comment is the opinions section of the Varsity. This is where U of T students are given the opportunity to express their thoughts on any given issue that is timely and relevant.
- Articles can be almost about anything that one can have an opinion of: politics, religion, economics, the environment, U of T student politics etc. The comment section also contains occasional unsigned editorials and letters to the editor.

Pitching Comment Articles

- The Varsity uses a more grassroots approach when it comes to organizing the articles in the comment section. As the editor, I will ask you what you would like to write about and then give you the assignment if the pitch is good. So what makes a good pitch? Here are some guidelines:
- The article is timely and relevant. This means that the subject matter is a current event and not something that happened five months ago.
- It must have at least one, specific argument.
- It must not repeat something that was written in the last issue of The Varsity. For example, if we ran a piece about the G8's economic policy the week before it would not be good to pitch something similar. An exception is made if there is a new development.

The Varsity is committed to the principles of free speech and free expression. Any opinion is kosher in The Varsity as long as it conforms to Schedules "A" and "B," both of which can be found earlier in this handbook.

Writing Comment Articles

- Many journalists are fans of George Orwell and much of his writing philosophy applies to the comment section. Here is a link to his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," which should be required reading for anyone interested in writing an opinions piece for any purpose: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>

Here are his six tips for good, clear writing.

#1: Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech, which you are used to seeing in print.

-
- The above rule means writing what you think rather than letting someone else say it for you. Try to avoid clichés and meaningless phrases like melting pot, cultural mosaic, hotbed, toe the line, etc.

#2: Never use a long word where a short one will do.

- Your piece needs to be as clear as possible to the general reader and this means avoiding long, complicated words. Don't write "factually-based" when "true" will do.

#3: If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.

- All articles in The Varsity are subject to strict word counts. Most articles in the comment section are 600–700 words, so this rule is very important.

#4: Never use the passive when you can use the active.

- Instead of writing "The door was closed by the teacher," write "The teacher closed the door." The latter sentence is much more clear and dynamic.

#5: Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

- Using a Greek or Latin phrase in your writing is pretentious. Stick to using basic English unless there is a specific reason why you need to use a foreign or technical word.

#6: Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous.

- This is meant to ensure that you do not become so beholden to these rules that you lapse into writing in an unclear fashion. Stick to writing what comes naturally to you and you will find that writing a comment piece is easy, enjoyable, and fun!

The Editing Process

- As a writer you will be subject to strict deadlines. If you're told that you need to get in a piece by Thursday at 11:59 p.m. you need to get it in by then.
- Don't worry if a piece isn't perfect, that's what editors are for! Our job is to clear up grammar and syntax, so that your piece is clear to the reader and makes its point effectively.
- You need to be comfortable with having your words edited. An edited

-
- work is not a judgement of your quality as a writer, but it can be an effective means of helping you improve your writing skills.
- I will send you back an edited version of your piece with questions and comments, so that you can make sure I haven't altered what you meant to say and to have you add more information if need be.

Writing for ARTS

Arts@thevarsity.ca

Pitching stories

***DON'T EVER, EVER, EVER REPRESENT US AT A CONCERT OR AN EVENT, UNLESS YOU'VE CLEARED IT WITH US FIRST.**

- We're looking to be an arts guide, a reference point for students who are looking for something cool to do in the city: a great band to see, an artist to check out, etc. Keep your info Toronto-based, keep it cheap, keep it student-relevant. Students doing cool things is always good.
- We're not looking for stuff that is not relevant, or has lost its relevancy. We aren't interested in reviewing a Pixar film three weeks after its release, or a report on Miley Cyrus's new movie (if we don't have an interview, that is...).
- Keep conflicts of interest in mind. Do not pitch us stories about events you are directly involved in. And please, don't pitch us a story about your friend's band.
- To pitch, email arts@thevarsity.ca. or come to office hours, Wednesdays from 5–7 p.m. In your email, make the subject "Arts Pitch." (It would be great if you could format your pitch in point form Who: What: Where: When: and Why:.) If it's a show or theater production that you want to attend, give it to us at least two weeks in advance, so that we can contact the publicist on your behalf.

Interview etiquette

- Do your homework. Have a familiarity with a person or group's work.
- Remember the power of silence; let the person speak for themselves. If they're pausing, don't be too quick to jump into the next question.
- Keep the subject on them.
- Make sure your questions aren't too ambiguous: "How is your career?"
- Have a tape recorder, make sure you know how it works, and, as a courtesy, ask before you turn it on.

-
- Don't necessarily rely on the tape recorder; you should also take notes. This will help you later, because you might not want to transcribe the whole hour interview, and notes will give you highlights.
 - Be polite and courteous, but don't be afraid to ask the hard questions.
 - Always save your notes and audio files.
 - If you're doing an interview at a bar, DON'T GET DRUNK. Even if your subject is getting drunk, don't do it.
 - Don't ask your subject for an autograph, and don't ask for them to take a picture with you. That is horribly unprofessional. (Don't let them see those heart doodles in your notebook either.)
 - Never show a source or publicist your story before it's published, even if they ask. If you do get asked and are unsure of how to proceed, consult your editor or editors.

Reviews

- DO: Be honest. Don't review what you think the consensus is — stick to your guns. It's your review people are reading, not the consensus. Don't like something just because you think that you 'should.'
- DO: Explain why something is good, or why something is bad. If you are reviewing a comedy film, don't just say something is funny, analyze why it was funny. Be specific.
- DO: Be informed, and know what you're reviewing.
- DO: Keep an open mind. Even if it's something you're pretty sure is going to be terrible, hope for the best.
- DO: Be fair, and judge things on their own terms. A gross-out comedy should be approached in a different spirit than the new Werner Herzog film.
- DON'T: Use the five paragraph structure you learned in grade school.
- DON'T: Use the "angel on one shoulder, devil on the other" trope. Example: "I felt conflicted when I heard this album. The angel on my right shoulder says, 'Well the chord structures are so nice,' and the devil said, 'Yes, but the lyrics are terrible.'"
- DON'T: Quote/Paraphrase the press release, the TV commercial, somebody else's review, or any publicity materials. Know what you're saying, think of it yourself, and be able to justify every sentence of your review, rather than adopting what publicists want you to say. Example: "This album was a delightful and introspective statement on the purpose

of our reality in natural existence.” If you don’t understand what you’re saying, neither will we.

- DON’T: Use catchphrases and buzzwords like the kind you might see on the back of a DVD case or on a movie poster: “Oscar-worthy”; “An edge of your seat thriller”; “It will make you stand up and cheer”; “If you see one movie this holiday season...” If you would read it on a billboard, don’t use it.
- DON’T: Describe the experience of the event. Focus on THE BAND, THE FILM, THE EXHIBIT. A bad lead: “As I picked up my ticket for the concert, I saw hipsters smoking in the darkened alley, and I felt hip. Look at me with my advanced ticket, I thought smugly, Bet you wish you had one of those.”
- USE THE FIRST PERSON CAREFULLY. The reader cares about the subject, and your opinion, but they don’t care about what the line was like outside the show, or how your morning went, or anything about you that is not directly related to what you thought about the art work’s merit.

Writing interviews/profile pieces

- Don’t practice hero worship. Find what’s interesting about your subject, but don’t write about them like you describe your fifth grade crush to your bestie. A bad lead: “The multi-talented, multi-faceted Justin Bieber can always be counted on to reinvent himself, and no one can predict just how transcendent his next work could be.”
- Let the interview subjects speak for themselves. Their quotes are always better than you describing what they said.
- Be pointed in your physical descriptions. If there isn’t a broader purpose to describing your subject’s torn t-shirt, don’t bother. Make sure you can justify every line as part of your ‘thesis statement.’
- Structurally, it is often satisfying to begin with a brief lead, a quote, and then a brief explanation of who the person is and why they’re being interviewed. However, this is not a set-in-stone rule.
- Again, don’t quote/paraphrase the press release. Find what you think is interesting about the subject, not what the publicity materials tell you is interesting. A lame lead: “James Cameron is set to revolutionize moviegoing with groundbreaking 3-D technology that promises to make sweet love to your eyeballs. Cameron recently sat down with The Varsity to talk about why his new movie is destined to be a box office ‘king of the world!’”
- Don’t be afraid to be less than adulatory. Sometimes you have to hurt feelings in this biz.

Don’t fumble it in the homestretch, please.

-
- ALWAYS MEET YOUR DEADLINE, NO MATTER WHAT, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE, NOT MATTER WHO YOU ARE! IF YOU MISS IT, YOU WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED, NOT NOW, NOT EVER!!!
 - Please send the attachment, and also copy and paste the text into the body of the email, in case the attachment doesn't open.
 - Use spell check to find very basic spelling mistakes. This is what modern technology is for.

Writing for FEATURES

Features@thevarsity.ca

What is a feature? How does it differ from a news piece?

- Often longer than a standard news piece, but not necessarily
- Often an issue piece — about an idea rather than an event, less-time sensitive
- Different writing style
- Most features have at least a gentle point of view — an argument, not a comment piece, but you're making a point
- Can be an issue piece, detailed story about an important event, article about some event or person in history, long interview, arts review, and more...

What sort of features does The Varsity publish?

- The Varsity Magazine (published several times annually), and also our regular issues
- Something that speaks to us as students — “The student interest is not necessarily something that students think about, but it's something they will respond to positively when they see it in print.”
- Topics we have not covered much, or about groups we tend to ignore

Coming up with the Idea!

- Talk to friends
- Look at variations on existing ideas
- Flesh out existing Varsity articles and topics
- Flesh out under-reported stories in the mainstream news
- Find an interesting profile subject

The pitch

- Never write an unsolicited article, especially not a feature
- Pitching for features is often a several-round process

Reporting

- Not much different from a normal news piece, except that you have more time
- One interview is more than likely to lead to another

-
- You want to think hard about whether you're missing anyone who's important to this issue, but eventually you WILL have to stop, as space is limited

Structure

- Really need to think about structure and outline in features
- Standard WSJ feature format (Lead, Nut Graph, Story, Anecdotal Conclusion)
- Lead — catch attention
- Nut graph — what is the story really about?

Also:

- DON'T GO OVER THE WORD LIMIT
- Keep in close touch with your editor throughout the process

Graphics

- Not exactly your job but think about it and, if you have ideas, speak to your editor!

Sidebars

- For material that is important but would interrupt the flow
- Sometimes a sidebar should actually be another story

Writing features for the magazine

- You need to write other articles before you jump into features
- Impress your section editor(s) — they recommend writers for the magazine. Hitting deadlines is very important.
- Once you've established yourself at the paper a bit, you'll be invited to pitch meetings — can often pitch to editor ahead of time
- Be persistent!

Writing for SCIENCE

Science@thevarsity.ca

HOW TO WRITE ABOUT SCIENCE

Science writing as pedagogy: When you're writing about science, you're usually trying to explain a concept to someone who doesn't understand it in the first place — so think of yourself as a teacher.

- The audience isn't stupid! It is a fine balance — you want to explain things clearly, but you also don't want to be condescending to your audience. (They won't like that, and will tend to stop reading.)
- What are some of the best ways of explaining/teaching things? By building on things people already do understand and know!

Metaphor

- Fungal threads are the Internet of the plant world
“Some 80 per cent of plants are colonised by fungi that form the familiar network of fine white threads that hang off many roots. The threads, called mycorrhizae, take in water and minerals from the soil, and hand some over to the plant in exchange for nutrients. Now it seems plants use them to communicate too.”
– Michael Marshall, *New Scientist*, November 12, 2010

Imagery

- “Somewhere beyond the layers of cloud-tops, veiled below the horizon, lies a series of massive craters on the southern surface of the planet Jupiter. Their explosive history and recent origin can be traced to the fragments that once formed the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet, before its close encounter with Jupiter in 1994. Scientists celebrated it as the first ever observation of extra-terrestrial impact. Like the Earth, Jupiter bears the scars of past surface impacts. The first observation of Shoemaker-Levy 9 began thirty years before its fateful collision.”
– Alexandra Eremia, “Locating the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet,” *The Varsity*, November 1, 2010

Analogy

- Scientists use it all the time! Rutherford's atom-solar system analogy anyone?

Science writing as story telling: how to structure an article

-
- Now that we have the goal of explaining and teaching in mind, how do you actually go about writing your piece?
 - Science writing is no different from creative writing in that you are telling your audience a story.
 - As a result, every time you write a sentence, you have to wonder, ‘Has my audience lost interest? Are they still reading?’
 - Much of science writing is about persuading your audience of why something is interesting and why they should continue reading.
 - Why should they care? Why is this concept fascinating? You don’t necessarily have to say it directly, but the writing should be able to explain that fascination implicitly.
 - If you’re enthusiastic about the topic you’re writing about, that should translate into your writing (and no, that doesn’t mean using lots of exclamation marks).
 - Always avoid repetition! If the audience feels like they’ve read a concept/explanation already, chances are they’ll stop reading.

Persuasion through your use of language:

- Don’t think that just because it’s science, your writing needs to be bland and overly serious
- Use figures of speech: They’re not just good for explaining, but also for giving some life to your writing. You can alliterate, be ironic, use rhymes —
- A text isn’t just words on a page, it is also a series of sounds in the mind that’s reading them.
- So pay attention to how it actually sounds. What kind of rhythm is present here? Read it out loud!
- Even use humour (at your discretion) — also depends on the topic.

Persuasion through your use of structure:

(see diagram below — created by a previous science editor at The Varsity. I may modify this a bit)

- Look at examples from science articles. How is each type of story shape effective, and to which kind of story are they best suited?

Structuring a sentence

- The most important sentence in an article is the first one (the lede).
- The positions of power within a sentence are (in descending order): the end, the beginning, the middle.
- This has to do with how much attention people pay to different parts of the sentence, and what pieces of information they'll remember, based on where it appeared in the sentence.
- Use that to your advantage. If you want to emphasize a particular piece of information a sentence, put it at the end or the beginning, don't bury it in the middle, where people aren't paying as much attention to it.

Some stylistic points & things to keep in mind

- Always always always use an active voice. This is not a lab report!
- Avoid long sentences and paragraphs. Try to keep paragraphs at a maximum of 4 sentences long.
- Be clear and concise. Use words that are easy to understand. Remember, you're writing for a campus-wide audience and not everyone has a background in science.
- Avoid beginning the sentence with a number. If it's absolutely necessary, here's a handy trick to avoid it : the word "some"!
"Some 231 squirrels were playing on my lawn today. It was mess."
- Outline your story before you write it. This will help determine the focus and direction of the piece, and makes writing a lot easier.

And when in doubt... email the science editor!

Writing for SPORTS

Sports@thevarsity.ca

The Varsity Sports: A “how to” guide for writers

Sports journalism

- Sports journalism reports on sports topics and events. It involves investigating a story rather than relying on press releases and prepared statements from the sports team, coaching staff, and players. Sports stories can take on a sociopolitical significance and deal with issues ranging from the hyper-compensation of top athletes to the use of anabolic steroids, the cost of building sports venues, to breaking down barriers of race and gender.

Types of Sports Stories

- There are three types of stories that can be found in the sports section of the newspaper:
- Game and event coverage essentially provides readers with a summary of what the athletes were competing at, who won and by how much, and any background necessary to understand the significance of the highlights recapped later paragraphs.
- Human interest and feature stories tend to delve deeper into issues in the sporting world and are written with the same format as a hard news story or feature.
- Columns are an editorial reflection of a writer’s views on subject matter relating to sports.
- Blogs have taken on an interesting role in sports media with the advent of the internet; not only do sports fans and athletes alike post regular entries into their online journals, but professional writers as well. The content covered can range from training schedules to game reports, criticism of a sporting organization to praise of a player’s charitable giving.

How to write a Sports article

There’s a specific formula that newspaper journalists follow when composing a piece. Sports writing, while an art in and of itself, is no exception. Here are a few tips:

- You have to know what you’re talking about or the context of the story. A working knowledge of the sport(s) you’re reporting on is essential and encompasses not only the current players, coaches and standings, but

rules, history, and current controversies as well. Keep in mind that many sports teams, the Varsity Blues included, have press centres equipped with extensive information and are designed to serve as a resource for the media.

- The opening sentence or lead should be catchy, concise, and place emphasis on an interesting fact or highlight of the story. Although not necessarily in the first paragraph, the lead must encapsulate the basic “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of the story.
- When reporting on a game or an event, your job as a reporter is to give the major play by play. You want to provide a basic chronology from beginning to end with details on major turning points, big plays, mistakes, or momentum building moment.
- Use quotes from people involved. Be prepared to ask good questions and collect information from players and coaches to incorporate into the body of your article. (NOTE: Make sure to find out the appropriate background information on the person you’re citing. For example, when quoting a student fan you’d want to get their full name, institution attended, major and year of study, but when quoting a player, the most important things would be their position, how long they’ve played with the team for, and on occasion, where they were playing before.)
- Be clear and concise. Sports articles found in newspapers tend to be to the point and stick with basic vocabulary. When explained in context, metaphors and technical terms can be imposed, but for all intents and purposes try to steer clear of jargon that anyone but an avid enthusiast might not be familiar with.

What you need to know

- Your story will get the space it deserves in the paper. This means that a story breaking news of a sports scandal on campus will typically have a higher word count than a game report assessing yet another loss for the home team. The exception, however, would be if there’s a particularly exciting reason for the home team getting trampled for the umpteenth time that season. Don’t be afraid to dig for a story because chances are It’s out there.
- In the world of sports journalism, media needs to be accredited. While this holds true to journalists reporting on most subject matter it is especially important to the sports writer. Not only is it near impossible to get an interview without going through the teams’ press centre and media director, but neglecting to go through the appropriate channels could really peeve administration. The relationship between the sports reporter and the management of the team their reporting on is a crucial one, and while management is generally appreciative of publicity, they are

responsible for protecting their athletes, coaches and brand. Before you go to a game, or profile an athlete make sure you've taken the proper steps. If you ever have any questions on this matter, contact the press centre for the sports team directly or email your editor.

- Sports stories are time sensitive. That means that news tends to get old fast, and pitching a story on an event that happened last month is more or less a lost cause unless you can find some particular relevance or implication to the here and now.

The Finer Points of Varsity Style

Refer to this guide first, otherwise check the latest edition of the CP Stylebook.

Punctuation

Apostrophe:

- Do not use with plurals of capital letters or numbers, unless necessary to avoid ambiguity.
the ABCs, the '30s
BUT She got A's in english class.
- Use an apostrophe for possessives where a name ends in the letter s.
The Jones' cat
Mike Jones' cat
Erasmus' ideas
- Do not put an apostrophe in 1990s. BUT: the '90s.

Colon:

- Use a colon to when giving additional or explanatory information. Use only in cases when it can be replaced by the terms for example, namely, and that is. Make sure the first part of the sentence can stand alone as a full sentence, and is not a fragment.
 - I need many things from the grocery store: strawberries, cheese, and ham.NOT I need many things: strawberries, cheese, and ham.
- Do not capitalize the first letter of a sentence following a colon, unless the word is a proper noun or the beginning of a quotation.

Comma:

- Use the oxford comma in lists which include "and" and "or."
I like peas, beans, and carrots.
- Put commas inside closing quotation marks.
"I like peas, beans, and carrots," she said.

When introducing a clause in the middle of a sentence:

- Which clauses give a reason or add a description that is not always essential.
"The car, which had tailfins, was lit on fire."

-
- That is generally used when the clause is essential to the noun it defines.
“The car that had tailfins was lit on fire.”
REMEMBER: ‘which’ clauses need commas, ‘that’ clauses don’t.
 - Use commas in numbers 1,000 and up.

Ellipses:

- Use ellipses in square brackets to indicate any omission from text or quotation.
“in the faith mentality. [...] Its essential fanaticism”
- Terminal punctuation remains where it would normally go if the sentence was intact.
Will it rain today? [...] Should I bring an umbrella?

NOTE: keyboard shortcut = alt, semicolon

En dashes:

- En dashes are used to express a range of values.
It will take me 5 – 6 hours to drive to Montreal.
- En dashes are also used in place of a hyphen in compound terms where one element of the compound is itself a compound of two or more words.
post–World War II (not post-World-War-II)

Em dashes:

- Use em dashes when commas or parentheses create confusion.
- Write em dashes with spaces before and after.
The tea — with lavender and chamomile — was fragrant and soothing.
- Use to make a sharp break in dialogue, with no punctuation afterwards
“Today I —”

NOTE: keyboard shortcuts. en dash = alt, hyphen
em dash = alt, shift, hyphen

Hyphens:

- Hyphens exist to eliminate confusion. Make compound words to avoid ambiguity.
a used-car dealer vs a used car-dealer.
- Use a dictionary to find out if a word is normally hyphenated.

There are no spaces before or after a hyphen!

EMAIL IS NO LONGER HYPHENATED.

Parentheses:

- Use parentheses very sparingly. It is better to make separate sentences, use commas, or use em dashes.
- Punctuation goes outside the parentheses.
(Like this), okay?

Quotations:

- Capitalize the first word in every quote — as long as it's a full sentence.
The woman said, "He sneered and said nothing."
- Periods and commas always, always go within the quote.
"Like this."
- In full quotations, all punctuation goes inside.
"Good people do unkind things?"
- But if the last words of a sentence are in quotation marks, keep the ?, !, ,, : marks outside.
I really love the song "Iron Man"!
- Do not use them to enclose slang or colloquialisms.
- Any quotation marks inside a quoted statement are in single quotes.
"I hate my life," said Peter," explained John.

Semicolon:

- Use semicolons to separate statements too closely related to stand as separate sentences.
- Use to separate phrases that contain commas.
John Turner, Liberal Party leader; Ed Broadbent, NDP Party leader; Brian Mulroney, PC Party leader.

Abbreviations

- Always use alum, rather than alumnus, alumni, alumnae.

-
- Never write o.k. Okay is proper English.

Acronyms:

- Always spell out acronyms the first time unless well-known. Do not clarify in parentheses.
- Street names:
When the address has number, abbreviate St., Ave., Rd., etc.
When the address has no number, spell it out.
To get to The Varsity office, I had to cross St. George Street.

Numbers

- Spell out numbers below 10 and use figures for numbers 10 and above.

EXCEPTIONS are:

- Official names and organizations
7 Fathers (the film)
- Addresses
42 Albertus Ave.
- Ages, following a name
Susie Jane, 3, likes lollipops.
- Dates and years
September 4, 2034
- Monetary units, when using a symbol, are always numerals
\$2
- First word of a sentence
Twenty-four people died in the avalanche.
- In written dialogue or literature

Commas:

- Use commas to clarify numbers.
1,000; 203,498,539,085
- Decades:
Since decades are plurals, they do not need an apostrophe before the s.
1970s, '90s

Year of study:

- Spell out “fourth year” or “fourth-year student”

Dates:

- Don’t put a “th” at the end.
The election is happening on October 8, 2011.

Times:

- Always write with lowercase and with periods.
7:30 p.m., but 8 p.m.

Percentages:

- Never use the per cent symbol, always spell out the words “per cent”.
eight per cent, 54 per cent.

Capitalization

Proper nouns:

- Proper nouns are always capitalized.

Internet:

- The Internet is a place and therefore should be capitalized.
- Titles of websites should also be capitalized, but not italicized.
Google, Yahoo, Facebook, Gizmodo
BUT NEVER www or http://

Religion: Capitalize specific names of gods, deities, and holy books.

Universities:

- Follow this style:
University of Toronto is written as U of T
University of Toronto Scarborough is written as U of T at Scarborough and UTSC
University of Toronto Mississauga is written as U of T at Mississauga and UTM
BUT when referencing the school, it is the university

Departments:

- Capitalize only when writing the full and proper name. This can be fact checked on official U of T Websites:
Faculty of Arts & Science (note the ampersand)

Department of English, but the English department
Department of Anthropology, but anthropology department

Degrees:

- Follow this style:
BA, bachelor of arts, bachelor's degree
MA, master of arts, master's degree

Titles:

- All titles which appear before the name should be capitalized. Titles which appear after the name should be lowercase:
President of the University of Toronto, David Naylor.
David Naylor, president of the University of Toronto.
President Obama
Barack Obama, president of the United States

Italicizing

- Creative works: Whole works are mostly italicized; constituent parts go in quotes. University courses are not creative, so do not italicize. Follow this style:
Album "Song"
Collection of Stories "Individual Story"
Novel "Chapter"
Television show "Episode"
Journal "Article"
Film
Paper or magazine

BUT do not italicize The Varsity

Websites
Exhibits, exhibitions
Conferences

- Use romans (which is the opposite of italicizing) for italicized words when the surrounding text is in italics.

Phrases never to use, ever

Dead metaphors of any kind: toeing the line, making no bones about, standing shoulder to shoulder with, axe to grind, etc.

The fact that
Etc., eg., i.e.
Just because

Really
Very
Interesting, interestingly
Nice
Thus, Thusly
I couldn't help but wonder, I wondered, I thought to myself
It begs the question
parallel construction

Technical stuff

Some important reminders:

- Headlines have sentence style capitalization, unless they include a proper noun.
- HEDS and DEKS should not have closing periods or double quotes, only cutlines. (Unless there is other necessary punctuation, such as commas; then there should be a period).
- Page numbers, jump text, and dates must always be checked.
- Check that photo credits exist, unless the photographer's name is not available. Do not credit Flickr or Google images.
- There should be no confusion by words split over two lines.
- No URLs should be chopped into two lines, and should always be italicized.
- URLs should not start with `http://` or `www.`, just the rest of the name.
- Only one space after closing punctuation.
- Copy editors need to check everything that will be on the printed page.

- In briefs: Briefs should always end with a period followed by the writer's name.
- In subsequent entries just include the writer's initials, with no periods.
.—Alexandra Kazia
.—AK

Arts

- Parentheses: Use parentheses for actor and director names.
Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt)
Fight Club (Dir. David Fincher)

Science

- Genus and species: The scientific name is always italicized.
- Genus is always capitalized, unless indicated differently.
Rattus norvegicus
- Superscript: Double-check superscripts in chemical formulas. These are the only cases where sub- or superscript is permitted.
- Active voice: An active voice should be used at all times!

“I wrote an article for The Varsity”

NOT An article for The Varsity was written by me, but was rejected.

Sports

- Parentheses: These are okay to use for statistics.

Opinions/Comment

- Past stories: When a letter references a past story, include the date and title of the story in parentheses, the title in quotes

Interviews

- First entries
The Varsity:
Full Name:
- Subsequently, initials, no periods
TV:
FN:

Common problem words:

BA

MA

PhD

email

UN

U.S.

okay

per cent

Internet

a.m./ p.m.

university

president or prime minister, unless preceding the name

Governor General, unless former governor general

Professor James