

Community Media Writing Guide

A guide for voluntary contributors writing articles for *Waltham Forest Echo*, *Tottenham Community Press*, and *Enfield Dispatch*.



Your independent community newspaper

**WALTHAM
FOREST ECHO**

**TOTTENHAM
COMMUNITY PRESS**

Local news that matters to you

ENFIELD DISPATCH

THE BOROUGH'S FREE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Pitching an article

1. Firstly, decide which type of article you wish to write. If you want to write about a project you are involved with, an event you are organising, an experience you have had, or a local issue that you care about and wish to highlight, you should pitch a **feature**; if you are writing about your opinion on a particular subject, you should pitch a **comment** piece; if you are writing solely about a local person of interest and you intend to speak to them about their experiences, you should pitch an **interview**. Only experienced journalists should pitch a **news article**, which needs to be written from an impartial perspective and be balanced.
2. Secondly, send an email to the editor of the publication for which you wish to write. Tell them who you are, what you do, and where you're from, then briefly explain why you want to write an article and what it will be about.
3. If the editor likes your article idea, they will give you a word count and submission deadline. They may also give you some suggestions for how to go about writing it and things they would like you to include. **Do not send an article before you have received a response from the editor – this avoids wasting time writing something they do not want.**

Writing an article

Perspective

Most articles should be written from a first-person (author's) perspective. This is because most articles are written by people who are involved in some way with the subject they are writing about, and do not have a neutral viewpoint. Writing in the first-person allows you to give a more personal touch to your article, explaining how you got involved with the subject and how it affected you, and encourage others. Typically only news articles are written from a third-person perspective, although there can be exceptions.

Introduction

The first paragraph of your article is the most important one you will write. If the reader's attention is not grabbed quickly, they will likely skip to the next article. Think about your introduction carefully and keep it brief. Save unimportant or boring details for later on and focus instead on what will intrigue and encourage people to read the rest of the article.

Example of a bad introduction: *On Saturday 25th June I visited Dave's Veg Market, 355 High Street, Walthamstow, to find out why the shop owner is hosting a charity fundraising event at the Rose & Crown pub following the Nepal earthquake in May.*

Example of a good introduction: *When my local greengrocer found out about the Nepal earthquake he decided he couldn't just stand by – he wanted to help save lives.*

Things to include

Background: Always assume the person reading your article has no prior knowledge of the subject, and they therefore need to be introduced to it. Everything must always be explained, if only briefly.

Quotes: You may wish to include quotes from other people in your article. Quotes can be obtained in person, on the phone, or via email or social media. You must always make it clear when approaching someone that you intend to quote them in the publication. If you speak to someone on the phone or in person, write a transcript of what they said, to avoid misquoting them. Only use the most interesting and relevant quotes. Introduce them with their full name and the reason they are being quoted.

Example of a bad quote: *Dave said: "Sing for Nepal is on 20th July. Please come to it."*

Example of a good quote: *Dave Hogg, organiser of the Sing for Nepal fundraiser, said: "We're incredibly excited, we're going to put on a great show and we hope local people will come out in force to support us and help raise vital funds for the Nepal Earthquake Appeal."*

Statistics: It is often useful to provide relevant facts and statistics in an article. If doing so, clearly state the source in the article, so that people can look it up for themselves.

Information box: This can be used to help readers find out more about the subject of the article. Details such as phone numbers, email addresses, or web links, should always be contained in the information box rather than in the main body of the article.

Things to avoid

Clichés: These often hinder a reader understanding the article, particularly those for whom English is a second language.

Example of a cliché: *Dave admitted the money he was aiming to raise was only a drop in the ocean, but that it was still important to contribute.*

What to write instead: *Dave admitted the money he was aiming to raise would only have a small impact, but that it was still important to contribute.*

Jargon: This is language typically used within a group of people, but which can be confusing to outsiders. Organisations use it to mask their true intentions.

Example of jargon: *The council wants to find savings by merging two branches of its library service and creating a central learning hub for the community.*

What to write instead: *The council is closing the library.*

Waffle: Avoid extraneous words.

Example of waffle: *I went along to the shop because I wanted to ask Dave about a fundraising event that he is planning to hold next month for the tragic victims of the earthquake in Nepal.*

What to write instead: *I asked Dave why he's hosting a Nepal earthquake fundraiser.*

Bullet points: They don't work well in newspaper articles.

Press releases: These are announcements sent to the press and are useful for alerting the media, but do not work as articles. Do not write in the style of a press release.

Problems

Let the editor know if you have any problems in writing your article and they should be able to offer help and advice.

Submitting an article

1. Once finished, send your article via email as an attached word document, ideally by replying to the ongoing email thread (which makes it easier for the editor to keep track of everything).
2. The editor will acknowledge receipt of your article and may also offer some feedback. They will edit the article for style, clarity, and length, but will not send you the edited version (this would take far too long when so many articles need to be edited in a short space of time). You may, however, be asked some questions if there are any queries about your article.
3. Sometimes, even if an editor has said they like your article, it may be omitted from the next publication. It could be because you have missed the deadline, but even articles submitted on time cannot be guaranteed inclusion. This is because late adverts are sometimes sold, which take priority over editorial, or because the editor may decide to save an article for a future edition instead.
4. Articles are published in print before they go online, although a PDF of each paper is made available to download on the first day of every month. The paper is usually distributed during the first week of the month. Do feel free to share your article on social media and elsewhere.

Image guidelines

Articles should whenever possible be accompanied by strong images. Submitted images do not need to be of a professional standard nor taken on a high-specification camera (many mobile phones now have great cameras) but should be in focus; well lit; and clearly show a person, group of people, or scene, that is relevant to the article. The editor will often tell you what they are looking for.

Image files can be in JPG, PNG, or TIFF format, and should be at least 1MB in size. Send the original image file to the editor via an email attachment – do not send an altered, cropped, or resized file.

If you are submitting images not taken by yourself, make sure you obtain permission to use them from the copyright holder. If an image needs to be credited to acknowledge the copyright holder, let the editor know.

Images of children should only be submitted with consent from their parent/guardian.

Style guidelines

The following three pages provide a selective list of style guidelines for the application of punctuation and grammar that has many potential executions. For unambiguous spelling and grammar usage, please refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Abbreviations/Acronyms: Unless very famous (e.g. *BBC* or *NHS*) write in full first time, followed by the acronym in brackets. Only capitalise letters that form the acronym (e.g. first write *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds*, then write *RSPB*). If the acronym is commonly read as a word, only capitalise the first letter (e.g. *Asbo*).

Addresses: Include comma (e.g. *Hillside Grove, Southgate*). When writing an address, someone is *of* a road, not *from* a road (e.g. *Jammy Dodger of Hoe Street, Walthamstow*). Equally, something is *in* a road, not *on* a road (e.g. *Big Church, in God Street*).

Age: Only mention someone's age if it is relevant to the article. Write as *year-old* with a hyphen, or *years old* without (e.g. *12 years old*, or *a 12-year-old*).

Ampersand: Use only when part of an organisation's official name (e.g. *B&Q*).

Apostrophes: For use in abbreviations and possessives only.

Artist: The name of an artist, collective or band should be capitalised but not italicised.

As: Not a substitute for *because* or *when*.

Breeds: Not capped, unless there is a geographical element (e.g. *Yorkshire terrier*)

Capitals: Use caps for proper nouns such as names, titles, places, organisations, and institutions. For job titles, only cap up when using an official title in full (e.g. *Mayor of London Sadiq Khan visited Tottenham* or *the company's chief executive visited Tottenham*).

Colons: Should be used to introduce quoted speech.

Collective nouns: Usually singular (e.g. *the council is* or *the company has*). Exceptions include pop groups and sports teams (e.g. *Leyton Orient are the best football team in the world*). The police are, a couple are, a family are; but the Met Police is.

Commas: Generally used for lists or to break up long sentences. Use of the 'Oxford comma' for lists may sometimes be needed to aid with clarity (e.g. *I love my parents, Ed Sheeran, and Harry Kane* rather than *I love my parents, Ed Sheeran and Harry Kane*).

Compass: Points of the compass should be in lower case as in north, south, east and west unless used to refer to recognised place (e.g. *East London*).

Councils: First mention in full (e.g. *Waltham Forest Council*) and then subsequently use *the council*, unless multiple councils are mentioned in the story.

Councillors: Write in full first time using *Councillor* with a capital letter but subsequently use *Cllr Ejiofor*. Only mention political party and ward if relevant (e.g. *Councillor Joseph Ejiofor, a Labour member for Bruce Grove, wants to clean up the High Road*).

Dates: Style is *Friday, 9th November*. Only mention the year if referring to a date not in the current year. Do not use apostrophes (e.g. *the 1950s*). Also write *new year* without capitals but write *New Year's Eve* or *Bank Holiday Monday* for the name of an official day.

Diseases: Cap up according to the dictionary (e.g. *Alzheimer's disease, lung cancer*).

Drugs: No capitals for names of drugs or medications unless they are brand names.

Due to: Refers to timing only, when things are *due to* arrive.

Earth: Capitalise when used as a pronoun (e.g. *Planet Earth is doomed*).

Elections: Only capitalise the name of a specific election (e.g. *The 2017 General Election*).

Focused, focuses, focusing: All have one 's'.

Full stops: Not used in abbreviations (e.g. *mph, Dr*) but used for Latin terms (e.g. *e.g.*)

Gendered words: In general, avoid using them (e.g. *Firefighter* instead of *fireman, police*)

officer instead of *policeman*, *spokesperson* instead of *spokesman*, *chairperson* instead of *chairman*). Nouns such as *actor* and *waiter* can be used for any gender.

Government: Never capped, but specific areas of government should be capitalised (e.g. *The Ministry of Defence is an absolute shambles*).

Honours: You are *made* an OBE or MBE, not *awarded* one, and you do not *receive* one. Do not use these letters after someone's name unless relevant.

Hyphens: Use to join two words that together form an adjective or adverb (e.g. *the trigger-happy police officer*). No hyphen is needed for two distinct adverbs/adjectives (e.g. *a deep, dark hole*). Also use to clarify meaning (e.g. *sweet-shop girl* and *sweet shop-girl* mean different things). Only hyphenate prefixes if double 'e' or 'o' (e.g. *re-election*, *co-operative*, *reassess*, *reopen*). Note the difference between using two words as a noun (e.g. *make-up*) and using two words as a verb clause (e.g. *they should make up*).

Inquests: A coroner records a verdict and a jury returns a verdict.

Jobs: Only cap up official job titles (e.g. *Prime Minister Theresa May* and *Kelmscott School headteacher John Meadows*).

Knighthoods: *Sir David Attenborough*, then *Sir David*; *Dame Judi Dench*, then *Dame Judi*.

Listed buildings: The style is *Grade 2 listed*.

Measurements: Write measurement in full on first use when appropriate (e.g. *25 litres*, but not *75 miles-per-hour*) and abbreviate for subsequent use (*25l*). Never spell a number when using abbreviated measurements (e.g. *3km*, not *three km*). When being exact (e.g. *2ft 3in*) always write with digits and abbreviations. When being general (e.g. *he was about six feet tall*) write numbers as normal (see **numbers**).

Money: Style is £31.95. If the number is in the millions or billions, write in full first time and without spaces (e.g. *£64million*). For subsequent use write *£64m* or *£1bn*. If using approximate figures, write in full (e.g. *My cat is worth tens of thousands of pounds*).

Names: In full first, first name subsequently (e.g. *John Smith*, then *John*). This rule can be flexible, particularly for famous people, when it would be odd to refer to *Theresa May* as *Theresa* rather than *May* or *the Prime Minister*. Also see **Titles**.

No-one: Hyphenated.

Numbers: Spell out one to twelve, then use figures for 13 and above. Spell out twenties, hundreds, thousands etc. when writing in general, rather than specific terms (e.g. *thousands of people are in danger*). Use commas in amounts of 1,000 and above. Write fractions in full with hyphens (e.g. *one-third*). If you must start a sentence with a number, spell it out. Use *about* when describing approximate numbers. Write *more than 100 people*, not *over 100 people* and *fewer than 100 people* not *less than 100 people*.

Okay: Do not use OK. Okay?

On to: Is two separate words. Avoid *onto*.

Only: Put it in front of the word it qualifies (e.g. *he waited only three weeks*, not *he only waited three weeks*).

Organisations: An *it*, not a *they* (e.g. *Tesco has built its new superstore on Walthamstow Marshes*, not *Tesco have built their new superstore on Walthamstow Marshes*).

Over: Not a substitute for *more than* or *during*.

Parliament: Cap up for *Houses of Parliament* but lower case for *parliamentary*.

Percentages: Use the % percentage symbol only when writing specific figures.

Post Office: Cap up for *Enfield Post Office*, but lower case for *the local post office*.

Publications: The names of any published material should be italicised (e.g. *Nevermind*, *Great Expectations*, *Waltham Forest Echo*, *The Matrix*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Mona Lisa*).

Qualifications: GCSEs, A-levels and BA honours.

Quotes: Use double quote marks for all quoted speech and text. For full sentences in quotes, introduce with a colon. When quoting someone for the first time, use their name before the quote begins. For quotes inside quotes use single quote marks and for clarification use square brackets (e.g. *Stella Creasy said: "I couldn't believe it when Eddie [Izzard] said 'I want to stand in Chingford'."*). Full stops or commas precede a closing quote mark, unless the phrase has been isolated within a normal paragraph (e.g. *The mayor said it was "absolutely massive", but no-one knew what she was talking about.*)

Religion: Cap up the names of religions, as well as their holy books and their deities (e.g. *Muslim*, *Koran*, *Allah*; *Christian*, *The Bible*, *God*).

Royalty: Lower case for royal household and royal family, but cap up for individual royal names (e.g. *The Queen*, *Prince of Wales*). Do not use *Her Majesty*.

Scouts: Not gender specific. Use lower case except for the name of a group (e.g. *9th Southgate Scouts*).

Stations: Cap up when referring to a station name in full. Insert mode of transport when it is necessary to differentiate between stations in the same area (e.g. *Walthamstow Central Bus Station* and *Walthamstow Central Underground Station*).

Tax: All taxes are lower case except when abbreviated (e.g. *VAT*).

Tenses: Use active not passive (e.g. *the boy shot the cat*, not *the cat was shot by the boy*).

That/which: Use *that* if the clause is crucial to the sentence, use *which* if it is not (e.g. *the company that bought the land was based offshore* and *the company, which was based offshore, bought the land*).

Time: Use *4pm* not *four o'clock*, *from 11.30am-4pm*, *between 3pm and 4pm*.

Titles: Only use a title for professionally qualified or elected people. So no *Mr* or *Mrs*, but do use *Dr* (doctor), *MP* (Member of Parliament), *Cllr* (councillor), *Rev* (reverend), *Sgt* (sergeant) etc. On first mention of a police officer, military figure, or religious authority, refer to the full job title using upper case (e.g. *Detective Inspector Pedro Alvares*), then *DI Alvares*. For the House of Lords use only *Lord* or *Lady*. Also see **Names**.

Trade names: Cap up official trade names, such as *Biro*, *Elastoplast*, *Fibreglass*, *Hoover*.

Wars: *First World War* and *Second World War*. Cap up if the war is officially recognised.

Word endings: Use *while*, *among* and avoid *whilst*, *amongst*. Also use *burned*, *dreamed* and avoid *burnt*, *dreamt* etc.

Years: 2018/9 for one-year gap, but 1999-2019 for longer periods.

Z: Never use 'z' in words that end in 'ise' (e.g. *recognise*, not *recognize*).