



The Bastion's Very Small Style Guide

Prepared by Chirag Chinnappa and G. Aarathi

Writing for *The Bastion*

What do we aim to do at *The Bastion*? We aim to bridge the gap between media, public policy, and academia through in-depth journalism.

What that means is we try to make jargon-heavy conversations on public policy accessible to the masses. In order to do this, we have to be careful about the ways in which we phrase arguments and convey information.

Facts are important, as are statistics in policy discussions. But, if they're delivered in dry jargon-y prose, our readers won't engage with our content and the debates they raise. So, striking a balance between informative yet accessible writing is what we aim for.

There are lots of ways you can do this.

You could narrativise what you're talking about by using appropriate examples like [this piece](#) does.

You could (and should) interview people for interesting insights like [this piece](#) does.

Or, you could just tug at someone's heart like [this piece](#) does.

All we're trying to say is: writing for a big audience requires being conscious about the *craft* of writing itself. Think about what you're trying to say and how you'd like to say it. Think carefully about your arguments and presentation too. Structure your arguments in a logical progression first and see if they make sense to you. Bother your assigned editor with any questions you might have while ideating. Bother them in general. In our experience, writers who have done all of these things (and perhaps even more) have produced some of their best work, and some of *The Bastion's* too.

Writing Sentences and Paragraphs

Here's a sentence for you: *The Bastion* aims to bridge the gap between media, public policy, and academia through in-depth journalism.

Now, that sentence could be rewritten as: *The Bastion* is an organisation that aims to bridge the gap between media outlets, public policy, and academia through deeply researched journalistic articles.

These two sentences are essentially saying the same thing. Neither of them are particularly *bad* per se. But the second one uses four more words to convey the same information. Given that

we only give our writers **1000-1200 words** to write with per article, wasting four words on fluffy fillers isn't worth it.

Try and stick to short, crisp sentences while writing. Once you're done with a free-flowing first draft, re-read each sentence and cut out the fluff. Make sure that each sentence is well linked to the next, and that your argument progresses with each paragraph. Also, try not to use too many commas, because, sometimes, when you're reading the piece, it can get really tiring pausing all the time, you know.

Here's an example of some writing that ticks those boxes:

<https://thebastion.co.in/politics-and/data-data-everywhere-whose-is-it-to-give/>.

Finally, good journalism is almost always the result of a flowing dialogue between the journalist and their editor. So if you have any questions or trouble while writing, no matter how small, your assigned editor will always be ready to help you out. Just ask them!

Language: God Save the Queen

But beyond all the cerebral stuff, what about spelling? Being the colonised subjects that we are, we follow *British English* in our articles. There are a [lot of guides](#) on the Web that list out the inexplicable differences between the Queen's English and American English. In any case, here are a few key things you should remember while writing in this style (lifted from [The Writer](#)):

- **Words that end with 'ise'**: In British English, you write *memorialise*, *recognise*, *organise*. In American English, those words are written as *memorialize*, *recognize*, *organize* and so on.
 - The same goes for these similar words: *paralyse* v/s *paralyze*; *analyse* v/s *analyze*
- **There's no color without 'u'**: In British English, words end with *our* not *or* (which is how American English goes.) So, *colour* v/s *color*, *favour* v/s *favor*, *labour* v/s *labor*
- **'R's come first**: Write *centre* instead of *center*, *fibre* instead of *fiber*, *theatre* instead of *theater*.
- **Don't take offence**: Americans have been known to launch the odd linguistic offense now and then, and practice various oddities when speaking the English language. This practise is not a common offence when writing in British English.
- **Tired of all these rules?** Then crouch in the foetal position, NOT the fetal position. British English adds an *oe* or *ae* to different words, often related to science for some

reason (we blame Latin). You visit an orthopaedic surgeon, NOT an orthopedic surgeon. An amoeba is a unicellular organism, not an ameba.

Spelling and Grammar

We understand that people engage with the English language differently. However, to the best of your abilities, please try and ensure that your drafts are free of obvious typos. Remember, a polished draft a day keeps an editor's frown away.

When it comes to spelling, use a good old-fashioned spellcheck, or [Grammarly](#)'s free service to check your work. If unsure of the meaning of a word, then please reference the [Oxford English Dictionary](#). We do understand that English grammar, with all its weird inconsistencies, can be confusing. In those cases, we recommend referencing [this guide](#) when unclear about grammatical rules.

That's all we have to say, really. If you have some other stylistic questions, you might find the answers in the Appendix below. If not, then just ask your editor. We hope you enjoy your time with us. Happy writing!

The Bastion's Editorial Team

Appendix: Miscellaneous Things That We Think Are Helpful

Apart from this, we've borrowed a few (many) excerpts from *The Economist's* style guide as a flag post for nuances we usually overlook while editing someone else's written work. Here goes:

1. **Abbreviations:** a) Write the words in full on first appearance: thus, University Grants Commission (not just UGC). If in doubt about its familiarity, explain what the organisation is or does. And after the first mention, try not to repeat the abbreviation too often (unfamiliar abbreviations may oblige the reader to be constantly referring back to the first use. It is better to repeat some names in full, or to write the agency, the committee, the party, etc.
2. **Italics:** Only foreign words and phrases should be set in italics with proper accents. This is true unless they are so familiar that they have become anglicised and so should be in roman. For example: ad hoc, apartheid, bourgeois, etc.
3. **Quoting:**
 - a. If you wish to quote someone, either give a date or use the present tense. For example: "The UGC is well-intentioned but poorly implemented," says Mrinmayee when interviewed by *The Bastion*.
 - b. Square brackets should be used for interpolations in direct quotations: "Let them [the poor] eat cake." To use ordinary brackets implies that the words inside them were part of the original text from which you are quoting.
 - c. Direct quotes should be used when either the speaker or what he said is surprising, or when the words he used are particularly pithy or graphic. Otherwise you can probably paraphrase him more concisely. The most pointless quote is the inconsequential remark attributed to a nameless source. For example, "Everyone wants to be in on the act," says one high-ranking civil servant.
4. **He, she, they:** You have a difficult task to grammar. The struggle to be gender-neutral rests on a misconception about gender, a grammatical convention to make words masculine, feminine or neutral. Since English is unusual in assigning few genders to nouns other than those relating to people (ships and countries are exceptions), feminists have come to argue that language should be gender-neutral. If you believe something written is "exclusionary" or insulting to women to use 'he' in a general sense, you can rephrase some sentences in the plural. So, "Instruct the reader without lecturing him" may be put as "Instruct readers without lecturing them". Still, some sentences resist this treatment, so do not be ashamed of sometimes using man to include women, or making he do for she. As long as you are **not insensitive in other ways**, few women will be offended if you restrain yourself from putting or she after every he.
5. **Countries, nations and states:** London is the country's capital, not the nation's. If you wish to build a nation, you will bind its peoples together; if you wish to build a state, you will forge its institutions.

6. The aim is not just to tell readers what we think, but to persuade them to understand HOW we think; if you use arguments, reasoning and evidence, you should be fine. Go easy on the “oughts” and “shoulds”.
7. It is *The Bastion* and not the *Bastion*.

