

A Magazine of Politics & Culture
CURRENT AFFAIRS

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PROSPECTIVE WRITER GUIDE DOCUMENT

If you are in possession of this document, you have expressed an interest in writing for *Current Affairs*. We'd like to tell you a bit more about what we're looking for and how the editorial process works.

First, please note: *Current Affairs* is quite different from other magazines. All our content has a very particular tone and style. The best way to get a sense of what we're looking for is to spend some time reading our material. Subscriptions and back issues can be purchased through our website, and you can look through a list of representative articles [here](#). You don't have to be a *Current Affairs* subscriber to submit work to our magazine, but it helps. Not simply because we have a nepotistic bias toward paid members of the *Current Affairs* family (though we do), but because if a writer is unfamiliar with the kind of thing we publish, they are less likely to propose things that will fit well.

While we do accept (and encourage!) submissions, we only take a very small number. This is, first, because we are a small magazine with a highly constrained budget, and second, because we really are quite choosy due to our rather idiosyncratic style. If we do not accept your submission, this in no way implies any judgment on its merits. We may just not be commissioning *any* pieces at that time (this is often the case), or it may simply not quite work in our magazine.

That said, please do not be discouraged from sending us ideas!

I. Editorial Process

If you have an idea for an article, please fill out this [form](#) with at least one clear, detailed paragraph describing the main argument or theme of your proposed piece. Please also attach/link one or more samples of your previous work (published or unpublished), and/or a few paragraphs of the proposed piece so that we can get a sense of your writing style.

It is best not to send fully completed pieces. This is because we like to work with writers in shaping a piece's direction. If the piece is already written, be warned that if we accept it, it could be in for substantial rewrites.

If you do not hear back from us within two weeks, it is acceptable to prod us with a follow-up email at editor@currentaffairs.org.

Please be aware that our editing process is very hands-on, and that we may make intensive revisions to your original submission in order to bring it in line with the *Current Affairs* house style. We'll usually confine our edits to grammar, style, and readability. Your final draft will almost certainly end up looking quite different from your original draft, unless you have written for us numerous times before. However, our editors are very friendly and collaborative. If a pitch has been accepted, then we are already confident that a great piece of work can emerge at the end, and we want to work with writers to make their work as good as it can possibly be.

An author always has final approval over whether their edited piece appears in the magazine or on the website. We are happy to publish pieces under the author's real name, or, if they prefer, under a pseudonym. (A long list of premade pseudonyms can be supplied upon request.)

II. Content Guidelines

a. Form

- We have two publication formats: our print edition and our online edition. Main articles for the print edition are usually around 3000-4500 words, while online articles are usually 1200-2400 words. (The print edition also contains lots of boxes, sidebars, etc. with short interstitial pieces, which can run anywhere from 100-500 words. Please check out the magazine to get a sense for what these are usually like! We love to receive ideas for games, puzzles, satirical advertisements, and other bits and pieces.)
- We aim to make *Current Affairs* accessible and enjoyable to our many millions of readers. If you are writing on a specialist subject, **please write as if you were addressing a reader who is only passingly familiar with your topic. Articles should be able to be read and enjoyed by any literate person with a high school education.** We don't mean to say that you shouldn't write about complex ideas and arguments. This isn't *Newsweek*, after all: we're not writing for children. But please try to express your thoughts in clear, understandable language with lots of examples.

B. Substance

- *Current Affairs* greatly values sincerity, compassion, and conviction. Please write about issues you genuinely care about. We are not overly fond of "hot takes" or contrarianism. (The difference between contrarianism and genuine criticism is that the contrarian opposes things because they enjoy opposing things, rather than out of true conviction. We publish lots of critique, but it should serve a purpose.)
- We are much more likely to accept pieces that contain original research and reporting.
- Submissions need not be humorous, though humor is certainly encouraged. Be warned, however, that if your jokes are not funny, we will remove them and

replace them with our own jokes. We will also occasionally insert jokes where once there were none.

- General themes that tend to produce good *Current Affairs* articles are:
 - Critiques of bad premises and arguments that are infecting current debates.
 - Strategies and suggestions for solving contemporary problems.
 - Discussions of types of human suffering that people ought to care more about than they presently do.
 - Merciless verbal thrashings of bad writers, thinkers, commentators, and other such entities.
- If the general thrust of your article is “Guess What? This Thing That Everyone Likes Is Actually Terrible,” please devote 50 percent of your wordcount to practical proposals on how to improve the thing, or discussion of an existing alternative that you believe is superior.
- We also like book reviews! But it’s probably best not to pick a book on a niche discipline or debate, unless you’re confident that you can contextualize the subject matter in a relevant and engaging way for the uninitiated. Book reviews are among the trickiest pieces to write, because they require you to make readers interested in a book they might have no intention of reading. Best strategy: do not make it about the book, make it about the thing that the book is about, and use the book solely as a jumping-off point for an independently good essay about the thing. Above all else, whether writing about a book, a movie, or a TV show, it should be compelling and understandable to people who have never read the book or watched the media in question.
- We rarely print fiction, but are happy to do so when the right piece comes along. Satirical or speculative fiction is a general plus..
- Poetry is a tough sell (the editor-in-chief is a philistine), but it may still be considered as long as it’s an appropriate match for our tone and content.
- Twitter-based controversies are not suitable subjects for articles under any circumstances.

III. Tips

- PWEB: This is an internal Current Affairs style guide requirement that means “please with examples buttress” or, less confusingly, “please buttress with examples.” What this means is that it’s not enough to make a declarative statement—you must provide convincing examples to back up your claims. For example, the statement “Neoliberalism makes us all miserable” may be accurate, but by itself it’s 1) not easy to prove, 2) confusing to people who are unfamiliar with the word, and 3) not compelling without evidence. You would be better off describing specific situations in which people are made miserable by neoliberalism, and let readers draw their own conclusions. Also, the use of the word “neoliberalism” is limited to once per article.
- Assume a skeptical reader, and aim to be persuasive rather than partisan. Don’t write exclusively for people who already agree with you! A really good article

will make its point, in part, by dissecting counterarguments. A good tip is to write your piece imagining the response of the reader who would disagree with you the most, and ensure that your piece addresses what that reader would say.

- Motive: it is very unlikely, unless you can get a direct quote from someone, that you can successfully impute their motives. Do not theorize about the inner lives of individuals unless you can seriously back up your assertions.
- BE SPECIFIC: generalized, abstract writing is not to our taste. Base your arguments on direct quotes, concrete examples, and striking events. Formless rage at the general state of affairs is perfectly understandable, but makes for poor articles.
- Avoid MOT (Most Obvious Thesis) about a topic unless you have an original approach when it comes to framing. Specifics are always better than generalities. “The pandemic proves we need Medicare for All” is true, but it’s better to approach the topic from an original, striking, *specific* angle.
- Consider structure: the opening of any article should be compelling and direct. The argument should generally move from point to point, and not circle around or repeat itself. Conclusions should remain at the end. There should only ever be one introduction and one conclusion.
- Consider *subject position*, aka who you are and what your relationship is to the topic. If, for example, you are an upper middle class white man, and you are writing about an upper middle class white male pundit, do not dismiss his beliefs as “obviously only held because he is an upper middle class white man.” It would be much better to explain, with examples, why this pundit’s ideas are bad.
- Write with wit, panache, grace, and clarity. Writing should emanate warmth. Readers should not feel sneered at.
- Do not write like a graduate student or a lawyer. This means:
 - DO NOT assume your readers have taken a college course on this subject. Do not assume your readers have attended law school. Once again, articles should be clear and legible to people with a high school degree who are only passingly familiar with the subject. Ask yourself frequently “would the average reader be bored or confused right now?” Never ask yourself “would my reader be impressed with my intelligence right now?” (This second attitude should be saved for your dates, not your writing.)
 - DO NOT name-drop any literary or social theorists. If you name-drop a literary or social theorist, we will delete the entire paragraph in which this reference occurs.
 - DO NOT use academic jargon. Do not use clumsy academic sentence constructions. Your sentences should be readable. If you can use a nice brisk monosyllabic word or a compelling image rather than five polysyllabic words in a row, please do so. We promise we will be much impressed with your writing, and your intelligence, if your sentences are clear and vivid rather than stuffed with big words.
 - DO NOT include any untranslated non-English words or phrases in the middle of sentences, *even if they are italicized*. Spanish words we may

occasionally allow, as Spanish is well on its way to being our country's second national language. Greek, Latin, German, and French will be treated with great suspicion.

- DO NOT use any English words that no normal human being has ever heard before. *Current Affairs* editors are fairly bookish types, so if we have to look up something in the dictionary, this is an especially bad sign.
- When you have finished your draft, go back through and check for repetitive words and phrases. Every writer has words they rely on too much! It helps the editing process if you can figure out what yours are and adjust in advance.

IV. Payment/Rights/Etc.

All *Current Affairs* pieces are paid. Online articles are \$200. Print articles are \$300. Payment will be provided immediately upon receipt of a final draft, via check or PayPal. Please let us know which you prefer. If you have not been paid within one week of submitting a final draft, please contact ops@currentaffairs.org.

You retain the rights to your work and may use it however you please. *Current Affairs* may use the content in up to one print issue, in print and online compilations of Current Affairs content, and online in perpetuity. *Current Affairs* will retain sole and exclusive ownership over the content for the entire time of drafting, editing, and publication, and for two weeks after first publication online. Beginning two weeks after the content is first published online, you may use the content in any manner, and *Current Affairs* may continue to use the content as agreed.

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