

The NewStandard

**Content Contributors'
Handbook**

Second Draft Edition

June 2004

Contents

Part One: About The NewStandard

Section 1 A: Introduction and Founding Principles	3
Section 1 B: How we differ from corporate media	5
Section 1 C: What kind of content does The NewStandard publish?	8

Part Two: Writing News Articles

Section 2 A: Perspective and Subject Matter	10
Interest and Familiarity	10
Context	11
Focus	11
Choosing and weighting sources	13
Section 2 B: Form and Structure	16
Order of Information	16
Paragraph Structure	16
Voice	16
Language	17
Section 2 C: Procedural Considerations	18
Basic Source Guidelines	18
Anonymity	19
Private individuals	20
Libel	21
Attribution Correcting Errors	22
Aiding the Injured	22

Part Three. Writing Other Content

News Report	23
News Briefs	23
Feature Articles	23
Commentary	24
Media Analysis	24
Cartoons	24
Photographs	24

Part Four: What Content Contributors Can Expect From Editors

Direction	25
Proofing Drafts	25
Sources	25
Correcting Errors	25
Content Integrity	25
Rigorous Defense	26
Resources	26
Hyperlinks	26
Metadata	26

Part One: About *The NewStandard*

Section 1 A: Introduction and Founding Principles

The NewStandard is an independent online news source that provides frequent, primary source coverage of events from around the world and in communities throughout North America. It is a project of PeoplesNetWorks, an organization that provides web-based communications and logistical tools to activists and grassroots organizations. *The NewStandard* is one such tool. It aims to deliver crucial information about events and trends that affect people's lives. Together, PeoplesNetWorks and *The NewStandard* are building a new kind of news resource - one that provides immediate, relevant coverage, and complements information with empowering tools to act on local and global events.

The NewStandard was created according to the following principles:

News should be non-profit

Providing news is a service that should not be driven by greed. We use all revenue to pay our staff and contributors and expand our ability to produce news and organizing tools. Our readers, contributors and staff are not exploited to make a profit for anyone.

News should be geared toward people

We are committed to keeping our news advertisement-free. Because none of our funding is contingent on advertisements, we have no incentive to modify our news to target a particular class of consumers. Similarly, we have no investors. *The NewStandard* is funded by its readership in the form of subscriptions and donations. That way we ensure our primary motivation remains providing news relevant to our subscribers.

News should be relevant

The NewStandard publishes stories that expose and hold government, corporations, and other special interest groups accountable to the public; it provides news and information that our readers need in order to be able to affect their world; and it promotes understanding of complex public interest issues.

Workplaces should be collectively organized and empowering for everyone involved

PeoplesNetWorks operates on the principles of *participatory economics* - an economic model designed to promote equity, solidarity, diversity, and self-management.

These principles include:

Payment for effort and sacrifice. We do not offer pay based on job title, investment capital, educational background, race, age, gender or other essentially arbitrary criteria. We believe in equal pay for equal effort. For journalists, this means that our compensation rate for articles is based on the effort that goes into getting and writing a story, taking a photograph, or creating an illustration. Some factors that go into determining the compensation rate include: number of sources consulted, risks taken, and size/length.

Balanced job complexes. We ensure that everyone in the editorial staff does a proportionate amount of various types of work, including managerial, editorial, clerical and janitorial.

Collective and empowered decision-making. We use democratic procedures that ensure that members have decision-making power reflecting how much a given decision impacts them. For contributors this comes in the form of significant room for feedback, suggestions, and policy influence.

Diversity. We value and actively seek the participation of people from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives, and our collective processes foster outcomes that appeal to a broad range of audiences. We seek to publish the work of as diverse a group of writers as possible.

News should be accessible

We are aware that news over the Internet is inaccessible to the portion of the population without Net access, yet we can't afford to mass produce and distribute *The New Standard* in print. That's why we aim to create a printable version of *The NewStandard*, in PDF form. Our subscribers can print these PDF's, copy them, and distribute them to friends, coworkers and neighbors. We encourage grassroots organizations and local print media to use these PDF's as stuffers in newsletters or local newspapers. In addition, we have a syndication service in order to encourage other publications to reprint content from *The NewStandard*.

News should be affordable

We realize our regular subscription price is too high for many people (though we believe the true costs of ad-driven media are even higher). That's why we have a sliding scale subscription price. In addition, we are able to provide a limited number of free low-income/Global South subscriptions, paid for by other subscribers as well as by PeoplesNetWorks. We also make news more affordable to grassroots organizations by offering them discount bulk subscriptions. We also provide all of our news briefs and summaries of every article free to the public. This way we ensure that we are not withholding crucial information from anyone, regardless of their ability or desire to pay.

News should be motivational

Modern news outlets treat their audiences as objects. Readers and viewers are supposed to passively absorb information sandwiched between offensive advertisements

and almost invariably are made to feel disconnected from the very events being described to them. We believe news should make connections for people and thus should be delivered in a context that enables people to be the makers of news instead of mere information sponges. With that in mind, PeoplesNetWorks strives to provide connections between important current events, and the people and groups making change.

Section 1 B: How we differ from corporate media

In today's corporate- and profit-dominated world, most news is controlled by commercial or governmental interests, and produced by hierarchical capitalist methods. The result is inaccurate or irrelevant news stories, frustrated journalists, and a confused and disempowered public. Often, the corporate and governmental bias in mainstream news is covered up with claims of journalistic objectivity, obscuring public understanding of governmental and corporate interests affects on the news.

The NewStandard is designed to combat these trends. All news outlets have a bias. The difference between us and the other daily sources is that ours is explicit. Rather than hide behind the label of "objectivity" while serving the interests of investors and advertisers, our mission is to portray the world from the perspective of people who view it and are impacted by it.

The NewStandard is organized in a fundamentally different way so as to foster the creation of content that is both as accurate and transparent as possible and conveys in-depth understanding of public interest issues. It is also geared to maximize journalist empowerment by giving journalists as much control over their work and the final product as possible.

We offer a personal touch, a level of interaction and a kind of appreciation you're not going to get at a corporate shop, and we're firmly committed to maintaining these attributes even as we grow. Below is a summary of benefits we offer or will offer when funding is available to journalists and artists who contribute to *The NewStandard*:

Valued relationships with Publication staff

Everyone in the PeoplesNetWorks collective is an editor, a designer, a secretary, a janitor - and a writer. We respect our contributors' role as the core of our product. Journalists are our eyes and ears, and we give you the time, attention and resources you need to make sure your story or observation is presented as you mean it to be. We also strongly encourage discussions about any ethical issues that may arise. We are always available to discuss them with you ourselves, and we provide forums for you to discuss them with other content contributors.

Competitive pay that values effort well beyond word counts

Even at the outset, with our modest budget, we're offering remuneration for writers, photographers and cartoonists that reflects the effort we know you invest in your work.

Without placing judgments on what products are “better” than others, as a general rule we pay more for work that requires more effort.

Substantial interaction with editors and consultants

Our staff of editors, not to mention our contracted researchers and consultants, takes the time necessary to work on your material every step of the way. We’re here to serve you so that you can produce copy the way you are most comfortable.

Significant control over the final product

We don’t want you to just email your work to us, unless that’s what you want. Our publishing tools allow you to suggest elements such as titles, formatting, pull quotes, teasers, summaries and search engine keywords for your article, and we consult heavily with writers regarding any significant changes in their work.

An audience that respects and appreciates your independence

Our readers appreciate that *The NewStandard’s* content is not compromised by corporate or government interests. They want their news just the way you want to provide it. No sugarcoating or whitewashing, no references to what celebrities think, and no pro-corporate or pro-state biases. Our readership wants news that matters, not news that’s “safe.”

Quality copy editing and proofreading

No less than three editors work on every article we publish, including a primary copy editor and two proofreaders. That’s a ratio we intend to keep or better as we expand our operations. You don’t have to be Hemingway as long as you can put your news into words. We’ll spend the time necessary to polish your work until you and we are happy with it.

Other rewards for your effort

Beyond the cash payments you receive for contributing to the Newspaper, we offer free gift subscriptions/memberships to all contributors. In addition, we offer PeoplesNetWorks Site Credits to the author(s) of each item we publish, redeemable for lots of goodies from our partner organizations. These are other alternative media organizations who we have chosen to enter into mutually supportive relationships with.

Syndication royalties!

We don’t want to profit off of work you did. The revenue from our syndication service is distributed among our journalists, with only a small portion being taken out to run and promote the service itself.

Affirmative Action

We are well aware that a diverse and dynamic group of contributors is our best guarantee of sustainability as a quality publication. Therefore, we have established policies favoring content from voices marginalized elsewhere. People of color, youth, women, LGBTQ folks, people with disabilities, and citizens of non-European/non-North American countries are given special consideration. The quality of our content is never compromised, but the diversity of our contributors is advocated by our policies.

Policy influence

You're not going to find this just about anywhere else, and it might be hard to believe, but we give journalists democratic power within our organization. Once an artist or journalist has contributed substantial content to us over a sustained period, we will give them proportionate influence over the policy and direction of our publication. Through online votes and periodic face-to-face conferences, we offer significant say to our writers and graphic artists.

Union membership (coming soon)

The NewStandard currently relies heavily on freelance journalists and has almost no paid staff writers, other than the editors. As soon as The NewStandard is financially viable, and we can develop stronger relationships with our journalists, we will institute radical labor policies. We know it takes the adventure and some of the struggle out of labor organizing, but we will *want* you to join an independent union, and we'll help you do it. What's more, we will want our contributors to organize an autonomous Workers Council - and we'll help fund it without subtracting dues from your paychecks! We will even provide a forum for affiliated writers and artists to discuss labor issues. While most newspapers and TV networks are disrespecting and attacking labor, we wish to build strong relationships with various industry-related unions and become an example of "worker-management" relations.

Section 1 C: What kind of content does *The NewStandard* publish?

Hard News

The bulk of *The NewStandard*'s content is hard-news. This news falls into three categories: news articles, feature stories, and news briefs.

News Articles

These are full-length articles covering current events. They are usually about 600-1600 words in length, and are paid for according to how difficult they were to research and compile. News articles are based on first-hand sources (interviews, direct access to documents, etc) and field research and are compensated at higher rates than news reports, which are researched primarily through second-hand sources.

News Reports

These are also full-length articles covering current events. They are usually about 600-1600 words in length, and are paid for according to how difficult they were to research and compile. News reports are generally based on other news articles from the mainstream and alternative media, though they often contain information from first-hand sources as well.

Feature Stories

Between 2000-4000 words in length, features take in-depth looks at subjects and are often based on investigative reporting. They are often accompanied by interactive visual aids, photo series, and so forth. Whenever possible, features cover otherwise untouched stories, from unique angles.

News Briefs

We rely heavily on short, 80- to 200-word up-to-the-minute summaries of news items. Briefs are typically researched indirectly, based on other current reports, and frequently link to more in-depth articles elsewhere on the Web. *The NewStandard* stresses the same values and perspective in *news briefs* as in *news stories* — we take the most relevant and insightful aspects of various other reports (when available) and cull them into sharp, original reports.

Editorial Content and Analysis

Since *The NewStandard* is primarily a news site and not a commentary or analysis site, analytical, opinionated and editorial content takes a back seat to hard news. However, we do publish at least a couple of pieces of this type of content a week, and will run more as we grow.

Media Analyses

One service *The NewStandard* provides is a window into the other side of the news — corporate, governmental and commercial — from our angle and through our lens. We occasionally run stories on trends in mainstream media. Media Analysis pieces should be between 800-2000 words long.

Commentaries

Commentaries can and should include opinionated content, and colorful writing is a plus. Satire and humor writing fall into this category as well.

Media Reviews

We offer book, television, music and movie reviews on a fairly regular basis. Perspectives are of course expected to be those lacking in mainstream media, including a willingness to analyze the social value of a book, film or show, as well as an emphasis on independent projects. Reviews should be 500-1000 words long.

Images

Cartoons

Recognizing the value of political cartoons, *The NewStandard* runs several every week. Most cartoons are reviewed on a case by case basis, but we are looking to develop regular relationships with a handful of good cartoonists..

Photographs

We are looking for first-hand photography of world events. We do not want to resort to buying photos from wire services, but we wish to include at least one photo in every issue of *The NewStandard*, and on occasion run photo essays or multiple images to accompany a story. We are especially looking for images from crisis areas worldwide, as well as mass demonstrations and militant grassroots actions.

Illustrations / Designs / Animations

The NewStandard contains a high level of original illustration content, including maps, charts, interactive features, etc. We commission illustrations as needed.

Part Two: Writing News Articles

Though many news sources and journalists claim to be objective conveyers of the truth, *The NewStandard* does not claim objectivity. *The NewStandard* recognizes that journalists and editors of any news publication always make choices about which facts, quotes, and sources to include in a story, and which to exclude. In addition, journalists and editors make decisions about the placement and weight given to these facts and perspectives, the length and placement a story deserves, and so forth.

Therefore, instead of false “objectivity,” we encourage transparency and accuracy. The reader should know where the information in a story came from and should be able to expect that great care was taken to avoid misleading the reader through inaccurate or insufficient information.

Section 2 A: Perspective and Subject Matter

Below are guidelines for how to make the choices that affect the story’s balance and bias. These choices include: subject matter, context, focus, and sources.

Interest and Familiarity

As a general rule, *The NewStandard* is most interested in current or breaking news stories written from an angle that represents the public’s interest. The stories potentially covered by *The NewStandard* is not limited to unreported or underreported news, but includes all news that helps the public make better decisions and fosters a better understanding of the issues people face. The “public” does not include big investors, politicians, celebrities, or elite institutions.

Journalists should choose to cover subject matter with which they are reasonably familiar or that they have the ability to quickly understand. Journalists should also make sure their independence is not compromised by any conflict of interest.

To avoid conflicts of interests, *NewStandard* contributors should:

- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts. If a contributor is an employee, member of or consultant to any political party, labor union, social organization, or advocacy group involved in issues said contributor is writing about, such information should be disclosed in a “tagline” at the end of submissions.

Ex: For a story on the micropower radio movement the following note would be appropriate: “The reporter is a member of the Columbus Community Radio Foundation, a non-profit media

advocacy group that is launching a low-power radio station in Columbus, Ohio.”

- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.
- Disclose to the editors any personal investments which may present a conflict of interest when covering a story.

A pre-existing viewpoint is not a conflict of interest. If a journalist is aware of a pre-existing viewpoint, is open to the newsgathering process and considers positions and claims from diverse perspectives, and takes care to test them against evidence, then that reporter is capable of producing content that informs the public. The reporting process will not be compromised just because the reporter has strong beliefs and opinions.

Context

Before writing the story, or even choosing the exact focus of the article, seek general comprehension of overarching issue and historical context, even though much of this background information will not be included in the story. Include as much of this context in the story as possible. In general, fault on the side of substance in order to ensure that readers have enough information.

Focus

The focus of the story is a conscious decision. The journalist and editors must decide together what the main topic of the story will be, what the lead will be, which facts to hone in on, and which perspectives will be the most prominent. These choices will impact the effect the story has on readers. Even after the original decision has been made, the focus of the story must be continually questioned and revised where appropriate. All changes in focus must be discussed between the reporter and editors.

Below are some general guidelines for choosing the focus of a story:

- Since *The NewStandard* is geared toward providing news from a people’s perspective, its coverage of political events differs from the corporate news. To avoid becoming a government or corporate mouthpiece, the speeches, opinions, and actions of politicians and other public officials or corporate leaders should not be the focus of a story unless such pronouncements or actions are deceptive, misleading or run counter to other evidence gathered by the reporter. If official statements are being challenged with credible evidence, or being exposed as outright lies, they may indeed become the focus of a story. Similarly, if a politician’s actions contradict his/her public statements, and/or endanger the public, they may become the focus of a story. Otherwise, events themselves, policies, facts, and experiences should be the focus.

- When working with data, the numbers that best represent an event or condition should be used. Data should be put into context and the methods for collecting it explained. When reporting sizes (for instance the size of an oil spill) comparisons can often be helpful. The goal is to report the data accurately and to make it accessible to the readers.

Ex. The government releases employment information for July and the unemployment rate has dropped. The questions an article should answer include, “What is the real meaning of this particular change in the economy?” and “What does this mean for working people.” There are many factors that must be taken into account in order to answer these questions, such as the number of jobs created over the period, changes in the average length of time a person remains unemployed, estimates of discouraged workers (people who would like to work, but haven’t looked for a job in the previous 4 weeks), changes in the average number of hours worked per week, and changes in the average hourly wage over the period. If, for example, the average length of time a person remains unemployed is lengthening, wage increases aren’t keeping up with inflation, the average number of hours worked per week is stagnant or falling, and the increase in jobs created over a period is negative (or significantly less than the increase in number of working age people) it is likely that a falling unemployment rate is due to an increase in discouraged workers and not any improvement in the economy. The focus of the article must reflect this.

- When working with issues, a critical look must be taken at the context. Simply repeating the claims of one or more groups as if they were all equally valid does not constitute responsible journalism. Reporters should test competing claims—or any claims, for that matter—against evidence. Those found to be inconsistent with or contradictory to the evidence should be identified as such.

Ex. The Idaho state legislature is considering placing a cap on malpractice suits. Doctors complain that they are being forced to move to other states or take early retirements because malpractice insurance has become too high, as a result of these suits. The first course of action is to determine if there is actually a link between malpractice suits and rising malpractice insurance rates. The journalist finds a recent study, which indicates that, in states with malpractice suit caps, the rate of increase in insurance rates is higher than in states without caps. The study results may become the new focus of the story, along with the real reasons behind malpractice suit capping.

- In all cases, avoid oversimplification of an issue.

Choosing and weighting sources

When choosing whom to interview, whose opinion or statements to quote in an article and which documented facts to include, seek out a variety of viewpoints from as many diverse sources as possible. Be sure to include voices of those not normally heard from in the media. When there is an option, do not use grammatically awkward or misleading quotes. Since quotes are meant to be representative of both the voice of a person and their ideas, chosen quotes or paraphrases should be faithful to both. It is also important to describe the potential bias of all sources, to question any assumptions and assertions made by sources, and to research their accuracy.

Human Sources

There are three main categories of human sources discussed in this section: analysts, witnesses, and participants.

Analysts. *An analyst is someone who is being consulted/quoted because of research or specialized knowledge in a particular field.*

Examine and take into account the background, track record, and potential bias of all analysts. It will often be appropriate to include this information in the article. When quoting analysts and using their views to inform a story, use analysts with proven track records unless they are only being used to give voice to a common opinion and no one available with a proven track record holds that opinion. An analyst must have a proven track record to be considered an “expert” in a given field. The research of analysts without proven track records should generally not inform an article’s direction or focus. This is to increase the accuracy of the article.

When quoting or paraphrasing analysts:

- Define analysts’ area of knowledge as specifically as possible. When referring to sources with specific areas of expertise, avoid using vague terms such as “expert”.
- Consult analysts about hard facts and analysis only. Do not use analysts to represent public opinion. Consultant’s personal opinions on issues are of no more value than any other person’s opinion. Do not favor them when using statements of opinion.
- When reporting on a point of view held by a large group of analysts, unless there is a factual reason to do otherwise, use the word “Some” or use a description to modify the group.

Ex. 1: *Some* analysts say...

Saying “most analysts believe” implies all “analysts” have been consulted or polled for the story. If possible, move from the general

to the specific in subsequent sentences by identifying key analysts in the group. Use names, titles, and affiliations.

Ex. 2: Economists *opposing* the Bush tax cut argue....
This identifies the analysts' position regarding a tax cut.

Witnesses. *A witness is someone who observes an event or is personally familiar with individuals or a situation, but is not a participant.*

An article covering an incident should include the stories of various witnesses. The voices represented should be as diverse as possible. Seek to corroborate the accounts of witnesses before reporting them.

Individuals can also serve as "character witnesses" when the subject is a person or institution the witness is particularly familiar with.

Participants. *A participant is someone who is actively involved in an event or situation.*

When reporting on an incident or situation, quoting participants in those events, or using their stories and views to inform an article, give weight to the voices of participants based on the following criteria:

- Number of like-minded participants.

Ex. There is an antiwar demonstration with 100,000 participants. At the same time, there is a counter-demonstration of about 20 pro-war activists. The article's focus should center on the 100,000 antiwar demonstrators. The overwhelming majority of the quotes should come from antiwar activists. Coverage of the counter-demonstration should be proportional, so, in this case, any mention of the pro-war demonstrators should be small.

- *Financial motivation.* If some participants in an event are paid and others are not, this should be noted when giving voice to those participants. In addition, people who participate without financial motivation should be given special consideration and voice.

Ex. 1 There is an antiwar demonstration with 10,000 participants. The law enforcement presence at the demonstration is massive with about 5,000 police at hand. Since the police are on the job and are getting paid to be at the event and the demonstrators are by and large there voluntarily, at their own expense, and in fact the reason for the event, the demonstrators should be given a disproportionately large voice in the article.

Ex. 2 There is a controversial energy bill being considered in the US Senate. An article is being written on the efforts of environmen-

talists and energy corporations to influence the vote. The environmentalists calling and visiting their senators are volunteering their time and the lobbyists for the energy corporations are paid. First, all affiliations of the lobbyists from both sides and their financial motivations or lack thereof should be included in the article. Second, volunteers should be given special focus and consideration.

- *Effort, sacrifice and risk.* If some participants exert a high amount of effort and sacrifice or take a high amount of risk to participate in an event, it should be noted in the article. This type of effort should be given special consideration in the article as it speaks to a high degree of passion.

Ex. A beauty pageant is taking place. There are hundreds of thousands attending the event. During the event, a handful of activists sneak in and hang a banner that challenges the pageant as sexist. Though there are hundreds of times as many audience members as protesters, the protesters should be the focus of the story because they are exerting a special amount of effort, risk, and sacrifice compared to the fans. It is not news that a beauty pageant happens and there are thousands in attendance. It may be news, however, when a small group of passionate people risk arrest to get their message across.

Documents

When quoting from written documents or using information from written documents in a story, use primary source documents whenever possible. Using news sources and other secondary source documents is strongly discouraged. In almost all cases, these sources must be cited in the body of the article. Exceptions include when citing a statement from a press conference or other well-attended event where (1) no *NewStandard* reporter was present, (2) no transcript is available, and (3) the statement being cited is widely quoted. In these cases, the statements do not have to be attributed to their source.

Section 2 B: Form and Structure

When structuring an article, the goal is to maximize the amount of content the reader will retain. This necessitates maintaining the reader's attention. Content should be accessible, clear and coherent.

Order of Information

Keep important information toward the top and make the first paragraph a general summary. Readers should immediately understand what the focus of the article is and why it is relevant to them.

Keep sub-stories together. In order to keep writing cohesive, summarize any sub-stories in first paragraph, but keep the sub-stories themselves together in the rest of the body.

List relevant hyperlinks at the bottom. At the end of an article, it may be desirable to include websites where readers can find more information relevant to the article.

Paragraph Structure

Keep paragraphs short, but avoid overuse of one-sentence paragraphs. As a general rule, concise paragraphs promote readability. However, one-sentence paragraphs often lead to choppy, distracting writing. The goal is to convey as much information as possible to the reader, without losing their attention either by having paragraphs that are too dense, articles that are not cohesive, or sentences that discourage reader commitment.

Make sure paragraphs are self-contained. Our syndication policy allows other publications to cut paragraphs from articles to fit for length. We reserve the right to mandate that any particular paragraph or set of paragraphs be kept in the article when it is reprinted. However, the cohesiveness and meaning of the article must remain intact, allowing for minor cosmetic adjustments, if one or more paragraphs is removed.

Voice

Do not editorialize. All commentary/opinion must be other people's opinion. Hard news is not a forum for disguised editorials.

Do not sensationalize. Do not present preliminary reports on issues as though they are conclusive or almost conclusive. Be wary of reporting anything which can arouse baseless hopes and fears in a reader. While all news has a bias, ours is to present news relevant to people, rather than news palatable to corporations. Given that, news must be presented as straightforwardly as possible, and readers must make their own conclusions from the information provided by the article. Sometimes important news is not spectacular.

Identifying actors. (Active/Passive Voice.) Avoid using the passive voice because it makes the relationship between subject and verb less straightforward and avoids assigning responsibility for an action. In the active voice, the subject is a be-er or a do-er and the verb moves the sentence along (“The council approved the policy,” or “He knocked the cup over”). In the passive voice, the subject of the sentence is neither a do-er or a be-er, but is acted upon by some other agent or by something unnamed (“The new policy was approved,” or , “The cup was knocked over.”)

Ex. Passive Voice: At least 11 Palestinians were killed and more than 135 were injured Monday in five attacks by Israeli military aircraft on Palestinian militant targets in the Gaza Strip.

Active Voice: Israeli forces, firing from military aircraft, killed at least 11 Palestinians in five separate attacks on targets in the occupied Gaza Strip.

Language

Articles should be written in US English. Though it is permissible to use terms, phrases or quotes in other languages within the article, they should be translated or explained.

Section 2 C: Procedural Considerations

Basic Source Guidelines

When quoting sources, the goal is to make them read as clearly as possible and to accurately convey the true voice and perspective of the person or document you are quoting. This means both accurately transcribing a quote and protecting the statement's spirit. Also, the voice of the narrating journalist should be easily discernible from the voice of the quoted or paraphrased person or document.

Quoting Sources

Though some sources will not be cited in the article, the journalist should be prepared to provide editors with all of their sources upon request.

When quoting people or documents:

- Use ellipses (...) to replace substantial cuts in content.
- Use bracketed ([]) information to replace pronouns that are otherwise ambiguous and to introduce required clarity.

When quoting survey polls:

- Provide detailed methodology, including the sponsor of the poll. Always include the exact question asked, or rephrase it directly.

Below are some general guidelines for directly quoting and interacting with human sources:

- Electronically record conversations with sources whenever possible. When audio recordings are available of conversations with sources, the sources cannot deny or substantively modify their statements. Tell sources when they're being recorded.
- Avoid deceptive or undercover (surreptitious) methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained in the story and thoroughly discussed with editors.
- Give sources the option of approving quotes and paraphrases. Quotes or paraphrases used in articles should be read back to the sources to ensure that no quotes were mis-recorded. Quotes that will use ellipses must be read as they will appear. If a source disagrees with a quote, the quote can be re-explained. Sources may only review their own quotes, not the rest of the article.
- Individuals who are publicly accused should be given the first opportunity to respond to the accusation. If they are unavailable for comment before the article is published, they should be allowed to respond either in a

follow-up article, or in a letter to the editor. It should be noted in the article that they were contacted, but didn't respond.

- Do not change colloquial English (dialects). Quotes are meant to add different voices to the story. Colloquial English represents the voice of the speaker.
- Attribution should precede paraphrases, not follow them. This avoids confusion between a speaker's voice and the reporter's voice.

Ex. Attribution following paraphrases: The Palestinian Authority must undergo extensive reform and cease all acts of terrorism before peace negotiations can proceed, said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Tuesday before the Israeli Knesset.

Attribution preceding paraphrases: Last Tuesday, in a speech to the Israeli Knesset, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that the Palestinian Authority must undergo extensive reform and cease all acts of terrorism before peace negotiations can proceed.

- Erase words used as fillers for pauses, such as "umm", "ah", and "like." Such phrases add nothing to content and are distracting.
- Correct awkward grammar for people who are being interviewed in English, but who have a different first language. When possible, quotes should remain as unchanged as possible, but in the case of very awkward or confusing grammar that makes quotes hard to understand, grammar can be modified—or else, paraphrase the source's remarks in such cases. Remember, these sources are doing you a favor by speaking in English.
- Always ask why a source has chosen to say something - be wary of assuming the source is motivated solely by the search for truth. Always give people the chance to answer any charges or accusations being leveled at them.

Special Cases Where Special Sensitivity or Anonymity Should be Applied

Anonymous Sources

- Quote anonymous sources with caution. The information gleaned from sources who will only speak under conditions of anonymity can be invaluable to the public's right to know. However, there is also a risk of misinformation due to lack of accountability of the source. A balance must be struck between ensuring the accuracy of the anonymous source's information, and providing information that would otherwise not be provided. Sources who can provide the same information, but do not require anonymity, should be favored. If anonymous sources are quoted, supply as much information as you can about the source without divulging the source's identity.

Ex: “An aide attached to Mr. Smith’s office in the Pentagon said...” or “An aide in the procurement office of the Pentagon said...” This is preferable to using phrases such as “a Pentagon official said.”

- The stock phrase “sources said” means almost nothing and should be avoided.
- Verify source’s name and position/relationship to events/subjects. Besides witnesses/participants in events, source’s identity must be verifiable.
- Uphold all promises of anonymity. However, the name/position/relationship to event cannot remain anonymous to the reporter and must be revealed to at least one editor.

There are generally two types of sources that want to be anonymous: (1) Whistleblowers who want to reveal sensitive information to the public but fear that they will be fired or face some sort of reprisal if their identity is revealed; and (2) Powerful officials—even leaders of social movements—who want to release information anonymously not so much to bring about justice but to promote their agenda or embarrass and discredit opponents. It is more appropriate to protect the identity of whistleblowers who have credible information.

While sources should always be encouraged to go “on the record”, it may be the case that they can’t, therefore, their identities should be protected unless a court orders otherwise. Because promises of anonymity should be upheld at all costs, they should not be given lightly and, whenever possible, promises for anonymity must be cleared with the editor first. Anonymity will not be upheld if the source has knowingly lied to or misled the journalist. If a source’s motives seem suspicious, avoid making any promises.

Private individuals

When quoting or reporting on private individuals:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with people who are particularly vulnerable or inexperienced as sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect’s fair trial rights with the public’s right to be informed.

Libel

All journalists should be aware that false statements about individuals can sometimes lead to libel and slander claims. The Media Law Resource Center (MLRC) provides the following definitions of libel and slander:

Libel and slander are legal claims for false statements of fact about a person that are printed, broadcast, spoken or otherwise communicated to others. Libel generally refers to statements or visual depictions in written or other permanent form, while slander refers to oral statements and gestures. The term defamation is often used to encompass both libel and slander.

In order for the person about whom a statement is made to recover for libel, the false statement must be defamatory, meaning that it actually harms the reputation of the other person, as opposed to being merely insulting or offensive.

The statement(s) alleged to be defamatory must also be a false statement of fact. Since name-calling, hyperbole, or exaggerated and heated words cannot be proven true or false, they cannot be the subject of a libel or slander claim.

The defamatory statement must also have been made with fault. The extent of the fault depends primarily on the status of the plaintiff. Public figures, such as government officials, celebrities, well-known individuals, and people involved in specific public controversies, are required to prove actual malice, a legal term which means the defendant knew his statement was false or recklessly disregarded the truth or falsity of his statement. In general, in most jurisdictions private individuals must show only that the defendant was negligent, that he failed to act with due care in the situation.

To see this definition in full, visit the MLRC website at <www.mlrc.com>.

Attribution

Every fact should have a source, but not every fact needs attribution. Ideally, all claims or assertions should be attributed to a named person, along with that person's title or biographical information.

Attribution *must* be given when:

- There is controversy surrounding a statement/fact
- Information from an investigative report of another news source is used.
- There are statements regarding projections and explanations.

- A reader is likely to question the accuracy of an assertion.
- A story about a non-event is being published.
Ex. At least according to the Pentagon, there have been no attacks on US soldiers in Iraq today.
- There is any doubt that a source for a statement should be cited.

Correcting Errors

Journalists should be receptive to complaints about inaccuracies and follow up on them. As soon as they realize that there is a possible error in the newspaper, they should tell the appropriate editor immediately.

Aiding the Injured

The NewStandard will not publish any story if participants in an event are harmed due to a journalist's unreasonable decision to remain outside of an event. This is particularly applicable to crisis and war coverage. A journalist must, whenever reasonably possible and where the safety of the journalist will not be compromised, prioritize aiding injured people above covering the event.

Part Three. Writing Other Content

For the most part, the guiding principles for writing a news article apply to all other types of content for *The NewStandard*. Yet, there are some key differences as noted below:

News Reports

Almost all of the rules for writing a news article apply to a news report. The main difference is the prevalent use of secondary sources in news reports.

A news report takes the form of a news article, but unlike an article, it relies heavily on other mainstream or alternative news sources. Reports do not require the journalist to conduct interviews or other types of primary source research, though such sourcing is preferable, where readily available. Generally news reports are researched over the Internet or with minimal investigation. Though the source guidelines for reports are less stringent than for news articles, many of the accuracy rules still apply. If the quoted publication does not make its source transparent or if the journalist or editor has reason to believe the publication is inaccurate, the information is not admissible. All quotes or other specific information gleaned from other news publications must have sources cited.

News Briefs

Almost all of the rules for writing a news article apply to a news brief. The main differences are (1) the form of the brief and (2) the use of secondary source resources.

A news brief is a short (80-200 words) item that presents a synopsis of breaking news. Generally news briefs are researched over the Internet or with minimal investigation. The idea of a news brief is to give readers a quick summary of an event, report, or other newsworthy item and provide links to other, more in-depth articles. Links to other articles should be listed at the bottom as in a news article.

Feature Articles

The main differences between a feature article and a news article are (1) focus, (2) depth of research, and (3) editorial leeway.

A feature article is a piece that focuses much more on the ongoing context of a situation or issue rather than a single event. A feature article may be an investigative report or it may be written to profile an individual or group. Though a recent, upcoming or breaking news item may provide the lead for the feature, the larger context should provide the

substance of the article. Features often require more research than a news article. In addition, the journalist is given more freedom to use colorful language and weighted terminology.

Commentary

The main differences between commentaries and news articles are (1) voice, (2) editorial leeway, and (3) citing sources.

A commentary is a piece written in order to share the opinion of the author. A commentator can write the piece in any voice, and personal opinion, colorful language and weighted terminology are encouraged. However, opinions should be backed up with verifiable fact and all facts in a commentary should be researched. Though not all sources must be cited within the commentary itself, the commentator must be prepared to provide editors with sources to back up all claims made in a commentary.

Media Analysis

The main difference between media analysis pieces and news articles is editorial leeway. Media analysis is written in order to point out trends and biases in media. The analyst may insert opinions into the writing and the writing can include colorful language and weighted terminology. However, the accuracy of the analysis must not be compromised. All quotes from people or media sources must be attributed to their source and must be accurate.

Cartoons

Cartoons are essentially graphical commentaries. Neither humor nor parody is required of them, but typically cartoons will include elements of both. Cartoons should express opinions or skepticism on current events of public relevance. Cartoons need pull no punches, but they should also avoid generalizations and stereotyping, or offensive language/imagery targeting traditionally oppressed groups. When a cartoon is using parody, the parody should be self-evident. Where not using obvious parody, facts and quotations must be accurate.

Photographs

The rules for submitting photographs will be included in the Handbook in the near future.

Part Four: What Content Contributors Can Expect From Editors

Direction

Journalists should expect to consult heavily with editors when developing a story idea. Editors will assist in determining the lead and focus of a story in order to increase the chances that the story will be published by *The NewStandard*.

Proofing Drafts

No less than three editors will review any article. If an editor has made substantive changes to an article, the journalist will, whenever possible, be given an opportunity to review and comment on the changes. Editors are encouraged to be skeptical when reading articles, and in many cases, they may return with questions which require the journalist to consult more sources. They also may send the pre-publication article to consultants or to those who will be critical or biased against its content for review.

Sources

Editors reserve the right to contact any source themselves and will often perform their own fact checking of an article or portions of an article. Journalists should be prepared to provide detailed information (including contact information) about their sources to editors.

Correcting Errors

Any factual published error, regardless of its nature or the means by which editors learn of it, will be corrected in all existing versions of the article. A note at the bottom of the article will state that there has been a correction. Separately, the correction will be prominently shown elsewhere on the site. An editor not involved directly with the error, will review the correction to help ensure its accuracy. Editors will always be receptive to complaints about inaccuracies and follow up on them. Errors in nuance, context or tone will, when appropriate, be corrected with editors' notes. In cases where editors disagree with a reasonable critic about an error, they will give the critic the opportunity write a letter to the editor.

Content Integrity

Editors will respect the thrust and integrity of all submitted items. They will not distort or misrepresent content, nor alter it substantially so as to knowingly or suspectingly change the meaning of an item submitted for publication.

Rigorous Defense

Whenever content contributors have followed these guidelines thoroughly and acted in the public interest, they can expect the editors to steadfastly stand by them in disputes and challenges, legal or otherwise. That is, where journalists have acted honestly and in good faith, editors will return such good faith.

Resources

The editorial collective will be compiling a large database of experts and consultants to serve as resources for journalists and editors. Editors may provide journalists with contact information and instructions for consulting these resources.

Hyperlinks

Editors may add whatever hyperlinks they deem appropriate to the end of an article.

Metadata

All of the descriptive, categorizational and peripheral information about a content item is called “meta data.” Included in this are title, topic, teaser, pullquotes, etc. Editors will always encourage contributors to suggest meta data, but editors reserve the prerogative to make substantial changes to any and all meta data.