

Column Writing



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Signed columns give you the opportunity to speak out.

Personal columns differ from editorials in that they are the opinion of the writer rather than the collective opinion of the newspaper staff. They are signed, or by-lined.

The style can be formal or informal, depending on the subject. The column can focus on any subject--sports, social issues, daily lives, religion, observations. The column should be written so that the reader can "hear" the writer thinking. The columnist's voice should be so powerful that readers can hear the writer talking to them.

What should a column do?

- Highlight creative expression of opinion.
- Reflect the personality of the author.
- Showcase superior writing ability and distinctive style.
- Express the viewpoint of one writer rather than a newspaper. (Any approach--persuasion, praise, explanation, entertainment--can work)
- Build on careful, thorough reporting that incorporates purposeful interviews and documented observations.
- Focus on a subject that appeals to many readers.
- Present new insights in a lively manner that shows the writer's conviction.
- Provide commentary that stimulates readers to think, to evaluate, to act, and to see everyday life from a new perspective ranging from the serious to the humorous.
- Use an original title that defines the slant or the type of content. Good titles often play on the writer's name or reflect the writer's skills. Also the "live" headlines must follow appropriate styles. Bylines are essential, and photos of the writer are appropriate.
- Appear regularly in a newspaper on the same page.
- To establish an appropriate identity and to distinguish the column from other articles, the column title should use typography and graphics to complement the publication design. A column, however, should never be confused with a regular feature in the paper.

How should a column be written?

- A simple way is to follow the pattern of the editorial.
- A better way is to make the viewpoint come alive by showing rather than telling. Use colorful nouns and action verbs.
- The issue, not the writer or the writer's experiences, should be the focal point of the column.
- The message of the columnist dictates the form of the writing.
- First person is permissible but not required--and always it should be used in a subdued manner.
- Rather than argue a specific viewpoint, often a column achieves a more powerful effect by using a creative style, such as the following:

Narrative story	Fictional dialogue	Witty comment	Critical Review
Editorial slant	Any freeform structure that fits subject		

- A column contains a consistent tone, such as the following:

Thoughtful (stimulating)	Analytical (serious)	Conversational	Confidential
Reportorial	Critical	Satirical	