



# Silica Magazine

Editorial Guidelines, Jan 2016

**A Handbook for Journalistic Contributions**

## I. Thematics

- Write in clear, accurate, and concise language. Avoid passive voice whenever possible. Keep things punchy and driven by actions rather than narratives. **Show rather than tell.**
- Objective voice is strongly preferred (*i.e. never directly state what's 'good' and 'bad' in a piece*). Let readers draw their own conclusions about the topic with facts, not opinions.
- Keep all stories consistent with each issue's main “theme” (*i.e. 'The Lake Issue'*) While interpretations don't necessarily have to be direct, they should relate at least conceptually.
- A sense of “**skeptical discovery**” should be at the heart of every story. A play on the National Geographic vibe, but more jaded, less “lively.” Keep an eye out for idiosyncrasies and ironies when reporting your piece.
- Avoid, when possible, first-person perspective/voice. (*For exceptions, notify our editor-in-chief*).
- Avoid corny colloquialisms, cliches, any/all slurs, and curse words.
- All stories should fit into one of the following categories/ideas: Geography, science, meteorology, art, technology, networks, industry, global systems, civil engineering, ecology, conservation, environment, nature, and intersections of any of the above.
- Try to stay away from covering topics that are too ‘mainstream’ or are major tourism destinations. Think in the mentality of “*A travel magazine for the environmental apocalypse.*”

## Silica Magazine Guidelines for Contribution

– Features should generally be focused in scope; we do not cover broadly defined ideas, countries or natural phenomena. Use microcosms to represent broader macrocosms.

## II. Format and Style

Please restrict each pitch submission to one or two focused, concise and well-developed proposals. A good pitch contains a potential headline/main theme, and no more than a page that sets out the premise and approach of the piece.

Most main journalistic features should run from 1,500 to 2,500 words. Supplemental or secondary pieces should run from 750 to 1,000 words. Any longer or shorter pieces should be OKed and discussed directly with the Silica editorial staff.

Photo/art series should also include an introduction of 250 to 500 words, as background for editors to contextualize the piece. Whether or not these words are actually published is at the discretion of the Silica editorial staff.

Report units in the Metric System.

Silica uses **AP Style**. Consult **AP Stylebook** for style guidelines/questions.

## III. Newsgathering

Obey the law while gathering news, conducting interviews, taking photographs or other journalistic functions. *i.e. no illegal eavesdropping, bribery, computer hacking, stealing documents, etc.*

## **Silica Magazine Guidelines for Contribution**

When reporting, identify yourself and your affiliation with Silica Mag promptly. Any exceptions, such as overheard conversations or witnessing an event, should be explained to the reader in your story. This applies to online conversations as well.

On occasions where you must hide your identity to obtain a story, confirm with Silica Mag's editor-in-chief first. However, never lie about your identity as a journalist if/when confronted.

If you trespass during your newsgathering, disclose all violations to your editor. If you are caught trespassing, never implicate Silica Magazine as mandating, recommending, or allowing trespassing for your reporting.

All parties in recorded conversations must be informed they are being recorded.

Always maintain promises to protect a source's identity. Never promise favorable or positive treatment to a source.

## **IV. Sourcing**

Always verify your sources. This is especially important in the case of social media/online sources, anonymous tips, personal anecdotes from 'friends of friends.' If you cannot verify the provenance of your material, we can't publish it.

Rely, whenever possible, on fully identified, named sources.

When using anonymous sources, it is preferable to paraphrase quotes rather than quote directly. Never take quotes from an anonymous source that defame, accuse or make otherwise critical statements about other individuals.

Every unnamed source must still be made known to at least one of Silica's editors.

## V. Disclosure and Publication

Avoid any appearance of conflict-of-interest: *i.e. a reporter's girlfriend or spouse works for an oil company should not write about the oil business.* In rare exceptions, clearly state your relationships or affiliations to the reader.

If a subject denies any allegation made in your story, their denial must be noted upon publication.

A group under attack may refuse to offer its point of view on the topic, but a reporter must make every possible attempt to get the other side of the story.

Any information taken from another news organization must be credited to the original source.

A journalist is generally free to synthesize the underlying news and facts from other news reports, as long as he or she rewrites the facts in his or her own style and does not appropriate the wording of another reporter.

Secure all latest-available statistics and numbers for your stories. If possible, cite the date/year that all research took place. All sets of figures used in a story will be double- and triple-checked for consistency.

In terms of quoting other's work without their permission, follow these general guidelines: three or four lines of the average-length song, 250 words of the average-length book, and 20 to 30 words from the average-length newspaper column as permissible under the fair use doctrine.

## **Silica Magazine Guidelines for Contribution**

Passing off another person's work (or even part of their work) is plagiarism. We will not publish it and will not ask you to write for Silica ever again if you do it.

Fact-check every story, including names, dates, ages, places, statistics. Nothing should ever be assumed. Take the attitude that every fact could be wrong. Be wary of using public relations departments as your only source to verify a fact.

Quotes should be accurate. If edited or cut, there should be no alteration in meaning or context. Grammar and spelling may be corrected, as long as it does not alter the reader's sense of the person being quoted. If quotes contain facts within them, check them. When incorrect, do not alter the quote, but note the discrepancy in your story.

All heads, captions, pull quotes, text-as-artwork, etc. should be given the same factual considerations as all the story.

## **V. Photography and Illustration**

Media must be obtained legally (*see Newsgathering section*), and subjects should know they are being photographed unless in rare instances.

Standard practices about rights, permissions and "fair use" apply to all images used. If you're unsure about using a certain image, consult with our design team.

## **VI. Corrections**

As soon as a challenge to your story is sent, notify all editors. Errors should be corrected promptly in text and online, and with an accompanying note indicating that the story has been corrected.

Generally, we will not “unpost” or delete articles or photos.

## VII. Legal Considerations

### LIBEL

*Libel* is generally defined as “a statement in writing concerning any person which exposes him to hatred, ridicule or contempt, or which causes him to be shunned or avoided, or which has a tendency to injure him in his office, profession or trade” and in ALL instances – is false.

Libel can not only occur through written word, but through combinations of headlines, photos, captions, or illustrations if reasonable that a reader would conclude a defamatory (and false) accusation was being advanced.

Statements applying to a large and indeterminate class of persons may not be defamatory because they are held not to be applicable to any single individual.

Under U.S. law, a dead person cannot be libeled.

Reviews of artistic works such as paintings, photographs, literature, plays, motion pictures and the like may be privileged from libel suits as long as the statements are restricted to the aesthetics of the work presented.

## **PERMISSION**

Journalists do not have a special privilege to trespass into a person's home, office, club, hospital room or similar zone of privacy, even in the pursuit of news. As a general rule, access to these areas is by permission only.

Be particularly careful when photographing or interviewing children.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

Play fair, do your homework, and work together with your editors to make Silica a reliable and ethical media outlet.



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Silica Magazine, ARR 2016

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