

Clamor

THE PROCESS:

WHAT TO EXPECT

1. Email us (politics@clamormagazine.org) a paragraph or two explaining your idea, your angle, how you will go about reporting it, who you will talk to, and any other information you think is important. If you are submitting a piece you have already written, please let us know if it (or part of it) has been published elsewhere.
2. We will let you know as soon as possible whether your idea is a good fit for Clamor, and how you should proceed from there.
3. If we accept your pitch, we will start working together to produce an article readers will enjoy. See "What We Want" for reporting and writing guidelines.
4. Throughout this process, suggestions and edits will be made. All articles will be edited. This is meant to be a collaborative effort. We want you to be a part of the editing process so that the final article is something we're all happy with. However, it is important to keep the reader in mind above all other considerations.
5. During the editing process, we may ask you to conduct additional interviews or additional reporting to clarify points or get a different perspective. It is important to stay in contact with us throughout this process. Please check your email regularly, and provide a phone number where you can be reached.
6. Once the article is complete, feel free to suggest headlines, photos or graphics. We cannot guarantee your ideas will be used, but they will be taken into consideration.
7. Clamor will contact you to discuss payment, writer's bios, and other technical details. If you have any questions about these matters, please email either Jen Angel (jen@clamormagazine.org) or Jason Kucsma (jason@clamormagazine.org).
8. If at any point in the process, you have any questions or concerns, please let us know right away. Regular communication is essential!

—*Madeleine Baran and Amanda Luker,*
Politics editors, Clamor magazine

WHAT WE WANT

This document is meant only as a set of general guidelines to steer writers in the right direction. It is not a comprehensive lesson in how to write well. If anything is unclear, please contact us (politics@clamormagazine.org) for clarification.

- We are generally looking for 500-2,000 word feature articles, though we do make exceptions.
- We are primarily interested in feature articles. Your article will be more likely to be printed if it is not op/ed.

GUIDELINES

Choosing a story

- Use specific, small examples to illustrate a larger point. Cover a strike as opposed to the labor movement. Cover a local movement to tear down a freeway instead of writing a general article on transportation problems in the United States. Cover something local to illustrate a national or international trend.
- Disclose any personal connections to the issue you're covering to the editors right away.

Choosing an angle

- Make sure your angle is not too time-sensitive. Imagine how your article will look to readers four months from now, when it appears on newsstands.
- Have a brainstorming session. Who are the key players? Who is affected? Try to think of as many sides as possible.
- Look at how other papers and magazines have covered your topic. How will your approach be fresh and different?

Reporting, Interviewing and Quoting

- Don't go into reporting with your mind completely made up. Be open to the facts and to people's experiences. If you aren't, you might miss the main story.
- Put the news in human terms. Tell people's stories instead of just summarizing the impact of an event.
- Avoid email interviews. Conduct interviews in person whenever possible. This will add details and color to your story.
- Talk to lots of different people. Talk to lots of people you don't agree with.
- Listen to the people you're interviewing. Let them talk. At the end, ask if there's anything you forgot to ask or they would like to add.
- Don't contact the opposing side or sides as an afterthought. Interview them in-depth and take their opinions seriously. For example, if you are writing an expose on the beef industry, contact beef farmers and industry reps right away, and interview them extensively throughout the process.
- It is a good idea to keep the contact information handy for all the people you interview so you can follow up with them as necessary.
- Avoid jargon. If someone you're interviewing uses a term you do not understand, ask him or her what it means, and include that explanation in the article. Put complicated terms into simple words everyone can understand.
- Don't use overly academic sources. Prioritize talking to people over quoting from books. If you are going to use an academic source, it is usually better to interview the author, if possible.
- Don't use quotes that could be better expressed by paraphrasing. Only quote when you would lose something by paraphrasing. For example, facts can usually be paraphrased. Mood often cannot.
- If you quote people or groups that the reader may not know, identify them.

Content

- Avoid over-simplifying. The best writing will clearly convey the complexity of an issue.
- We're not interested in one-sided accounts. The reader should have access to all the information and be able to make his or her decision. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- Don't get your quotes from other articles.
- Situate your topic within a historical context. Local historians, professors and authors are good sources for historical background. This does not have to be extensive. A short paragraph or two can usually do it.
- Don't rely solely on the internet to do your research. Although it can be a useful tool for locating people to interview and getting some background, never assume that anything on the internet is correct. Always fact-check internet information with one or more human sources. Try to avoid overly-referencing web sites.
- Don't include personal information except when relevant.

Style

- Your lead should attract the reader's attention. Try an anecdote, a strong quote or an arresting image.
- Immediately follow your lead with the main point and why the reader should care.
- We prefer articles not be in first person unless there is a compelling reason to do so.
- Look at how other journalists structure their articles to see what works and what doesn't.
- Don't use footnotes. All sources should be mentioned in the text itself. [For example, "According to presidential candidate Howard Dean's web site..."]
- Don't use passive voice. [For example, don't write, "The resolution was passed." Write, "Congress passed the resolution."] Things don't just happen. Someone does them.
- Vary sentence length.
- Except in extenuating circumstances, saying "said" is usually the best option. [Avoid overly literary choices like quipped, scoffed or boasted.]
- Put the article in the past tense. Stay consistent with your tense throughout the article.
- Avoid clichés.
- Don't use overly-complicated language. It will only distract and confuse readers.
- Write tightly. Take out extra words and avoid redundancy and wordiness.
- Read your article outloud. Does it make sense? Does it flow?

Accuracy and Clarity

- Demystify statistics. Make the statistic something the reader can relate to and understand. For example, don't say a bus driver drives 50 miles a day or 45,000 miles a year; say he drives the equivalent of driving across America twice. Don't say a ranch is 26,000 acres; say it is the size of Manhattan. If you don't understand a statistic, ask several experts to clarify it for you.
- Check all your facts with as many sources as possible. Do not assume that any one person or group is giving you the whole story, or even an accurate one.
- Assume that a variety of people with differing levels of knowledge about your topic will read your article. Does everything make sense? Is everything clear?
- Include ways the reader can find out more information or get involved, when appropriate.
- Have other people read your article (friends, family members, co-workers), and give you feedback. Does everything make sense to them? Does the article catch their attention?