A Guide to Posting on NeighborMedia

Professionalism and journalistic best practices provide a citizen journalist credibility. Below are a series of considerations to make related to the research, writing, and publishing of your stories, ideally strengthening your work. In addition to writing, please consider how these guidelines might also benefit your work with other types of media.

THE STORY

Framing the Story

Consider your topic
What do you want to write about?
What unique angle can you add to the story?

Audience
Who is your audience?

Reporting
What else has been said on this subject? Get background info.
Do you want to interview a subject?
Do you want to set up an appointment ahead of time or approach someone for an interview on the spot?
Write questions ahead of time, give to your subject if you feel comfortable.
Where will your find sources for your story?

Writing the Story

Save Early and Often!
Always write your story in another program before publishing it. Save early and often. That way, if your Internet connection is disrupted you will not lose your work.

Point of View
Consider from what perspective you are writing. Is this an opinion piece in which your testimony is important? Or is it more based on other peoples' experiences and testimony? The perspective in which you write will influence the tone of your story and your reader's reaction to it.

Writing in Third-Person Perspective
In traditional journalism, a reporter's testimony is not typically an important part of the story. It is your job to talk to other people and collect information from them. These people are called witnesses or sources.

Writing In First-Person Perspective
It is good practice to use third-person perspective whenever possible. If you see something that no one else saw, first person words like **me**, **I**, **mine**, **us**, **our**, etc. might be appropriate.

Writing Good Headlines

Headlines should:

- Be short & concise.
- Be descriptive.
- Consider your target audience and how your headline will grab their attention.
- Be about 50 characters (including spaces).
- Only capitalize words when appropriate.
- Intrigue your audience when appropriate.

Writing a Good Lede

A lede is the first one to two sentences of your story. If done well, this is what pulls a reader into your story.

Some things to keep in mind:

- Keep it short and concise
- What's the story about?
- Highlight what makes your story different from others on the topic.

The Body of your Post

Before publishing a story, have you:

- Printed and read your story aloud for clarity?
- Checked the number of words in your story? A good rule of thumb is to keep stories under 600 words. Make every word count.
- Considered using bullet points or headings to break up the body of your post?
- Asked a trusted person to proofread your story?
- Spell and grammar checked your story?

Just the Facts

Sources, Credibility & Fact Checking

Your journalistic credibility rests in the accuracy of your facts. Whenever possible, try to get multiple sources for facts stated in your stories.

Always cite your sources. This makes your writing more trustworthy to the audience.

Individual Sources: Consider your source's credibility and authority on the subject. Copying and pasting verbatim a quote or short amount of text *can* be ok if you use quotation marks AND cite your source (name and position) AND provide a link to the original source (if not original reporting).

Web Sources: It *can* be ok to use content from another website if you add something of value to their original content and you credit the original source by naming and providing links to it.

You may also want to add links to or mention sources that influenced or informed the

content of your story.

Accuracy
Take the time to thoroughly research and report a story.
Seek first hand sources to validate information.
Consider the source of your information. Is it trustworthy?

Fairness
Are you fairly representing the facts?
Provide a variety of viewpoints for a story when appropriate.

Transparency/Disclosure
Traditional journalism places high value on negating a journalist's potential conflicts of interest. Because NeighborMedia reporters are based in the community and approach reporting as a citizen, there may be times when you feel very strongly about a subject and may have some personal connection or interest in a story. To maintain your credibility, it is a good idea to disclose any personal connection you may have to a story. This can be within the story itself or a short disclaimer at the bottom of the story. The audience will appreciate your honesty and the context you provide for your reporting of a story.

Graphics

The Internet is a visual medium, how can you use visuals can tell your story? Are there types of graphics other than photos that could help illustrate your story?

PUBLISHING YOUR STORY

Formatting & HTML

- If you want to add italics, bolding, links, additional photos, videos, etc. to your story you must do so using HTML. (See appendix for html tips).
- Be careful when writing your story in Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word adds characters that can break HTML code.
- Before publishing a story, copy and paste the text of your post into a "plain text" program like Mac's TextEdit or Windows' Notebook. Then copy and paste the "plain text" version of your story into your blog post.

Distribution

Consider the best way to reach your audience. NeighborMedia.org will be the first place you publish most stories, but where else might you distribute it?

Here are some other places to consider:
Email - Is there an email list serve in your community? Do you have friends who might like to read the story? Would the subject be interested in reading the story?

TV - Any video you create should go onto CCTV's channels. All you need to do is

submit a DVD with the program and fill out a "Cablecast Agreement" form. Are there other ways to put your stories onto CCTV's Channels?

Social Media - Are platforms like Twitter.com or Facebook.com good outlets for your work? How might you maximize those outlets?

Other Media - Might other local outlets be interested in your story? Could your perspective inform their reporting on the topic?

THE NEIGHBORMEDIA & CCTV COMMUNITIES

NeighborMedia is one of the many ways individuals can participate in CCTV. Here are some opportunities to connect with other people and programs at CCTV and some best practices for representing yourself in the public eye.

Collaborations

CCTV has a very active community of members and producers, who may be eager to collaborate with you in some way. If you would like to collaborate, here are some helpful resources for you:

Production Opportunties eblast: Once each week (usually Mondays), CCTV Staff sends an email listing requests and offers for production assistance to some 300 producers. If you would like to include a request or offer, please email a brief description of what you are looking for to the NeighborMedia Coordinator.

Ask around in a class: People are usually eager to work on projects, talk with others to see if your interests and skills are a good fit.

Ask other NeighborMedia correspondents: Usually others are eager to help or may have ideas for you. You can email the NeighborMedia Google Group, ask at a NeighborMedia meeting, or ask the NeighborMedia Coordinator to help connect you with others.

Representation

When you are reporting in the community, it is important to consider how you publicly represent yourself.

As a free-speech platform, CCTV provides access to a variety of voices and viewpoints, without preferential treatment to certain types of content. To preserve this neutrality, you should represent yourself as a NeighborMedia correspondent – not as

a staff member of CCTV – and appropriately represent CCTV in the public eye.

How to represent yourself:
 I am a citizen journalist with NeighborMedia, a program at CCTV.

How not to represent yourself:
 I'm with CCTV.
 I work at CCTV.

Other resources
http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles
http://therapidian.org/tips
http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/69328/the-11-layers-of-citizen-journalism/
http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/
http://www.lawrence.com/
http://oaklandlocal.com/
http://globalvoicesonline.org/
http://citmedia.org/blog/
http://pressthink.org/
http://www.j-newvoices.org/
http://www.learner.org/resources/series44.html?pop=yes&pid=522