

***Heights Observer* Style Guide**

(September 18, 2012)

The *Heights Observer* is a citizen-based news source published monthly by FutureHeights, a nonprofit organization dedicated to civic engagement and quality of life in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights community.

We welcome all those who wish to submit news and information. We ask that all participants abide by the terms and conditions set forth below, as well as the style conventions we adhere to at the newspaper.

The term *style* refers to the rules we follow for consistency of capitalization, alternate spellings, abbreviations, and other textual elements. There are many possible ways to do these things. We have chosen to follow Associated Press style. You may see things done differently in other publications. They are not wrong; they are simply using different style rules.

It is important for both writers and editors to follow the same style rules. It makes everyone's job easier. Read this guide carefully, in its entirety, before beginning your work. Please note that the word list at the end of this guide is updated regularly. Feel free to suggest additions to the list.

General Information

The *Heights Observer* publishes several types of stories: news, opinion, features, announcements for upcoming events, and letters to the editor. Decide which type of story you are writing, then stay within prescribed word limits:

- 400–600 words maximum for a news item or feature story (stories that profile a person or explore a particular subject, rather than breaking news)
- 220 words maximum for the announcement of an upcoming event or a letter to the editor

Be as succinct as possible. For both PC and MAC users, determine your word count by clicking on “Tools” and then “Word Count” on the drop-down menu.

Opinion Keep your opinion out of the story. You may quote the opinion of others, but be sure to attribute those views or quotations to a specific person. On the other hand, if you are writing to express your opinion, submit your article as a Letter to the Editor or an opinion piece. (See drop-down menu under Category.)

Hyper-Local Remember that the *Heights Observer* is hyper-local. Identify the local perspective of this story. Consider interviewing a local resident, store owner or prominent citizen, or show how a national or regional story affects people living and working in the Heights.

Original Writers should submit their own work, cite their sources and provide resources for more information (phone numbers, websites, e-mail addresses).

Bias Avoid! Be fair, accurate and civil. This encourages open conversation about issues and builds community.

Events When writing about forthcoming events, be sure to include name of the event, as well as the date, place, and time of the event. Avoid “hying” the event with over-the-top adjectives in the description.

Editing All stories will be edited and the editor may contact the writer directly for further information or to clarify aspects of the story.

Press releases: A press release may be news, but it is not an article. To be published in the newspaper, a press release should be rewritten as a straight and unbiased news item—without the hype and in accordance with this style guide.

The *Heights Observer* print edition has limited space. For that reason, some submissions may be published online only—on the *Heights Observer* website or the weekly e-news.

Photos Include a high-resolution (min. 350KB) photo, if possible. Photos should include a suggested caption and photo credit. Please be sure you have permission to use it.

Deadlines Keep your promises and communicate. Pay attention to deadlines and communicate as soon as you know when you can’t meet one. For a list of writer and editorial deadlines, go to www.heightsobserver.org and click on “Become an Observer.” On the next page, click on “monthly deadlines” (highlighted in green). Meeting these deadlines gives you a better chance of seeing your story in print. The publisher, however, reserves the right to not publish a story. A late story may be held for the next issue or posted online.

Legality Watch out for legal issues. Do not allow anything in the story that may damage a person’s reputation. Be very careful about this! If you’re editing a story about a crime, or alleged crime, do not convict someone in print. Presume innocence and avoid any implication of a suspect’s guilt. If you are uncertain about something in the story, contact the FutureHeights office for clarification.

Fact check Obtain all the information you need to ensure the story is accurate and complete. Use the Internet (with caution), documents (as needed), and the telephone.

Internet use Check everything you can quickly, such as whether an organization still exists or whether online information about a person or organization makes what he or she says or does

less than credible. For example, if the story's main subject was arrested for embezzlement recently, and our story writes in glowing terms about his accounting practice, we will end up looking stupid. Be cautious about what you see online—many things are not true! Stick to valid sources. Wikipedia is a good place to start, but verify its content and do not cite it in articles.

If a source is unclear in a Google search, examine the URL for clues to the source of the information and follow up to be sure it's credible. URLs ending in *.edu* and *.gov* can be considered reliable.

Corporate websites If a company is mentioned in a story, go to its official website to check names. Sometimes you will even find a relevant press release posted, along with contact information. Check the Newsroom or Media tab. Do Google searches for all names mentioned in the story, and find any other stories that have been written about the subject, issue or people involved. Find the most recent ones to ensure that your story focuses on something new or different.

Notes Writers should keep their notes and paperwork, not just until the story is published, but until all possible reaction to the story has come in from readers and people mentioned in the story.

Register The *Heights Observer* is written and edited by people like you—mostly nonprofessional writers and community boosters interested in promoting the news and features of living in the Heights.

To write or edit for the newspaper, you must first register. To register, go to www.heightsoverserver.org. Click on “BECOME AN OBSERVER” at the left side of the page. Then click on “MEMBER CENTER” and follow the prompts.

Include a sentence or two about who you are and where you live for the author bio that will appear at the end of your article.

Editors will receive an e-mail with their assignment(s). Editors should then log in to the MEMBER CENTER to find their assigned article(s).

Grammar and Usage for Writers and Editors

- Use short sentences and active voice. Instead of “The article was submitted by Jane.” write “Jane submitted the article.”
- Vary the sentence structure. Use some simple declarative sentences and some compound sentences. Begin some sentences with an introductory clause. For example, “Before coming to the CH-UH district, Heuer taught math in Atlanta. . .” Avoid beginning each sentence with an attribution (He said this. She said that.)

- Omit needless words. “In spite of the fact that . . .” should be “Because . . .”
- Keep related words together. “She only made one pie” should be “She made only one pie.”
- Put statements in positive form. “He was not often on time” should be “He was usually late.”
- Avoid repetition of words or phrases. English is a rich language and the thesaurus is your friend.
- Do not assume the reader knows who or what you’re writing about. Identify people, places and organizations. For clarity, identify the person after you name him. For example, “Mike Cicero, CH-UH school board member . . .” or “FurtureHeights, the nonprofit organization that . . .”
- Distinguish between *citizens* and *residents*. Not all residents are citizens.
- Distinguish between *allow* and *enable*. Use *allow* when permission is involved; use *enable* when you mean “facilitate.”
- Distinguish among *assure*, *insure*, and *ensure*. Use *assure* when you mean “make promises or convince,” *insure* in financial contexts, and *ensure* to mean “makes certain.”
- Distinguish between *who* and *that*. Use *who* when referring to people (“The councilman who voted against . . .”); use *that* when referring to animals, organizations or things (“The dog that ate my homework” or “The grassroots organization that began the campaign . . .”).
- Avoid *like* when giving examples; *such as* is preferred.
- Avoid euphemisms, such as “passed away” for someone who has “died.”
- Avoid the phrase *a number of*. Try to be more specific: use an actual number or *a few*, *several*, *some*, *many*, *most*.
- Avoid *over*, as in “Over 120 people attended . . .” “More than 120 people attended . . .” is preferred.
- Distinguish between *since* and *because*. *Since* implies the passage of time; *because* means “for that reason.”
- Avoid beginning a sentence with a conjunction, such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *however*, *so* or *yet*.
- Use only one space after a period, NOT two.

- When using the personal pronouns *he* and *she*, be sure that it is clear to the reader to whom these pronouns refer.
- Watch for agreement problems with singular and plural nouns, verbs and pronouns. Agreement means that a singular subject takes a singular verb, and a singular noun needs a singular pronoun referring back to it later on.
- Does every sentence have a subject and verb? Do they agree? Does every pronoun agree with its antecedent?
- Attribution: Is it clear who is speaking? If not, make it so.
- Create a suggested headline, select a “Category” from the drop-down menu, and indicate if your story is time-sensitive.
- Proofread your article before submitting it.

Punctuation and spacing for writers and editors

- Do quotation marks open and close properly? Does each quote end with a period, comma or question mark, where appropriate, before the quotes close? Place semicolons after the close quotes.
- Check the commas in lists—there should be no comma before the final “and” or “or” unless it is needed to avoid confusion.
- Dashes and hyphens: There are three types of dashes: em-dash (long dash), en-dash, and hyphen. Use an em-dash to indicate a break in a sentence. Use an en-dash to indicate a range between two numbers. To make em-dashes and en-dashes, go to Insert, then Symbol, and click on special characters. Use hyphens for compound words and names.
- If a subordinate clause begins with a comma or em-dash, it should end with one, unless the sentence ends with the clause.
- Distinguish between *its* and *it’s*. Use the apostrophe for the contraction of “it is.” Please check for this, it’s a common error.
- Pluralize years using an “s” and no apostrophe: e.g. *The music was great in the 1980s*.
- Prefixes: In general, do not use a hyphen when the base word begins with a consonant (e.g. predate, retell). Use a hyphen when the prefix ends with a vowel and the base word begins with the same vowel (e.g. re-elect, pre-existing,). Use a hyphen when forming nouns and verbs that indicate occupation or status, e.g. *co-sponsor, co-chair, co-sign*; but no hyphen for *coed, cooperate, coordinate*. NOTE: There are many exceptions to these rules, such as the

difference in meaning between *recreation* and *re-creation*, *recover* and *re-cover*. When in doubt, use the first-listed spelling in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

Style for writers and editors

Corporate names Do not use a comma before *Inc.* or *Ltd.*, even if it is included in the company's formal name.

Organization names Spell entire name at first reference with acronym in parentheses, use acronym for subsequent references, e.g. Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC). See word list for specific examples.

Local government departments List full name when first mentioned; for example *the Department of Development and Planning*. Phrases such as *the department* or *Development and Planning* are preferable for subsequent references.

Academic departments Use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: *the department of history*, *the English department*. Use caps for the official and formal name, *Cleveland State University Department of Urban Affairs*.

Proper nouns Proper nouns take a capital letter—people, names of businesses, places, songs, book titles, etc. Check every proper noun for spelling, capitalization and wording, using the Internet, phonebooks, whatever you can find. Be obsessive about names and titles, first, because it matters to the folks you're writing about, but also because readers who spot mistakes in these simple things suspect sloppiness in other aspects of the publication.

Foreign terms Foreign words that are universally known and appear in the dictionary, such as *bon voyage* and *ad hoc* should appear in Roman type. Foreign words that are NOT universally known and are NOT in the dictionary should be in *italics* the first time they are used in the story and in Roman for subsequent usages.

People (general) Use a person's full name on first mention—no courtesy titles, such as Mr. or Ms. Use Dr. for a physician only, and only on first reference. On subsequent references, use only the person's surname. Avoid using first names alone, except for children 15 and under.

When dealing with family members who have the same surname, use both names (first and last) on first mention. If the article continues to reference both individuals, use first names to avoid confusion. Sometimes children can be called by their first names alone, but that depends on the nature of the story. Features stories, for example, are less formal than news stories.

People (titles) References to the president or other officials without his or her name are not capitalized. References to officials with the person's name are capitalized. So you would write "the mayor of Cleveland" or "Mayor Frank Jackson." The preferred *Heights Observer* style is to

use the person's name first, then his or her title lowercased, as in "Frank Jackson, the mayor of Cleveland."

Be sure that everyone has been properly introduced. A title, place of residence or occupation helps identify people. Capitalize titles only when they come directly before the name, and even then, only titles that "denote a scope of authority" e.g. political or religious. Abbreviate the following titles: Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Sen., and Rep.

Titles of works Use italics for the titles of newspapers, magazines, books and websites. Put quotation marks around titles of movies, music albums and songs, operas, plays, radio and TV programs, computer games, lectures, speeches and works of art. Exceptions: the Bible and reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks. Avoid quotation marks when referring to software, such as MS Word or WordPerfect.

Numbers Check the math, always! Calculate it yourself. Check source material to ensure that numbers were copied correctly. Think carefully about whether the numbers make sense (million and billion are sometimes confused).

- Numbers under 10 are spelled. Use numerals for numbers 10 and above.
- A number at the beginning of a sentence is always spelled. Rework the sentence if it's an unwieldy number.
- For numbers of 1 million or higher, use the word "million" instead of zeros: e.g. 1 million, 2.5 million. Do not include a hyphen, even if the number is adjectival e.g. the \$2 trillion rescue plan.
- For money, use \$1, \$100, or \$5 million, but 1 cent, 5 cents, 25 cents for amounts less than \$1. When writing about both dollars and cents, use decimals, e.g. \$1.50, \$3.98, etc.
- The word *percent* should be spelled; do not use %. Use numerals for percents and percentages, e.g. 3 percent, 12–15 percent, 4 percentage points.

Addresses If the address has a number in it, abbreviate St., Ave. or Blvd., but not Road, Circle, or others. If there is no number, spell out even the abbreviated ones: e.g. Pennsylvania Avenue.

If more than one street, road or avenue is mentioned, without the number, use lowercase. For example: corner of Lamberton and Coleridge roads.

State abbreviations Eight state names are not abbreviated. These are Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah. For all others, use traditional abbreviations, NOT the two-letter postal codes. Examples: Pa. (Pennsylvania); N.Y. (New York); Mich. (Michigan).

Telephone numbers The preferred format for telephone numbers is hyphens between the area code and the exchange, and between the exchange and the last four digits, as in 216-320-1423.

Days and dates Do not abbreviate days of the week. The style is Monday, Jan. 1. Abbreviate all months, except March, April, May, June and July. Do not use 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th. Use the year only if it is not within the past 12 months or the current calendar year, or avoid confusion. For a

range of years, it is acceptable to indicate only the parts that change. For example, 1995–7 or 1998–2003.

Time of day Use numerals to express hours and minutes, followed by a.m. or p.m. (lowercase with periods). Examples: 9 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

For time ranges: If both are in the morning or both in the evening, use an en-dash, as in 10–11:30 a.m. or 7–9 p.m. If one is in the morning and the other in the afternoon, use the word *to*, as in 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. or noon to 4 p.m.

Final Checklist for Editors

The editor is just as important as the writer in producing a story fit for publication. Once the story is assigned to you for editing, you are responsible for its accuracy, clarity and style.

Procedure

- Make a copy of the original story and save it in a separate file. Do this in case you change something and need to refer to the original or (heaven forbid!) there are problems after it's published.
- Read through the story to absorb the essence of the piece. Do not contact the writer with questions, or rephrase sentences, until you have read the entire story. If you need to contact the writer, send an e-mail. If you do not receive a timely response, contact the FutureHeights office.
- If you change a story in any significant way, particularly the lead-in or the focus, e-mail the story to the writer, giving the him or her an opportunity to react. Do this in case the editing has introduced an error into the story, which can sometimes happen. In addition, be sensitive to the reporter's feelings; most of our writers are not professionals. Criticism is particularly hard on novice writers.
- Edit for grammar and style. Refer to previous sections and the word list, as needed. Look for sentence structure and clarity: does each sentence express its thought in the best possible way? Remove needless words first, before changing the writer's way of expressing things. Do not change things unnecessarily, but do make them clear, succinct and grammatically correct, especially in news stories. Features may be written more creatively and that creativity should be retained if it's clear and makes sense.
- If there are significant holes in the story ask the writer, who should have answers. If the writer does not have answers, you can ask him or her to get them. If the writer is uncooperative, talk with the publisher or the editor-in-chief about this. She should be made aware of the situation, and may be able to help. You should not be phoning the writer's sources directly unless you have at least tried to get hold of the writer first.

- To ensure objectivity, check the writer’s name for any relationship to the people in the story. If the writer is the subject’s relative or employee, for example, that fact needs to be noted in the short bio of the writer, in italics, at the end of the story. We must be open and honest about any possible or perceived bias. Sometimes our writers are unaware of this and fail to include the information.
- Examine the content, sequencing and clarity of the story. Do things make sense? Does the lead paragraph express the story’s contents in the best possible way? Are there holes in the story—things left out or major questions unanswered? Is the sequencing as good as it can be? Are paragraphs broken up appropriately and does the writing flow?
- Every article undergoes a final edit by the publisher, editor-in-chief and copy editor before publication. Articles that you edited may be cut for space reasons or re-edited for clarity or to bring it into compliance with *Heights Observer* style.

Word List

area use a more specific term, such as neighborhood, region, city, Northeast Ohio

African American (noun)

African-American (adj.)

affect (to influence or change); effect (result)

among (for more than two); between (for two)

antisocial

can (ability); may (permission)

babysit, babysitter, babysitting, babysat

bylaw

caregiver, caregiving

Case Western Reserve University (CWRU)

Cedar Lee (no hyphen)

Cedar Fairmount (no hyphen)

cell phone (two words)

City of Cleveland Heights

Cleveland Heights City Council (for first reference; council for subsequent references)

Cleveland Heights City Hall (for first reference; city hall for subsequent references)

Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District (spell out for first reference; CH-UH School District or the district for subsequent references)

Cleveland Heights High School (for first reference; Heights High for subsequent references)

Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library (official title, use only if space permits; see Heights Libraries)

Cleveland State University (CSU)

Civil Rights Movement; but, *civil rights* when writing about personal liberties in general

citywide

clean up (verb); cleanup (noun and adjective)

co-captain

co-chair

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

comprise, the whole *comprises* the parts, as in “The book *comprises* three sections.” The phrase “is comprised of . . .” is never correct.

continual (frequently occurring; intermittent)

continuous (occurring without interruption)

co-op

cost-effective

council members (on Cleveland Heights board)

councilmen, councilwomen (on University Heights board)

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (with ampersand)

database

daylong

day-to-day

different from; NOT different than

Dugway Brook Watershed

east side of Cleveland (but Cleveland’s East Side, Cleveland’s West Side)

e-book

e-mail

e-news; e-newsletter

entry-level

face to face

far-reaching

farther (refers to actual distance); further (indicates something added)

fewer (smaller in number); less (smaller in size)

firefighter

firsthand

flulike

full-service (adj.)

full time (amount of time); full-time employee

fundraiser, fundraising

FutureHeights (no space between Future and Heights)

Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

handheld

health care

Heights Arts

Heights Community Congress (HCC)

Heights Rockefeller Building (corner Mayfield and Lee roads; managed by Rockefeller Center Management)

Heights Youth Center (HYC)

Heights Libraries (individual branches are Lee Road Library, Coventry Village Library, Noble Neighborhood Library, and University Heights Library)

Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC)

John Carroll University (JCU)

lay (takes a direct object: lay the book on the table); lie (indicates a state of reclining along a horizontal plane)

lifelong

lifestyle

Noble Neighborhood Library

Northeast Ohio

land line

long-lasting

long-term

longtime

nonprofit

online (adv. or adj.)

on-site (adv. or adj.)

open mike

out-migration

out-of-date

passer-by, passers-by

part-time

Point-of-Sale inspection (Cleveland Heights)

pregame

pre-K (year before kindergarten)

quit-claim (noun), but “released by a quitclaim deed”

re-election

side by side (adv.); side-by-side (adj.)

sing-along

smart phone

state of the art (level of development), but “state-of-the-art” as an adjective

Stone Oven Bakery (also Stone Oven Bakery and Café)

The Alcazar

The Tavern Co.

time frame

time line

toward, NOT towards

University Circle Inc. (UCI)

University Heights City Council (for first reference; council for subsequent references)

University Heights City Hall (for first reference; city hall for subsequent references)

University Hospitals' Case Medical Center

Walmart (the store); Wal-Mart Stores (the corporation)

up-to-date

website; but *Web page* is two words, and *the Web* both uppercase "W"

well-being

well-known

well-liked

well-wishers

Wi-Fi

word-of-mouth

workforce

workplace

youth (a young person, usually male; pl. youths) Avoid *youth* as a collective noun; *young people* or *teenagers* is preferred