

Submission & Style Guidelines

Thank you for contributing to the *Smart Ass*! With your help, we hope to continue to put out a quality publication that expresses our Democratic ideals to the campus and inspires political activism among youth. For the sake of promoting excellence in writing, convenience in editing, and a professional appearance on every page of our publication, we ask that you follow these guidelines when submitting articles.

--The Smart Ass staff, May 2005

1. Process

- Write! The subject is up to you—we recommend you check with the staff to see what others are writing or to elicit topic suggestions. The articles we print tend to be between 400 and 800 words; feel free to write up to 1500 words if your article is for the website. You're free to set your own tone, and may choose to write a persuasive piece, critical analysis, or biting satire. Strive to make your reader think, as opposed to simply echoing what (s)he knows, believes, or expects.
- Take advantage of what's around you. Interview professors and students for insight and opinion.
- Don't forget to check your facts!
- **PLEASE submit your article by the deadline.** This is for your benefit—otherwise we won't have the chance to review your submission properly.
- Once you submit your piece, it will be reviewed by a series of copyeditors before it goes to layout. At some point it may be sent back to you with suggested changes or additions. If we run out of room in the upcoming issue, we may print your article in a later issue or post it on the website.
- If time permits, we'll email you a copyedited form of your article so you can verify that the changes are OK and accurate. Let your copyeditors know if you disagree with a particular change, and work it out with them.
- We'll do our best to distribute a PDF of the near-final draft of the issue; please read over your article and its entry in the table of contents to check for errors.
- If you have questions or want advice on your article, the *Smart Ass* staff will be glad to help.

2. Document Format

- Submit as a Microsoft Word document (or an RTF file if you don't have Word)
- Use 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Don't add spacing between paragraphs
- Indent each paragraph with a tab character
- Put your name, email address, and any comments for editors at the beginning of the document
- You're encouraged to provide graphics or related links for the print issue and/or the website
- Include a good title if you can come up with one
- Indent long quotes by an inch, and don't use redundant quotation marks around block quotes
- Make words **bold** or *italic* for emphasis, but please refrain from using other text styles
- Use **ONE SPACE** between sentences. You can use your word processor to check for this: In Word XP/2003, try Tools > Options > Spelling & Grammar tab > Grammar segment > Settings... button > Spaces between sentences: (select "1")

3. Style Tips

- Use standard American usage and spelling. (This means *favor*, not *favour*; *Americanize*, not *Americanise*; *water bottle*, not *water-bottle*; *Mr.*, not *Mr*; and *truck*, not *lorry*.) If you're not sure how to spell something, look it up! Always run the spelling and grammar checker, but don't always trust it, especially for grammatical errors.
- Write in whatever voice comes most naturally to you. Don't go out of your way to sound formal or colloquial.
- Use first and second person sparingly. "You" is definitely appropriate in some contexts, but excessive use of it is—well—excessive.
- Be concise. Every word should be there for a reason.
- Vary sentence structure and length. It makes for a more interesting read.
- Strive for clarity. Use precise language to carefully explain your argument or point of view.

Submission & Style Guidelines

- Avoid ambiguous sentences. If “I saw the boy with binoculars”, who had the binoculars?
- Fix any run-on sentences. This is what punctuation is for—to help guide the reader through your train of thought without confusing him. (Remember the email joke: “Woman, without her man, is nothing” vs. “Woman: without her, man is nothing.”)
- Avoid comma splices (situations where you have two complete, independent thoughts separated by a comma with no conjunction, such as: “Bush doesn’t like eating broccoli, he thinks it’s extremely disgusting.”) Splicing short sentences can be OK, especially when providing contrast via juxtaposition: Democrats like programs, Republicans like tax cuts.
- Don’t worry too much about split infinitives or sentences ending with prepositions. These are characteristics of the English language that sometimes have to be put up with. (Can you find 2 split infinitives in this section?)
- Consider replacing passive voice with active voice to make your prose less dry, simpler, and more emphatic: “Garfield ate the bird and belched loudly” rather than “The bird was eaten by Garfield, who then belched loudly.”
- Be conscious of how your article is organized. Consider alternative forms of organization and choose the most logical or most persuasive one.
- Don’t repeat things unless you’re trying to make a point.
- Repeat things if you *are* trying to make a point!
- Parallelism rocks. Use it. Now. (See Purdue University’s *Online Writing Lab* for examples: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_parallel.html.)

4. Usage & Punctuation

- **Dashes and hyphens**
 - Hyphens are the shortest mark and are used to connect words together, especially when they are acting as an adjective: We need to study the long-term consequences in the short term.
 - Do NOT hyphenate words to split them over two lines. We will take care of this as necessary.
 - Technically, an *en dash* (–) is used to specify a closed range of numbers, dates, etc.; you can go ahead and use a hyphen here if you want, though: pp. 2-4 or pp. 2–4; the Supreme Court ruling was 5-4 or 5–4. Also use the en dash when hyphenating multi-word phrases, e.g. “pre–World War II mentality” (because “World War II” counts as a single entity to be joined with “pre-”). *To insert an en dash in Microsoft Word, you can type a hyphen surrounded by spaces or use Ctrl + the minus key on the numeric keypad.*
 - An *em dash* (—) should be used to set off a group of words within a sentence: I write for *Smart Ass*—do you read my articles? John McCain—a member of the Armed Services Committee—has criticized Rumsfeld’s leadership in the Iraq war. Em dashes are also used for open ranges: 1945—. If you’re using plain text and cannot enter a proper em dash, use two hyphens instead. *To insert an em dash in Microsoft Word, you can type two hyphens between words, or use Ctrl+Alt + the minus key on the numeric keypad.*
- **Apostrophes**
 - After a singular or plural noun not ending in “-s”, add an apostrophe to make that noun possessive (a hard day’s work, the women’s bathroom).
 - After a plural noun ending in “-s”, add a single apostrophe at the end to make it possessive (two weeks’ notice, dresses’ buttons).
 - After a singular noun ending in an “s”, add “’s” to make it plural except after words which are traditionally left without the added “s” (such as Jesus’)
 - Use apostrophes in contractions, NOT possessive pronouns. Remember that it’s = “it is” and you’re = “you are.”
 - Do NOT use an apostrophe after dates: the 1970s
 - Use apostrophes to pluralize single letters of the alphabet: Mind your p’s and q’s.
 - It’s “Veteran’s Day,” not “Veterans’ Day” (yes, I looked it up)
 - To use an apostrophe at the beginning of a word for an omitted letter, type Ctrl+’ followed by the apostrophe, e.g. ‘Tis the season to be jolly.
- **Quotations**
 - Use double quotation marks around a direct quotation within a paragraph, or to indicate irony. Do NOT use quotation marks if you are paraphrasing.

Submission & Style Guidelines

- Use single quotation marks when double quotes would be used, but whatever is to be quoted is already inside double quotes. According to the Associated Press, “Mrs. Heinz-Kerry told a reporter to ‘shove off.’”
- In accordance with American style, put commas and end marks *inside* quotation marks unless a different end mark is already there:
 - She told the journalist to “shove off.”
 - She exclaimed to the journalist: “Shove off!”
 - Did she really scream “Shove off!”?
- Use brackets when adding, omitting, or replacing information within a quotation: According to the Associated Press, “Mrs. Heinz-Kerry [...] told him [the reporter] to ‘shove off.’”
- Put the abbreviation “sic” in brackets if something in a quotation is an error or appears to be an error, and you want to emphasize that *you*, the infallible reporter, certainly haven’t made a mistake: “You’re working hard to put food on your family [sic].”
- If you indent a quotation to set it apart from the text, do not put quotation marks around it.
- Enable “smart quotes” so that open- and close-quotes appear different (don’t use " or ').
- **Abbreviations/Acronyms:**
 - Use periods in abbreviations and acronyms only if they’re typically used in that context: U.S. Marine Corps, FBI, CIA, R.I.P., George H.W. Bush, Ph.D. Do NOT put spaces between consecutive initial letters (U.S., not U. S. or US or U S).
 - Remember that e.g. means “for example” and i.e. means “that is”
 - “Versus” is abbreviated “vs.,” except in names of court cases (“v.”)
- **Spelling and Capitalization:**
 - Make sure that any words or names requiring accents have them: Núñez, naïveté
 - If referring to the parties, Democratic and Republican are always capitalized
 - Al Gore invented “the Internet”, NOT “the internet”
 - Unless it precedes a name, “president” and other such titles should be lowercase
 - When referring to the U.S. legislature, capitalize Congress, Senate, and House
- **Profanity:** If they’re absolutely necessary, write “s**t” and “f***”
- **Parentheses:** If you must use parentheses, make sure that the end mark goes within them only if the phrase it ends is entirely within the parentheses: I loved her (or so I thought). According to MSNBC, he “praised the president for ‘great strides in environmental protection’ during his administration” (really!). (Maybe he meant “great strides” backward.)
- **Titles:** Italicize titles of publications (don’t underline them).
- **Court Cases:** Italicize names of court cases: *Marbury v. Madison*
- **Hyperlinks:** Leave hyperlinks blue and underlined: <http://www.senate.gov>
- **Lists:** When listing items, DO use the “serial comma” before the conjunction linking the items in the list: He likes apples, bananas, and oranges. Use semicolons if any of the items are long or contain commas themselves: I’ve been to Pensacola, Florida; New Richmond, Indiana; and Seattle.
- **Subjunctive:** “If I were a rich man,” not “If I was a rich man”
- **Adjectives and Adverbs:** The word “everyday” is an adjective, NOT an adverb: “I changed into my everyday clothes” BUT “He drives to work every day.” “Anymore” is an adverb equivalent to “any longer”: “I don’t like to swim anymore” BUT “Do you have any more peaches?” “Everyone” and “anyone” are singular pronouns. Make sure to include an “-ly” if necessary for adverbs: “a perfect job” BUT “He did the job perfectly.”
- **Indeterminate Gender Singular Pronouns:** In formal writing, NEVER use “they”, “them”, “their”, or “theirs” as singular pronouns (equivalent to “he or she”, “him or her”, “his or her”, and “his or hers”, respectively). To make it clear that a single person is the referent, choose the masculine or feminine set of pronouns for that person. If it’s necessary to emphasize gender neutrality, you can use “he or she”, “one”, etc., but this is often awkward. Sometimes it’s best to rephrase the sentence, especially by expressing the idea in the plural—so “Every Democratic official should support grassroots organizing in his or her home district” becomes “All Democratic officials should support grassroots organizing in their home districts.”
- **Numerals:** “One” through “nine” should always be written out; use numerals for other numbers except at the beginning of a sentence
- **Dates:** Don’t use ordinal numbers in dates: “March 3”, NOT “March 3rd”

Submission & Style Guidelines

- **Special Symbols:** If you want to insert special symbol characters that are included in Times New Roman, insert them in Microsoft Word via Insert > Symbol. If your symbol is not included in the Times New Roman font, make a note of it in the document.

5. Word Choice

This section aims to provide advice regarding commonly confused or misused words. See <http://www.bartleby.com/64/3.html> for more examples.

- **a/an:** Use “an” only before words or abbreviations that start with a vowel sound when read aloud: “an honorable discharge”, “a historical reference”, “an FBI investigation”
- **affect/effect:**
 - As nouns: An “effect” is a result or influence: *They have an effect (an influence) on the proceedings.* “Affect” means feeling or emotion, especially as manifested in one’s appearance
 - As verbs: “Affect” means to influence; “effect” means to bring about: *The governor’s actions will affect his decision; We will effect change*
- **all right:** Use “all right”, not “alright”
- **among/between:** In general, use “between” to describe something shared by a pair and “among” to describe something shared by more than two. *the consensus among the delegates; a pact between Bob and Joe*
- **capital/capitol:** “Capitol” only refers to a building which houses a legislature; “capital” is used for a capital city, financial capital, or capital letters
- **compare/contrast:** For clarity, use “compare” when discussing only similarities, and “contrast” when discussing only differences among things
- **complement/compliment:** To “complement” is to complete; to “compliment” is to praise
- **elicit/illicit:** The verb “elicit” means to bring or draw something out, as in *to elicit contributions from wealthy donors* or *to elicit an enthusiastic response.* “Illicit” is an adjective meaning corrupt or ill-attained: *he was fined for accepting illicit contributions*
- **ensure/insure:** Use “insure” only when referring to the providing of insurance: *We want to ensure that your company will insure us against accident claims.*
- **farther/further:** In general, use “farther” when describing a physical distance or range and “further” when referring to nonphysical advancement: *Is Barnes & Noble or Borders farther from your house? I don’t intend to walk much farther; Please explain further.*
- **fewer/less:** In general, use “fewer” when referring to things that can be counted, “less” for degree or overall amount: *He has less money and less enthusiasm, but his opponent has fewer supporters.*
- **impact:** Try not to use “impact” as a verb: *It will have an impact on his decision,* NOT *It will impact his decision.* In the second case, “affect” is probably a better verb. Exception: “impact” as a verb can mean to apply physical force to something: *They will impact (crush) his car.*
- **lay/lie:** The forms of these verbs are easily confused.
 - to lay (to set something down): he **laid** the book on the table; he **has laid** the book on the table; he **is laying** the book on the table; he will **lay** the book on the table
 - to lie (to tell a lie): he **lied** about his income; he **has lied** about his income; he **is lying** about his income; he will **lie** about his income
 - to lie (to lie down or to be at rest): he **lay** on the couch yesterday; he **has lain** on that couch before; he **is lying** on the couch; he will **lie** on the couch
- **sit/set:** The verb “set” should be nearly synonymous with “lay”, “put”, or “place”: *he set the book on the table.* The verb “sit” means to be resting or to assume a resting position on one’s own.
- **than:** “Than” should NOT be treated as a preposition in formal writing. Rather, it should serve as a conjunction. When a pronoun that is being contrasted with the subject of the sentence follows “than”, that pronoun will be in the objective (accusative) case, not the subjective (nominative) case, even when the verb is not repeated: write *She is a better swimmer than I (am)*—because “she” (the subject) and “I” are being contrasted. However, write *She likes him more than (she likes) me* because “him” (direct object) and “me” are being contrasted.

Usage and Style Resources: *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (2003) • Strunk and White: *The Elements of Style* (1972) • Lynn Truss: *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (2004) • Usage resources on [bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com) • Purdue University’s *Online Writing Lab*: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

