

IN THE

*Trenches*<sup>TM</sup>

# Article Contributor's Guidelines

**A Style Guide for Colleagues who  
Contribute Articles to CharityChannel**

- ◆ A guide for writers who contribute online articles for CharityChannel
- ◆ Shows how to meet the style requirements for submission
- ◆ Discusses the down-to-earth, upbeat tone for articles
- ◆ Explains how to apply to join a Contributors Panel
- ◆ Covers how to submit articles

**Article Contributor's Guidelines: A Style Guide for Colleagues who Contribute Articles to CharityChannel, Second Edition (vers. 2.0)**

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## About In the Trenches Online Articles

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CharityChannel Press is the publishing arm of the CharityChannel professional community. It publishes online articles, books, workbooks, and manuals.

CharityChannel has over a decade of experience publishing practical, down-to-earth articles contributed by CharityChannel members. The publishing project draws upon the unique strengths of the pioneering CharityChannel professional community, which, approaching the dawn of its third decade, is large, diverse and mature. It includes many of the third sector's most experienced and accomplished practitioners, providing a deep pool of contributors. It also includes tens of thousands of earnest practitioners who welcome practical articles that can help them become even more effective as practitioners.

Over two thousand articles have been contributed by members of the professional community over the last decade. In 2009, CharityChannel Press expanded writing opportunities to include books, workbooks and manuals. This is the guide for colleagues desiring to contribute online articles; if you are interested in writing books, workbooks and/or manuals, please also see the *Author's Guidelines: A Style Guide for CharityChannel Press Books, Manuals and Workbooks* (Second Edition).

*In the Trenches* articles are written for the novice as well as those who have been involved within the nonprofit sector for many years. They are written in a concise, simple, down-to-earth, fun style. They keep the reader engaged, and satisfied.

Because CharityChannel was created by and for busy practitioners working at all levels of nonprofit organizations and institutions, its projects—CharityChannel Press is one—are strongly oriented toward the real-world needs of its members. Articles, as would be expected, are drawn from the hard-won expertise of their contributors and emphasize results. The *In the Trenches* project received its title as a salute to colleagues who work day-in and day-out in the third sector, and as a reminder to contributors and editors that articles must be of immediate, practical value to the busy practitioner.

observation

Even so, *In the Trenches* articles are not merely a basic overview. They are authoritative and might cover what a beginner should know to get started and to rapidly progress in the topic, or might be written for the more experienced peer who wants a fresh perspective on the topic. Along the way, the article provides valuable insights, helpful advice, and fun facts for flavoring.

**Audience**

We think highly of our professional community and assume that our colleagues have some knowledge about the subject of the article, but are looking for practical information about the topic to enhance their professional competency or to help them advance their career. That's where *In the Trenches* articles come in.

Chances are, when it comes to your article, your readers will not have the time to read a particularly lengthy, footnoted tome, but want something they can put into practice *today!* And that is the attraction. Perhaps they will look back to your article as the moment when the light bulb turned on and burned ever more brightly as they followed you through the steps.

It might help to know that readers of *In the Trenches* articles are often very well qualified in related subjects other than the one you are writing about. They like that the *In the Trenches* articles are written to enable them to get a good grounding in the subject, without making them wade through dreary, obtuse prose. They might be merely curious about your subject, or might be under pressure to learn it quickly. They don't like to waste time, and appreciate that your article will help them get started.

## Contributors Panels

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**M**ajor article topic areas are organized into Contributors Panels, each headed by an editor or co-editors. For example, contributors to Nonprofit Boards and Governance Review (NBGR) belong to the NBGR Contributors Panel.

To be eligible to contribute, writers are required to be current members of CharityChannel. If you are not yet a member, or if you need to renew, please go to the Membership section at <http://charitychannel.com>. Once your membership is current, you may apply to join a Contributors Panel. Navigate to Articles > Sign Up to be a CharityChannel Contributor.

Acceptance onto the panel by the Contributors Panel editor is the first step to being invited to contribute articles. Editors are looking for contributors who, by virtue of their years in the field and demonstrated track record of accomplishments, are at the top of their game. Editors might also provide you additional requirements for the panel, and ask for your commitment to them prior to accepting you onto a panel. For example, some editors require a stated minimum number of articles in a one-year period.

Once accepted onto the panel, you will be required to maintain a current Profile section, including a current professional biography and professional quality headshot.

Your CharityChannel Profile section is your public face to the professional community, and each of your articles is linked to it. You'll want to update your colleagues often via your journal. Also, consider adding your Profile's URL to your email signature. By design, the URL to your Profile is very simple. Here's an example:

<http://charitychannel.com/cc/stephen-nill>

Your particular URL is provided on your Profile page.



Your Profile headshot automatically appears as part of your articles, along with a link to your full Profile, where readers may learn more about your professional background, see a list of your other articles, read and contribute to your journal, and even request to connect with you. To access your Profile section, please log in to <http://charitychannel.com> and click the Profile button.

As a member of a Contributors Panel, you are granted access to the Discussion Group section for your panel, located in the Groups section of the CharityChannel website. The Discussion Group section enables you to receive messages from the editor to the group, and has a full forum system to enable you to discuss your articles with your colleagues on the panel. You may also discuss any other topics relating to the subject matter of the panel with colleagues who are among the most accomplished in the sector. In other words, you do not have to merely discuss articles; you may engage in discussions relating to your field, with colleagues who, by virtue of years in the field, are very well qualified.



## The In the Trenches Policies and Style

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Besides their conversational, down-to-earth tone, *In the Trenches* articles have a distinctive voice. The following guidelines should help you to write with the desired voice.

### Original Articles

Articles and book reviews are required to be original to CharityChannel. As the author, you retain the full copyright in your article; you're just giving CharityChannel the first worldwide publication rights. So, once it is published by CharityChannel, you're welcome to publish it elsewhere.

Sometimes you might have an article that you've written and published elsewhere, and that you'd like to use as the basis for a new article for CharityChannel. That's okay. An original article may draw upon and contain many of the same elements and themes of a prior article published elsewhere, but it must be a substantial re-write or update. If your article is based on a prior article you've written and published elsewhere, please alert your editor and provide a copy of, or link to, the prior article.

There is one exception to the "original article" rule. If you've published your article only on your own web site or blog, you are welcome to submit it to your editor for consideration. Just be sure to let your editor know.

### Topics

Article topics sometimes just pop into your mind, growing out of your professional experiences. Other times, it can be some real work to come up with one. Your editor will be

happy to work with you to come up with a topic. Sometimes it can be helpful to discuss potential topics with your colleagues on the Contributors Panel via the discussion forum system for your panel. (See section, above, on Contributors Panels.)

Topics must fit the subject area for the Contributors Panel. Sometimes an article is a better fit for another category of articles. If in doubt, discuss it with your editor.

Of course, there is one category of articles for which deciding on a topic is never a challenge: book reviews. If you are on the WE REVIEW Contributors Panel, you will of course be writing about the book you just read.

### Title

Your article's title should give the reader a good idea of what it's about.

Examples of strong titles:

- ◆ Why Your Board Needs Term Limits
- ◆ Reason for Hope? What Your Board Needs to Know About Government Funding
- ◆ Waiting for Super Donor? What Your Board Needs to Know About Individual Donations

Weak titles give the reader little or no idea of what the article is about. Examples of weak titles (because the title gives no clue as to the article's content):

- ◆ Taming the Green-Eyed Monster
- ◆ Like Looking in a Mirror
- ◆ What, Me Frustrated?

Please avoid excessively lengthy titles, that is, titles approaching one-hundred characters or more. Titles should be in title case.



Meredith Hancks had previously contributed well-received book reviews to CharityChannel's WE REVIEW feature, so she was already a known and respected writer when CharityChannel Press published her first book, *Getting Started in Prospect Research: What You Need to Know to Find Who You Need to Find*. Writing articles for CharityChannel is a great way to build a relationship with the CharityChannel Press editors.



stories from  
the real world

## Length

Our advice for article length is to write to the length where you, as the author, believe you have covered the topic to your satisfaction. If you have done the topic justice but your article turns out to be fewer than about 750 words—the minimum acceptable length—your topic might be too narrow and in need of broadening. If your article exceeds about 1,500 words—the maximum length for any given publication instance—please break it up into parts. When writing an article in parts, each part should stand on its own, yet cross-reference the earlier parts and, in the case of three or more parts, later parts.

## Formatting

- ◆ Use 1" margins all around the page (left, right, top, bottom)
- ◆ Use Courier 12-point font.
- ◆ Single-space your manuscript paragraphs.
- ◆ Insert only one hard return between paragraphs, so that there is one blank line between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs.
- ◆ Format your article flush left. Do not right-justify any text.
- ◆ Do not use bold except for subheads or unless absolutely necessary.
- ◆ Do not use all capital letters, or underlining, for emphasis. Italics are acceptable for emphasis, but don't overuse italics even then.
- ◆ Do not center anything. Keep subheads flush left.
- ◆ Avoid all extra fancy touches or unusual formatting styles.
- ◆ Bulleted and numbered lists are useful tools for breaking up information into points or steps that are easy to remember or follow. Introduce all lists with a sentence or two, and include concluding text after. Use bulleted and numbered lists to break the text down into specific steps or distinctive points. Use a numbered list when describing steps done in sequence, or in a "Top 10" context. Use bullets when the number or sequence isn't important.

## Article Tone

- ◆ As with everyday conversation, write in the first person. So, refer to yourself as "I" and to the reader in the second person, as "you." Use "we" when referring collectively to yourself and the reader; this pulls readers into your inner circle and makes them feel special!

- ◆ If you have been chosen to write an article for CharityChannel, it is because you are a recognized authority on the subject matter and can back it up with relevant accomplishments. YOU are the authority for the book. If you find yourself citing or quoting other authorities with any frequency, you are probably straying.
- ◆ Think back to when you knew little or nothing about the subject on which you are writing. Even basic terms and concepts were unfamiliar, right? Now that you are a seasoned expert, don't assume the reader is familiar with them. Define terms and concepts as you go.
- ◆ When you speak across the fence with your neighbor, you do so with simple, straight-forward sentences. You might even use sentence fragments. That's exactly how you should write your article—just as if you're speaking conversationally with a friend or colleague. If you find that you're writing long, complex sentences, you're probably straying from the straight-forward, down-to-earth voice we're looking for. Break them up into simpler sentences, and you'll be back on track.
- ◆ Keeping things conversational and loose doesn't mean that anything goes. The rules of good grammar still apply. Don't write so simply that you insult the reader. Remember, the reader might be a neophyte in the subject matter, but is definitely not a dummy or a complete idiot!
- ◆ It's okay to use contractions.
- ◆ Slang is okay if it would ordinarily come up in conversation. It's more than okay if it's used in the subject area about which you are writing. Careful though; slang for the sake of slang should be avoided as it just comes across as forced and phony.
- ◆ When you speak, you naturally do so with a flow and a simplicity that makes you easily understood. Humans do this naturally when speaking. You should write in the same way.
- ◆ CharityChannel articles are fun and upbeat. Besides a light, first-person approach, the use of humor, charm and wit can make your writing shine. As with good seasoning, though, use it sparingly and to taste; overuse can get in the way and detract from readability.
- ◆ Examples, stories and anecdotes are a great way to make sure the reader will grasp the point.

### Easy to Read

- ◆ *In the Trenches* articles are easy to read. No matter how challenging or complex the subject, they communicate clearly.
- ◆ Use subheads generously to indicate a change in direction of the material or to break up long blocks of text.

From experience, we know that authors often struggle with a decision on pronouns such as “his” and “her.” Should the author use he, him and his; she, her and hers; he or she, she, s/he? Because this comes up so frequently, consider the advice of the *Chicago Manual of Style* in this regard:

**5.203 Maintaining credibility**

Biased language—language that is either sexist or suggestive of other conscious or subconscious prejudices that are not central to the meaning of the work—distracts and may even offend readers, and in their eyes it makes the work less credible. Few texts warrant the deliberate display of linguistic biases. Nor is it ideal, however, to call attention to the supposed absence of linguistic biases, since this will also distract readers and weaken credibility.

**5.204 Gender bias**

Consider the issue of gender-neutral language. On the one hand, it is unacceptable to a great many reasonable readers to use the generic masculine pronoun (*he* in reference to no one in particular). On the other hand, it is unacceptable to a great many readers either to resort to nontraditional gimmicks to avoid the generic masculine (by using *he/she* or *s/he*, for example) or to use *they* as a kind of singular pronoun. Either way, credibility is lost with some readers. What is wanted, in short, is a kind of invisible gender neutrality. There are some ways to achieve such language, but it takes thought and often some hard work.

*The Elements of Style*, Fourth Edition, has this practical advice:

The use of *he* as a pronoun for nouns embracing both genders is a simple, practical convention rooted in the beginnings of the English language. Currently, however, many writers find the use of the generic *he* or *his* to rename indefinite antecedents limiting or offensive. Substituting *he* or *she* in its place is the logical thing to do if it works. But it often doesn't work, if only because repetition makes it sound boring or silly.

Consider these strategies to avoid awkward overuse of *he* or *she* or an unintentional emphasis on the masculine:

Use the plural rather than the singular:

*The writer must address his readers' concerns.* vs. *Writers must address their readers' concerns.*

Eliminate the pronoun altogether:

*The writer must address his readers' concerns.* vs. *The writer must address readers' concerns.*

Substitute the second person for the third person:

*The writer must address his readers' concerns.* vs. *As a writer, you must address your readers' concerns.*



- ◆ If you find that you're writing more than about six or seven paragraphs of unbroken text, before continuing you should probably insert a new subhead or an ordered or unordered list.
- ◆ Consider using tables or charts. Not only do they break up the blocks of text, they help to reinforce the concept and information in a concise manner.

## Humor

Use of humor is a great way to stay in the voice of *In the Trenches* articles. If it comes up naturally, use it. But don't force it. When using humor, keep these in mind:

- ◆ Be careful of straying from desirable dry wit to undesirable forms of humor such as slapstick, or "humor" that is hurtful, condescending, insulting, critical or controversial.
- ◆ Avoid ethnic, racial, gender-related, or unduly dark humor.
- ◆ Remember, you're writing for a large, diverse audience. Avoid sexual innuendo and coarse language.

## *The Chicago Manual of Style*

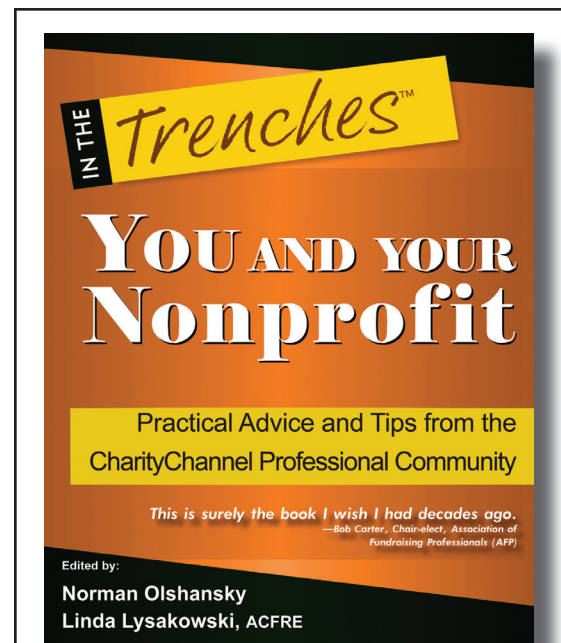
In matters of style, look first to these guidelines. If they don't cover a question, look next to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Besides the book version, there is an online version at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>. *Tip:* There is a thirty-day free trial available for the online version.

Having said that, please don't be too hung up on formal style guidelines. As long as you are writing conversationally, you're going to be on the right track. So, relax and enjoy the writing experience!

One area that continues to challenge authors, though, is the use of masculine and feminine pronouns. We discuss that in the sidebar on page 11.

## Permissions and Trademarks

While merely referring to another work does not require permission, you are responsible for



The forty-three colleagues who contributed to *YOU and Your Nonprofit*, including the co-editors, are members of CharityChannel, and many of them have contributed articles to CharityChannel over the years. In fact, that's how they were identified to contribute to the popular nearly book.



stories from  
the real world

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- ◆ Two useful sources of information about rights and permissions are *The Chicago Manual of Style Online* and *Johnston’s Copyright Handbook*.
- ◆ Please note that song lyrics and poetry—even as few as three words—can be copyrighted. If in doubt, do not use such material, as determining the copyright holder and then obtaining permission can be a laborious (and expensive) process.
- ◆ As you are aware, plagiarism—no matter how unintentional—is a serious matter and could lead to legal entanglements for you, your book, and us. Please be careful to avoid inadvertently taking language and/or full concepts from other printed or online sources, whether they are journals, books, or web pages, without permission. If uncertain of a copyright or trademark issue, please discuss it with your editor and, when appropriate, consider consulting an intellectual property attorney prior to submitting the article for publication.

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1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is for commercial or for nonprofit educational purposes;
2. The nature of the copyrighted work;
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the whole; and
4. The effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

You, the author, are responsible for putting researched information into your own words. Reading an article and then writing what you learned in your own words is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing does not require permission, but if you merely rearrange words or retain similar phrasing, organization, and sequencing of material, you may be guilty of plagiarizing. You are responsible for recognizing the difference.



# How to Submit an Article or Book Review

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**A**rticle submission of articles (including book reviews) can be done either directly on the CharityChannel website, or by email to your editor.

## Online Submission of Articles

### *Articles*

Please go to <http://charitychannel.com> and log in. Click on the Articles tab. Near the top of the Articles box, click on "Submit Article." Type or paste your article Title, Body, and Summary into the appropriate text boxes. Please do not check "Featured" or add "Tags." Select the appropriate category for your article, then click "Assign Category to Article" to assign the category. Please do not add a publish date, but rather just leave the date boxes blank. As the last step, click "Publish." Your editor will automatically be alerted. Note that your article will not actually be published until your editor has reviewed and approved it, and even then it will not be published until the date set for publication of your particular article.

### *Book Reviews*

The process of submitting a book review online is similar, but is done at CharityChannel Press > We Review - Book Reviews. Click on "Submit Article," and follow the same instructions as above. However, there is an additional text box where you will provide the Author, Date and Publisher. Please format this information in accordance with the following examples.

- ◆ Two useful sources of information about rights and permissions are *The Chicago Manual of Style Online* and *Johnston's Copyright Handbook*.

- ◆ Eisenstein, Amy. 2010. *50 Asks in 50 Weeks: A Guide to Better Fundraising for Your Small Development Shop*. Rancho Santa Margarita: CharityChannel Press.

For multiple authors:

- ◆ Ward, Geoffrey C., and Ken Burns. 2007. *The War: An Intimate History, 1941–1945*. New York: Knopf.

For an editor:

- ◆ Greenberg, Joel, ed. 2008. *Of Prairie, Woods, and Water*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ◆ For 2+ editors, use eds.

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