What kind of content works best for our readers?
A Quick Guide to Writing Features

Why you're here

You're here to make sure that our readers know about you, what you do and ultimately engage with your article, whether it's about an event or a service, or a piece of research.

But you don't want them to just know about you – you want them to take action as a direct result of your content: book that course, buy your service, share findings with others, apply your learning to working practice.

Here's a quick guide to how to make your copy work hard for you to achieve your goals, by making your article something the sector wants to read.

3 rules for all content

Like everyone else online, our readers are time-poor, with limited attention spans. They want to be served relevant content, that's fun to digest and quick to get to the point.

1.	Topical	Is GDPR going to grab you as much as it did in 2018? No, thought not...avoid jumping on the bandwagon and shoehorning your content to fit the latest trend, but do be aware of whether your piece will be timely, or just plain tired...
2.	Relevant	The more your content can speak across sectors (performance, craft, heritage, visual...) the more relevance it has for all readers. So topics that cut across all will win the day.
3.	Pacey	Keep it moving. Like I have here...don't hang around to get to the point.

What's your style?

Apart from being **relevant** to the sector, **topical**, and **cracking along at a fair pace** you can improve how readers engage with what you have to say.

Your content is your way of making people know who you are, so have **a clear and distinctive tone of voice**. Be true to who you are because authenticity works. In this guide I'm demonstrating an informal and informative style by keeping my sentences short and pacey, and the style conversational. If you're not sure how to articulate this then...

Talk to your Communications team

Your organisation's communications lead will make sure you're striking the right tone of voice that fits your organisation's own. If your communications lead isn't producing this editorial, then talk to them as much as possible as you write drafts, and *definitely* sit down with them to review it before you press 'send' on the version you send to us.

For those without a designated communications lead, please share your draft and get feedback from others: it's always good to do this face-to-face if possible, so that you can see their reaction, whether they read in full or 'skim read'. And if they look puzzled by anything or have to re-read something, it gives you a good idea of what you may want to re-write!

5 Attention-grabbing Content styles

Well, so far, so obvious, I hear you say. What can I do that gets us read? We've identified some clear trends by looking at partner editorial that's worked best on ArtsProfessional over the past year. If you're thinking of sharing a case study that demonstrates best practice, or if you want to set out to the sector a 'How to' piece, think about how you approach your subject matter to make it compelling.

Readers want insights from those who really know because they were there. Here are some great ways to frame your content:

1. **Controversy and provocation**

   Something that challenges readers' assumptions have strong appeal: crisis, wake-up call, honesty about an issue, are we misunderstanding? What's really going on? Content that takes a provocative or challenging stance can work well.

   But beware: 'empty' provocation has the opposite effect, so do all you can to avoid things like 'what does it really mean to engage audiences?' It means nothing – and we can see that a mile off...

   For example: Are we misunderstanding cultural democracy?

2. **'Celebrity' and leading names**

   Do you have a leading name behind your campaign/call/issue? If you can have your piece exclusively authored by someone with a very strong reputation and is in the public eye this will have pull appeal. If you have a leading name behind you, put it in the subject title. If 'Judy Dench tells us how to give good feedback', then you've got a winning article.

   For example: No access, no public funding?

3. **Let's get personal**

   And if you don't have a sleb, a killer quote illustrating a personal experience can work wonders: "that was the point of no return", "I thought he'd never ask...", "I found out how much was too much...", you have an unusual first person testimonial that take us inside a unique experience that offers wider learning? Then tell us more! **Share your learning:** what can we learn from your mistakes?

   For example: It's time to be honest about failure and Why I'm not celebrating

4. **Debunking**

   When you are able to say from an insider perspective 'this is not how it works', that lands well with readers too. We all really want to know how 'it' actually works, and what doesn't – as told by those with authority and insight.

   For example: Tackling class discrimination

   Which leads nicely to...

5. **Exclusive data – revealing unknown trends**

   Data is powerful. And if you have data that you can share exclusively with ArtsProfessional we will happily consider running a news item on it, and your editorial can have an extra boost through mutual linking of news item and your article where you share more detailed insights.

   For example: Audiences for classical music

Whether it's done with humour or through challenge, we all love solutions and fresh ideas to work with!

So you've got the framework, how to keep 'em reading?

Great titles will get you eyeballs. A strong story framework will help readers travel with you. But to make them stay with you, be aware that digital readers don't read all of anything (I know, heartbreaking, isn't it?). Instead they scan. Readers look for the **key facts**, and your writing and presentation can help readers to find them. You can do this by using:

- **Great infographics**

  If you have in-house design capacity, clear graphic representation of your key points work well. There are lots of free digital infographic tools you can use.

- **A short, digestible list of facts**

  I've done a couple of lists here to show how a short punchy list helps pull readers' eyes to the next point.

- **Think about the user journey**

  What do you want readers to do with the information you share? Make sure you tell us clearly. Put links and reference throughout your article, and not just at the beginning or end. Focus on what your reader wants to know and not what you, the writer, want to tell them.

What *not* to do

There are some clear content formats that are best avoided. If I can't relate to it, and learn from it, I'm not reading it. Here are our top 5 turn-offs:

1. **Who we are and what we're going to do**

   Your article is not the 'about us' section of your website. Think about 'what solutions can I offer to readers?' rather than 'what do I want to tell them about me?' Related to this, please avoid articles on...

2. **A forthcoming event: Coming up/Don't miss this amazing event...**

   Do you have a leading name behind your campaign/call/issue? If you can have your piece exclusively authored by someone with a very strong reputation and is in the public eye this will have pull appeal. If you have a leading name behind you, put it in the subject title. If 'Judy Dench tells us how to give good feedback', then you've got a winning article.

3. **'How to...'**

   These articles *can* work: if you have the holy grail, the last word, the definitive guide to an issue that relates to all art forms, then go for it. But this content might be even more successful if you can frame it in the styles suggested earlier.

4. **Case Study...**

   Ditto. Content works far harder if you follow our framework suggestions.

5. **Self-promotion**

   Celebrating your successes, and telling people how you did it. Hooray for you. Why should I care? What's in it for me, the reader? Blowing your own trumpet rarely works anywhere, unless you make it relevant to me.

The Commissioning process: here's how it works

Once you've read this you will send us an outline, just a couple of sentences on what you want to write, and tell us what it's about and what action you want readers to take.

We will read and have a conversation with you to see if we can provide you with any further suggestions for contributors, and have a look at where your article might fit with future content plans we have.

You write your first draft and send it to us along with:

- A headshot image of the author (portrait aspect)

- Images of your work are very welcome too (landscape aspect width 1100px x height 700px, include photographer's credits and we'll use this to head your article)

- Your social handles so we can tag you.

We will read and come up with titles and sub-headings. Then we'll discuss and agree with you a schedule for publication.

We look forward to reading your piece!

Amanda Parker, Editor