

# Writing for Just Focus

## Our expectations of you...

- **To do what you said you'd do.** We do want you to make Just Focus a priority, but not at the expense of your schooling or emotional well-being. Which means you have to set some realistic expectations for yourself. Don't over commit to stories, because it just means you'll come up with something either half-arsed or not meet the deadline. If you don't think you can do it, or can't do it by when you said, say so. We're pretty understanding people.
- **To keep true to the kaupapa of Just Focus.** We're hoping this is as easy as writing something that you yourself would want to read. But it's making sure Just Focus remains relevant to young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, but also gives them something with substance.
- **To come up with lots of original, articulate, witty, insightful and quality work.** Features, interviews, profiles, reviews, random bits of info etc. You know, generally brilliant stuff!

## What we can give you (this isn't an exhaustive list by the way, this is all open for discussion):

- Free stuff ? ....So we'll try, but no promises.
- Help you to develop your skills and experience. This is probably the most useful thing you'll get out of this. Hopefully we'll develop you into fine young web journalists, with more experience than most people fresh outta high school.
- Connecting up
- Training
- Fun

# The Fundamentals

## **1. Audience**

Every magazine or website has a target audience which basically guides what and how you write.

Just Focus is aimed at all young people in Aotearoa New Zealand aged between 13 and 25. This is an amazingly diverse group – from the 17-year old refugee migrant in Auckland to the sixth-generation New Zealander down in Otago, and everyone else in between!

Because what you write is on the worldwide web, it's available to, and will most likely be read by, people all over the place – that's great! The target is still young people in this country though.

If you're not sure if something is going to be interesting to anyone other than you, just ask yourself – would my mates want to read about this?

## **2. Focus**

The focus of Just Focus is the big wide world. Remember in your articles to write with a global focus and relate it where possible to what's going on in Aotearoa New Zealand. Refer to the Kaupapa of Just Focus and the Global Education Centre. We are aiming to enable people to understand the links between their own lives and those of people throughout the world.

Just Focus is a way to inspire young people to create change to bring about a more just and sustainable world. Your job is to help in the process of raising awareness of and analysing the factors and underlying causes that surround poverty, injustice, conflict, health and environmental degradation both in New Zealand and internationally. Ultimately the goal is to explain why and demonstrate how people can take action to live more compassionately in their daily lives in their community. (See Appendix for the Development Resource Centre's Values)

## **3. Appropriateness**

Unfortunately, we can't be completely free in what we say and publish. There are many interests to balance – not just our readers but also the Global Education Centre (that pays for this project!) and parents. It basically means we have to be responsible to all, and make sure no one's reputation will be damaged and no one will be hurt or encouraged to cause harm to themselves or others because of what we say. We'll tell you if we can't print something because of these reasons, but we ask you to be aware of it when you're doing your work.

## 4. From Ranter to Reporter

There's a tendency when you first start writing to just have a rant. To blurt down everything you think about everything without talking to anyone else, without doing any research or finding anyone to back up what you're saying. That's **opinion**.

Opinion has its place in journalism. If you're exceedingly important, an expert of some kind, very good-looking or just in the enviable position of having power to abuse, then your opinion will mean something to a general audience.

We know how passionate all you fellas are and we'll be having some opinion pieces, for sure, but in general we want you to extend yourself beyond the rant, and go out and talk to people.

You need to tell your story, give your thoughts and address an issue THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S WORDS.

### A couple of article types and ways to avoid opinion...

- **Features**

A feature is an in-depth article on an issue or an idea – for example, sweatshops, the war on terrorism or gay marriage – anything that requires a bit more discussion and reflection. It should be an article that looks at a range of different opinions and arguments, from different sides of the story. It should place the issue in context, put together the pieces and give the reader a greater understanding of the issue.

Most importantly, you should be looking at the issue through other people's words – and referencing what you're reading.

- **Profiles**

A profile is a piece on a particular person. Generally, it's someone talking in their own words about themselves – you're just facilitating the information. You want to get more information than is available generally – as in, more than is in the press release, in their biography, more of a character sketch than is usually seen of this person.

A good interview is the key to a good profile. Once you've done that you can write it up in a couple of ways. Either as a question and answer, which is basically an edited transcript of your interview; or you can write it as an actual article, interspersing direct quotes with paraphrasing and a bit of description.

(Ask us for our "Guidelines for Interviewing" document if you're planning on writing a profile...)

## 5. Research

No one should be doing anything without a bit of research first. And besides, it's one of the beauties of journalism, getting to research stuff that you ordinarily have no other reason to. You can never do too much, and the more you're familiar with the person or the issue, the better the interview and the end result will be.

- If it's not your idea, make sure you have a clear idea of what the editor wants from you – the angle, the type of story, the length etc.
- Do a search on the Internet for other stuff that's been written about the person and/or issue. You don't want to be doing the exact same thing everyone else has, nor missing vital background info that's the difference between smart questions and silly questions. There's a list of useful sites below.
- While you're doing it, getting down all the questions that are missing, all the anecdotes that might make good questions, any jargon that's likely to come up. Just pay close attention.
- Contact Eva – the Just Focus coordinator. Here at the office we have library with books, videos and DVDs on heaps of issues that you can borrow for free. Also, we've got lots of good links to sites for info.

### Useful research sites:

[www.justfocus.org.nz](http://www.justfocus.org.nz) - so you can see if someone has done something recently or not on that topic. Also, check out the links page, new ones will be added as people find them. The glossary can also help you out with complex terms.

[www.scoop.co.nz](http://www.scoop.co.nz) - this is a news site. They basically load up press releases straight from the source, but also doing their own investigations and stuff.

[www.nzherald.co.nz](http://www.nzherald.co.nz) - this is good for getting background info on New Zealand issues. They have good (free) archives.

[www.tearaway.co.nz](http://www.tearaway.co.nz) - most of the articles they have done in the last couple of years are on the site.

[www.reprazent.org.nz](http://www.reprazent.org.nz) - these are forums for young people, with a focus on stuff that affects them. Good thing to cruise on and gauge the opinions on issues, and even which issues they're into.

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com) - we know you know about it, but it really is a very, very useful tool.

[www.takingitglobal.org](http://www.takingitglobal.org) – we love this site!

**Alternative Media** - try some of these for a different perspective:

<http://www.zmag.org/>

<http://www.altpress.org/>

<http://www.alternativenews.org/>

<http://www.world-newspapers.com/alternative-news.html>

<http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/>

<http://www.irc-online.org/>

<http://www.newsfromafrica.org>

## 6. Writing it up

So you've done the research, got together all your notes, now for the good bit – writing it up. This is where you get to use your creativity and display your excellence in grammar and spelling.

If you want to become a better writer, the best piece of advice we can give you is to read a lot. Read everything. The more you read – and that's newspapers, magazines, novels, poetry, non-fiction, the back of cereal boxes – the more of a feel you'll get for writing.

All writing has a certain rhythm, just like a piece of music. Which all sounds very vague, but you'll see what I mean when you start thinking about. You'll start recognising the flow and get irritated when a certain quote jars because it's in the wrong place.

### **The following are few essential elements which should be in your writing:**

- **Header**

As in, the title of the story. It has to lead a reader in and to some extent explain what the story is about. It should use key words that will be picked up when people are 'google-ing'

- **Intro**

As they are constantly bombarded with information from all directions, a reader needs a reason to read your particular piece. A good intro is what's going to draw them in. It needs to get their attention and give an idea of what kind of article it's going to be.

- **Quotes and paraphrasing**

This is what is meant by 'telling the story through other people's words.' A good article is not complete without them – in fact, it's just a rant without them. It gives a profile a sense of life; it gives an issue a face and a voice. A **direct quote** is when you're quoting exactly what they said with these marks: "...". If they haven't said something especially succinctly, and you can say it better, just paraphrase them – re-write what they said without using quotation marks. You don't really need to use a direct quote unless it adds something to the paragraph.

- **Stats**

A good way to illustrate your point is to give some statistics about an issue. For example, to say ‘HIV/AIDS is a global pandemic’ is accurate, but to say ‘14 000 people catch HIV every day and half of them are under the age of 25’ will really show people the seriousness of what you are saying. When using statistics, make sure you say where you got them from this gives credit where credit is due and saves your ass if they are wrong!

- **Subheads**

Subheadings break up the text a bit. Teenage attention spans and all that. It’s just a small head whenever the story moves in a slightly different direction. Make these include key words for good ‘google-ing’

- **Pullquotes**

This is a small, eye-catching chunk of text which is drawn out of the article and printed much larger. Kind of a design element, but can also give the reader another clue about the article.

- **Bylines**

What you’re all in it for, right? Yep, your name online. So: full name, age and school (where appropriate).

### **Bottom Page Quotes**

These are the little quotes from random sources that run along the bottom of the page. Don’t necessarily have to have anything to do with your article, but can. They usually have to be under 30 words. A few good quote sites:

[www.quoteland.com](http://www.quoteland.com)

[www.worldofquotes.com](http://www.worldofquotes.com)

[www.quotegarden.com](http://www.quotegarden.com)

[www.uselessmoviequotes.com](http://www.uselessmoviequotes.com)

<http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Authors/QuotationsToMakeUSthink.html>

Or, you can use random facts or bits of info.

### **Photo captions and credits**

A caption to describe what’s going on in the photo and link it to the story, and a credit to the photographer.

## **7. Style**

Not like hot pink’s in this month and beige is so last minute, but how we do things round here.

**Names of people.** The first time you mention a person’s name, you want to use their full name, but after that just their first. Other publications cut it back to the surname, but generally we like to keep things a bit looser. On the odd occasion we use the last name if it seems inappropriate to use their first.

**Names of organisations.** The first mention should be full, with the abbreviation in brackets next to it, and then just drop it back to the abbreviation. EG. The World Health Organisation (WHO) blah blah blether. The WHO were blah blah blether.

**Language, please.** Try and keep it fairly relaxed. We like to keep it quite conversational – but that’s not sloppy. Tight, but easy to read. You know?

**Italics.** Use them for *song titles, album titles, movie titles*. Titles. And when you want to emphasise a word of course.

## 8. Also remember your punctuation!

- This is a hyphen - , and this is a dash – . As you can see, the dash is longer. The hyphen should be used to link two or more words together and should not have space either side. EG. Late-night rather than late - night.  
You want use the dash when you kind of making a sudden stop in a sentence, either in pairs or alone. It’s got a space either side.  
e.g. *She was poor – real poor.* Rather than, *she was poor-real poor.*  
And when it comes to numbers, use the dash when it’s something like “...aged 15 – 24.” The dash indicates it’s between those numbers. Only use the hyphen if you’re linking two numbers, like “...her number’s 021-645-783.”
- Do. Not. Ever. Use. Text. Message. Spelling. Unless it serves an expressive purpose of course. It’s a bastardisation of the English language, and you don’t have to be a purist to see that.
- There’s a difference between these brackets: ( ) and [ ]. You use the round ones when there’s some kind of aside in your sentence (I’m sure you guys know that). The other ones are used when you need to add some information for the sake of clarity or proper description. Like when you’re putting someone in direct quotes and they didn’t actually say the word inside that sentence, but that’s what they were talking about. Or when they did something rather than said it. e.g. “I think that [Just Focus] rules, while [JET] sucks.”
- Use macrons for Māori words. (Go to Insert, Symbol and then find the one you need)
- Use New Zealand English (not U.S.)

## Recommended Reading (for the diligent ones with library cards)

**INTRO: A Beginners Guide to Professional News Journalism**, Edited by Jim Tucker, 1999  
**TELL ME NO LIES: Investigative Journalism and its triumphs**, Edited by John Pilger, 2004

### Acknowledgement:

Much of this manual was inspired and plagiarised from  
How To: write for TEARAWAY MAGAZINE  
The Voice of NZ Youth: A Practical Guide for YETI 2005  
by Tessa Johnstone and is re-printed with the permission of Tearaway Magazine.

## Appendix

The Development Resource Centre is the bigger organisation which supports Just Focus. Keep in mind their values.

### **Development Resource Centre Values:**

#### **Empowerment**

Knowledge empowers people. It promotes justice, peace and equality. Providing people with alternative sources of information increases their choices and in particular enables vulnerable people to have their voices heard. This means we will provide a range of information to clients, the public and especially the most disadvantaged, with a particular focus on alternative information from civil society organisations.

#### **People centred development**

Development must be people centred and recognise that all cultures, particularly indigenous cultures, offer valid solutions to social development problems. This means we will keep in touch with a wide range of people and civil society groups within Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally and assist them to make their views heard.

#### **A holistic approach to development**

A holistic approach to development is essential and must embrace social, political, economic, environmental, spiritual, and human rights aspirations and initiatives. This means we will provide information to users, which will widen their perspectives of the broader context and nature of development.

#### **Participation**

The public participates in global development, and the DRC has a significant role in enhancing understanding of development issues including a recognition of Aotearoa New Zealand's changing regional and global roles. This means we will keep up to date with global development issues and maintain and strengthen contacts with other organisations, both governmental and non governmental.

#### **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides the basis of a partnership between tangata whenua and all other citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles must be an integral part of the way we operate. This means we will ensure that the obligations of te Tiriti o Waitangi are reflected in our practices and policies. The DRC is committed to the Maori version of te Tiriti o Waitangi and, through an organisational Treaty process currently in progress called *A Just Aotearoa*, the principles of partnership, empowerment and participation have been identified as requiring reflection in DRC's organisational policies and practices.

(<http://www.dev-zone.org/Ourvalues.html#Values>)