

## WCE: Publius Style Guide

### What we tell our readers Publius does for them:

“Publius is written by a consortium of writers, sometimes internal, most frequently external. Workers’ Comp Executive believes that it has the responsibility to air most viewpoints and welcomes the comments of its community on any subject. Publius does not necessarily represent the views of this publication.”

### Stated Editorial Objective:

“...essays are intended to stimulate thought and debate in a way that well-crafted sound bites before legislative committees, regulatory hearings, or journalists under deadline cannot do.”

## Writing for Publius

### Guidelines:

#### Article and Words-per-Sentence Length:

600-700 words. 20-25 words per sentence. 700 words is the maximum desired edited length.

#### Reader Level:

Using Microsoft Word’s Spelling & Grammar options, you can elect to have it check the readability of an article to display grade level, Flesch Reading Ease rating, words per sentence and passive voice statistics.

From the “Review” tab in Word 2007, choose Spelling and Grammar to check the document. Before starting the check, from the menu choose: Options > Proofing > Show Readability Statistics. After the check, it will display the statistics for your article and you can modify it to achieve the goals of:

#### Grade Level: 12

**Flesch Reading Ease:** 40 – 50

**Words per Sentence:** 20 – 25

*Publius items are commentaries intended to be thought-provoking, insightful and intelligent with respect for the readers’ knowledge of the topic areas and their interest in knowing more about it.*

### Essential Elements of a Publius Contribution:

#### Contribution Titling:

Examples of recent Publius contribution titles:

Year-End Sale

Shot in the Foot

You Are...

And The Gold Medal Goes To...

Work in Progress: SB 1145

P-K4 P-K4

CPR For CPR

Beware Of Attorneys Bearing Gifts

They’ve Detached the Rudder Cable

When All Else Fails

Another Inconvenient Truth

Watchdog. Here, Watchdog. Oh, Watchdog?

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Self-Insured Groups A L'orange

ULAE, ILAE, We All LAE

The titles are highly editorial in nature, often clever, and define a distinct opinion about an important topic that would not be used in a news item or other reference item. In many cases, the title does not directly define the topic/subject covered but is intriguing enough to make a reader find out what the topic or subject is.

*The title summarizes the opinion expressed in the article – not necessarily the topic itself.*

**Voice:**

Opinionated and editorial – states a strong opinion of events or decisions taking place in Workers' Comp. The voice is that of what the reader thinks of as "Workers' Comp Executive" – the publication. The article is not bylined, it states the opinion of the publication defined by its editors and contributors.

**Lead Paragraph:**

Think of it this way: The readers are hungry and in a very foreign land (politics and agencies) so they tell the waiter "I want some Turtle Soup, and make it snappy."

The lead paragraph should grab the reader by stating:

The topic/subject area.

What is happening in it.

What we think about it and what our position is on the topic or subject.

**Example:** Using the recent "CPR for CPR" contribution as a model, the topic was budget deficits. What was happening was the Governor and the Senate President were proposing both budget cuts and tax increases. We felt that the proposed solutions would not work long-term or even short-term. CPR (California Performance Review) is used as the Title and in the article to state how the "solution" itself need basic life-saving (CPR in the medical use).

**Incorrect Lead:** "California is facing a budget crisis and two leading politicians are proposing two opposing solutions to remedy it. Governor Schwarzenegger supports spending cuts to reduce and hopefully balance the budget, while Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata is proposing a one-time tax increase to cover the deficit. Neither proposal addresses how to prevent future budget deficits."

**Correct Lead:** "We don't have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem. No, that's not it, we don't have a spending problem, we have a revenue problem. No, that's not it, we have a revenue problem and a spending problem. Gov. Schwarzenegger appears to believe that all we need to do is ratchet down spending and we can overcome the state's current dire fiscal straits. Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, also a very lame duck, seems to think that the voters of California are gullible enough to think that a targeted, one-time tax increase to balance the books can be approved by going to the ballot."

The correct lead takes a position that neither solution is viable. The opening line articulates the differing and confused thinking within the governing body. It derides the Governor and Senate President for not working together and ignoring the real problem by taking short-term, easy answers at the expense of tax payers. It does this with an engaging metaphor that most any reader can related to: "It's not that I'm spending too much, I'm not making enough money. I need a raise!" Readers will understand that you get a raise by working harder and performing to a high standard, which our politicians are not doing.

The lead is literally putting words in peoples' mouths, and by doing so expresses an opinion of them.

*Lead paragraphs need to grab the reader quickly, and **engage** them or challenge their own opinions while stating ours.*

**Body of the Article:**

The main body of the article should support and explain the statement made in the lead. Ideally, the body of the article should provide commentary by:

Highlighting key statements, events or actions happening in the subject or topic area covered.

Providing key facts, statements or evidence to support our position.

Questioning or challenging the wisdom of the people or agencies involved.

Expressing what we think the "outcome" of those actions or decisions will be.

Suggesting a better course of action or thinking on the subject or topic.

All of the above should be precise, stylish and continues to build on the initial stand or metaphor from the lead paragraph.

**Closing Paragraph:**

*Bring it home and wrap it up.*

Like any editorial or commentary, the closing paragraph is the icing on the cake. It is the place to summarize our position and make a declarative statement that the reader will support. Ideally, it should be a short, well-crafted paragraph like the "CPR for CPR" closing commentary below:

*"Then again, that was recommended under CPR. It is highly unlikely that this or any other CPR recommendations will be dusted off for this budget debate. If that is the case, then we need to talk about another form of CPR, one that requires a defibrillator for the state's economy."*