

PA TACTICS

AFGSC RECOGNITION & TRAINING

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New program aims to train command Airmen

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Every week, I sit at my desk and trudge through stories submitted for the Air Force Global Strike Command Web site.

With Microsoft Word open on my computer, a cup of coffee in one hand and a clump of what is left of my hair in the other, I examine one article, photo or video after another.

First, I determine the news value — is this story important enough to distribute to more than 10,000 monthly AFGSC followers on the web or social media and possibly be published in any number of military and civilian newspapers and magazines?

Most of the time, the answer is “no.” Many of the stories submitted for AFGSC only have an impact on the base where the story originated (a squadron- or wing-level change of command, for instance, doesn’t have AFGSC-wide appeal).

However, if the answer is “yes,” I move to Step 2 ... editing.

While editing, I scan photos



Before Editing

for composition, lighting, action and the caption. For articles I examine the lead, the bridge, the body and the conclusion. I check grammar, spelling, word usage, transitions, story flow, clarity, and so forth (and I pull more clumps of hair from my already-balding head).

Until I took over the job as the NCOIC of the Operations Branch of Public Affairs here, this process of editing an article was something I assumed every Public Affairs Airman

was taught during their days at the Defense Information School and those lessons were then honed through months or years of experience gained on the “newspaper staff.”

You know what they say about “assuming.”

Many of the stories submitted to AFGSC appear to be first drafts — stories sent directly from the author to our office without a second pair of eyes to catch typos, misspelled words, sentence fragments, poor grammar and punctuation, and other common writing

mistakes. Although these stories are frustrating to edit, our main concern is that these same stories are published on AFGSC Web sites and their social media pages. Every time a reader catches a misspelled word, a typo or other writing mistake on your Web site, your internal information staff (and the office as a whole) loses credibility.

I don’t believe for a second that every news story we publish on our Web sites is going to be error-free. Before arriving at my current assignment, I edited base newspapers for nearly 10 years. I remember the Friday phone

calls from people who obviously knew more about newspaper production than anyone on the PA staff (or, at least they thought so). I remember the nights I worked until 8 or 9 p.m. because other office duties prevented me from working on the



After Editing

newspaper during normal duty hours. And I remember standing in front of a “full-bird” colonel on Thursday afternoon explaining our newspaper deadlines and why I couldn’t get his article into

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tomorrow's newspaper. I also remember the good points. I remember the pride I had in the finished product. When I wrote a story, I wrote it one word at a time and one sentence at a time, editing as I progressed from one paragraph to another. When the story was finished, I edited it again. When I felt sure I had no mistakes, I read it one more time. When I was confident the story was as good as it gets (or at least as good as I could get it), I passed it on to a fresh set of eyes (another Airman in the office or maybe the NCO working in media relations or the lieutenant working in community relations). As meticulous as I was about editing my stories my proofreaders always seemed to catch at least a few ridiculously obvious mistakes.

What can we do to improve our writing, photo skills or video products? The simple answer is, write more, take more photos, or shoot more video and learn from your mistakes. Also, if you read enough professional newspapers and magazines, you'll eventually become accustomed to how good writers and photographers create their news and feature stories and photos.

Examine their leads, bridges, bodies, conclusions, photo angles or lighting. See how they uses smooth transitions to move the reader from one thought to another. Check out the quotes the writers selected for their stories.

Another method for improving writing is by having experienced writers, photographers and videographers coach your less experienced journalists. Use their experience to help build solid storytellers.

This is where Megan Meyer and I come in; we will produce this newsletter to highlight the good things you are doing in the field. We will also mention trends we have seen and offer tips on how to improve them. There will also be "mini" media contests where we will give you the category and you will have some time to write, shoot or produce your article, photo(s) or video (the categories are not going to be anything you shouldn't already be doing, ex. News Article, Feature Photo or Stand Up video).

Three judges will provide feedback for each submission and a winner will be announced in the following newsletter with another category for the next two-month period.

I hope that this can save the hairlines of balding Air Force editors throughout the world.

Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs Excellence Program

Submissions must be published and accessioned during the quarter indicated. Submit only one entry per office. For articles and photos, send links in an e-mail to brian.stives.1@us.af.mil and megan.meyer.4@us.af.mil with "Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs Excellence Program" in the subject line. For videos and larger photo categories, AMRDC the files to the same e-mail addresses with "Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs Excellence Program" as the subject.

1st Quarter Contest Categories

News Writing

Stand Alone Photo

News Video

Deadline to AFGSC/PA

Feb. 24

ON TARGET TALK



In a Dec. 1 news article, **Airman 1st Class Katrina Heikkinen** wrote a nice article about team Malmstrom volunteering their time for Meals on Wheels. Airman Heikkinen did a great job on getting the program manager

to talk about how much the base helped them in delivering the meals and adding the emotion of the volunteers. She continued the month with an great article on Malmstrom Airmen coaching youth hockey in the local community. Nice to show the “other side” of the military and the things we do in the local community. **Senior Airman Reggie Manning** did a great job of “getting into the weeds” to show why Malmstrom won the Hennessy Award in his Dec. 16 article.

Airman 1st Class Dan Gage hit on a tough subject to write about in his Silent Witness article in November. Nice mix of stats and personal experiences letting the audience know how domestic abuse affects everyone. **Senior Airman Mike Tryon** was busy covering great things at F.E. Warren, first were two Airmen from the 90th Security Forces Squadron who donated Thanksgiving baskets to families in need and the second article was on some much needed renovations on their fitness centers.



Senior Airman Jessica McConnell demonstrated the proper way to write an impersonal lead in her Security Forces civilian wins a MAJCOM award article on Nov. 30 while **Airman 1st Class Stephanie Ashley** showed a lot of thinking outside

the box with her photo of Mr. Sullivan sitting at his desk – nice job of getting a different perspective. Airman McConnell also had a feature on the “Day of Love” where Minot Airmen served senior citizens on Thanksgiving. Great job at getting the feelings of the people serving and the ones being served great in the article and the photo that went along with it. **Capt. Genieve David** did an excellent job at showing a big quality of life improvement – an increase of almost 40 percent in basic allowance of housing.



Staff Sgt. Alexandra Boutte captured great in-flight refueling photos of the B-2 Spirit for her SMOKEX article. Not to be outdone, **Senior**

Airman Laura Goodgame went to the 393rd Bomb Squadron’s Aircrew Flight Equipment back shop and produced an excellent array of photos from them. Airman Goodgame followed up the photo shoot with an excellent

article and photos about a fire dawg placing eleventh at the World Firefighter Challenge.

Airman 1st Class Andrea Liechti penned a fantastic feature of the Global Strike Challenge score posters. She did an excellent job on getting behind-the-scenes reasons on why they did what they did on stage. **Airman 1st Class Micaiah Anthony** was a man on the mission during November - he captured great imagery at the Global Strike Challenge and then had a fantastic close up of an Airman grinding down the surface of a safety latch - great photos. **Senior Airman Amber Ashcraft** displayed her writing skills with a commentary on how she learned holiday traditions vary widely from place to place.



Be aware of common errors

When I was brainstorming ideas for this month's Kudos article (common writing mistakes Megan Meyer and I find in Air Force Global Strike Command News Service submissions), I thought up some creative slugs, ranging from "out of the frying pan, into the garbage can" and "write first, think later."

All kidding aside, we have often wondered if some of the articles we've seen on our base Web sites were edited at all.

Here are the most common errors we have seen on some of the Web sites:

1. Names are spelled two ways

If a name is spelled two ways, we don't know which is correct without calling the person who submitted the article.

2. Words are repeated

For example, "During the meeting, the the sergeant said ...

3. Punctuation is missing or incorrect

EXAMPLE: "I love writing, said Major Smith. (no end quote)

EXAMPLE 2: What time is it. (a period is used, instead of a question mark)

EXAMPLE 3: "I love editing" he said. (no comma after the quote)

4. A majority of the quotes are created from boring "fact sheet" information

"The B-52 is a long-range, heavy bomber that can perform a variety of missions. It can carry nuclear or precision guided conventional ordnance with worldwide precision navigation capability," said the sergeant.

If the information is a known fact, don't quote someone saying it. Quotes should be thought-provoking or add additional information your

readers cannot find by typing "B-52" into a Web search engine.

Generally speaking, quotes should be used sparingly. Ideas that are especially well phrased and powerful make interesting quotations; facts generally make boring quotes. Quotes should contribute to the points you are making, not the other way around.

5. Quotes are missing attribution

If we find a quote without attribution, we (Megan and I) can't correct the mistake by trying to guess who said it. Even if we can only find one quote source in the story, as far as we know, the author could have quoted a second person this one time. And if we're confused, there's a good chance your readers are confused as well. While we're in the area of "attribution," here's another rule we see broken all too often. DO NOT introduce a quote with the same information found in the quote. *For example: Sergeant Smith said the new software allows Base X employees to sleep while their computers do all the work. "Using the new software, our folks can now catch some Z's while this new software performs the mission," he said.*

6. Dateweek (i.e., Monday, Tuesday, etc.) is used rather than the month and date.

If a story references "Tuesday," we don't know what Tuesday the author is referring to. When you submit articles to AFGSC, please change all dates to the appropriate style (i.e., July 23, June 4, etc.)

7. Old news

We all know that if an event occurs in midweek, there's a good chance it's not going to make that week's "newspaper." The staff will cover the event and then hold the story until next week's newspaper. Many of these stories are not published on your Web sites until a week after they

actually happen. If we receive articles through AFPIMS that are more than two weeks old, the story will get "published" in the Windows recycling bin nine out of 10 times. Had the story been sent to us when it was completed, it would have had a chance of making the AFGSC Web site and possibly even the Air Force Web site (which will not take articles more than 48 hours old). Just remember, "We're a news service before we're a history service!"

8. Is it a feature or is it news?

Another classic mistake we see too often is feature-like writing mixed into a straight news article, or a feature lead followed by straight news. Many of our journalists will write a decent news story and then wreck it by adding flowery feature treatments. On the other hand, some folks will write a creative feature lead followed by straight news.

If you're writing a news article, stick with the basics ... who, what, when, where, why and how (remember the "summary lead" they taught us at DINFOS?). A straight news article also is written in the inverted pyramid style. I've actually seen straight news stories with a quote like this thrown in the middle: "We developed the new software to help our folks do their jobs more efficiently," exclaimed the major with a boyish smile stretched across his face.

On the other hand, if you're writing a feature story, take your time and write a great feature ... from start to finish. Don't start the story with a feature lead unless you plan to carry that tone throughout the article. In a news story, immediacy takes front seat; however, when writing a feature story the reader's interest is the priority. You want to use creative verbs and nouns and paint a picture in the reader's head.

If you have any questions or want to see something addressed in future editions, call me at DSN 781-6519.