

Inside Bluegrass

A Publication of the
Minnesota Bluegrass and Old Time Music Association

Official Style Guide *2000*

Inside Bluegrass

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Introduction

Dear Inside Bluegrass Contributor,

As you may know, most magazines have what are called “style books.” This “book” gives potential writers information about how to write for that magazine. In an attempt to help you (and me, too — I need rules to work by), I have compiled this book for *Inside Bluegrass*. I know this pamphlet looks obnoxiously long and intimidating. But you don’t have to meet these guidelines for your work to be accepted — this guide merely tells you what I will wind up changing. It may also give you some hints for improving your writing, and tells you what to expect to find in *Inside Bluegrass*.

Stories and Story Lengths

A standard issue of *Inside Bluegrass* contains an Editor’s column, letters if any are available, bluegrass news (“Grass Clippings,” “Off the Wire”), a cover story (the story most prominently mentioned on the cover), one or more feature stories (which will also be mentioned on the cover), record and festival reviews, tablature and lyrics columns, MBOTMA news (minutes, new members), and the Coming Up calendar. We also run occasional stories about musical history (old-time performers), about musical techniques (alternate tunings, picking style, sound reinforcement), or about band development (how to create publicity materials, etc.). I can use submissions in all of these categories, though my greatest need is for cover and feature stories. The information here summarizes what I am looking for in each category.

A standard page of *Inside Bluegrass* holds about 950 words of copy (assuming there is no artwork on the page). This is about equivalent to one and a half pages of single-spaced typewritten copy.

Stories submitted should not exceed the following guidelines:

- Cover stories: Maximum of four magazine pages. A cover story this long should include at least two photographs or illustrations, and so should not exceed *three thousand* words. The preferred length for a cover story is two pages with two illustrations, hence about 1250 words.
- Feature stories: Maximum of two pages. At least one photo is required for a story over one page long.
- Reviews, tablatures: Maximum of one page.
- Letters to the Editor: The MBOTMA by-laws require that all letters “contrary [to Board decisions]” be published in the magazine. In practice, we publish all letters received (assuming they are in good taste). However, I will ask that any letters more than one page long either be trimmed or be rewritten as a feature story.

As far as how often you can publish a story about yourself, it is my policy to allow bands one feature story per year. (This, obviously, does not include Festival bios and the like.) I will grant cover stories as space permits, with the restriction that no band can have more than one cover story per year, and that bands that have not had a recent cover story have priority over bands which have been recently covered.

Submissions will be accepted on paper, on disk, or via electronic mail. Electronic mail is, of course, the preferred format (it makes life easier for me. And if I’m happy, I’m less likely to get out my red pencil and start hacking away at your story). I can read most word processing documents, including Microsoft Word and WordPerfect. If you use another word processor, I would suggest you check with me before submitting. If you submit on disk, you may use either Mac or PC 3.5" disks, but please format them appropriately (i.e. don’t format a 720K disk as a 1.4 MB disk. I can’t read such disks and they can damage my disk drive!)

Photographs and artwork: Photographs can be submitted electronically (TIFF or JPEG format) or you can send us print originals. (I prefer originals, since I know how to color-correct for our presses.) We cannot accept slides or negatives. The photos will be printed in black-and-white, but we can accept color originals. If possible, use photos that are not too dark. (Hint to bands having publicity photos taken: Use a light-colored background. Trust me, it will turn out better.)

If you request, photos will be returned to you. I generally mail them back about one week after the issue date. Please include your address with the photo. A return label is much appreciated.

Authorship and Attributions of Articles: Since *Inside Bluegrass* depends on material submitted by readers, stories in the publication may not represent the opinions of the magazine, the editor, MBOTMA, or its Board of Directors. All material submitted, therefore, should list an author's name. If you do not wish to have your name printed on a story, confer with the editor; pseudonyms are allowable. (For the use of authors' names in reprints, see the section on Reprinting and Copyrights.)

Deadlines

The basic deadline for *Inside Bluegrass* is the fifth of the month preceding publication (that is, January 5 for the February issue, etc.). All items, including Coming Up listings, must be received by then. However, cover stories must be received by the first of the month preceding publication (e.g. January 1 for February). I do this so that I can be sure I *have* a cover story.

The exceptions are the January, March, and December issues. The deadline for January is December 3; the deadline for March is February 3; the deadline for December is November 3.

Language

In writing for *Inside Bluegrass*, please keep in mind that this is a family magazine. Don't use language that you wouldn't want to hear on the lips of your two-year-old child. (Or even more stringently, don't use words that *I* wouldn't want to hear on the lips of *my* — hypothetical — two year old.) Blasphemous, scatological, and sexually explicit terms are to be avoided. Except in direct quotations, the harshest words I will print are "heck" and "darn" (and I reserve the right to edit out even those words). Even in direct quotation, stronger words will be edited out. This doesn't mean that you can't talk about scandalous subjects (traditional seduction and murder ballads will not be cleaned up) — just that you should talk about them in genteel English. Also, slang should be kept to the minimum needed for effect.

In addition, sexist language should be avoided if at all possible. God is neither he nor she. This extends also to animals: I maintain that a squirrel is an "it" (unless proven otherwise), not a "he."

Finally, keep reading level in mind. Articles in *Inside Bluegrass* should be at the sixth to eighth grade reading level. (Don't worry; that's not an insult to our readers. Hemingway wrote at the fifth grade reading level. Newspapers are usually written at the sixth grade reading level. The eighth grade reading level is what is expected of high school graduates.) This is the level most readers feel comfortable with; if you write above this level, I will try to simplify the article.

If you're not sure how to lower the reading level of a piece, remember this: Shorter is better. Keep your sentences brief. Don't use big words. Don't use too many commas; try to break your ideas up into smaller sentences. Avoid adjectives. Keep to the point. Plan where you're going.

See also the section on *Writing Tips*.

Punctuation and Orthography

Except for the minor exceptions listed below, contributions should conform to the guidelines of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (the “Chicago” style is generally conceded to be the easiest to read of those in common use). The *Associated Press Manual of Style* is particularly to be avoided. Some particular features of the Chicago style include the following:

- The “serial comma” is to be used. (That is, you should write “I went to Minneapolis, Saint Paul, and Bloomington,” with a comma after Saint Paul, rather than “I went to Minneapolis, Saint Paul and Bloomington.”)
- Periods and commas *must* be placed inside quotation marks. This is *required* American usage, but is often violated. And while we’re talking about quotation marks, remember that, in American usage, double quotation marks (“ ”) are always used to mark quotations. Single quotation marks (‘ ’) are only used for quotes within quotes.
- Numbers less than one hundred are to be spelled out, as are round numbers (those ending in “hundred,” “thousand,” “million,” etc.). So you would write “ninety-nine,” not “99,” and “three hundred,” not “300.” You may, however, write “142” and “1996.” This applies also to years and decades. You should write “the Fifties,” not “the 50s” (or worse yet, “the 50’s,” which is not correct in any style book).
- Dates are to be spelled out, not abbreviated (i.e. write “January 1, 1996,” not “1/1/96” or “Jan. 1, 1996” or “1 Jan 1996”).
- Multiple punctuation marks (!!, !?, ??) are to be avoided. The only exceptions are quotation marks and ellipses (...). When using ellipses, note that *three* periods are used for an elision that does not end a sentence (e.g. “I went... to the store”) while *four* are used for one that *does* end a sentence (e.g. “Into the valley of death rode the six hundred...”).
- Abbreviations are to be avoided, except in personal titles. Thus you should write “Saint Paul” rather than “St. Paul,” and “Minnesota” rather than “MN” or “Minn” (unless you are giving an address). This also applies to measurements (e.g. say “six inches” rather than “6’’”). (An exception: We do use abbreviations in the “Coming Up” calendar.)
- When writing the possessive of a name ending in “s,” you *should not omit the final s*. That is, you should write “Robert Burns’s poetry” and “Jesus’s teachings,” not “Robert Burns’ poetry” and “Jesus’ teachings.”
- Underlines and ALL CAPS are to be avoided. Book titles and emphasis are to be conveyed by *italic type*. Italic and boldface are *not to be used in the same story*. The editor retains the option of converting underlines and all caps to italics, or of omitting any such notation.
- All lines of poetry (including song lyrics) should be capitalized. That is, you should print

Cheeks as red as the blooming rose,
Eyes of the deepest brown...

not

Cheeks as red as the blooming rose,
eyes of the deepest brown...

Also, the stanzaic form of poetry should be preserved. Do not run the lines together, especially when quoting more than one or two lines.

Extensions to the “Chicago” style. The “Chicago” style was last revised in 1982. Since that time, two major changes have taken place in common usage:

- Phone numbers. It is now considered proper to hyphenate an area code into a phone number — e.g. my phone number is 651–454–8994. This is the usage followed in *Inside Bluegrass*, replacing the earlier form (651) 454–8994.
- Christian Era dating. In times past it was customary to mark dates A.D. and B.C.; this usage was accepted (though not endorsed) in the Chicago style. It is now considered better form to use dates C.E. (“Common Era”) and B.C.E. (“Before the Common Era”). These suffixes can be omitted if there is no danger of confusion.

Other Standards:

- Band names and album titles. There is no special style for band names. Do not italicize, bold-face, or quote the band title. Album titles should be placed in quotes. So if you are referring to a recording in a feature, you might say
My current favorite bluegrass album is The Dry Branch Fire Squad’s “Fannin’ the Flames.”

Grammar

Also known as the “Bob Waltz pet peeve department.” Submissions are required to conform to the accepted rules of American grammar. Here are some of the mistakes I see most frequently:

- “Aren’t I?” This is *not correct grammar*. You *must* say “Am I not?” (Would you say, “Are I?”)
- “They” (plural) is not a substitute for “he” or “she” (singular). I will paraphrase as fits the context.
- “Its” and “It’s” are not to be confounded. “It’s” is a contraction for “It is” (“*It’s* my ball!”). “Its” is a possessive, “belonging to it” (“Give the dog *its* bone”).
- “I.e.” (*id est*) means “that is.” “E.g.” (*exempli gratia*) means “for example.” The two are not interchangeable.
- To “ensure” means to make certain. To “insure” means to acquire a policy from State Farm, or Lloyd’s of London. You can only “insure” something by buying insurance. Otherwise you are “ensuring” it. Thus, “I *insured* my car for ten thousand dollars,” but “I want to *ensure* that the magazine is published on time.”
- English has a subjunctive mood. It denotes hypothetical situations, and is denoted primarily by the use of the verb form *were*. Thus, “I wish I *were* home” instead of “I wish I *was* home”; “If he *were* here” rather than “If he *was* here”; “*Were* he to break his mandolin, the concert would have to be cancelled.”
- “Hopefully” is an adverb meaning “full of hope.” It does not mean “I hope it is so.” That is, you cannot say “Hopefully he went home” when you mean “I hope he went home.”
- “Loan” is a noun. “Lend” is a verb. You *lend* someone money; the money you give is a *loan*. You *cannot* “loan” me five dollars.
- “For free” is redundant. “Free” is sufficient.

Format

In general I do not impose a particular article format on my writers. However, I have a suggested format for record reviews, which I show here. Fill in the blanks marked [] with your own information:

[Bluegrass/Old-Time] Record Review

[Artist Name]: [Record Title]

by [Author Name]

[Record Number, e.g. Rounder 0001]

Copyright [Year]

Contents: [List songs found on the album]

Liner Notes: [List the number of pages of liner notes, and say if they include song lyrics or the like]

Pros: [Describe the best thing about the record]

Cons: [Describe the worst thing about the record]

Rating [Give it from zero to four stars. Zero is unlistenable, one is boring, two is good if you like that kind of thing, three is very good, four indicates that you want to buy copies for everyone you know.]

Once you've provided this information, you can say whatever else you want about the record.

The reason we use this review format is to allow capsule reviews to be printed. Reviews which do not follow this format may be accepted, but they won't ever be reprinted or summarized.

Record reviews should be at least 200 words; there is a maximum length of one page (about 950 words if there is no picture; about 750 words if there is a picture).

Note to record distributors: You do not need to advertise in *Inside Bluegrass* to have your record reviewed. You need merely submit a disk. I will try to see to it that your recording is reviewed by someone knowledgeable about your musical genre.

Also, a reminder: *Inside Bluegrass* is printed in a three-column format. The columns are two and a third inches wide. Try not to write something, such as a table, that is too wide for such a format.

Design elements of the magazine

The type style used for the main copy of *Inside Bluegrass* is 10 point Times Roman. It is placed on 12 point leading. The basic format is justified text with a quarter-inch first line indent. The first paragraph of a story will have no indent. There is no blank space between paragraphs. This approximates the style of high-quality books.

In addition, a "subhead" style is available (14 point bold type, with extra space before), and there is a "list" style with a hanging indent. You may, of course, use other formats, but the editor retains the right to convert all documents to these basic formats.

Inside Bluegrass is printed on 8.5"x11" paper, with a half-inch margin all around. Thus the printable area of a page — the maximum area allowed for text, ads, or graphics — is 7.5"x10".

The basic ink color for *Inside Bluegrass* is black. A second color is used on the cover; this color varies from month to month at the discretion of the editor (it is usually chosen to accentuate the cover graphic. I will often use a brownish or reddish tint for photos of people; nature-type photos will be green or blue; art may be any color). We create our own duotones for the cover photo; please do not submit duotone originals.

Musical Notation, Tablatures, and Foreign Language

Musical notation in *Inside Bluegrass* is set using Coda Software's "Finale." This means that I can typeset just about any notation used since neuming ceased to be used. So feel free to submit any form of musical notation.

Tablature is more complicated. After some months of work, I have developed a font capable of generating every type of tab that I've ever seen for instruments with three (e.g. mountain dulcimer), four (mandolin), five (banjo), or six (guitar) strings. That doesn't mean you couldn't surprise me, though. We may have to negotiate a bit.

I will set whatever sort of tablature you feel most comfortable with. However, all else being equal, I prefer tablature of the musical-notation-plus-tab type (as used, e.g., in the "Remembering the Old Songs" column, with tab below the music). Tab set in this format has the advantage that it can be used by musicians on any instrument.

If you need to typeset foreign languages, I have typefaces for Greek and (unpointed) Hebrew, as well as the complete International Phonetic Alphabet and a complete assortment of accent marks and the like. If you need some other alphabet (e.g. Cyrillic), please contact me at your earliest opportunity. I can probably work something out, but I'll need some time to work on it.

The following special symbols are also available if needed:

™ £ ¢ ∞ * † § ‡ ¶ • ° ≠ ± ® © ¥ ß ð ƒ Δ ¬ ≈ √ ≤ ≥ ¡

Reprinting and Copyrights

Material in *Inside Bluegrass* is copyrighted, and cannot be reprinted without permission. But if contributors want to reprint articles they wrote, that will almost always be deemed acceptable. (Just call me to get permission if it's a major piece.) Contributions printed in other magazines should be attributed: "This article first appeared in *Inside Bluegrass*," followed by the issue date (e.g. "January, 1996.")

In general I will not reprint items which appeared first in other magazines. All items in *Inside Bluegrass* should contain substantial original contributions. If you decide to rework a piece, be sure to give credit. (E.g. "This article is adapted from material which first appeared in *Wisconsin Bluegrass News*, March 1996 issue.")

Also, if you quote a song, be certain to list who wrote it (unless, of course, it's traditional).

Advertisements

Ad sizes and prices are as follows (sizes in inches, horizontal size first)

1 page — \$100. 7½" x 10"

½ page — \$52. 7½" x 5" or 4⅞" x 7½"

⅓ page — \$35. 4⅞" x 4⅞" or 7½" x 3¼" or 2⅜" x 10"

⅙ page — \$18. 4⅞" x 2⅜" or 2⅜" x 4⅞"

⅓ page — \$10. 2⅜" x 2⅜"

There is a discount of one-eighth (12.5%) for ads which run in three consecutive issues; this increases to one-fourth (25%) for ads which run in six consecutive issues.

Classified ads are 20¢ per word, with a \$5.00 minimum. MBOTMA members receive one free two-line classified ad per year.

Note: *Inside Bluegrass* no longer accepts camera-ready ads. We are now publishing entirely electronically. If you wish to submit an ad, you must either have us typeset it for you or you must submit in electronic form (TIFF or EPS files only!). There is normally no charge for typesetting ads. Advertisers have the option of asking for a second color on an interior page — but the cost will run several hundred dollars. Consult with the editor before specifying a color ad.

Ads are accepted by telephone, electronic mail, or hard copy. Ads submitted by phone, however, are not guaranteed; if a phone ad contains an error, the advertiser is still liable for the price of the ad. As with all contributions, advertisers are urged *not* to submit by telephone.

Some Hints for Writing Better

Inside Bluegrass prides itself on decent writing. Not great writing, but at least nothing that will make you ashamed. If you haven't done much writing yourself, here are some easy-to-remember rules to help you write better.

Adjectives are the root of all evil. Sure, you need modifiers once in a while. But most people put in too many adjectives and adverbs. The result is complicated sentences. They slow the reader down. Try to avoid "adjectivitis." Or, as Mark Twain put it, "As to the Adjective: when in doubt, strike it out."

Too many commas spoil the sentence. Long sentences are hard to follow. They raise the reading level of your publication, and they can confuse the reader. A good rule is that a sentence should never contain more than two commas. One is better; use two commas only for parenthetical expressions. If you feel the urge to use multiple commas, ask yourself, "Can I make this into more than one sentence?"

If you're smart, don't act smart. Long words are almost as bad as long sentences. Most of the great speakers and writers of history used nice, short words. So do most great songs. If it has more than two syllables, it's probably wordy.

I don't care what you're writing about; it's boring. Write about something else. Yes, I'm being sarcastic. But the point is, you'll usually bore people if you launch straight into your subject. Suppose you were writing about one of the most famous fiddle tunes of all time. Which is a more interesting opening sentence, "The 'Orange Blossom Special' is a great song," or "Chubby Wise wasn't trying to write a classic. He was just playing around"? If you're like me, you like the second better. Your goal should be to sneak up on your topic — start out with a clever introduction, then get down to business.

Summary

The following are the basic requirements for *Inside Bluegrass*:

- **Suggested story types:** Cover and feature stories. Tablatures. Stories about musical history or techniques.
- **Maximum story length:** Cover story, 3000 words (plus photos); feature story, 1500 words; other story, 950 words less space for artwork. Photos are required for all stories over one page (950 words).
- **Language:** Should be acceptable to all age levels
- **Reading level:** Stories should not exceed the eight grade reading level
- **Style guidelines:** Submissions should conform to the guidelines of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. In particular, the serial comma is to be used. Underlines and ALL CAPS will be converted to italics or bold face, as appropriate. Abbreviations are to be avoided. Band names should not be placed in quotes or otherwise noted. Album titles should be placed in quotation marks. Book titles should be placed in *italics*.
- **Deadlines:** Feature stories due by the first of the month preceding publications. Other stories due by the fifth of the month preceding publication except as noted.

Glossary

The following list includes a few of the standard terms used in electronic publishing.

Duotone — A graphic, usually a photo, which uses two colors. In *Inside Bluegrass*, we often use duotone cover photos (black and one other color).

EPS — Encapsulated PostScript format. A format for submitting vector artwork. The preferred format for ads.

JPEG — A format for photographs. It consumes less space than TIFF, but also lowers the quality of the photo.

Leading — The space between printed lines. Specified in points.

Point — Printer's measurement, approximately equal to one seventy-second of an inch. Also a measurement of type sizes.

TIFF — Tag Image File Format. A format for submitting images. Acceptable for ads, and the preferred format for photographs. Unlike JPEG, it does not affect the quality of the photo.