Hand Book

For

REPORTERS

And

NIGHT EDITORS

of the

McGill Daily

Published by the Managing Board

THE McGILL DAILY REPORTER'S HANDBOOK

Forword

This little pamphlet presents suggestion as to rhetorical and typographical style as well as some general advice to the college reporter.

Many of the rules contained herein are arbitrary, and opposite practices have as much right to authority, but uniformity of style cannot be obtained unless definite rulings are adopted and ADHERED TO in dealing with doubtful points. It is just as correct, for instance, to write EMPHASISE rather than EMPHASIZE but the DAILY has adopted the latter spelling and every reporter is expected to use it.

The suggestions contained in this little pamphlet will not teach you to write. This can only be learned by constant and careful practice. Above all, try to remember that you are writing for a newspaper——— the DAILY is not a seed catalogue.

History and Organization of the Daily

McGill Daily, official organ of the Students' Society of McGill University, is a newspaper published daily, except Sunday during the academic years. It was founded in 1911, by W. E. G. Murray, and was preceded by three undergraduate publications. **The Gazette, The Fortnightly** and **The Martlet.**

The direction of the Daily is vested in a Managing Board of three members, except that in financial matters the Students' Council has final decision, after consulting with this Board. Under the Managing Board is a number of Associate Editors. Of these, some are special feature writers. The duty of the others is to edit the individual issues of the paper, each man being assigned to, and having absolute charge of, one paper per week. These are commonly known as the Night Editors, and it is to them that the reporters are responsible.

The Editor-in-Chief is head of the paper and represents the Daily on the Students' Council. He is responsible for the contents of the paper, principally the editorial page, which enjoys complete freedom and is not used for the expression of the opinions of the Students' Council. The Managing Editor has general direction of the news services, library, morgue, mechanical arrangements and circula-

tion. The third member of the Managing Board is either the News Editor or the Sports Editor. The News Editor is in charge of assigning work to the reporters.

Promotions are made solely on merit, the Associate Editors making the necessary recommendations to the Managing Board. All positions on the staff are Honorary.

The Reporters

Reporters should try to realize at the outset that their success or non-success on the Daily depends entirely upon theiir co-operation or lack of it. An essential quality of any newspaper reporter is regularity and punctuality, and this quality is as necessary on the Daily as elsewhere.

The work of reporters consists mainly of "covering assignments." Assignments are made out in the Assignment Book every day by the News Editor, between the hours of one and one-thirty p.m. EVERY REPORTER MUST CALL AT THE OFFICE ON THE DAY ASSIGNED TO HIM BETWEEN ONE AND ONE-THIRTY AND CHECK OFF THE ASSIGNMENT OPPOSITE HIS NAME. In this way the night editor knows early in the afternoon what work is being done and what is being neglected. If for any good reason the reporter is unable to cover an assignment he will

indicate the fact in the assignment book, **before one o'clock,** giving reasons. Remember that inexcused absences count against you almost as much as inaccuracy.

Reporters who prefer to work for the sports department will receive all instructions from the sports editor.

Reporters are expected to obey implicitly the instructions of the Night Editor who may happen to be in charge of the issue. Remember that there is other work to be done besides the covering and writing up of assignments. There is the notice column to edit, the "What's On" to compile and a number of re-writes and advances to attend to. Besides these, there may be occasional messages outside the building. When you finish whatever you may be doing **ask** for more work and remember that the Night Editor ranks the cheerful performance of the smaller tasks on exactly the same levels as the covering of an assignment.

The Essentials of News Writing

"The qualities most desired and striven for in news writing are accuracy of statement—in small things as well as in great, in particulars as well as in essentials — simplicity, directness and point. Never attempt fine writing; never use big words where small words are possible. Go right to

the heart of the subject without flourish of trumpets. Stop when the story is told without conclusion or moral tag."—C. R. Williams, Editor of the Indianapolis News.

Accuracy. Too much stress cannot be placed upon the importance of accuracy. Verify everything; or if verification is impossible quote the authority from which you received your information. Consistent accuracy is the best recommendation that a reporter can have for appointment to an Associate Editorship, while errors and inaccuracy count heavily against all candidates.

Inaccuracies in initials, names and class numerals are inexcusable. See that every name you write is correct. When in doubt use the Students' Directory or the telephone.

Use the class graduation year number to show the year of a student, and not the numeral of the class, such as: John Doe is in Arts '35, and **not** in Arts II.

Directness Newspaper writing is based upon the principle that the reader must be given the maximum of information in the minimum of space. The best way to do this is to write the kernel of the story first and then expand the facts later in descending order of importance. Put nothing in for effect if the story can be told just

as well without it, but be sure to give all the facts, with the most striking items first. A well written story should give all the essential facts even if the editor has to cut off the last few paragraphs.

Form. All news stories have one characteristic in common: they must answer the six primary questions which every reader asks:

What? Who? Where? When? How? Why?

The answer to the most important of these questions must be found in the first sentence and all of them must be attended in the lead.

It is however very necessary that reporters avoid the stereotyped forms, such as "Tonight at 8:15 in the R.V.C. Dr. Vincent Howard will speak on coral islands of the South Seas," and similar phrases.

Good newspaper form demands, with directness, that the story shall be divided into three parts, the head, the lead and the body. The necessity for having all essential facts in the first paragraph or two was stressed above. The body should amplify the information contained in the lead, the items being arranged in descending order of importance, so that the last few sentences may be cut off without the loss of any really necessary facts. On the Daily, reporters usually make

up their own heads, and here again simplicity and directness must be stressed. A good head is a synopsis of the lead, always phrased in the active voice and conforming to the regulations laid down in the style sheets which you will find pasted on the walls of the Daily Office. Each "deck" of every head must contain a verb either expressed or implied, and unless this rule is adhered to headings over stories are merely labels.

With regard to the writing of the story itself, try to remember some of the rules of grammar. See that your sentences contain verbs. Avoid periodic, or long, sentences. And, above all, keep your paragraphs short. After every second or third paragraph insert short sub-heads. Your Night Editor will show you how to do this, but after the first story or two you will be expected to hand in copy properly broken up with sub-heads.

The time element. Always bear in mind that the article you are writing is to be printed not that day but the next, and must therefore be written with reference to the day on which it is to appear. If you are writing on Monday night that something is to happen on Tuesday use "today" when making any reference as to the time of the event. If the event is scheduled for Wednesday say "tomorrow." If

the event will not occur for more than two days after the day of writing, mention the day of the week, and if there is any possibility of ambiguity, add the date.

Preparation of Copy

All copy must be typewritten. Double spacing should be used, and wide margins left on both sides of the paper. Begin your story at least half-way down the first page and number your pages. Write (30) at the end of the article. Read your copy through very carefully before you submit it to the Night Editor. Make all necessary corrections with a sharp pencil or in ink. Indent all new paragraphs deeply and type your surname at the upper left hand corner of the first page. Be careful with the copy, and remember that the linotype operators are human and are not paid to interpret hieroglyphics.

Spelling

The Concise Oxford Dictionary is the official office dictionary; the Daily adheres to the forms listed therein, such as honour, labour, harbour, tire (of an automobile) file (of a newspaper), program, storey (of a building), judgment.

Wherever two or more forms of spelling are listed, the first is accepted by the Daily.

Use ize not ise in such words as

emphasize and **criticize.** Use **en** not **in** in such words as **enclose** and **endorse.**

Capitalization and Punctuation

Here again the safest rule is to try to apply the laws of elementary composition, but puzzling cases may arise in newspaper writing for which the text book offers no solution. Capitalize all proper names, all courses given at McGill, all references to McGill University, all classes and the word "Class", the first two words of a debating proposition (Resolved, That—), and all points of the compass when used as nouns or as adjectives with proper nouns. Never capitalize "a.m." or "p.m." or the word "intercollegiate" unless it forms part of a title.

Punctuate lists of names as follows: —W. E. Stevenson '36, L.N. Taylor '37, H. T. Williams Jr. '39. Use a colon between the hours and minutes in time;—2:30, but always use 10 etc., for the exact hour instead of 10:00. Use "p.m." and "a.m." only when necessary to avoid ambiguity. Use a hyphen for such words as "co-operate" and "co-ordinate," but do not hyphenate "football", "basketball", "touchdown", "interclub", "upperclass", "today", "tomorrow", or "tonight".

Put all numbers, 10 and above in figures, except when writing football stories when the smaller numbers may be used in describing the play. Sums

of money follow the general rule, those under $1 being written out.

Be careful with abbreviations. Professor, president, etc., may never be abbreviated. Never use Mr. when referring to a student. Instead give his initials or his full Christian name. Be careful when giving official designations or when referring to clergymen. Never omit "the" before the title "Reverend". "The Reverend Mr. Potts" but never "The Reverend Potts".

Conclusion

The rules and regulations above are not to be considered as a general guide to good college journalism. They are intended merely to tide the new reporter over the difficulties which are likely to arise during his first night or two on the staff. From then on he is expected to learn more by observation than by actual instruction.

In conclusion, the Managing Board of the McGill Daily expresses the pious hope that this little leaflet will prevent at least some of the glaring faults committed by new reporters in past years.