

activist writing lab packet

table of discontents

1. Writing, Oppression and Privilege
2. Inspiration
3. Press Releases/ Sample
4. Letters to the editor/Op-eds/ Sample
5. Announcements
6. News/Pretending to be a journalist
7. Mini Style Guide
8. Gaza Solidarity Case Study -
Op-ed vs. Speech vs. Press Release

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movement media for minneapolis saint paul

1. Writing, Oppression and Privilege

Think about oppression and privilege before you start writing. Many of us who have access to the media have that access because of race, class and/or gender privilege. Many of us who have access to the media also face discrimination within the media as people of color, queers and/or women.

Many of us struggle to get access to the media because of oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Be conscious of these things and how they affect your assumptions and your writing. Whose voices get heard? Who gets ignored? What circumstances mean that you're doing the writing? Are you positioning yourself as "speaking for" a community you don't belong to? Who are you writing for? Whose position are you articulating?

What forces may work to delegitimize your voice? What are the compromises demanded of women, people of color, and queers in order to be heard as "reasonable"? How can you be heard without being "reasonable" ?

You might even want to do a little brainstorming about your story--where do race, class, gender and sexuality come into it? They're always present, even if they're a "present absence". You could ask yourself, for example, about all the different ways in which right-wing rhetoric about Palestine relies on sexism, racism and homophobia to legitimate itself. Or how solidarity in the

UMN unions is weakened by classism and racism. Thinking about intersectional oppressions strengthens your analysis and helps you to clarify your audience.

But what about when you actually have to write?

What follows are some thoughts drawn from my experience. They're not meant to be any kind of final answer, or some kind of claim that I've solved the problems of being a white middle class cisgendered writer. I include them to get the wheels turning rather than to provide solutions.

I'm a white writer born in the US. On several occasions, I've found myself writing material about communities of color, immigrant issues, activism around indigenous rights in Mexico...Let's just say that I felt really challenged!. As a white, US born writer in these situations, you may not really know what you're talking about because you don't have roots in the communities you're writing about, so you can easily leave out something really important or emphasize something trivial. On top of that, will you end up reinforcing the "white people get to tell the story and only white voices are important" thing? Will you end up exoticizing the people you write about? ["In beautiful mountainous Oaxaca, traditional ways have never died out! Colorful details abound! Touching anecdotes are told authoritatively by the journalist-as-ethnographer! Take action to save the Other!"]

If it's not an emergency writing situation, I try to ask myself whether I'm the best person to write the piece. How can my organization foreground the voices of activists of color over the long haul? What is it about my organization that has prevented this from happening so far?

When I have to write something right away, I try to do these things:

** Inform myself and seek help.

**Take some time--I'm almost never in so much of a hurry that I can't ask around for a co-writer or talk to some activists from the community I'm writing about.

**Read online. I try to get a sense of the diversity of perspectives in the community I'm writing about (there's always a diversity of perspectives)

**Think about whiteness. Is there a way to write the story that calls whiteness to account? Can I talk about US/Northern/colonialist/white involvement in oppression rather than starting off with stereotypes of otherness?

**Don't oversimplify. An easy trap for white activists is to write about communities of color as if everyone within them had the same experience, felt the same, etc. Also, avoid the Soviet propaganda strategy--trying to gain "sympathy" by writing about people in struggle as if they are always

patient, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, reverent, etc, etc. It's patronizing to pretend that people in struggle are simple souls full of natural virtue, and it usually goes along with the idea that only white people can be complex. (See "Noble Savage")

Sometimes white people tell themselves that they're worried about being criticized by people of color if they write about an issue and make a mistake. (Look, I'd be lying if I said I'd never felt this way. I'm not proud of it.) Watch out that you don't use this as an excuse to avoid your own white privilege.

I won't even tell you how many stupid mistakes I've made! If you write a story and you make a mistake, that's okay. There's nothing to be afraid of in honest criticism, and if you make a mistake you can apologize, learn and move on. Remember to correct what you wrote wherever possible, write a follow-up letter, etc! Take ownership of your errors.

Who is your audience?

When I write, sometimes I have an idea in my head about the "average" reader, the person I'm trying to convince. My "average" reader is almost always male, white, middle class, slightly conservative, unfamiliar with the issue, vaguely hostile...Why am I writing to this person, anyway? I've set him up in my head as "normal", like I have to get him on my side. But that guy is never going to be on my side.

And why do I assume that "normal" means conservative and unfamiliar with the issue? If I'm writing about racism, hey, a huge percentage of this country has first-hand experience with racism. Poverty, the same.

Don't write like the important audience is the oppressor. We outnumber them, if we get our act together.

2. Inspiration

Author Derrick Jensen teaches writing, and his new book *Walking on Water* has some useful lessons for both writers and teachers. Some of his advice for writers (especially writers of fiction, but applicable to all writing):

- Don't be boring -- all good writing has passion; make your writing as intense as if it were your last utterance
- Provide specific details, in easy-to-follow order, to transport the reader so they're there
- Do your research
- Be courageous -- challenge established 'rules' and prejudices
- Make sure your writing answers an important question

- If it hurts, you're doing it wrong
- Spend more time thinking than writing
- Flush out your prejudices and get them out of your writing -- you'll never convince anyone else if you let them out onto your page
- Read and study great writing
- Make sure your stories include choices and transformation, and that these are credible
- Make every word count
- Mean something -- give your reader a reason to care
- And show you care about them yourself
- Be clear -- words are easy to misunderstand
- **What you write about, and how well, is a function of knowing and conveying who you are, what you love and what you want; if you don't know these things, find out**

3. Press Releases

To think about:

What is news? A useful thought from environmentalist George Monbiot: "A headline like "Protesters occupy trees along route of new road" will consign a press release straight to the bin, as most journalists will imagine they've heard it all before. But "World's longest sermon threatens to stop new road" (telling the story of the vicar who has discovered that it's illegal to interrupt a priest during his sermon, and intends to preach continually in front of the threatened trees) will make them sit up and wonder what it's all about. If you want to mention the tree-sit, you can do so further on in the text. There might also be a new political aspect of the story you can use to attract the journalists' attention to your protest: "New road could destroy region's economy, experts say" would, for most journalists, be counter-intuitive and interesting (which shows how much they've been paying attention). If your action's [far away], and you're organizing transport to get there, say so in the press release, pointing out that journalists are welcome to join you on the coach. Many reporters are so lazy that they won't bother turning up unless everything's laid on for them."

Who will cover your story? A lot of times, a general assignments reporter. This person won't be a specialist and will be tempted to focus on the legal/police aspects of your action. (Ooooh, that's always so exciting!) You can work around this by emailing press releases to specific reporters who write about your issue (and are sympathetic, if possible!) and by preparing a good media kit.

When to send your press release: If you're announcing a speaker, reading, event, legal thing, etc, send your first press release well in advance--up to three weeks before the event. Follow up with another one about two days before hand.If you're announcing a protest, send your press releases around two days before zero-hour.

What's the best time for an event? This isn't always your choice. You'll increase your chances of coverage with morning events Monday through Thursday, but you may also decrease the number of activists who can attend--a paradox! See the Ruckus Society's media manual at www.ruckus.org.

Activist time versus journalist time: Invite journalists half an hour after you plan to get there--remember that you want them to arrive when you're already set up and something's happening.

FORMAT--there are several, but this one is always acceptable:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 25, 2012

Phone, fax and email for CONTACT PERSON: Annie Nimmety, 612.555.5555, xyz@anarcho.com

NAME AND

CONTACT INFO FOR SECOND MEDIA CONTACT

HEADLINE ("Poor People's Campaign Activists Move Families Into Abandoned Houses on Valentine's Day")

Subhead if you need it ("Action prompted by rise in homelessness and foreclosures")

FIRST PARAGRAPH: Contains the core of your story. Spend most of your time writing this. No more than three or four sentences about who, what, when where and why. You can include links.

SECOND AND THIRD PARAGRAPHS: More details! Include a catchy quote from your media contact!

FOURTH PARAGRAPH if needed: Background information.. More catchy quotes!

FIFTH PARAGRAPH: One or two sentences about your organization

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: If there is one!

[Number signs indicate that there's nothing else to follow]

After you write

1. Have someone else (maybe several someones!) proofread it.
2. If you're emailing it, send it to yourself and *make sure the links work*.
3. If you're emailing, be sure to put your addresses in the **BCC field only**-otherwise, half your recipients will get a huge list of email addresses at the beginning of the email, and they won't read any further.

Sample Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL JEWISH ANTI-ZIONIST NETWORK IJAN-TWIN CITIES

Ijan.tc@gmail.com www.ijsn.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: XXXXXX XXXXXXXX – 555 555 5555

YYYYYY YYYYYYYY – 555 555 5555

THERE ARE MANY JEWISH VOICES: Jews of Conscience & Our Allies Against
the Israeli Government's War on Gaza Sunday, Jan. 11th, 2009

Outside the Sabes Jewish Community Center 4330 Cedar Lake Rd.,
Minneapolis

Gather at 2 pm

Press Conference at 2:30 pm

Minneapolis, MN – January 11, 2009 – Hundreds will converge outside the Sabes Jewish Community Center at 2 pm on Sunday, Jan. 11, 2009 to protest the Israeli government's two week old brutal strike against Palestinians in Gaza. At 2:30 pm, a press conference will be held, featuring brief statements by: Lisa Albrecht, International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network -Twin Cities (IJAN-TC); Ilana Lerman, Jews for an End to the Occupation; Ziad Amra, Minnesota Coalition for Gaza; and a representative from the Council on American Islamic Relations-Minnesota.

Lisa Albrecht of the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network says, "Just as it is not Anti-American to criticize the U.S. government, it does not signify hatred of Jews to criticize Israeli government policy. We believe that there is not one monolithic Jewish community or voice in the world, the U.S. or Minnesota. By our presence here today, we are affirming the diversity of voices in our community. No one Jewish organization speaks for all Jews." IJAN recognizes Zionism as a political belief that has shaped Israeli policy from its inception. As a Zionist state, Israel legally privileges Jews over Arabs. Over the past two weeks, we have seen the Israeli military conduct an air and ground war that has killed more than 800 people in Gaza and wounded over 3,000 - most of whom are civilians and not Hamas soldiers. Israel is carrying out these attacks with F16 fighter jets and missiles provided by U.S. tax dollars. The state of Minnesota invests in Israel, and holds Israeli bonds. Governor Pawlenty has recently met with Israeli trade representatives to further the Minnesota-Israeli economic partnership. In light of this economic alliance and the moral responsibility that comes along, we demand Governor Pawlenty cut our trade and investment ties with Israel

instead of financing this humanitarian crisis. We also demand that our elected officials call for an immediate cease fire and an end to the blockade of Gaza.

###

4. Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Before you write:

**Read lots of examples from the publications you want to write for. Find out what their format is--sometimes they're really picky and there's always an optimum length.

**What are the tone, style, structure and example-use found in letters that get published?

**What is the paper's usual position on the issue? Can you use this to make your letter/op-ed more interesting and controversial?

**Think about the local angle--what does this issue mean for your community, neighborhood, city, state, bioregion, etc? Are well-known local figures ("controversial local developer Basim Sabri", UMN President Bob Bruininks" etc,) involved?

**How will you show that this story is timely? If you're writing about the prison-industrial complex, for example, the best time to write is when there's some new development in legislation, some scandal in the news, a new prison being built, etc. Of course, you can usually find something that makes your issue timely--just remember to foreground it. (Remember that most papers do not consider the ongoing crises of capitalism "timely", no matter how much disaster they cause.)

**Will your writing be stronger if you have a co-author/co-signer? Do you know an expert in the field, someone personally impacted by the issue or a well-known local person? If you do have co-authors, *make sure that everyone involved signs off on the final version. After everyone has signed off, you can't change anything significant without going back to the group.*

**Don't be afraid to fail! Even if your op-ed isn't printed, you're telling the editor that this issue is important enough for someone to spend time writing about it.

****If you're writing for a centrist, progressive or professional publication, you can probably write a longer piece with more content and a more complicated argument. The advice below is geared towards those times when you need to write about an issue for a mainstream publication. The sample op-ed given is from a progressive nonprofit and was published in the Star Tribune.**

Letters:

1. Make only one point (or maybe two). Keep it short. The only letter I've ever had published was three sentences long.
2. Find other people to write letters. Game the system--if ten people write in, the editors will figure that there's enough interest to print one letter.
3. It's okay to call the paper if your letter hasn't appeared within a couple of weeks. You can ask if it's still under consideration, if they've received it, why they decided not to publish, etc. Remember that your call may not do anything for your letter, but it will probably help other people.

Op-Eds

1. Stay focused--plan on making three or four main points only. Once again, short paragraphs.
2. Open strong and close strong. If you're stuck for how to open, lead with a surprising statement or an anecdote. Surprising statements might be simply facts that are little known, radical slogans that aren't hackneyed, quotes from interesting people in the situation, etc. A classic (slightly cliched, but sometimes you get writers' block) way to frame an op-ed is to tell the beginning of an anecdote at the beginning and finish at the end. "A little girl picked at her dinner. Low wages and desperation under the Tsar meant that..." [Exciting editorial about revisionist Russian history follows] "And the little girl? She grew up to be noted feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman."
3. Most of the time, you want to include a solution to the problem you raise, a demand for change, etc, steps that can be taken. Recommendations for further action remind people that this is a living issue.
4. Cite your sources, particularly if you're giving information that will seem, er, radical to your audience.
5. Quote relevant people. Do your homework--this is a great chance to foreground voices other than your own or your group's. It's okay to call or email people even if you don't know them--almost everyone is flattered, actually.
6. Provide a suggested title--the paper probably won't use it, but it may guide their choices so that you don't end up with a totally misleading headline.

7. Submit your op-ed with a short cover letter outlining why your subject is timely and of interest to the readers of the publication, along with the background that makes you a good choice to write about it.
8. Submit by fax or email and send a copy by mail.
9. Follow up--call the next day. Editors get a million calls like this, so keep it short--just ask if they've received your op-ed. If you're having a friendly conversation, say something about how timely! and important! your topic is--helps get it on the radar. If you haven't seen your op-ed in a week, you should call back and ask if it's going to be printed. If not, see 10.
10. It's okay to submit your op-ed to more than one paper, but don't submit to more than one paper in the same market at the same time. So you could submit your op-ed to the Star Tribune and the Chicago Tribune, but not the Pioneer Press. If the Star Tribune confirms that they won't be printing your piece, submit it to the Pioneer Press. (That said, I [Brian] once had the exact same letter printed in both the PiPress and the Strib on the same day, with one sentence changed. Presumably they don't like me now, but I don't think they did before, anyway. I (Jane) contend that this is about a letter and not an op-ed.)

Sample Op-Ed

Mike Dean: Voter photo ID is onerous, unnecessary

By MIKE DEAN

February 6, 2009

In launching an attack on voter fraud, Minnesota legislators are like Don Quixote going after his dragon: They are fighting an imaginary problem.

A few legislators recently introduced a bill requiring all voters in Minnesota to show a valid photo identification in order to vote. While this may seem a reasonable request, many people in Minnesota do not have the ID that this law would require.

Indiana has already shown us the impact that a photo identification law can have. During that state's presidential primary, a group of nuns were turned away from the polls because they lacked proper government identification. As would be the case in Minnesota, the Indiana law has largely affected older Americans who no longer need driver's licenses.

Should Americans who no longer drive be disenfranchised? Should veterans who fought to defend our country be turned away at the polls because they don't have valid photo identification?

For some, the costs of obtaining a government-issued ID are prohibitive. In most cases, Minnesota charges a \$24 fee to obtain a driver's license. Besides the fee, a variety of documents may be required, including a birth certificate, a passport or a naturalization certificate. Obtaining these forms can cost up to \$200. Such costs are tantamount to a poll tax and are an unreasonable burden for segments of our population.

The Indiana law creates unfair restrictions. That has not prevented some legislators from attempting to bring Indiana's photo identification requirements to Minnesota to prevent voter fraud. But the facts just do not support the existence of such fraud. Most reported fraud is caused by clerical errors and computer problems with voter rolls. It is not the devious work of someone attempting to vote multiple times.

A study by the Brennan Center found that "allegations of widespread voter fraud ... often prove greatly exaggerated. ... Many of the claims of voter fraud amount to a great deal of smoke without much fire. The allegations simply do not pan out."

This study rings true in Minnesota. In 2004, former Secretary of State Mary

Kiffmeyer claimed that there were 14 instances of voter fraud; only one of those cases was prosecuted. More recently, teams of lawyers from the Franken and Coleman campaigns have been unable to discover any voter fraud during the Senate recount. They have discovered some problems with the election system, but none of those would be solved by photo identification legislation.

Voter fraud is not a problem in Minnesota. Legislators are better off spending their time on problems that truly plague the state.

Mike Dean is executive director of Common Cause Minnesota.

5. Announcements

Before you write

**Think carefully about why you're sending the announcement and who it should go to. Remember that too much email is probably almost as bad as none at all.

**Have your goal in mind--do you want people to call their senators, attend a benefit, gather at the capitol to overthrow the government? (It worked in Iceland!)

**Get all your facts, contact information, links, etc together *and check them*. Once an email goes out to a large list, correcting it is, um, horrible.

Things to include:

1. Clear information about who is sending the alert--a link back to your website, contact information, etc
2. Dates! Include them in the body of the text; don't rely on the timestamp. When is this being written? When must action be taken? It's distinctly possible that this announcement will kick around in email boxes worldwide until six months from now.
3. Clear beginning and ending markers, maybe a row of dashes or stars at the beginning and ending of your email. Remember that all kinds of forwarding and cutting and pasting tends to happen, and you want to at least minimize the possibility of confusion about what you actually sent.

Writing the announcement

1. Use a really good headline that identifies who should care and why. "Vegan Calamity: Earth Balance Buttery Spread Endangers Pygmy Elephants"
2. Put the most important information in the first paragraph. Put the action to take in the second paragraph. Follow up with background information.

3. Background information. It's a bit tricky--you don't want to bore people, but then it's not actually very radical to say "take some action based on three sentences--don't bother to find out for yourself!" In part, that's what links are for, so use them. **Remember to link to websites you have some confidence in rather than the first thing you google.** Note that activists have gotten in all kinds of trouble for accidentally linking to dubious sites--one woman linked to a site that linked to a bunch of neo-nazi material because she had looked only at the page she wanted to link and not at the rest of the site. Not cool!

4. If you're asking people to take action, go someplace, etc, **provide really good instructions.** Can you link to a map? Can you link to bus routes? Can you provide all the phone numbers people will need? Etc.

Try what you're requesting people to do. Call the front desk! Email the subcommittee! Talk to the manager! Make sure you can bus to Lakeville at 2am!

If you're asking people to do something new and scary, remember that detailed information about what to expect is helpful. This is particularly true when you're requesting phone calls. "You will be connected to the CEO's secretary. Ask her to take a message for him saying [messagemessage]"

5. Make it easy to read: use white space, use bullet points, use little stars, etc. Think about how demoralizing it is to see an 800-word paragraph staring at you in your email.

6. If you're asking people to take a (legal) action, ask them to let you know that they've done it. Are they emailing the publisher of a racist book by a well-known feminist? Ask them to cc you on the email! Some people will take action but won't tell you (secretive!) but it's helpful to have an idea of the number of people who are doing things.

6. News

Writing for your group's newsletter, website, Indymedia, etc.? Here are some tips for pretending to be a journalist!:

- **What's the audience?** An article for a progressive magazine should be different than a report for Indymedia, or a submission to Earth First! Journal, or piece for a (supposedly) nonpolitical publication. **This doesn't mean you should ever "water down" your/your group's politics** - just that it takes some skill (that is, practice) and awareness to craft writing that will be most effective in the particular context. A lot of activists try to err on the side of "too mainstream"; I'd rather err on the side of "too radical" because goddess knows

there's enough "mainstream" writing out there already.

- **What's your timeline?** If 12 people just got arrested at your rally, for goddess' sake don't wait until you can get ever last fact straight, spell all their names right, or find the answer to that nagging grammatical question before publishing your news. You can always come back and edit later. But beautiful writing should never take precedence over effective organizing. That said, the ability to write quickly takes practice; especially when when your adrenaline's flowing, triple-check that you have all the facts right as you know them, aren't making simple mistakes, and have as much who-what-where-when-why-how as possible.

On the other hand, if you're writing, say, a lengthy political analysis of the LOLcats phenomenon - or something else where there's no timeline involved, and where the writing isn't coupled with more urgent tangible action - then a need for speed shouldn't have to come at the expense of making your writing as good as you want it.

- **Establish relevance.** For example, if you're writing for Twin Cities Indymedia, instead of starting with:

As a Zionist state, Israel legally privileges Jews over Arabs. Over the past two weeks, we have seen the Israeli military conduct an air and ground war that has killed more than 800 people in Gaza and wounded over 3,000 - most of whom are civilians and not Hamas soldiers.

Instead, lead off by saying:

On Sunday afternoon at Loring Park in Minneapolis, 200 antiwar Jews and allies demonstrated in solidarity with Gaza, where Israeli bombardments have continued for the fourth consecutive week. The state of Minnesota invests in Israel, and Governor Pawlenty has recently met with Israeli trade representatives to further the Minnesota-Israeli economic partnership. Lisa Albrecht, IJAN-Twin Cities organizer, led off the rally by proclaiming, "Jews of conscience in Minnesota are here today to demand an end to all Minnesota trade with apartheid Israel."

- Unless you're writing an in-depth investigative or analytical piece (and maybe even then), break up long blocks of text. Use quotes, stories, anecdotes, or images to keep things interesting.

- **Avoid going over the top.** We activists often have a problem with this because we're so passionate. Although others probably do care about the issues we're passionate about, using ALL CAPS!!!!, five exclamation points, and overblown rhetoric ("The patriots demanded that Congress impeach the devil George W. Bush immediately!!"). Again, this doesn't mean watering down your politics; for instance, when Hugo Chavez said, "The devil came here yesterday, and it still smells of sulphur today,"
- **Copy what works.** Learn by noticing the style and form of writing that's effective and enjoyable. For example, I write a lot for Twin Cities Indymedia – so I spend a fair amount of time perusing other Indymedia sites around the world. I try to copy what works and avoid what makes me cringe.

For lots of examples of (usually) good, activist-written news in varying styles, I recommend checking out **indymedia.us**.

7. Style (the boring part?)

AP STYLE: For the sake of credibility and appearance, there are times when you're going to want your writing to seem as professional as possible. For these times it's helpful to know basic AP (Associated Press) Style – what professional journalists typically consider the gold standard for style. Even though a lot of this is bullshit that shouldn't really matter, using this for press releases endears you to journalists. Here's a quick guide of the most common issues.

Numbers • Spell out the numbers one through nine; for 10 and up, use numbers. • Spell out numerals that start a sentence; if the result is awkward, recast the sentence: *Twenty-seven detainees were released yesterday. Yesterday, 993 police officers fell down.* • The one exception to this rule is in a sentence that begins with a calendar year: 1938 was a turbulent year for Leon.

Abbreviations United States • as a noun, United States: The prime minister left for the United States yesterday. • as an adjective, U.S. (no spaces): A U.S. soldier was killed in Baghdad yesterday. States • Spell out the names of the states in text when they appear alone: Wildfires continued to rage through southern California yesterday. (Don't use MN, CA, etc.) • Place one comma between the **city and the state name**, and another after the state name, (e.g. *She traveled from San Diego, Calif., to go to a free school in*

Kansas City, Mo. Datelines • Put the city name in CAPITAL LETTERS, usually followed by the state, country or territory where the city is located. *SAINT PAUL, MINN. – Bob Fletcher slipped and fell on a rotten banana this afternoon. Three anarchists died after spasms caused by excessive laughter.*

Dates • Always use Arabic figures, without st, nd, rd or th. • Capitalize months. • When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. (e.g. *Nov. 11 was the day of her birthday.*) • When a phrase lists only a month and year, do not separate the month and the year with commas. (e.g. *May 1968 was her favorite month.*) • When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas. (e.g. *Aug. 20, 1964, was the day the insurrection was set to begin.*)

Time • Use figures except for noon and midnight • Use a colon to separate hours from minutes (e.g. 2:30 a.m.)

Punctuation

Apostrophe (') • For plural nouns ending in s, add only an apostrophe: *the boys' Barbie dolls, states' rights.* • For singular common nouns ending in s, add 's: *the hostess's invitation, the witness's answer.* • For singular proper names ending in s, use only an apostrophe: *Descartes' theories, Kansas' schools.* • For singular proper names ending in s sounds such as x, ce, and z, use 's: *Marx's theories, the prince's life.* • For plurals of a single letter, add 's: *Mind your p's and q's, the Red Sox defeated the Oakland A's.* • Do not use 's for plurals of numbers, or multiple letter combinations: *the 1980s, HMOs*

Colon (:) • Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence: *He promised this: The company will never let the union in. But: There were three considerations: profit, profit and profit.* • Colons go outside quotation marks unless they are part of the quoted material.

Comma (,) • Do not put a comma before the last item in a list of stuff: *John, Paul, George and Ringo; red, black and green.* • Use a comma to set off a person's hometown and age: *Jane Doe, Framingham, called the police action "maniacal." Joe Blow, 34, was arrested yesterday.*

Parentheses • The perceived need for parentheses is an indication that your sentence is becoming contorted. Try to rewrite the sentence, putting the incidental information in commas, dashes or in another sentence. If you do use parentheses, follow these guidelines: • If the material is inside a sentence, place the period outside the parentheses. • If the parenthetical

statement is a complete independent sentence, place the period inside the parentheses.

Quotation marks (“ ”) • In dialogue, each person’s words are placed in a separate paragraph, with quotation marks at the beginning and end of each person’s speech. • Periods and commas, etc. go within quotation marks if they’re part of the quoted material. • Use single marks for quotes within quotes: *She said, "He told me, 'I love you.'"* For multiparagraph quotes, do like below:

Jesse Sparkles told an Indymedia reporter at the scene that what he saw differed from claims by police.

"The officers were never in danger for an instant," Sparkles said. "The woman had her hands in the air the whole time, and wasn't even close enough to the officers to touch them.

"Of course, this scenario has repeated itself time after time after time in north Minneapolis. The police are never accountable; we need to abolish them now!"

[Below is what the AP says about ethnic groups; rather than following this, I would use the term that the specific person or group of people I’m writing about prefer to use to identify themselves.]

- Of ethnic groups: - The preferred usage for African Americans is “black.” The term is not capitalized. - Preferred usage for Caucasians is “white,” also not capitalized. - Preferred usage for Asian people is “Asian,” capitalized. - “American Indian,” capitalized with no hyphen, is preferred over “Native American.”

For a more in-depth look on all this, just do a google search for “AP Style.” Or better yet, just take note of style when you read things you like.

8. Gaza Solidarity Case Study - Op-ed vs. Speech vs. Press Release

Op-Ed

It's not hateful to criticize the Israeli government

By Lisa Albrecht

St. Paul Pioneer Press, January 7 2009

As a Jew and citizen of the U.S., I am outraged, sick to my stomach, and aching in my heart. First, I say that it is not anti-American to criticize the U.S. government, just as it does not signify Jew-hatred to criticize the Israeli government.

Second, I say that there is not one monolithic Jewish community or voice in the world, the U.S., or Minnesota, though mainstream Jewish organizations that are pro-Israel get the most media coverage.

There are many Jews all over the world who do not unequivocally support Israeli government policy. I am a member of the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network; we support a free Palestine that can determine its own future and an end to Israeli apartheid of Palestine. We stand in opposition to the ideology of Zionism, which has resulted in Israeli government policy to try to remove all Palestinians from Israel. By being a Zionist state, Israel legally privileges Jews over Arabs. Over the past 12 days, you have seen this ideology dramatically in action — an air and ground war that has killed more than 650 people in Gaza, and injured more than 3,000 Palestinians. Shifa Hospital in Gaza reports that the majority of the injured and killed have been Gazan families, not armed Hamas soldiers.

The Israeli government says that it is acting to end Hamas' rule in Gaza. Remember, both the U.S. and Israel supported democratic elections in Palestine, and Hamas was democratically elected. When countries negotiate for peace, they do not get to tell the other side who can sit at the table.

Israel says it has attacked Gaza because Hamas soldiers have shot thousands of rockets at Israel. I do not condone this bombing, but let me ask you, what would you do if you were part of a population of over 1.5 million people in one of the most densely populated places in the world? Your borders have been closed by Israel for 18 months. You do not have access to enough food for your family, or medical care, electricity, water or gasoline. You have no income, live under constant curfew, and your olive and vegetable fields have been destroyed by Israel. When a people are treated inhumanely and violently, it is no surprise that they fight back. No wonder that the Israeli government will not allow foreign journalists into Gaza to report on its destruction.

Again, the Israeli government justifies the war because of the thousands of rockets fired by Hamas into Israel. However, since September 2000, here is some startling data that we do not read about: 1,062 Israelis killed AND 4,876 Palestinians killed; 123 Israeli children killed AND 1,050 Palestinian children killed; 8,341 Israelis injured AND 33,034 Palestinians injured; One Israeli political prisoner held AND 10,756 Palestinian political prisoners held;

And for us in the U.S., perhaps the most important number, during fiscal year 2007, the U.S. government gave \$6.8 million a day to Israel (and less than \$300,000 to Palestine). (My source for these numbers is the Web site ifamericansknew.org.)

I was in Gaza in December, 1990, with a women's peace brigade 15 days before the first Gulf War started. I met with Palestinian peace activists, mothers, daycare workers, teachers and doctors. The poverty was dramatic. Children played in crowded alleys as open sewage ran between their legs. The people wanted peace, and did not hate Jews. And I thought that the conditions I witnessed then were horrendous. I also visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum; when I saw the photos of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, I started to shake. They looked like the Palestinians I had just visited in Gaza.

Israeli government policy gives me, an American Jew, the right to "return" to Israel and get immediate citizenship, even though it is not my homeland. However, Palestinian families who have lived on the land for generations, and were removed in 1948, have no right of return. Nor do they have any recourse when the wall put up by the Israeli government separates them from work, family, access to water and highways, and even divides Palestinian villages themselves.

The Jan. 5 headline in Haaretz, the largest Israeli newspaper, quotes foreign minister Tzipi Livni, saying "Israel will no longer show restraint when attacked." This is the person who is hoping to be the next prime minister of Israel in elections happening in a month. If 18 months of total lockdown of Gaza was showing restraint, what in God's name is going to happen to the innocent people of Gaza?

What must we do? We must demand that our elected officials call for an immediate ceasefire and an opening of Gaza's borders. I do not believe that using violence will end this crisis. History has shown us that there are successful nonviolent ways to work for justice. In the 1980s across the globe, individuals, colleges, entire cities and states, and businesses stopped buying anything made in South Africa, and governments that had invested in South African bonds got rid of them. Working with black South African leaders, the world ended apartheid.

We must challenge the Israeli government by hitting them where it hurts — financially. We must call on Gov. Tim Pawlenty to cut our trade and investment ties with Israel. We must support the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee. Read labels when you shop. Find out where your retirement money is invested. Hold Israel responsible

for its violations of international law and Palestinian rights, and hold our elected officials responsible.

Do not let mainstream Jews and their organizations call you "Jew-haters." Have courage and speak out. Do not be silent about Gaza. Salaam/shalom.

Lisa Albrecht is an activist educator and writer. She is associate professor and Morse-Minnesota Alumni Association Distinguished Professor of Teaching in the School of Social Work of the University of Minnesota. The views expressed here are her own. Her e-mail address is lalbrech@umn.edu.

Speech

Do not be silent about Gaza

delivered by Lisa Albrecht at State Capitol rally, January 5, 2009

Saalam/Shalom and thank you/shukran to my Muslim brothers and sisters who organized this event and invited me to speak. To all of you listening, I say: Do not be silent about Gaza.

I come before you today as both a Jew and a citizen of the United States. I am outraged, sick to my stomach, and aching in my heart. First and foremost, I say that it is not anti-American to criticize the U.S. government, just as it is not anti-Jewish to criticize the Israeli government. Secondly, I say that there is not one monolithic Jewish community or voice in the world, the U.S., Minnesota or the Twin Cities, though mainstream Jewish organizations that are Pro-Israel get the most media coverage.

There are many Jews all over the world who do not unequivocally support Israeli government policy. I am a member of the [International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network](#); we support a free Palestine that can determine its own future, and an end to Israeli apartheid of Palestine. We stand in opposition to the ideology of Zionism, a politics that has resulted in Israeli government policy to remove all Palestinians from Israel, and an ideology that you have seen dramatically in action over the past week. It has resulted in the killing of over 500 people in Gaza, injuries to over 2,500, and now the ground war that has cut Gaza in half and an air war that the [London Times speculated today](#) includes the use of phosphorus shells — weapons supposedly being used "legally" as smokescreens for Israeli troops, when in reality they cause horrific burns on the bodies of their victims.

Do not be silent about Gaza.

I was in Gaza in December 1991 with a women's peace brigade 15 days before the first Gulf War started. I met with Palestinian peace activists, mothers, day-care workers, teachers and doctors. The poverty was dramatic. Children played in crowded alleys as open sewage ran between their legs. The people wanted peace, and did not hate Jews. And I thought that the conditions I witnessed then were horrendous. I visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum on that trip, and when I saw the photos of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, I started to shake. They looked like the Palestinians I had just visited in Gaza.

The Zionist government policy of Israel today gives me, an American Jew, the right to "return" to Israel and get immediate citizenship, even though it is not my homeland. However, Palestinian families who have lived on the land for generations, and were removed in 1948, have no right of return. Nor do they have any recourse when the wall put up by the Israeli government separates them from work, family, access to water and highways — and even divides Palestinian villages themselves.

The Israeli government says that it is acting to end Hamas' rule in Gaza. Remember, both the U.S. and Israel supported democratic elections in Palestine, and Hamas was democratically elected. When countries negotiate with their enemies to end conflicts, they do not sit down with friends. The U.S. and Israel have no right to determine that Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas are satisfactory negotiation partners, but Hamas is not.

Do not be silent about Gaza.

The government of Israel says it has attacked Gaza because Hamas soldiers have shot thousands of rockets at Israel. I do not condone this bombing, but let me ask you, what would you do if you were part of a population of over 1½ million people in the most densely populated place in the world? Your borders have been closed by Israel for 18 months. You do not have access to enough food for your family, or medical care, or electricity, water or gasoline. You have no income, you live under constant curfew, and your olive and vegetable fields have been bulldozed by Israel. When a people are treated inhumanely and violently, it is no surprise that they fight back. And today, it is no surprise that the Israeli government will not allow foreign journalists into Gaza to report on its destruction.

Again, the Israeli government justifies the war because of the thousands of rockets fired by Hamas into Israel. However, since September 2000, here is some startling data that we do not read about:

- 1,062 Israelis killed AND 4,876 Palestinians killed;
- 123 Israeli children killed AND 1,050 Palestinian children killed;
- 8, 341 Israelis injured AND 33,034 Palestinians injured;
- 1 Israeli political prisoner held AND 10,756 Palestinian political prisoners held;

U.N. resolutions targeting Israel between 1955 and 1992: 65. None targeting Palestinians.

And for us in the United States, perhaps the most important number: During fiscal year 2007, the U.S. government gave \$6.8 million a day to Israel (and less than \$300,000 to Palestine).

Do not be silent about Gaza.

The headline today in [Haaratz](#), the largest Israeli newspaper, quotes Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni: "Israel will no longer show restraint when attacked." This is the person who is hoping to be the next prime minister of Israel in elections happening in a month. If 18 months of total lockdown of Gaza was showing restraint, what in God's name is going to happen to the innocent people of Gaza — the child playing in his yard killed, the ambulance driver and doctor killed by a bomb that targeted the ambulance, the Muslims praying at mosques that have been bombed, the students studying at the Islamic University? Israel says they are terrorists.

I ask you, who gets to define the word terrorism? Terrorism is the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce, intimidate or retaliate against governments, the population as a whole, or foreign societies in the pursuit of goals that are political, religious or ideological. Do you agree? This is the FBI's definition.

Do not be silent about Gaza.

What must we do? We must demand that our elected officials call for an immediate ceasefire and an opening of Gaza's borders. Let them refrain from using the word "terrorism." We must challenge the Israeli government by hitting it where it hurts — financially. We call on Gov. Tim Pawlenty to cut our trade and investment ties with Israel. We must support the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee. Read the labels on all the products you buy and don't buy anything from Israel. Ask restaurants where their produce comes from before you decide to eat there. Ask your workplace where it invests your retirement money, and demand that your money is not invested in Israeli bonds. Hold Israel responsible for its violations of international law and Palestinian rights. And hold our elected officials responsible. Do not let mainstream Jews and their organizations call you anti-Jewish. Have courage and speak out. Do not be silent about Gaza. Salaam/shalom.
