Writing For MGA!

A Guide to Help You Achieve Literary Greatness
Among Fellow MGA Enthusiasts

Introduction

It's been several years since this topic was addressed in *MGA!*.

Since then, there have been changes in the way NAMGAR interacts with members with respect to submitting material for publication. It's probably a good time to revisit *Writing for MGA!*.

This is a guide to help you achieve literary greatness amongst your fellow MGA, Magnette, and Variant, enthusiasts. This article discusses the writing process, images, and submission for publication.

NAMGAR member contributions account for most of the material in *MGA!*. We encourage everyone to send us MGA, Magnette, and MGA Variant stories, experiences, technical tips, thoughts and images. Material is welcome at any time: this is an ongoing effort with no specific deadline. We try to publish most of what we receive. However, we do have space and time constraints, so articles and images may not appear for several issues.

Why wouldn't we publish your article? Perhaps the material isn't timely or was covered in an earlier issue. Sometimes the publication schedule makes material obsolete. It's possible the material isn't suitable: sex, drugs, and violence work well in books and on television, but we don't think it piques the interest of NAMGAR members in the right way.

The Process of Writing

Almost everyone says that they don't know how to write. What they really mean is they don't know how to write well. Writing well comes with practice; few of us enjoyed our English and grammar classes in high-school, and, unless forced into jobs that required a lot of writing, few of us willingly nurtured the skill.

Step One: Just write! It's that simple. Don't think about how you are saying it, just write it down the way you would say it to a friend, warts and all. Get your thoughts on paper or into a word processing file. Once written down, you can edit, accentuate, or exaggerate, as required.

Don't try to complete your masterpiece in one sitting. Write it, put it down and come back to it over the course of several days. Writing is more tedious than difficult. Writing an article may require several reviews and rewrites before you get just what you want.

If you need assistance with grammar and spelling, most computer software now has tools to assist you; otherwise, there are dictionaries, thesauruses, and writing guides available from a bookstore, library or on the Internet.

We would like publishing material to be as painless as possible, for us and for you. If you have questions about how your work is progressing or general questions about the writing process, feel free to reach out to the Editor or Copyeditor for suggestions. Their contact information is listed on the Masthead of *MGA!* as well as on the NAMGAR website. We can provide helpful suggestions for many types of articles.

Some common mistakes to be aware of make our editing job tougher. **Avoid exclamation points; it diminishes their effectiveness!!!!!** Also be aware of certain words that tend to be overused, like "just," "also," "next," and "very." Not necessarily bad by themselves, but when they show up in every paragraph, or multiple times in one paragraph, it's time for a rewrite.

Remember that punctuation marks always go inside the closing quotation mark. When there is a list of items in a sentence, there should be a comma after the next to last item: the one before "and" (e.g., gas, oil, water, and beer). Use quotation marks or italicization for titles of poems, songs, articles, short stories, books, movies, plays, musicals, TV shows, magazines, and the title of an article in a magazine. When referring to more than one MG, MGs is correct, *not MG's*.

How Many Words Should I Write?

The number of words varies by article type. There are basically five types for *MGA!*: Letters to the Editor, Articles, Columns, News, and Fill.

We like to keep Letters to the Editor (Open Fire) small and compact. Length should not exceed one hundred words, less is more here; occasionally a small image is acceptable, if relevant to the material presented. Longer letters are frequently edited, sometimes severely, to permit all letters to be printed.

News articles are meant to inform the membership of happenings in a geographical area. They are around three hundred fifty to four hundred words. An image is encouraged because it adds additional interest to the article. News articles might be for NAMGAR related events, GTs and Regionals, or for attracting NAMGAR members in an area, not yet associated with a regional group. Be mindful of dates, because we only publish six times a year.

Articles are typically in-depth, themed, and around fifteen hundred to seventeen hundred words: this is about two printed pages when accompanied by a few pictures.

Fill is used to flesh out the magazine with short anecdotes, very short stories, trivia, etc. They are typically between three hundred fifty and eight hundred words, about one whole printed page with an image or two.

Step Two: There is no Step Two! See Step One.

Article Submission

A word processing document is the preferred method for articles for publication. File types include: TXT, RTF, DOC, ODF, etc. Any photographs should not be embedded in the article. More on that later.

Use a standard font like Arial, Times Roman or Courier. Not all computers have the same fonts installed. All word processing applications have at least one of these. If you use a "fancy" font in your text, we will convert it to something that can be pre-processed by our digital publication software. Use a font size of 10 or 11 points for your basic text and a bold or italic font to indicate information that you want emphasized.

After submission to *MGA!*, our Copyeditor will review it for spelling, grammar, punctuation errors, standard nomenclature, clarity, and continuity. Please don't be offended if the Copyeditor contacts you regarding your article. The Copyeditor just wants to ensure that your article is presented well in *MGA!*. Sometimes, but not often, we will edit an article for length.

You Don't Have a Computer

We urge you to type your articles or have someone type them for you. Handwritten material can be very difficult to read even if you excel at penmanship. We can scan old photographs for you and will return the originals. You may submit an article and pictures, slides, and negatives by mailing them to the address listed for the Editor or Copyeditor on the *MGA!* Masthead.

Pictures

Pictures can really add to articles. Could you imagine a magazine without pictures? We can. They call them scientific reports… Zzzzz. Even if you aren't writing an article, but just submitting a picture, this section is for you, too!

Pictures should be in focus and well lit! One can do a lot of things today with photographic software, but one can't make a bad picture good, especially when it comes to focus.

When sending a picture, include a short description so we know what we're looking at and how it relates to what you've sent. Just sending a photo? We would still like a description. If there are people in the photograph, it would be helpful if you provide their names. The ones we make up may not be very flattering.

Today's smartphone images rival most of the older digital cameras and even some of the newer ones. In the past we said don't send mobile phone images: today it's acceptable. Here are some general picture taking tips:

Besides focus and lighting, pictures accompanying an article also require the correct resolution. Images destined for a cover or centerfold have stringent requirements.

If you are taking a picture hoping that it might make it on one of the covers, turn your camera so that the image will be vertical: portrait mode. The laid-out cover image format is 11 inches high by 8.5 inches wide.

If you're going for the centerfold, these images should be shot horizontal: landscape. A laid-out centerfold image is approximately 11 inches x 17 inches.

These types of images require additional processing to ensure clarity because of their size.

Cover and centerfold photos should be dramatic in composition, lighting, or both. Be aware of what's in the background. If it's a photo of a gorgeous MGA, but there's a lawn mower and some trash cans in the background, forget it. You don't want the background to compete with the center of attention in these photos.

Don't crop your images. We will do that, if required. We need allowances to position the image on the page when creating the layout. Force your flash to fire or use the back-lit feature of your camera, when subjects are lighted from behind. Even better, if you know how, use a fill flash

Do not make any alterations to the image using photographic software. We will do that so we can make the corrections we require for print publication. Images from digital cameras usually have camera data embedded in the file that can be useful in making corrections for printing. Some photographic software products may not preserve that information when the image is edited.

Digital cameras can shoot in several different formats, the most common being JPG. Don't let that bother you. We will convert them as required. We wished we could tell you how to set your camera up, but there are too many models. This is one time you may be forced to read the manual.

Scanning Photos, Documents, and Resolution

If using old photographs, many optical scanners and multifunction printers do a decent job of scanning. This can be an alternative to mailing originals.

There are a few things you need to consider. Some optical scanners offer scanning types for the type of material being scanned. If you are scanning a photograph, use the photo scan option. If you are scanning a document with text, use the document scanning option.

Make sure your scanner resolution is set to scan **at least 300 dpi!** Scanning software typically defaults to 200 dpi or less. We need a resolution of at least 300 dpi for successful printing. Save photographs and scans as JPG files. TIFF, BMP, and RAW, et al. are also acceptable.

You can save documents, logos, or other "text" material in any of the formats mentioned above, or as a PDF file. PDF files generally reproduce better shapes than the photo file formats. We can edit some PDF files, but please don't count on it. Again, scan at 300 dpi.

If you don't have a way to scan items, and don't want to send us the original material, ask a friend, family member, neighbor or fellow NAMGAR member if they can do it for you.

Sending Digital Material

Email is the way most people transmit material to the *MGA!* Editor. One or more files attached to an email usually works fine. We can handle email with total file sizes up to about 10MB per email. Generally, your email program will complain if it thinks an email is too big.

Sending more than one email to transmit all the necessary files is acceptable. Just tell us that there are more emails coming so we can watch for and assemble them appropriately.

If you are sending a large, high-resolution image or multiple files in an email, consider sending a ZIP file. ZIP files can reduce the total size of all the included files, but more importantly, they group the files and make them easier to handle in the editorial office.

Please do not embed the image in the body of the email; attach it to the email instead. Embedding can subject it to modifications by the mail application which you might not intend. Smartphones and tablets really like to reduce an image's size for emailing. They do this by reducing the resolution.

There are too many combinations of email programs and electronic devices to provide a step-by-step instruction. Here

are a few rules of thumb:

- ▶ Do not send the image as a photograph.
- ▶ Find that image file in your image folder and note its name.
- ▶ Then, open your email application and attach the image file as a document, by name.
- ▶ If your email application challenges you about the file size, always select the largest size available, typically two megabytes (2MB) or more.

You may also submit the material on a CD-ROM/DVD-ROM. Just be sure that the disc you create is *Microsoft Windows* compatible. Check your disc burning application "Help" file for the necessary settings, if using an operating system other than *Microsoft Windows*. If you cannot find a setting for creating a *Microsoft Windows* compatible disc, use the ISO-9660 standard. Another option is to use a Cloud repository to transfer large files. Contact the Editor for details.

Legal Stuff

MGA! and NAMGAR.com are official publications of the North American MGA Register, Ltd. (**NAMGAR**). Contributions from members are encouraged, and every effort will be made to use appropriate material. Unsolicited material from non-members is welcome. All materials sent must be free of copyright encumbrance and include release forms where applicable.

NAMGAR makes every effort to publish the material it receives, but submission to *MGA!* magazine or the website is not a guarantee of publication. All material published in these venues becomes the property of NAMGAR. The Editor and/or Web Coordinator reserves the right to edit for length and appropriateness.

Copyright is a tricky area and is really the domain of Intellectual Property lawyers. But we've been asked to clarify a couple of points.

Free of Copyright Encumbrance: If you didn't create the material yourself (text, photographs, drawings, etc.), then you must get permission from the person(s) who did. The permission must be in writing and specifically give permission to NAMGAR for publication. For example, if an article was published which used a piece of artwork from a professional il-

lustrator, the illustrator would be required to send us a statement granting permission to use that illustration. Within this context, there are exceptions, so if you are unsure — ASK!

Material Becomes the Property of NAMGAR: What needs clarification is that if your material is published in *MGA!* or on the NAMGAR website, it becomes the property of NAMGAR. You are free to submit the raw material (e.g., the Word document, et al.) to anyone else you desire.

However, you do not own the NAMGAR published work (e.g. the article in a NAMGAR publication created from that Word document), and you may not grant permission to anyone or any other publication to reprint that published work, as it appeared in NAMGAR print or digital format.

Another publication may not print the material, as published in *MGA!* or via electronic media without the permission of NAMGAR's Communications Manager. Again, if you are unsure — ASK!

Occasionally, we receive published works and images from their authors for reprint in *MGA!*. If you are such a person and you wish to guarantee your copyright on the material, include a release form with your submission detailing the rights for use.

Computer Software

The computer software you use to create your articles and images can be as varied as the computers in the marketplace. Most computers come with one or more of the following: a word processing application and an image editor.

If you don't have a full-featured word processor on your computer system, consider an Open-Source application like *LibreOffice* at LibreOffice.org. This application will run on several operating systems.

If you do not have full-featured photographic software on your system, consider products like *Paint Shop Pro*, *Picasa*, or *Gimp*. Most of these products can be found by searching the Internet and range in price from free to hundreds of dollars. •