

When Writing Articles for AVOTAYNU

A Guide to AVOTAYNU Style Policies

Avotaynu editors are responsible for making sure that all articles conform to the style standards of the publication. These standards create a uniform appearance to the issue. Outlined below are a number of considerations we ask you to follow. If you conform to these rules, it will be unnecessary for the editors to rewrite your article.

1. Avoid writing in the first person. Virtually every article we receive could be written in that manner. *I* went on a trip to Poland, *I* discovered something worth telling, *I* interviewed an important person. Avotaynu readers are not interested that it happened to you. They want to know about Poland, about the discovery, about the person interviewed, not that *you* did it. Do not refer to the reader with such words as *you* or *the reader*. You are not talking to the reader, you are writing something to be read. Do not say, “I want to tell you about an exciting discovery...”. Say “An important discovery was made...”.
2. Do not write your experience as a chronicle of events. Put the most important part of your story first, since people will not necessarily read your entire story. They will read until the essence of your story is captured or they become disinterested. If you have something important to say and it is placed at the end of the story, many readers will never read it. If you are writing about a trip to Poland, do not say: I got on the plane, flew to Warsaw, went to my hotel, ate dinner, went to the Archives, and discovered the name of every Jew that ever lived in Poland. By the time they read that you flew to Warsaw, half the readers will be bored with what you had to say.
3. Omit clauses or sentences that are of no interest to the reader. Remember the only purpose of your article is to inform the reader. I left the hotel and went to the White House to meet the President. “I left the hotel” adds nothing to your story.
4. Write using simple, clear words and sentences. Remember: You are being asked to inform, not to show your creative writing ability. Do not require your reader to read your article with a dictionary by his/her side. Do not show your tremendous command of the English language by using words that will obfuscate the intent of your story. It is something up with which we will not stand. Our editors will replace your polysyllabic words with simpler ones that have the same meaning.
5. Avoid statements of opinion, especially those that might be controversial. Avoid descriptive adjectives that are opinionated, even if they are praiseworthy. Statements such as “the well-known author...”, “the great rabbi...”, “AVOTAYNU, ably edited by Sallyann Sack”.
6. Avoid long sentences. Some style books claim a sentence should not exceed 25 words. Avoid sentences with long clauses because they tend to be more difficult to read and therefore you will tend to lose the interest of the reader who is trying to understand what you are saying which defeats the purpose of your writing the article in the first place. Break them up into more than one sentence.
7. Avoid long paragraphs. At the AVOTAYNU column width of 46 characters, paragraphs should be fewer than 15 lines.
8. Do not overuse hyphenated words or parenthetical expressions; do not underline words because you want to emphasize a point; and do not overuse words that are put in quotes because they are meant to connote a special sense. Try to limit quotation marks to words which quote what a person said. Wrong: Are you tracing your “roots” because locating hard-to-find material is really not one of your fortes (or that of your spouse, either).
9. The majority of our readers read only English. Translate titles that are in other languages by placing

the English translation in parentheses. Example: Pinkas Hakehillot (Encyclopedia of towns). Do not assume your reader knows any but the most common Yiddish and Hebrew words, better yet, assume your reader is Christian. Words such as “cheder” and “mohel” should have an English translation. It can be assumed that “bar mitzvah” is a term known to all readers.

10. Avoid using contractions such as don't, they're, it's. Instead say “do not”, “they are” and “it is”.
11. When using abbreviations, first spell out the words followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. Thereafter, in the article, use only the abbreviation. Exception: very common abbreviations known to all readers, such as U.S. Example: The National Genealogical Society (NGS) is in Washington, DC. Members of NGS live throughout the country.
12. In general, the numbers one to nine are written out; the numbers 10 or greater are shown as their digits.
13. Decades do not have an apostrophe. Not 1930's, but 1930s.
14. Book titles or magazine names are in italics. Exception: AVOTAYNU is always in all caps and not underscored. Articles within publications are in double quotes. Quotes are in double quotes; quotes within quotes are in single quotes; quotes within quotes within quotes should be avoided.
15. American spelling conventions of English are used. Do not use British spelling conventions.
16. Use the Jewish version: BCE and CE instead of B.C. or A.D.
17. Titles: An academic title is not used in bylines or in the body of the article unless it is relevant to the article. For example, if Sallyann Amdur Sack wrote an article about genealogy, she would be referred to as “Sallyann Amdur Sack” and “Sack”. If she wrote an article about clinical psychology, he would then be “Sallyann Amdur Sack, PhD” and “Dr. Sack”. All clergy have their titles preceding their name. “Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern”, “Rabbi Stern”, “Reverend Nelson Murphy”, “Reverend Murphy”. Persons with official recognition in the genealogical world have their title in bylines but not in the body of articles. Hence, “by Miriam Weiner, CG” but in an article “Miriam Weiner”.
18. People *emigrate* from a country and *immigrate* to a country.
19. The following are the AVOTAYNU spellings for words that have alternate spellings: brit, Eretz Yisrael, hakehillot, Hassid(ic), kehilah, ketubah, ketubot, landsmanshaftn, mohel, pinkas, Romania, yahrzeit, yeshiva, yeshivot, yizkor. There are no standards for the spelling of Jewish/Yiddish given names. Exception: in titled works, such as books, the spelling will conform to the title.
20. The spelling of Jewish holidays are: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Chanukah, Tu B”Shevat, Purim, Pesach or Passover, Lag Ba-Omer, Shavuot and Tishah B”Av.
21. The Hebrew months are Tishri, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul.
22. Sephardi/Ashkenazi are nouns, Sephardic/Ashkenazic are adjectives.

Standards

1. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* is the standard for spelling and word usage.
2. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is the standard for punctuation and style. Avotaynu has elected to make the following exceptions to this standard.

- a. When describing centuries use the numeric form; 20th century, not twentieth century.
- b. Write a range of years using the full four digits of the starting and ending year, unless the ending year is within the same decade as the starting year. Examples: 1910–1925, 1895–1902, 1940–45. If the range of years explicitly implies a time frame of one year or less, always use the short form, even if the period overlaps a decade. Example: During the fiscal year 1939–40.
- c. U.S. currency is never prefixed with “US” unless it is necessary to distinguish from another currency which is in dollars. Do not say, “The cost of the book is £10 or US\$21.” Instead say, “The cost of the book is £10 or \$21,” however “The cost of the book is AUS\$23 or US\$17.”
- d. In general, do not use periods for commonly abbreviated words. For example, UN, all degrees (PhD, MA, MD). Exception: U.S.

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