

# MEMO

To: Jane Smith  
From: Kathleen Conley  
Date: April 5, 2012  
Re: Developmental editing for “Analyzing the Game”

## Overview

The purpose of this memo is to detail and describe suggested changes for the piece titled “Analyzing the Game,” with *The Atlantic* being the target publication for the revised version. As articles published in this magazine center on news stories, politics, and cultural commentary, the subject matter of your piece is definitely a topic that this readership would be interested in. The next step in the editing process is to then reframe the text as it currently stands, making sure that it exemplifies the overall tone of the magazine and that the writing is tailored to fit with audience expectations. The goal of this developmental editing is to help you make these revisions possible, so that the final version of your article will fit seamlessly with articles typically produced by this publication. Please realize that some of these suggestions are negotiable, but that they all aim to enhance and polish your work.

## Tone and Voice

Articles in *The Atlantic* are catered towards an educated audience, but the general tone of most articles is closer to “accessible” than “academic.” Several common markers of academic or scholarly writing are usually absent. For instance, the author may examine an issue from a critical distance, but need not be overly distanced from the audience. The use of first-person pronouns (e.g. “we,” “our lives,” etc.) is quite common in feature articles. This makes the writing a bit less formal, and also makes issues more immediate and relevant to readers. While these feature articles are not necessarily literary journalism, they do tend to discuss subjects in a narrative fashion.

A strength of your writing is your ability to write objectively. This being an emotionally sensitive issue, it is a credit to your piece that it does not stray into the realm of subjective and opinionated editorial writing. You are making an argument, but readers will be more inclined to agree with you because it is based on the actual experiences of the subjects you have researched, and isn’t simply a rant (which, admittedly, many would believe to be justified, but you do a nice job of restraining yourself). It might also be helpful to think about the article primarily as the reporting of an issue; ideas that challenge the ethics of the pickup community can grow out of your writing organically, but trying to convince the reader to share your opinion will not be your main focus.

As you revisit this piece, the next step will be to balance this objectivity with a more informal (yet professional) tone. For instance, the current introduction sets up the issue to be discussed, but the academic stance may disengage some readers. There are also conscious references to what the article itself aims to achieve, but stating the goals of your writing in this way is unnecessary. It may be helpful to think about your article as the telling of a story: it may not have a “plot” per se, but it will have a beginning and end, with a logical development of ideas in between. By writing at the start what the article aims to accomplish, the ending to the story is somewhat spoiled, and readers may not be motivated to read the piece in its entirety if the ending is given away at the beginning.

In the opening paragraph, you may want to consider setting a scene or context for the article overall. Reworking the second paragraph may be a place to start. As a reader, I found the fact that most of the high ratings for Strauss' book were given by women to be puzzling. But this also made me more interested in reading the rest of your article. These kinds of strategies will give readers a reason to care about the issue, as it challenges previous conceptions or informs them of a new idea with a style that is enjoyable to read.

To engage readers, don't be afraid to use the active voice over the passive. This is in keeping with the idea of minimizing the distance between writer and reader, so that the article is almost conversational. For instance, the first sentence of the fourth paragraph can easily be made active by removing the introductory phrase, "Here, it must be discussed that." By making this simple change, the sentence becomes less wordy and no longer over explains. As long as your points logically build off of each other (which they already do), the purpose of your writing will be clear, so you shouldn't feel the need to reinstate academic distance.

## **Length**

The length of feature articles in *The Atlantic* varies greatly; they are usually anywhere between 2,000 and 9,000 words, but in some cases they may be longer or shorter. Your current article is about 4,500 words, so issues of length will most likely not be of major concern.

## **Citations and Integration of Source Material**

Your decision to base your points on more than Strauss' *The Game* is a wise one. Whereas simply analyzing Strauss' book would seem more like a book review, your discussion of the Mystery Method and the message board posts reveals the broader implications of what the existence of the pickup community means for our culture. In this regard, your criticism is well done.

While block quotations sometimes appear within articles in *The Atlantic*, they are somewhat of a rare occurrence. But this is not to say that the block quotations in this article are inappropriate or uncalled for. I would suggest that they be used sparingly and to support the main claims of the article, but you may not want to use them to perform close readings of selections of text, which is a practice more suitable to academia than this type of publication. In the same way, the quotations from scholarly articles certainly support your points, but using them frequently may not be fitting in this situation, given the general (rather than specialized) audience and the tone for the article. Keep in mind that a final published article will not be formatted with parenthetical citations.

Much of the content currently presented in footnotes is relevant and often quite necessary. However, this style communicates, again, a level of formality that may be inappropriate in this case. This small issue can be remedied by simply integrating the most essential parts of the footnotes with the main text.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, consider taking the following steps as you move forward:

- Set a scene/context for the issue at the beginning of the article to make the topic immediate and relevant to the culture of readers.
- Think about using the strategies of narrative structure to keep readers interested and wanting to keep reading.

- Make sure that you use a tone appropriate for a knowledgeable yet general adult audience (rather than academia).
- Exercise a preference for active over passive voice when possible to decrease distance between writer and audience (less formality will strengthen the piece and inspire conversation).
- Cite scholarly journals only when the support they provide is accessible to a mainstream adult audience, and if they add new ideas rather than simply restate your own.
- Integrate important footnotes with the main body of text.

I hope that these suggestions will be of help to you as you review your work, in which you have already made a lot of progress in examining and commenting on your subject. If you have any questions or if I can provide any further assistance, I can be reached at [kathleenrconley@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenrconley@gmail.com).