

Editorial vs. Non-Editorial Presentation A Guide for ELi Writers and Editors

AVOID OPINIONS!

In general, you should ask yourself, “Is this statement a *fact* or an *opinion*?” If it is an opinion, and it is not a quotation from some other person whose opinion is being presented as part of the story, an opinion either needs to be eliminated or to be highly qualified. Examples:

Poorly done:	Well done:
You should try Grade B maple syrup! It’s terrific!	Many people prefer Grade B maple syrup because the flavor is very intense compared to Grade A.
Our children’s gym teachers are generally underappreciated.	Toshi Derken told me that she believes “our children’s gym teachers are underappreciated.”

HEADLINES SHOULD NOT SOUND EDITORIAL!

Try to avoid article headlines that sound like they could be headlines for editorials. (The same holds for banner side headlines.) Examples:

Poorly done:	Well done:
East Lansing Water Tastes Terrible	Citizens Notice Change in Water Taste
Joe’s Pub Has Best Variety of Burgers!	Wide Variety of Burgers at Joe’s Pub

PHOTOS AND OTHER GRAPHICS SHOULD NOT LOOK POLITICALLY ONE-SIDED!

Avoid reproducing a political sign, logo, or image in such a way as to make it look like we’re endorsing those politics. Examples:

Poorly done:	Well done:
Simple reproduction of a “no-trespassing” anti-BWL sign	Photo of sign in a yard with a contextualizing headline like “Yard Signs Aim to Warn BWL Trimmers”
Banner slide image showing Jane Doe with a headline that says “Jane Doe Runs for Council”	Banner slide image showing <i>all</i> Council candidates with a headline that says “ELi Asks Council Candidates for Views on Debt and Development”

SEE OVER →

DON'T BE AFRAID OF USING THE FIRST-PERSON VOICE!

The first-person voice ("I") is fine to use so long as you are not presenting opinions in a way that editorializes. In fact, paradoxically, using the first person often makes a piece *more honest* (less editorial) by explaining your position in a story. Examples:

Poorly done:	Well done:
The Historic District Commission must act now to avoid exacerbating local economic distress.	I am on the Historic District Commission (HDC). One reason the HDC is considering Plan A is to eliminate abandoned buildings in the downtown area.
Pumpkin is the best local fall flavor in Michigan.	My family happens to like the taste of pumpkin, and so fall means pumpkin season in our house: pumpkin pies, pumpkin soups, even pumpkin sodas.
Commissioner Warren has said, "It's just too soon" to vote.	I asked Commissioner Warren about the group's choice to put off the vote, and she told me "it's just too soon" for the Commission to decide on the matter.
The East Lansing Diner is a better place to take out-of-town guests than the East Lansing Grill.	The East Lansing Diner offers a quieter atmosphere than the East Lansing Grill, such that I find the Diner to be an easier place to have a conversation with guests.

REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND SET OF EYES!

Let's make sure, when we are acting as each other's reviewers/editors, to look very carefully at each word, each sentence, and each image, to make sure we are spotting and fixing headlines, graphics, sentences, and words that could be seen by a reasonable person as editorial.

Remember we are here to serve the people of East Lansing by providing non-editorial, non-partisan, factual, clear, and accurate news. *We can* and *should* let our neighbors know Person A is doing charity work that benefits dozens of needy folks in our community, that Fruit B is in season and as sweet as it gets all year, that Committee C has two members who have external business relationships with a company with business before that committee. But when we're doing this, we need to do it in a way that signals, while we all have personal opinions, we are honest about the difference between our personal opinions and the facts:

Opinion:	Fact:
Person A is a hero!	Person A is doing local charity work.
Fruit B is the best!	Fruit B is now in peak season.
Committee C is corrupted by money!	Committee C includes two people with external financial relationships that overlap with the Committee's business.