Vistas Style Guide

- *Keep articles 300 to 400 words or less, unless assigned by the editor.*
- *Articles should be written in an objective, third-person format, unless a personal memoir.*
- *Submit articles by the fifth for the following month (April 5 for the May issue).*
- *Submit pictures uncropped, 4 Mb or larger, with the caption, names and photo credit.*
- *Include author(s) names and at least one email address.*

Vistas, the monthly newsletter of ECIA, is a service to the community of Eldorado at Santa Fe. *Vistas* is funded by the annual assessment paid to the homeowners' association by lot owners of Eldorado. *Vistas* presents information of interest and use to everyone living in the community, with articles by the ECIA Board of Directors, staff of the contracted management firm, HOAMCO and by residents themselves. This guide explains ECIA's standards for written submissions to *Vistas,* literary mechanics, syntax and style. This ensures consistent readability and quality while protecting residents' rights to express their views in a courteous, clear and competent fashion.

The pages of *Vistas* are open to Eldorado homeowners and the Board encourages participation in this dialogue. Your desire and right to expression are important to the entire community. However, not everyone writes with professional skill or results. Thus, the purpose of this guide is to help the non-professional writer produce an article as readable and informative as possible.

Writing for this general audience is not the same as writing a legal brief, a novel, an inter-office memo, academic dissertation or scientific report. Nor can the article ignore the standards of courtesy, respect and decorum that are part of civil discussion. These standards will help you, the writer, get across what you have to say more effectively. Unless it's a signed memoir, keep the tone objective and leave out "I" and "me".

Vistas, like any publication, strives to serve its readers with the ABCs of good writing, as they are often called: *Accuracy, Brevity* and *Clarity.* Keep these in mind as you prepare an article for this, or any, publication. Verify the facts that you present. If you offer an opinion, conjecture or belief, say so clearly. If appropriate, identify your source. "A good way to do this is to quote someone," said Jane Smith, "This can also get an idea across quickly." Respect your reader's time and tell your story directly without wandering. Make your points so they cannot be misunderstood by anyone, even a reader skimming through the article. Writing for *Vistas* is journalism as much as for any newspaper or magazine, and the motto in newsrooms is, "Write it tight and write it bright." In other words, use as few words as necessary to make them work. Another newsroom motto says, "If in doubt, leave it out." If it's vital, keep it in.

Short sentences are good. Keep it simple, straightforward – and clear. Short words are preferred to pomposity. Use more verbs and fewer adjectives. A catchy word that sizzles beats a long-winded polysyllabic circumlocution.

Never be afraid to use short paragraphs when you have something distinct to say.

Write in what grammarians call active voice: *Somebody does something,* rather than *something is done by some person.* Why handicap yourself? Questions are okay. So, rarely, are *italics.* Please avoid the exclamation point!

The first sentence, which pro writers call a *lead* (pronounced and sometimes spelled "lede") literally pulls your reader into the article. It tells the relevant facts, or at least enough to grab the reader's attention to keep on reading and not jump to some other eye-magnet. Don't hold your big news until the end. Busy readers may never get there. Tell the big news first, then explain who, what, where, why and how.

Always write for your *reader's* convenience, not your own. Identify people clearly. Explain programs and organizations before you call them by initials (an exception in *Vistas* is "ECIA"). If you must explain a new idea, do it clearly and briefly. The rule of thumb is *never discount the reader's intelligence, but never assume he or she already knows some vital fact about your subject.* Otherwise, why write?

Vistas does not print opinions or arguments as individual articles. However, verified facts about any topic are always

valid, when the purpose is to increase understanding rather than to change beliefs, sway judgment, or belittle an individual or group of people. That is not to say that you should hide facts that may be uncomfortable if they are necessary for understanding. Remain calm, objective, fair and kind in the way you say it. Direct personal attacks and coarse language have no place in any respectable publication.

A few specifics:

- Dates take the form of "May 3," **not** "May 3rd." "3 May" or "5/3".
- Abbreviate *Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.* and *Dec.* with periods but spell out the remaining months.
- Time of day is "10 AM, 5:45 PM, 12 Noon" **not** "10:00 a.m." or "6pm.".
- Use this format for letting your readers know when an event will take place - day, date and time: **Friday, May 3 at 9 AM,** or **Friday, May 3, 9AM – Noon**.
- When including a phone number, use this format- **505 466-8875**.
- When including an email address, use this format- **articles@eldoradosf.org**
- Initials in names take periods: "J. P. Morgan" but others do not: "USA, ECIA, UNM"
- Avoid shorthand, jargon or unfamiliar abbreviations.
- Do not use ALL CAPS for emphasis.
- Most articles should be 300-400 words in length unless you've been asked otherwise by the editor.
- *Eldorado* was originally *El Dorado;* the community school, volunteer fire department and a few others use *El Dorado* in their legal name.

Headlines come *after* the article has been edited and placed on a page. It is not the writer's job to create the headline, although suggestions are certainly welcome. In general, the headline, like the lead, should engage the reader and tell enough of the story to attract attention. It can be clever but should not be a memo subject line. Before you submit your article to *Vistas,* please proofread and spellcheck twice.

Articles are due on the fifth of the month preceding publication to **articles@eldoradosf.org** and include the writer's name, organization if applicable, telephone number or email address (an editor may need to contact you). Email uncropped 4Mb or higher photos with caption information and photo credit. Most articles are under 400 words and may be sent in any font. Whenever possible before publication, ECIA staff will return the edited article to the writer to check facts and be sure nothing is misinterpreted.

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