

# 3

## Content

---

### Kinds of Content

#### Obligatory

It is understood that, in real-world terms, there is nothing you can actually be compelled to publish. Not even the calendar of events, generally regarded as the *raison d'être* of the local group newsletter, is compulsory: it is no longer a condition for receiving local group funding assistance.\* (See Chapter 2 for more on the calendar, Chapters 6 and 7 for information about funding.) Regardless of the rules under which you operate, the option of resignation is never closed to you.

For the purposes of this section, however, let's assume that you plan to meet at least the minimal criteria for a serviceable publication. In addition to the basic elements identified in Chapter 2, the following tend to be regarded as obligatory in a local group publication (SIG newsletters may or may not have comparable obligations):

- calendar of events
- local secretary's remarks
- other officers' remarks, when appropriate
- minutes of business meetings, or synopses of actions taken

---

\* At the time of publication (January 2002), this statement is no longer true. By AMC action in 1995, amended in 2000, a local group must publish a newsletter or calendar of activities at least quarterly as a requirement to qualify for dues-allotment funding.

- treasury reports
- items mandated by local group bylaws, such as election materials, notice of business meetings, ombudsman's findings, or proposed amendments to the bylaws

One editor recalls her early blunder of omitting things such as the latter on the assumption that it was the locsec's duty to bring them up. An editor should know better than anyone else that nothing gets published automatically—someone must see to it. Regardless of who may be responsible for such things as initiating election proceedings at the proper time, it would behoove the editor to maintain a yearly calendar of dates affecting the newsletter and ensure that sufficient notice is given for things that must be published at certain times.

It can happen that the editor questions the propriety or advisability of publishing something that would ordinarily fall under the "obligatory" category. Such differences must be handled with care; they have been known to split groups. If you find yourself in this position, study the section entitled "The LocSec and You" in Chapter 9 and, if necessary, seek advice. Remember that you are accountable for what you publish.

Obligatory material, while not usually the most exciting copy from an editorial point of view, may still serve some purposes dear to the editor's heart. For instance, suggests Susanne Wright, "Print a treasury report. This is a handy way to get contributions in, especially when the group is in the red most of the time. Thank the contributors profusely, and mention their names in print."

There is also value in printing reports of local group business even when they are not required. As long as officers' columns do not take on the air of "we talk, you listen," they can help to maintain a feeling that the group is active and productive and that the lines of communication are open.

## Optional

The larger the newsletter, the more optional items you will be able to use, such as

- editorials
- columns
- letters
- activity writeups
- new-member features
- member profiles
- articles
- essays
- reviews
- poetry
- fiction
- polls and surveys
- photographs
- line drawings
- cartoons
- puzzles

This list is descriptive, not prescriptive. Feel free to invent categories of your own or to judge work without reference to its classifiability. You may feel that items in

some of the above categories—fiction, for instance, or puzzles—consume too much space for their value to the majority of readers. If you like to define your position with rules, you may want to make their exclusion a matter of policy; or you may just quietly omit them.

## Editorials

An editor is not expected to divest himself of his own opinions, likes and dislikes, and idiosyncrasies. He does not forfeit his personal rights or the privileges of membership for the sake of his editorial position. It is not, however, good practice for the editor to parade all those individual views in print.

As a general rule, the place for the editor's own remarks is on the editorial page, where it is understood that he is speaking for himself and not for the organization. The editor, like any other officer or appointee, should bear in mind that his position may cause readers to attach extra significance to his comments; but he need not muzzle himself on that account.

Some editors like to include miscellaneous notes and news items in their columns and to label the occasional editorializing column clearly as opinion.

## Columns

A small number of regular columns lends a pleasing continuity to a newsletter. Too many for the size of the publication fosters the impression that the newsletter is dominated by a clique. The range of subjects and formats for columns is as broad as the interests of your readership.

## Letters

Susanne Wright says: "Print letters. An editor of a smaller publication may not have much luck getting people to write erudite articles. But once you start printing letters, you've got it made. People love to see their names in print, and Ms are no different. Not only does this ploy fill a newsletter, but it is also a very effective means of building membership."

One of the lessons of experience is that it is next to impossible to predict what will trigger a response among Ms. A carefully devised controversial article will sink without a trace—and an offhand throwaway line at the bottom of a page will release a flood of mail. But there is no doubt that it is easier to keep an interesting letters column going than to overcome inertia and get one started.

## Activity Writeups

Lively accounts of meetings and events not only make good copy but encourage attendance—and give you a chance to print members' names. Appointing a reporter is an excellent way to add to your pool of steady contributors and an especially good device for helping a new M to get involved.

## New-Member Features

A welcome isn't all you can extend to new members. Remember that unless your group size is completely static, every issue you put out is a first issue for somebody. And even long-time members, if they're not very active, may appreciate orientation features from time to time. Publish information about meetings and open houses (is there a door charge? are guests permitted? what do people usually wear?) and translate those acronyms and abbreviations so rife in Mensa (what's an RG? what, for that matter, is a LocSec?), especially those that are peculiar to your own group. If there

are generally accepted smoking, BYOB, and similar rules in your group, you will be doing everyone a favor to mention them now and then.

## Member Profiles

One feature requested again and again by M readers is biographical sketches of fellow Ms. Many newsletters publish “Meet-an-M” profiles; some concentrate on introducing new members, while others focus on prominent or long-time Ms. Commonly a periodic questionnaire or a new-member data sheet (which may double as input for a membership register) serves as the basis. An alternative that has extra benefits is assigning a member to conduct interviews with other Ms and write them up. Magazine interviews with celebrities make a good model for the beginner to follow.

## Articles, Essays, and Reviews

Informed articles, well-thought-out essays of observation and opinion, and perceptive reviews of current books or films bring substance and variety to a newsletter. Stimulation and selection of contributions such as these are covered later in this chapter.

## Poetry and Fiction

Not all editors feel that Mensa newsletters should attempt to be literary magazines. However, the longevity of a good poem or story on the reprint circuit argues the presence of an audience for literary material. Be warned that the publication of a single poem tends to open the floodgates.

## Polls and Surveys

Opinion polls and statistical surveys are popular features with Ms, who love to be consulted and to fill out questionnaires. Writeups of the results can be condensed or expanded to conform to almost any space requirement.

## Photographs, Line Drawings, and Cartoons

Despite your impressions at gatherings, not all Ms are verbal creatures. Those whose medium is art or photography can make valuable contributions to your newsletter, especially if you choose a format that features cover art. Graphics and photography are covered in Chapter 4 of this handbook.

## Puzzles

Various surveys suggest that Ms are split about 50-50 on puzzles. Few are neutral; most either love them or hate them. Puzzles may serve an editorial purpose that is not particularly evident to the readership, though: publishing names of puzzle contributors and puzzle solvers is an opportunity to give recognition in print to a number of Ms, including some who neither write nor draw.

## CAUTION

### **Beware of copyrighted material.**

Although almost every variety of copyrighted material from logo art to fiction has turned up at one time or another in an M newsletter, the most frequent violations occur with cartoons and puzzles. **Without written permission, you must not reprint**

**material owned by another.** Do read the section on copyright at the end of this chapter; it is important.

## Contributors

“When will I get to the point where copy just comes in by itself?” many an inexperienced editor has asked, enviously eyeing the copy-rich pages of the large, established newsletters. “Right now it’s like pulling teeth. I end up writing practically everything myself.”

There does seem to come a stage in the newsletter’s growth at which it has achieved a momentum of its own and contributions arrive in a dependable, if uneven, flow. It is easier to sustain than to build that momentum. But even the editors who reap those bountiful harvests must cultivate the soil now and then, and editors who aspire to their example may expect to do yeoman service first. Bill Holden writes:

“One of the things I learned early on was that the best way to get contributions is to buttonhole individuals and give them specific commissions. To be sure, this task was eased because I enjoyed the luxury of serving the third largest group during my editorship of *Intelligencer*. But during those two years, I spent quite a bit of time at Mensa meetings suggesting to various people (‘grossly and unjustifiably flattering them’ would not be putting it too strongly) that it would be nice if they would write up an account of such-and-such, and as often as not, it worked! In my experience, personal appeal is much better than appealing for contributions within the paper itself and has a pretty good batting average.”

It helps if your readers—who are, of course, also your prospective contributors—know what you are looking for. Says Rosemary Minnick: “Don’t assume that the membership knows much, if anything, about submitting material for your newsletter. Conduct a workshop or seminar, or write a piece or a series of pieces in your newsletter telling them what sort of material you want, how to present it, and what the format should be. Keep in mind that what constitutes news and proper copy form may be second nature to you but foreign to your contributors.”

But, cautions Bill Wilday, “Don’t beg for contributions—extract material from other newsletters, but don’t apologize for it. Ask individual members for short essays on particular subjects, but don’t beg in print.”

Letting it be known that you are open to submissions is not quite the same thing as announcing something like, “Send us whatever you’ve got—we’ll print anything.” How unflattering it is to be published in a newsletter that proclaims its total lack of discrimination—and how much nicer for all if publication in your newsletter is regarded as an honor. Most contributors have at least some ego invested in the possibility of publication. Don’t rob them of their pride in being published—it’s an incentive that works to your advantage.

In addition to displaying a general receptivity to contributions, you can do some specific things to encourage your members to write for you.

## The Care and Feeding of Writers

*by Norm and Beth Pos*

Quality breeds quality. A person, especially a professional person, is not likely to submit material to a local newsletter if it looks like a two-bit lemonade-stand flyer. If you have built up your newsletter to an attractive, even perhaps pretty format, with

neatness, bulk, substance, and variety, then you can expect to receive a steady flow of literary contributions. How to get to those rarefied heights is the problem.

When you hear someone at a Mensa gathering spouting off in a learned fashion about something, or when you learn that so-and-so is an expert on this or that, ask that person to write. Many people will respond to a direct request.

It sometimes helps to get the ball rolling to print something controversial. An article aggressively knocking some cherished concept is sure to get replies. If you are lucky, those replies will elicit others, and you are off and running. The topic will eventually run itself into the ground, however, so you should get another ball rolling in an overlapping manner. The kicker must not be too obviously that, or people will not bite.

A word of caution: as your fame as editor spreads, you will receive an increasing amount of mail that is intended by the writer(s) to be personal and not for publication. Many times you can make a fairly safe judgment on the basis of content, or knowing the source. If in doubt, contact the writer. Once something is printed, that is sort of that. It may help to include a regular statement to the effect that mail received by the editor is always considered for publication unless it expressly indicates otherwise.

Suppose Joe Blatz submits an article for the newsletter with which you personally disagree strongly. For gosh sakes, let Joe have his day in the sun. Reply, if you must, along with other replies in the *next* issue. The editor has an advantage, in that he gets to see published material prematurely. Nothing is more depressing to a writer than to see his article followed immediately by nit-picking editorializing, or worse, finding such commentary sprinkled throughout his piece in the form of “editor’s notes.” Do this and Joe Blatz will write for your newsletter just that *one* time. Gold-plated guarantee.

Finally, even though you in truth do most, if not all, of the work, do not give the impression that the newsletter is your personal property. Oh Lord, that is so easy to do! If you expect to cultivate your stable of writers, they must have the firm feeling that the vehicle belongs to *them*.

[EDITOR’S NOTE: *Beth Pos is now Beth Sample.*]

## Getting and Keeping Contributors

by Meredy Amyx

While greatly simplified, this three-point guideline should point the way to increased success in getting material for your newsletter.

### Solicitation

Try the direct, individual approach. In between the professional writers—most of whom hate to give it away when they can sell it—and those whose attempts at prose are frankly unsalvageable, there’s a whole range of people who don’t think of themselves as writers but who can be motivated to produce what you need. Go get them. Personally encourage them to write about something they know or have special interest in. Use your discretion in assuring some that you will edit as needed and recognizing others who need no help.

Make specific suggestions of topics if possible, leaving yourself open to their alternative ideas.

## Presentation

This is *crucial*. Your newsletter must not look like it's starving for material—even if, or especially if, it is. It must look like something in which people *want* to be published. Overall appearance counts for a lot. And prime the pump. Reprint outstanding material from other newsletters (taking care to give proper credit). Extract choice paragraphs from your members' letters and spotlight them as independent articles with their own titles and bylines. Never underestimate the gratifying effect of seeing one's name in print. When you get a contribution that exemplifies what you want, make it look as great as possible: give it a good position, clean typing, a nice display heading, the works. This alone will inspire new and repeat contributors. But don't ever quarrel with a contributor in print unless you never want to hear from him again.

## Appreciation

This is the only pay you can offer, so don't overlook it. *Thank* your contributors—privately, with a personal note, and publicly, with your presentation, whether or not you add a word of special acknowledgment in print (but try not to sound too astonished). And make sure that the author sees any good responses you get, from resounding praise to civilized argument. What's more discouraging than sending out one of your precious little creations and being met with massive indifference? Try not to let your contributors' work go begging. Make your contributors feel *good* about sending you their work, and you won't have to worry about blank pages.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is reprinted from InterLoc #134, April 1981.*]

## Selection

When you select something for print, you are recommending it to your readers' attention. Your private views on the subject matter are irrelevant; what counts is whether or not the writer deserves a hearing. If your best judgment says yes, then you must be 100% behind the selection *editorially*. What this means is that you will give it the best treatment you can, using your editorial skills if necessary to help the writer get his message across. Let your readers be the ones to respond.

One editor, regrettably unnamed, states: "The newsletter is the local showcase for Mensa. If it looks like a pile of crap, that's what Mensa will appear to be to the newcomer. Better a simple but neat calendar than a bulky but deranged mess."

## Criteria

You won't have too much trouble recognizing the good stuff when you see it. A thought-provoking essay that challenges conventional ideas without resorting to emotional diatribes is prime material. Clever word play, humor, and satire delight M audiences and need not push the bounds of good taste to be effective. Choice art work, stimulating puzzles, memorable poems—the possibilities are intoxicating. They can even distract you from accomplishing what you set out to do.

It is essential to remember that the newsletter belongs to its readers, the members of Mensa in the group it is designed to serve. "Service" means several things here:

- providing members with information they want or need
- contributing to members' enjoyment of Mensa
- representing a variety of interests, tastes, and points of view
- furthering communication among members

This last is one of the reasons why, for all its merit, literary excellence *cannot be the primary criterion* for publication in a Mensa newsletter. There is a crucial difference between a publication that serves a membership organization such as Mensa and a commercial publication, even an intellectually superior one such as *Harper's* or *The Atlantic*. The commercial magazine is in the business of selling copies and delivering an audience to its advertisers, and it will choose its copy accordingly. It has no inherent obligation to those who may hope to write for it. But the Mensa editor's chief obligation is to the members, and one of the functions of the publication is to give them a voice. The fact that a given M contributor's work would never in all time sell commercially may sometimes be reason enough for giving it newsletter space.

## Magic

The editor's conjuring trick is often to take in sows' ears and deliver silk purses—and never destroy the illusion.

If you can't in all honesty say to your readers, "I believe that this merits your notice," then you really shouldn't print it. But if the ideas or sentiments are worthwhile, even if the delivery is disappointing, you do have choices other than rejection. Make the most of what you have. Your goal is to help the author to present his ideas, not to demonstrate your supremacy. In some cases, working with the author will produce the best results; in others, the author may gladly give you leave to revise. Sometimes only minor alterations in phrasing or a simple resequencing of the paragraphs can make a dramatic difference. (Some techniques of editing are described further on.) How a professional editor might regard the same material has little bearing on such a case. Besides, you probably need the copy more.

When you've done all you can and the realities of the material still fall short of your ideals, try not to let the fact show. False enthusiasm is unbecoming, but so is deprecation. It is an insult to your contributors—and a deterrent to your potential contributors—to convey the attitude, "I wouldn't be printing this junk if I'd had any choice." Bill Wilday says, "Avoid editorial references to a newsletter as 'this rag.' Avoid such pieces as 'How do I fill this space? . . . (Only a hundred words to go!) . . . whew—made it!' Very sophomoric." Go with a thin issue before publishing half-heartedly.

The truth is that very little of what you get will be in the silk purse category. But you can offer it proudly to your readers if it answers the needs of the group and its members.

It is necessary, then, for the editor to strike a balance between garnering the best possible material for the demanding Mensa audience and making the pages of the newsletter available to those members who wish to use them. The fact that this may sound humanly impossible does not alter the fact that it is expected of you.

## What to Encourage

Harper Fowley urges: "Confine your copy to Mensa-related material, or material of special interest to Ms. Your readers can get their literary gems from *Playboy*, *Time*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Mad*, and the *Reader's Digest*, and it will probably be better than the contributions you get.

"If you plead for contributions, you will be almost forced to print them, and your magazine will be full of a lot of verbose junk. Better steal some good stuff from other newsletters instead."

Anne Hillis, however, writes to stress "the importance of using locally generated material rather than making a little scrapbook from other newsletters or writing it all

yourself either defensively, proudly, or apologetically. That includes the editors who say, 'Ha, ha, you didn't send me anything this month, so I'll have to. . . .'"

In the same vein, Ann Grasso says: "Too much material printed from exchange newsletters could dampen local creativity. If all the newsletters looked and sounded the same, it would be boring as hell."

The material you want to encourage is the material that will serve your members best. If you feel otherwise, you are probably editing the wrong publication.

## What to Avoid

It is, of course, easier to identify troublesome material than it is to define suitable copy. Both are in large measure matters of common sense and individual judgment; but experience produces useful generalizations about problems that may in turn make desirable items easier to recognize.

### Cliquishness

Every Mensa group has a core of active workers and contributors. To those not of the core, it usually appears to be an "in group"—and in some sense that's just what it is. The fact that anyone can join the in group simply by becoming more active is frequently overlooked by outsiders, who think of it (often resentfully) as exclusive or cliquish.

Try not to encourage an impression of cliquishness in your newsletter. Omit private jokes that most readers won't get. Include last names even of well-known members to avoid making newcomers feel like dummies. Give more prominent feature space to one-time articles than to continuing columns so the same names won't dominate every issue. Spell out your group's favorite abbreviations occasionally ("MG" or "MoG" = Monthly Gathering; "FS&M" = fold, staple, and mail); they may be entirely impenetrable to the uninitiated. Let your pages emanate a sense of welcome instead of slamming figurative doors in the faces of your readers.

One unnamed writer says: "The newsletter should contain no cutesy-cutesy stuff written by the editor. The editor's column and comments should be minimized. The newsletter should not be written by the same few people every month. It will come to appear to be 'their' paper rather than the group's."

### Battles in Print

The newsletter is not the place to air quarrels among members. It does no one any good, it spreads unhappiness and loses members, and it can be legally risky. An editor should never, ever permit the pages of his newsletter to be used for personal attacks on members. (See the section on libel in this chapter for more about what this means.) Above all, the editor must not wield the newsletter as a weapon in a battle of his own.

Marcia Shuman recalls her worst error as a beginner: "Criticizing the locsec in print. Handle difficulties outside the newsletter."

It is easy to forget, working all alone late at night in the privacy of your home, that what you put into the newsletter is baldly and irretrievably public. Printed is printed. The momentary satisfaction you gain from letting off steam on paper can cost you more than you ever imagined. Don't do it.

This caution extends even to personal remarks written in jest. Before you go to press with a line such as, "When last heard from, treasurer Tommy was heading south with the RG profits," or, "Terrorized into submission, the ExComm passed every one of locsec Lucy's motions," *think*. Read the line over, taking it absolutely lit-

erally—and ask yourself who else might do so. Pretend that you are a new or inactive member who does not know that your close friend Tommy is the most responsible treasurer your group has ever had or that Lucy's administrative style is soft-spoken and fair-minded. Imagine that you are Tommy or Lucy, wondering why your good reputation is suddenly in doubt. Apologies for such harmlessly intentioned humor are awkward, uncomfortable, and, worst of all, never entirely successful at counteracting the "where there's smoke" supposition. The appearance of a fight is every bit as damaging as a real one. It is never safe to assume that your readers all know the group's in jokes or can tell ribbing from scathing when a member is the butt of published ridicule.

Attacks on the organization also deserve careful thought. Constructive criticism of Mensa is never out of line, but sheer negativism benefits no one. Says Harper Fowley: "Letters unjustly critical of Mensa from dissident members do not HAVE to be printed. The editor can print or reject any material he/she wishes; no one has the right to demand that anything be printed.

"However, the editor should always keep in mind that he/she serves at the pleasure of the executive committee or the local group, and is replaceable."

## Offensive Matter

From time to time in Mensa a controversy flares up over where our publications should draw the line on questionable language and content. One memorable battle raged for months in the *Bulletin*, drawing strong opinions from both sides. Here are representative views from experienced M editors on the matter of obscenity.

Harper Fowley: "Nothing even bordering on obscenity—it turns some people off and has no compensating effects. Same on unpleasant subjects—prison, abortion, doomsday, etc."

Charles Bratt: "If it is not hard-core or revolting, I print it."

Meredy Amyx: "Who will be offended by a deletion? Only one—the writer, who knows the original wording. If printed, it could offend many."

Gene McMahon: "Never knowingly offend the majority, but ignore the offensive minority. Obscenity is intrinsically aggressive, without wit or imagination. Prohibiting another's harmless pleasures is a true obscenity."

Royall Whitaker: "If you don't say it, it can't offend."

Richard Nuenke: "Don't use the seven words you can't say on TV."

(Unidentified): "If obscenity is used to cover a poverty of imagination or language, it should not be used in a newsletter. If it is an integral part of the article, the story, the poem, or other piece, and if there is no better way to express meaning, use it. If it is gratuitous, of no redeeming social value, and just sounds like hell, don't use it."

Bill Fusselman: "Obscenity is not necessary to drive home a point."

(Unidentified): "I'll print anything I don't have to retype."

Gordon Hackbarth: "We're not publishing a Sunday school bulletin, but neither are we a stand-in for *Hustler*."

Linda Kelso: "I believe that obscenity is not necessary as a form of communication. I am very much aware of our younger members and would never want parents to hesitate over their youngsters' reading *Omen*. Final judgment rests with the editor and the editor's personal standards."

Al Fairweather: "One person's playground is another's dung-heap."

Hans Frommer: "Not printing obscenity should offend no one."

Suggestive or scatological language is not the only kind of material that can be offensive to your readers. Harper Fowley says: "Obscenities, scatology, and other

off-color material never help Mensa, almost always damage our image, frequently cause members to drop their membership at the next renewal period. Controversial issues such as abortion, religion/atheism, politics, and the like are divisive and should have no place in the Mensa Press."

## Anonymous Submissions

A writer may ask that his name be withheld from publication with his material or may wish to be published pseudonymously. If you use the item, you are honor-bound to protect the writer's identity, not only in print but also in private.

No good editor, however, will consider publication of material submitted anonymously.

## Scolding and Lecturing

Beth Sample has some advice worth heeding:

"Every editor has at least one schtick and at least one pet peeve. One of my strongest pet peeves is reading month after month about another editor's schtick. People don't join Mensa to be lectured on how rotten they are; for that they can go to church. An editor should realize that his few well-chosen words of wisdom are not likely to change a reader's life. They are more likely to turn him off—from Mensa or at least from his local newsletter.

"Falling into this category of lectures on rottenness are the more obvious: 'Why don't you people come to our fascinating meetings?' 'Why don't you lazy people help me put out this newsletter?' 'What's the matter with you people that you don't send literary contributions?'

"Also included in this type lecture are non-Mensa-related topics. An editor may be a strong conservationist, an avid libertarian, a wild-eyed liberal, very big on population control, etc. Fine. But *please*, do not regularly berate your readers if they don't share your views. One man's schtick is another man's apathy. Say it once, if you must. You may get feedback on it and have a good interchange of views. Great. But if no one responds, face it: Your readers are not interested.

"One duty of a Mensa editor is to publish material members are interested in. You will never hold your readers by telling them what they *should* be interested in."

## Rules of Thumb

A valuable tool in the selection process is a question or series of questions formulated to isolate the important elements of a submission you are considering. In practice they may amount to your editorial policy or guiding principles (for more on policy, see Chapter 9). When in doubt about whether to use a particular item or how to deal with a given issue, ask yourself your questions. They should help you to analyze how the alternatives fit with your overall objectives in publishing the newsletter. Here are some of the questions that various M editors are using as rules of thumb; among them you may find some that will serve you well, or you may prefer to devise your own.

1. Does it have appeal to a large enough segment of my readership to make it worth spending the space on? Is it in good taste? Is it well written? (Katherine DeWitt, Jr., *Capital M*)
2. In whose interest/to whose benefit is its publication? What is the worst that can happen as a consequence of publishing? of not publishing? Is this the best use of my resources? (Meredy Amyx)

3. Do it fit? Is it too clean? Is it funny for someone? (Henry Roll, *Atrocity*, Absurd SIG)
4. Is it real thinking or regurgitation of propaganda? opinion or analysis? one-sided or balanced? important contribution or rehash of accepted ideas? (Glen Lambert, Truth SIG, LUCID SIG)
5. Is it timely? Is it important to members? Is it expected (i.e., a regular feature)? Is there room for it? Is it appropriate/in good taste? (Bob Abrahams, *LAMENT*)
6. Is it in reasonably good taste? Is it interesting? Will it represent the group positively if a stranger picks it up? (Donna Porter, *The Lookout*)
7. Is the material of interest to the local group? Is the material written in such a way that it would be offensive to a substantial part of the local group? Is the material subject to copyright law? Is the material libelous? (John T. Travis, professional journalist and brother of an M editor, offering his hypothetical questions)
8. Is it morbid? Is it depressing? Is it obscene or pornographic? Is it in poor taste? Do I like it? (Cynthia Fisher, *Tampa Bay Sounding*)
9. What is of interest to our local readers? What is of interest to our local readers? What is of interest to our local readers? That IS our guiding principle. (Robert ("Hagar") Hartman, *MensAloha*)
10. Can I live with it? (Nancy Roller, *Graffiti*)

## Application

Let's say new member Ned sends you a short story, which, while entertaining and fairly well written, is longer than the submissions you usually accept. If you want to weigh the value of this piece in pragmatic terms, you might ask yourself, "Will this appeal to enough of my readership to justify the space?" (#1). If you are short on copy, you might ask only the questions designed to eliminate the unsuitable, such as, "Is it in good taste?" (#6), or, "Is it depressing?" (#8). If you feel that publication may not only keep Ned writing for you—and make him feel welcome in your group—but also spark creative efforts on the part of other members, then you may apply the question "To whom is this of benefit?" (#2) in one of its senses. What matters is that you evaluate the relevant factors and make a reasoned judgment that you can defend to yourself (#10).

The same question may have several applications. Suppose, for example, that you receive a letter from Suzy, who wants her fellow Ms to know that she has just opened her own business. Here is a second instance in which question 2 is useful: "To whom is this of interest?" You may decide that a significant number of your readers would be glad to have news about Suzy's venture. Or you may come to the conclusion that publication of the letter would amount to nothing more than a commercial for Suzy's company. The proper place for items that are mainly of interest to the writer is among the advertisements. Alternatively, you could suggest to Suzy that she write you a letter or article that would suit your needs: an account of her adventures along the road to incorporation, perhaps, or an insider's view of the goods or services she offers. Suzy would still have her free commercial, but you would gain some interesting copy and your readers would have an opportunity to benefit from Suzy's knowledge.

## Considerations

Sometimes it is illuminating to recall that no matter how bad a thing is, somebody—if only the author—likes it, maybe for reasons no worse than your own. But if you

find yourself doubting your right to exercise your own taste and judgment in matters of selection (“imposing your tastes upon the readers” is one way critics like to put it), remember that this is precisely what you were elected or appointed to do. You must try to satisfy your readers, but you must not compromise your own standards in the process.

If you should be stumped over a submission, try the opposite perspective. Pretend that your general plan is to avoid printing as much as possible—and then determine which copy is worth making an exception for.

Or reduce the entire equation to dollars and cents. Harper Fowley says: “Space costs money, and your subsidy will not cover a 40-page magazine. Are enough readers going to do that crossword puzzle to justify the cost of printing it? Is anyone going to enjoy that poem besides the poet who wrote it? Is it worthwhile to print an ad for a Regional that is 2000 miles away? Look over the rest of your copy.” You may not want to let cost be your deciding factor—quality is seldom so easily measured—but performing the exercise can often be instructive. Figure out exactly what your newsletter costs per page and relate the figure to the length of the submission. Then evaluate the item according to whether or not you would recommend that your group expend the necessary sum from its treasury in order to print it. That is, after all, what you are doing whenever you select something for publication.

## Evergreen File and Fillers

An “evergreen” file consists of nondated items that can be used whenever they meet your space or other requirements: you may not want them for your current issue, but you may have use for them in the future. As long as the author has no objection to leaving his work in limbo for a while, you have a buffer against times when you are short of copy or when you need to counterbalance an excess of some particular sort of material. The best approach is to rotate items in the file, using the oldest suitable item first. (If you know you’ll never want the item at all, though, don’t keep it.)

Do yourself a favor and use a spare hour to make your evergreen material publication-ready, so that when the pressure is on and you suddenly need the copy, it is all ready to drop in. Magazine editors keep “overset” files for the same reason.

Fillers—anecdotes, quotations, brain-teasers, squibs such as the odd little facts that appear in the newspaper’s back pages, and small pieces of art work—can bail you out when your page make-up isn’t working. Make a habit of collecting them whenever you find them (but do note the source when you clip them from other newsletters, and don’t borrow anything that’s copyrighted) and tuck them away in your file.

## Rejections

One of the genuine surprises that may occur in the course of an editorship is the receipt of a letter that says something like, “I want to thank you for rejecting my article. I had second thoughts as soon as I had dropped it in the mail. I know I can do better than that, and you’ve spared me the embarrassment of printing something I really wasn’t happy with.”

Even though you cannot anticipate such a gratifying validation of your judgment, there are times when you do have to be tough and say “no, thanks” to a submission. It’s better than the alternative. Pam Raikos says that one of her worst errors when she was a new editor was “putting in stuff I didn’t like in order not to offend contributors.”

If you can get off with handing the contribution back during a private moment at a party, saying, “I’m afraid I just can’t use this,” with no hard feelings, so much the

nicer for you. But you may occasionally be faced with the necessity of writing an actual letter of rejection. If the contributor has been professional enough to enclose an SASE, you certainly owe him a few lines if you return his material. There are two important rules to follow when you do:

- Say no more than you must.
- Be courteous.

Remember, it is not fair to hold a submission indefinitely. The sooner you return an unacceptable manuscript, the better all around. You should never let more than six weeks pass without a decision.

The following are a few suggested wordings around which you can compose rejection slips that get you off the hook while sparing the writer's feelings as much as reasonably possible.

### We Know You Can Do Better; Please Do

"Your submission does not fit our current editorial needs. Please try us again." (You may want to add some particulars, as long as they are honest reasons and not just excuses: the material is too long, for instance, or it is aimed at too specialized an audience. Do not make encouraging suggestions, though, unless you really would like to see the piece again after revision.)

### We Would Have Used It If We Could

"We were unable to find a place for your manuscript in our publication at present but would welcome your further submissions."

### We Don't Know Who Might Want It, But We Don't

"The enclosed manuscript has not worked out for us. We wish you good luck in placing it elsewhere."

### It Stinks

"We are sorry to have to return your manuscript, but we do not consider it suitable for our type of publication."

### Never in a Million Years

"This article is outside the range of material we are able to include in our newsletter. Thank you for your interest in our publication."

### The Disarming Rebuff

For the *Isolated M*, Harper Fowley had postcards printed with boxes to check in acknowledgment of receipt of correspondence. This is what the card says:

Thank you for your letter; we wish we had more time to answer it, but we hope this card will do.

- ☐ You have a tremendous literary talent—please write again.
- ☐ Good Heavens! We couldn't print that!
- ☐ Picky, picky, picky!
- ☐ Thank you for the feghoot. We rejected it.
- ☐ Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! That was funny!
- ☐ Thank you. That was just what we needed.
- ☐ Your contribution will appear in an early issue.
- ☐ An auction item! Thank you!

## Representative Copy

There is an interesting phenomenon that runs contrary to the reality of the newsletter editor's experience: namely, the supposition on the part of readers and potential contributors that what the editor prints *exemplifies* what the editor *wants* to print. The type or category of material (as differentiated from its slant) published in the newsletter is presumed to represent not only the editor's policy but also the editor's deliberate choice—as if, given a free range of available material, he would select only what does appear in his pages and reject everything else. There is some basis for the supposition in the case of large magazines, which can pick and choose among thousands of submissions and can assign articles they want written. But not even the biggest Mensa publications are in this class. Readers seldom realize how limited a small newsletter's options may be or how much its editor may yearn for material that never appears. Thus an editor who has never received any letters for publication may never receive any—because it is assumed that he “doesn’t” print them. A SIG coordinator may hesitate to send an editor a story about the SIG because the newsletter has never run any SIG stories. The editor wails, “I can’t print what I don’t have!”—and hardly anyone gets the message.

You can make this phenomenon work for you, though. You probably cannot change the assumptions people make, but you can deliver a persuasive statement about what you would like to receive by soliciting, reprinting from other newsletters, or, if necessary, writing material that resembles your ideal copy. Having pointed the way, you stand a much better chance of receiving similar contributions from your readers. And if there is a type of material you prefer to avoid, you may find that by consistently avoiding it you discourage such submissions without ever having to express your aversion outright.

It is worth noting here that one of the best reasons for rejecting a contribution of questionable worth is that its inclusion might well be taken as an open invitation to more of the same.

## Editorial Bias

Along with the phenomenon just described goes the almost universal assumption that the editor agrees with what he prints—and prints what he agrees with. Passionately partisan readers may react against what they see in print and still forget that their own side can't be heard unless someone speaks for it. You must guard against unconscious selection of material that favors one point of view and discriminates against others. But even when you print clearly opposing views on an issue, you may be accused of bias; readers tend to be aroused by what they differ with and overlook what they agree with. Some readers will make no distinction between what you publish and what you personally believe; even those who should know better can make this mistake when their emotions are engaged. It is not your responsibility to seek out representatives on all sides of a question but only to permit opportunity for alternate views to be aired.

However maddening the assumption of editorial bias may be, there is nothing you can do about it except to continue being as fair-minded as possible and refrain from answering misguided critics. Editors only get into trouble when they go around trying to explain and justify themselves.

**Restraint under fire may be one of the hardest lessons you will learn—but if you learn it well, you will operate from a position of strength.**

## Reprints

If you are going to use reprints, you must give credit. Within the Mensa Press (that is, all M publications, taken together), there is a customary format for credit lines. If you fail entirely to give credit for an item, no matter how small, or if you carelessly attribute it to a newsletter that reprinted it rather than to its source, you will suffer the wrath of your fellow editors. If you blow it with material from outside the Mensa Press, you could be in legal trouble. The section on copyrights covers all the legal particulars; this passage deals only with the mechanical aspects of using reprints.

### From the Mensa Press

You may freely reprint anything you find in the Mensa Press, provided that the item itself is not a reprint with an exclusive permissions statement appended.

A standard format for crediting reprints from other M publications has evolved through usage and generally takes the form:

By (author or artist). Reprinted from (newsletter), (issue date), (editor's name), editor.

Some editors also like to include the name or location of the source group, since few readers will recognize the often cryptic names of other groups' publications. Mention of other groups around the country tends to give members a pleasing sense of affiliation with a far-flung organization.

If not part of the reprinted text itself, the author's or artist's name should be added to the credit line. You may have to do a little detective work if reprinting unsigned, or illegibly signed, cover art; it is often credited elsewhere in the newsletter, sometimes on the masthead page. Consult the newsletter's disclaimer statement, if any, before making assumptions about the authorship of unsigned text.

### From Other Sources

If you are reprinting uncopyrighted material—material that is in the public domain, such as clip art, or material that is intended for reprint, such as press releases—you are not under legal obligation to identify the source. Mention it if it has a bearing on the item, or if you think your readers will want to know.

If you are considering material that is, or may be, copyrighted, take no chances. Examine the original document for notice of copyright. Question your contributor if you receive a photocopy or other material of doubtful origin. *Be cautious with any material received from someone other than the author, copyrighted or not.* The author may have other plans for his work.

Be especially suspicious of work that is distinctly better than your usual run of material; it may be the work of a professional, and it may even have been bought and paid for. No matter what it is, somebody wrote it—"author unknown" does not mean "no author." Anything that has the look of having been passed through many hands does not belong to your contributor. If uncertain, don't use it!

Cavalier treatment of copyrighted material is unfair as well as illegal. It amounts to theft: it is appropriation of something that belongs to another. You may recognize the following two examples, both of which have wrongly appeared in Mensa newsletters.

- "Ladle Rat Rotten Hut." This story, which begins "Wants pawn term dare worsted ladle gull," has been on the photocopy circuit for years. Its brilliant and humorous takeoff on the sounds of the English language guarantees its appeal to Ms. But the work is not in the public domain. "Ladle Rat Rotten Hut" is taken from a book called *Anguish Languish* (Prentice-Hall, 1956), by Howard L. Chace.

The author holds the copyright and, with a single exception, has never granted permission to any Mensa publication to reprint any of his work.\*

- “Equation Analysis Test.” This puzzle takes the form “26 = L. of the A.” (solution: letters of the alphabet). It was originally published in the May/June, 1981, issue of *Games* magazine. Unauthorized reprints and pirated photocopies have proliferated to such an extent that author/editor Will Shortz devoted a column of the May/June, 1982, issue to the subject. In at least one instance, Shortz wrote directly to an M editor to identify the puzzle as the property of his magazine.

If you wish to use material that you know to be copyrighted, you must secure written permission from the copyright owner. Write to the book or magazine publisher and ask for permission, identifying exactly what you wish to use. The publisher may ordinarily charge a fee for reprints. You may ask for a waiver of the fee, supporting your request with mention of your circulation and your nonprofit status. Allow several weeks for reply.

Read the section headed “Obtaining Permission to Reprint” under “Copyright” in this chapter for more information on reprint permissions.

**Do not gamble with copyrights. Written permission is a must.**

## Editing

The step in copy preparation that is referred to as “editing” takes in both copyediting and substantive editing. Copyediting means reviewing the copy for consistency and for technical or mechanical accuracy in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Substantive editing means working with the copy to shorten if necessary and to improve organization, clarity, and style.

As an editor, you are entitled to edit as you see fit. But it is important for you to know your own level of expertise in editing before you tackle someone else’s copy. Few M editors can actually boast professional qualifications for their jobs. If your spelling is unreliable, check before altering a writer’s copy. If you are unsure about a technical point, it’s better to leave the copy alone and let the author take responsibility for an error than risk saddling him with a mistake of your own. Chapter 12 lists references that will help you if you want to improve your command of written English.

## Principles

A number of editors have responded to the question of whether they would accept material received with a “print as is or not at all” stipulation from the author. Their answers reveal something of their views on editing in general.

Virginia Bensheimer: “No way! What goes in the newsletter is my responsibility.”

Bill Wilday: “I’m editor. I edit!”

Judy Kluger: “I’ll print ANYTHING as is, since that saves me the extra work of going over it or writing all the stuff myself.”

Harper Fowley: “I edit almost everything down to 300 words or less. Verbatim? I’d junk it.”

Royall Whitaker: “Try to work with author—he’s a member too.”

Hugh G. White: “I do as I damned well please.”

---

\* This statement was true in 1982, when the second edition of the *Editor’s Handbook* was published. Prof. Chace is deceased, and the Library of Congress copyright office now lists his daughter as owner; the work is not in the public domain. This information has been verified and is current as of February 2002.

Phillip H. Snaith: "Space being the primary editorial criterion, if it fit, it'd print; if not, into the round file."

Pam Raikos: "I don't use submissions if I'm not permitted editorial privileges with them."

George Hall, Jr.: "I play it by ear."

Art Swanson: "If the editor cannot control the quality of his newsletter, it's time to throw in the eyeshade and the blue pencil."

## Practice

This section is not a substitute for a good manual of style, much less for a sound education in the principles of writing. But it will point out some of the common flaws that you can correct without having to be an expert on style and technique. The more you apply your analytic skills to the material you publish, the sharper they will become, and your newsletter will improve as a result.

### Copyediting

Copyediting does not require your prior study of the material you are about to edit. If you have cultivated a good eye for minor lapses, you can correct them in a single pass, either marking hard copy or inputting changes directly into the file.

To be a good copyeditor, you must train yourself to see what is actually on the page and not what you expect to see. When you read normally, your eye moves rapidly and your mind compensates for small inconsistencies by substituting what you know should be there. You must force yourself to read slowly and objectively enough to spot a missed mark of punctuation, to pick up a lack of agreement between subject and verb, and to recognize a need for parallel structure.

The standard proofreader's markings apply to copyediting as well. If you learn to use them, you will avoid ambiguities and speed up the process. See the section headed "Proofreading" for a list of those markings.

### Substantive Editing

Summon all the skills of logical analysis and verbal dexterity that you use in discussion with another M at a party. Here, though, you are not opposing your fellow M in debate—you are on his side. Your job is to help him to make his case or convey his message as effectively as possible. If you find yourself wanting to tear it down instead of building it up, you're losing your perspective. Go do something else for a while.

Much of the copy you receive will be, in effect, a rough draft—as well thought out as a conversational argument, but no more so. You may spend longer preparing it for print than the author did. So be it. Occasionally you will be rewarded by a writer who has the perception and the grace to say, "Thank you for the terrific editing job you did on my article." No one else will know the difference. A good editing job is seamless and smooth. The only noticeable editing is bad editing.

Where you find one of the following problems, you are likely to find more than one. Often fixing one will fix several.

**Lack of focus.** Can you reduce the substance of the piece to a single clear-cut statement of theme, such as (for an article), "Government is out of line when it interferes in private matters between individuals," or (for a story), "One of the lessons of parenthood is letting go of one's offspring"? If not, you probably have extraneous material, which detracts from the whole. Cut. For the writer, a good extraneous idea can be the germ of another piece.

**Repetition.** Look for recurring words and phrases. They may signal redundancy of thought or argument as well as of language. If so, cutting is indicated. If not, vary the phrasing or find synonyms to sustain interest.

**Disorganization.** Can the development of the material be described in an outline of, say, three key points? One clue to poor organization is the presence of paragraphs that introduce one subject and then discuss another. Ask yourself whether every paragraph delivers the promise implied in its first sentence. Another symptom of disorganization is the author's repetition as he wanders in and out of topics. If you can improve the logical flow by reversing the sequence of a few sentences or paragraphs, do it. If the problem is more basic than that, you need to discuss it with the author.

**Inconclusiveness.** Every piece of writing should lead the reader from some starting place to some ending place, even if the ending place is a question. If the piece ends without doing so, the author needs to complete his thought process. This is something you cannot do for him.

## Editorial Prerogative

"License to edit" is a tricky thing. One of the important skills of editing is knowing when to stop. You must take care not to interfere with the author's own voice by substituting your favorite expressions for his equally legitimate ones or by putting words into his mouth that you wish he would say. And you must be absolutely sure that you do not tamper with his meaning. When in doubt, check. Ask him to clarify, or read him your proposed change and ask if it states his thought accurately. Do not make guesses. You have no right to put the author in the position of defending things that you said and he didn't.

You do not need to explain yourself, apologize for your decisions, or justify rejections. Unless you do something genuinely dreadful, your editorial prerogative will cover you. Be content to know this. It is in very poor taste for an editor to go around announcing the fact to others.

## An Important Exception

Election and campaign material cannot be thought of in the same category with the rest of your copy. It had best be considered not subject to editing. No grammatical lapse or infelicity of expression outweighs the possible damage of upsetting the election process by tampering with candidates' material or ballots or other official items. Only if you have doubts about the possible legality of publishing such material should you question it—and then don't hesitate: seek advice immediately.

## Responsibility

### Character of the Publication

Whether or not you think of your newsletter as a "family" publication, bear this in mind: members receive it involuntarily, as a consequence of membership, and ordinarily receive it in their homes. They do not go out and select it on a newsstand. They have a right to expect a certain *consistency*. Do not deliver nasty surprises.

### Editing Versus Censorship

"Censorship" is a scare word like "discrimination" and "sexism": it has its legitimate applications, but it is sometimes used by dissidents solely to alarm and manipulate. Responsible editing is not the same as censorship. Censorship is system-

atic suppression of material considered by the censor to be morally or ideologically objectionable. Its basis is fear. Responsible editing means selectivity but does not imply automatic exclusion of predefined subject matter.

Sometimes the hardest submissions to judge are those that you know right off you dislike or disagree with. You may find yourself bending over backwards to give the writer a hearing, even if the item itself is of dubious merit. This is a good time to ask for a second opinion. It is no blight on your credibility as an editor to seek another's advice once in a while.

Be sure that you are not guilty of censorship or even of permitting an unconscious bias to influence your choices. Then do not permit critics and disappointed would-be contributors to terrorize you with the term.

## Right of Reply

If you receive correspondence attacking something you have published (as distinguished from a personal attack, which you should not consider printing), you may want to offer the original contributor the option to respond in the same issue with his critics. At the very least, you owe him the right of reply in the next available issue.

When possible, you should try to balance opposing views. You do not have to manufacture the material, but if you have it you should make every effort to use it.

It is also up to you to determine the point at which a debate has worn itself out. If the same people are writing again and again to rehash the same points, or if the discussion has devolved into a private war between two people, or if everybody else is simply sick of it, put a stop to it. Call a moratorium on the topic and go on to something else.

## Corrections, Retractions, and Apologies

It goes without saying that you want to avoid the necessity of trying to undo something you have already done in print. In the first place, you can't really undo it. Guard against the situation by considering the ramifications of something before you print it. When appropriate, check facts. You need not look up such data as the population of Poland, but you must verify anything that could have unwanted consequences, such as allegations about a member's record of service in office or accusations of plagiarism.

If you have allowed a writer to make an improper, misleading, or damaging statement in print—or worse, have made one yourself—and now face the necessity of correcting it, consider which of your alternatives will best suit the case. Ask yourself exactly what harm has been done or might have been done and gear your correction accordingly. For instance, if the article contained a piece of misinformation, you may want to let one or two readers' letters to the editor serve to correct it. If your own editorial handling introduced an error, a statement of correction from you is in order, not a spate of letters criticizing the author for his blunder. If the author made insupportable implications or false assertions, the author should provide a written restatement and, if necessary, apologize. In all cases, satisfy yourself that the correction will do more good than ill; otherwise, let it pass.

## Integrity

No matter what else you do, never compromise yourself. Resign before sacrificing your principles. If you can justify a decision to yourself, it doesn't matter who disagrees; if you can't, it doesn't matter who backs you up. Once you have violated your own sense of integrity, you no longer have any justification for applying your

personal judgment in future cases. This would be a clear case of the job's costing you more than it paid you.

## Balance

If you can achieve it, you have done your whole job.

## Editorial Strategies

Within the bounds of good, responsible, fair-minded editing, there is a great deal you can do to influence the way material is received. When you have a reason for emphasizing or deemphasizing a piece of copy, you can employ a number of devices that will affect the impact of the material. These strategies are, in general, subtle, and no one can actually demonstrate their intent to sway the reader. Whether or not you choose to use them to deliberate purpose, you should be aware that they function the same way in thoughtless use.

### Position

Copy that begins at the top of a page is more prominent than copy that begins in the middle. The outside (nearest the edge, not nearest the center or binding) is better placement than the inside ("gutter"); the right-hand page is better than the left-hand page, unless the item is spread across both pages. The outside right is a prime location; advertisers often request it. Copy in the front of the book is usually better placed than copy toward the back. The insides of covers and the outside back cover are noticeable spots.

### Juxtaposition

Two items that have, or could have, some interrelationship may be received one way if situated together and another way if situated apart. For instance, placing a membership renewal notice that says, "Please stay with us!" adjacent to an "In Memoriam" for a deceased member could seem incongruous and create unintentional humor. Putting a proposed bylaws amendment on the same page as the local secretary's column may convey a subliminal message of authority, while positioning it on the puzzle page may have the opposite effect. A member who writes insulting letters to the editor may be dealt silent editorial justice by placing his remarks beneath a column of Densa jokes.

### Sequence

The relative order of items in series affects their interaction, and the choice of first and final items influences the reader's response to the entire series. For an example, review the list of editors' comments on obscenity in the section headed "Offensive Matter" in this chapter. See if you can detect a reason for the sequence of the comments and discover the conclusion they were meant to encourage in you.

## Proofreading









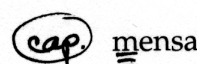












Putting out an attractive, meaty issue that is carelessly proofread is like getting all spiffed up to go out and forgetting to brush your teeth. Your good first impression suffers on closer inspection.

Some editors have listed "careless proofreading"—including omission of dates, incorrect directions, and wrong addresses—as their worst beginners' mistakes. Those things happen to all of us. There's not much you can do but apologize and go

on about your business—but you can try to be more careful in the future. It's worth the effort for what it says about the quality of your publication and your pride in your work.

Proofreading is not difficult; it's just tedious. If you don't have a sharp eye for typos, find an ace nit-picker in your group and enlist his aid. A good proofreader must discipline himself to read not just every line or every word but every syllable, character by character, and every mark of punctuation and every space. He must see what is there and not what should be there, and he must know when something is missing.

If you are using some form of word processing equipment and can pull another copy of your text, there is no reason not to correct every error you find. Your proofreader can mark them clearly on the copy itself. If correction means substantial retyping, you may decide to let all but the most egregious errors pass. Here marginal markings or Scotch "Post-It" notes—slips of nonpermanently adhesive yellow paper—will do best, so that when you decide "stet" ("let it stand") your copy is still clean. If you type copy manually, you can save yourself some trouble by proofreading each page initially while it is still in the typewriter and corrections can be aligned easily.

 delete	 apostrophe		transpose
 insert	 quotation		italics
 space	 hyphen		capital
 period	 close up		lowercase
 comma	 move left		boldface
 colon	 move right		spell out
 semicolon	 paragraph		ignore change

## Pitfalls

There is no escaping the fact that most of us have to learn the important lessons for ourselves—and learn them the hard way. The following list is a catalogue of actual mistakes made and regretted in the course of editing the *Bulletin* for two and a half years. If there is anything to be gained from the experiences of others, then just maybe this section can spare you some unpleasantness.

### Things You Might Be Sorry You Did (If You Do Them)

by Meredy Amyx

1. Agree to print anything, no matter from whom or on whose recommendation, sight unseen.
2. Print a puzzle for which you don't have the answer.
3. Print a puzzle for which you haven't had the answer independently checked.
4. Edit a statement you're not sure about without checking.

5. Accept an ad of any kind without reading it carefully.
6. Send anybody (especially the printer!) your only copy of anything, unless you don't care if you never see it again.
7. Print Part I of anything before you have the complete series.
8. Write a letter to any other editor without thinking of the fact that it might get published.
9. Put up with the same old hassles, unwittingly perpetrated, from regular contributors every month without telling them what's wrong.
10. Change dates for any group work sessions on short notice.
11. Assume that other people will understand something that doesn't make sense to you.
12. Print anything you feel nervous about or find yourself hoping nobody will read.
13. Explain exactly why you're returning a contribution you think is absolutely hopeless.
14. Make estimates of cost to anyone without checking.
15. Print a candidate's or officer's photo, statement, or report, or any other official sort of document, that came from someone other than the responsible party, without checking.
16. Print *anything* you haven't read—and read closely.

## Editors and the Law

Copyright is “the exclusive right, granted by law for a certain number of years, to make and dispose of copies of a literary, musical, or artistic work,” according to the *Random House College Dictionary*. This is not a legal definition, but it will suffice as a starting point for this section.

Because of the specialized nature of this material, it is appropriate to identify its sources. Herbert B. Turkington, then a Mensan, wrote the chapter entitled “Copyright” that appeared in the 1975 edition under the editorship of Norman Pos. The editor of the present handbook condensed the material, taking care to avoid alterations of meaning, and edited for style and consistency. Mensan attorney William Kovensky was kind enough to examine the draft for conformance with the Copyright Act of 1976 (effective January 1, 1978) and to recommend revisions. The editor then incorporated all necessary and some discretionary changes into the text and submitted it to Bill Kovensky for review before preparing the final draft.

## Copyright

*by Herbert B. Turkington*

*(Updated and revised by William Kovensky)*

### Securing Copyright

Copyright is obtained by publication with *proper notice of copyright*. Publication, in the case of Mensa newsletters, can be understood as releasing for distribution. Once publication has taken place without copyright notice, the material is in the public domain, available to anyone for any use without charge or credit, and the chance to secure copyright has been irretrievably lost.

**Is Copyright Necessary?** The chance that anyone outside the Mensa organization might want to copy anything appearing in your pages, let alone the possibility that it has any commercial value, is very slim at best. Many contributors to newsletters, as well as their editors and local group memberships generally, are concerned primarily with receiving proper credit as originators when items from their publications are picked up and reprinted in other Mensa periodicals. A simple request to this effect, prominently printed on the masthead page, will in all probability be honored whether or not the issue is also copyrighted. If you wish to forego copyright but seek intra-Mensa credit, a request line might take the form:

**All material in this issue not copyrighted by others may be freely reprinted in Mensa publications. It is requested that full credit be given to the author or artist and to this newsletter.**

However you word your request line, it is important that it not appear to be a claim of copyright on your own material if it is not in fact copyrighted; more on this below.

**Copyright for an Entire Issue.** For any of a number of reasons (such as pressure from contributing reviewers, article authors, even poets), you may determine that it is worthwhile to copyright an entire issue—or all of your issues, as a matter of course. If you are in doubt, it is best to claim the copyright. Nothing simpler; just publish with a proper notice of copyright on the masthead page (or on the title page or first page of text if you don't use a masthead). The recommended copyright notice takes the form:

Copyright © 1983 Local Mensa Group (or Special Interest Group). All rights reserved.

It doesn't matter in what order the three essential elements—the year (of actual, not nominal, publication), the name of the copyright claimant, and the symbol © or the word “copyright”—appear, as long as they are all together.

Right next to, or below, the copyright notice you can run your credit-request line, which in this case (since your own material is now copyrighted) might take this form:

**All material in this issue not copyrighted by others may be freely reprinted in Mensa publications, provided that full credit is given to the author or artist and to this newsletter. Prior written consent of the editor hereof is required for any other reproduction in any form.**

**Why Not Secure Copyright?** The only drawback to securing copyright is that you may be required to register an issue, or even each of your copyrighted issues, in the Copyright Office; and at the rate of \$10 per registration, plus the work of filling out the registration forms (Form TX) and sending them off with checks and deposit copies (small blessing: postage-free), this could become burdensome. The legal requirement that publications be registered “promptly” can be satisfied at almost any time after the date of publication, so it may be that you will never have to register an issue at all. There are two important considerations:

- If you ever want to bring legal action for copyright infringement against someone who has copied something from one of your issues, you will have to register that issue before suit can be commenced (though this can, of course, be done after the act of infringement has occurred).
- If you register one issue, or if it otherwise comes to the attention of the Register of Copyrights that you are publishing a periodical with a copyright notice, the Register has discretionary authority under the Copyright Law of 1976 to require you to register all your copyrighted issues (on pain of fine, but not loss of the copyright, for noncompliance). The Register has rarely exercised this authority, but it

has been known to happen. You should, therefore, evaluate the desirability of copyrighting your issues in the light of the possibility that you may eventually have to register them—if indeed you don't decide to register them as you go along.

**Copyright for Selected Portions.** Alternatively, you might wish to secure copyright for only selected contributions to various issues if, for instance, only the author of a single article in an issue is interested in having copyright protection. In such a case you would use the credit-request line form given in the section "Is Copyright Necessary?" above, and a copyright notice would be printed with the contribution to be protected and clearly refer to it, as:

Drawing © 1983 John Doe.

Separate registration is required for each separately copyrighted item in a single issue.

Since in this instance the copyright would be claimed in the name of the contributor rather than in the name of the local Mensa group, and would inure to his sole benefit, you should require the contributor to prepare, file, and pay for the registration himself. Incidentally, advising contributors of their responsibility to secure and register copyright claims for their contributions themselves may be the easiest way of handling the rare complicated situation you might run into, such as a posthumous contribution submitted and claimed by a relative or an executor, or a case of a so-called joint work in which the efforts of two or more authors working separately are combined. These are tricky areas in which a lawyer's advice is ordinarily required.

Printing a copyright notice for individual contributions without actual registration carries a small risk comparable in kind to the risk involved in ongoing publication of unregistered, copyrighted issues.

**Avoid the Middle Ground.** Whichever of these three approaches you may use from time to time, by all means avoid the halfway, half-assed "compromise" in which you appear to obtain copyright (in order to mollify contributors) but in fact don't. You may have seen somewhere a publication with a homemade-looking "copyright" notice, such as:

This issue is copyrighted in its entirety and may not be reproduced in any form without written permission from the editor, except that permission is granted to Mensa publications to reprint provided full credit is given to the author or artist and to this newsletter.

Any such notice is almost assuredly ineffective to secure copyright, since it contains neither the year of publication nor the name of the copyright owner. Worse, since it appears to claim copyright, it could lead to a situation in which a contributor whose work is purloined by others, or who finds he has no legal rights when his work unexpectedly becomes valuable, seeks redress against your group, claiming that he was induced to submit the work to your newsletter in reliance upon an implied representation that his copyright interests would be protected. Whether or not such a claim would stand up in court, there would be a hassle you don't need and legal expenses you can't afford. Of course the chances of this actually happening are about nil, but there is always the million-to-one shot that, say, a poem printed in your newsletter could be lifted for the lyric of a hit song. This is one of the good reasons to copyright all issues as a matter of course.

Remember, if it is your primary aim to get proper credit on reprints in other Mensa publications, a simple request to this effect will probably be honored anyway; if you want certain copyright protection, it is very easy to get, though perhaps at some expense. So why make trouble for yourself?

**The Copyright Symbol.** The symbol © gives full protection in the United States and all other countries signatory to the Universal Copyright Convention (most advanced countries); the phrase “All rights reserved” (or “Todos derechos reservados”) adds protection in Latin American countries that have signed the Pan-American Copyright Convention but not the UCC. The word “copyright” is redundant to the symbol ©, but its addition does no harm, and many publishers include it in case a broken typeface or other printing foul-up should result in an illegible © on a substantial part of a press run, and thus a defective notice.

**Forms.** Forms for an entire issue or for an individual contribution may be obtained free in any quantity from The Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540.

## Using Copyrighted Material

Whether or not you decide to copyright your newsletter to protect the material it contains, you must respect the rights in any previously copyrighted material that you may reprint by way of its inclusion in articles submitted to you. To republish without permission something already copyrighted is to infringe the copyright on that material, and the fact that there is usually no profit motive involved in Mensa publications is not a legal defense (as it may be, for example, in music-performance cases). While your nonprofit status might deter an aggrieved copyright owner from suing, or tend to ameliorate an award, you can't count on either. A court may award statutory damages, which can be whopping: up to \$10,000 (minimum \$250), plus court costs and, perhaps, the plaintiff's attorney's fees as well as your own. Although innocent “not-for-profit” copying might be successfully defended, horror stories do occur. There is nothing you'd want or need to reprint that would be worth taking the risk. Get permission.

**Obtaining Permission to Reprint.** Most Mensa publications contain permission/request lines similar to those suggested above, which you can rely on. In order to reprint a drawing, poem, story, or article from some other copyrighted source, or to publish a contribution that contains extensive quotations from such a source, it is necessary in virtually all cases to obtain written permission from the copyright owner or his agent. To get it, write the publisher of the source you wish to quote, or require your contributor to do so, setting forth exactly what you want to quote or reproduce and (if you haven't dealt with that publisher before) enclosing a recent issue of your newsletter so that the permissions officer can clearly see that you're not in the commercial publishing business. Permission, if granted at all, will usually be given without charge but with a prescribed credit line (usually the original copyright notice in the source), which must be printed EXACTLY AS GIVEN in your newsletter. Magazines, you will probably find, will respond faster than book publishers, who may have to clear the request with the author. (Book copyrights are often held by authors in their own names, but the publishers will have authority to issue routine permissions you can rely upon.)

**An expected permission that hasn't arrived by press date is a refusal.**

**Alternatives.** It is obviously essential to obtain permission to reprint an illustration, an entire poem or article, or a complete chapter from a book. In the case of an article by one of your contributors that draws upon a copyrighted source through quotations, you may be able to avoid going through this tedious process by having your contributor reduce the amount of material taken directly from the copyrighted source to the point where it constitutes fair use. “Fair use” is perhaps the trickiest area of copyright law, and it goes without saying that the best rule on avoiding the permissions route is, Don't. The next-best rule is to check it with a lawyer, though that of course will usually be financially unfeasible, unless you can find a Mensan patent

attorney willing to help. Third-best, then, for unreconstructed do-it-yourselfers (and gamblers), these guidelines:

### **1. Paraphrase**

Copyright protects the particular expression of ideas, not the ideas themselves, even if they are novel. If you give an author full credit for his thoughts but restate them in your own words, he has no legal complaint. (Obviously this applies only to verbal expressions; you can't paraphrase—that is, redraw—a cartoon without infringing the copyright on it.)

### **2. Extract, Condense, Reduce**

Sometimes you must quote; a critic can't analyze a poet's prosody without printing at least a few of his lines. But no more than are really necessary to prove the critic's point. Rule: the fewer and shorter, the better.

### **3. Weigh**

To decide whether the material quoted is reasonably necessary to your contributor's purpose, and whether the amount taken is no more than reasonably necessary to that purpose (i.e., no redundant padding-out with quotations from the source), you will have to evaluate your author's own contribution. Of course you needn't agree with him, or even think much of what he says, but you must be satisfied that what your contributor has done with the material he has taken is substantial in itself and not just a framework for the quotations. Consider two critical essays about the same poem. The first analyzes it line by line, necessarily reproducing it in the process (but strung out in bits and pieces over many paragraphs). The second takes the same amount of the poem, but quotes it en bloc wedged into a sandwich of critical appreciation that says little more than that the critic likes it. Case one, fair use (in all probability). Case two, infringement (or anyway, a good chance of an expensive lawsuit).

### **4. When in Doubt**

Perhaps the penultimate question to ask yourself is, does this contribution, taken as a whole, come across as a work with some originality, or is it more or less a substitute for its source? If you have any hesitancy about answering, be consoled; the courts are forever surprising the copyright bar about which particular instances they will consider fair use and which infringement. This brings us to the final question to ask yourself: How much am I being paid to take chances? A copyright infringement suit is likely to name you personally as well as your group. Resolve all doubts in favor of having written permission in hand or refusing the contribution.

**Courtesy Copies.** Many editors think it a good standing practice to send copies of their newsletters to the authors of original material drawn upon in articles in the newsletter, and to be sure that contributors are aware of this practice. If a contributor should be at all reluctant to have his article sent to the author he quotes, go to your battle station; his reason had better be persuasive. Of course it is not necessary to send copies to authors cited only to a minor degree, or to every author discussed in the treatment of a group. It is, however, an expected courtesy for copies to go to publishers of all books reviewed, even in the tersest of notices. (These same publishers will be handling your requests for permissions.)

## Libel

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following article is excerpted from a two-part article by journalist Art Spikol, originally published in Writer's Digest (August and September, 1979) under the title "The Libel Belt." It is reprinted by permission. Author Spikol wants Mensa editors to be advised that this is merely a guide, not the last word, and that libel laws vary from state to state and change constantly. While he feels that what he has written will serve us well over a long period, in the case of any sensitive situation a libel lawyer is the best counsel. Former AMC Publications Officer Beth Sample, a lawyer, reviewed the article in detail and noted: "Don't consider this article as a license to print intentional lies, and check carefully the truth of your 'fair comments.'" Thanks to Hans Frommer for this material.]*

There is a difference between intentional and accidental lies, between deliberately misleading innuendo and statements and simple, honest misunderstanding. True or not, it is thought to be better for the press to have the freedom to raise certain issues, and to express opinions on them freely, than to be restrained by virtue of being able to print only the truth, especially since the truth is only recognized as such after it is defended as such. . . .

As a writer, you'd probably like somebody to give you a list of everything that's libelous. You could then look at the list and say, "Well, now I know what to write and what not to write, so I'm safe." Unfortunately, that's impossible. First, the libel laws vary from state to state (although all states generally agree on the formal requisites of libel); second, it is not always easy to distinguish between what is *privileged*—in other words, fair game for the press—and what may be the press sticking its nose in where it doesn't belong.

However, you don't need a list. You need only a few guidelines. And the first guideline is simple. Don't automatically be afraid of libel. Libel means injury to reputation. A libelous publication is one which exposes a person to hatred or contempt or ridicule, or which tends to cause any person, organization or group of persons to be shunned or avoided socially and/or professionally and/or in their business or occupation. That should give you the idea: Attack somebody's reputation in print and you'd better be ready to defend your right to have done it.

The mere fact that some uncomplimentary information has been published is not automatically a guarantee that someone can successfully sue you. There are defenses to a libel action. And while this [article] can't take the place of a course in libel law, we'll try to present guidelines sufficient to avoid basic libel problems. But because writers, like laws, vary, I leave you with that age-old warning: One who attempts to be one's own lawyer has a fool for a client. In other words: *When in doubt, check it out.*

To create libel, you need three things. **The libel must be published. The person being libeled must be identified.** And finally, **there must be a harmful effect.**

### Publication

Let's say that I decide that I dislike you sufficiently to write you a letter about it, and in that letter I say that you are incompetent, not trustworthy, probably psychotic, a torturer of children [and so on] . . . Is that libelous?

You might say no, because it's only a letter. However, letters can be libelous—and this one could have been if I'd sent a copy of it to all our friends. That would constitute publication. . . .

There was a case where a man (it wasn't me) sent a [suggestive] letter to a New York widow . . . the woman decided that she had been publicly insulted and sued for libel. She lost—the letter hadn't been published until she herself put it in front of the postal authorities.

In a 1964 case, a Texas newspaper raised defense in a libel action, saying that although the paper had been distributed, there was no proof that anyone had actually read it. . . . That defense didn't work; the court said that it could be *presumed* that the newspaper had been seen and the article read.

## Identification

There are several ways in which you can identify someone. You can write the person's name—that'll do it for sure. But you can also provide a description so accurate and so revealing that the person about whom you're writing will be identified even though you have avoided the mention of any name, or have adopted a pseudonym. . . .

My policy in using fictitious names [to avoid accidentally selecting a real person's name] is: *one*, check the phone book for the existence of such a name (and you're much safer finding one for which no last name exists. . .); *two*, . . . pick a name that has some personal significance so that you can prove you made it up and bore no malice in using it . . .; or, if that fails, *three*, you might use a name so common that no one could possibly claim it refers to him alone, such as John Smith. . . .

How about groups? Can you say that the US Army is riddled with drug abuse? Or that some New York cabbies take "the long way" around? Sure—since both groups are too large for any individual to take such criticism personally or have it reflect on them personally. In smaller groups, it's best to use the word "some" or "a few". . . As a rule of thumb, when the number drops below 100, tread carefully. . . .

## Harmful Effect

If a person or group is identified, and if something negative is said about them, it stands to reason that their reputations could be damaged. If that's true, the libel could be complete—but there is no libel unless the effect of the printed reference is to make people think worse of someone—as we've said, to damage either a person's reputation, social acceptability or business or profession. The most dangerous kind of published reference would be one that would damage a person in all three areas, such as one that would charge crime or dishonor. . . .

One cannot be libeled by being accused of doing what he has a perfect right to do. . . .

However, journalists today must be more careful than ever with small details. The country is in a litigious mood—everybody sues these days, and even if there are no real grounds, suits are expensive to defend. Also, the press has occasionally been a target in recent years, and court decisions have gone against it in some notable examples, so the general public is no longer as quick to consider the freedom of the press inviolable.

In libel, the harmful effect requirement is what stops a lot of lawsuits. . . .

Who decides the disposition of a libel suit? Often the attorney involved; many such cases don't even get to court because the outcome is predictable. If the case does get to court, sometimes a judge will decide—unless he can't. In that case, he'll call in a jury.

## "Reckless Disregard"

You can't spend any appreciable amount of time around journalists without hearing about the famous *New York Times* vs. *Sullivan* case, which culminated in one of the most important decisions regarding press freedom in this century. . . The [Supreme] Court stated:

The constitutional guarantees require, we think, a Federal rule that prohibits a public official from recovering damages for a defamatory falsehood relating to his official conduct unless he proves that the statement was made with “actual malice”—that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not.

This paved the way for a new kind of journalism—a journalism that would conceivably enable anyone to make inaccurate libelous statements about a public official’s conduct, so long as he referred to the official’s public, and not purely private, conduct, and so long as the statements were not in reckless disregard of the truth.

In June of 1967, the US Supreme Court extended the ruling to cover not only public officials but public *figures* as well—that is, those people in whose public conduct society and the press have a “legitimate and substantial interest,” as the Court put it.

...

[In another case,] the Supreme Court reversed [a jury’s] judgment, saying that private persons are entitled to no more protection than public persons in matters that involve public interest.

## Gossip

Almost everything must be seen in the context of *whom*—whom we’re writing about. There are a lot of gray areas in libel. Is a public-private person (for instance, a writer like you, who may not be famous but who has had a few bylines in a few magazines) immune from press criticism? Hardly—in fact, because you help shape the opinions of people, you might be fair game for any media. But just how much depends upon *you*—how widely you’re read and how much impact you have on how large a readership. Your reach need not be great; there’s a good example in the case of the minister who was accused of seducing a housemaid. . . the court said that because ministers are leaders of the people and their influence is great, their behavior is a matter for public concern. . . .

As for the purely private lives of public people, check any gossip column. Most of the items where actual names are used are relatively harmless, but where there is something sensitive enough to create an atmosphere for a lawsuit, there is usually an attempt on the columnist’s part . . . to disguise the person under discussion. . . .

## Secondhand Sources

If it’s beginning to sound like the cards are stacked against the writer—far from it. In fact, there are plenty of defenses, and that may explain why most of the libel suits threatened never get off the ground.

*Privilege* is a public policy matter in the right of free speech. The idea is that you are granted immunity for liability or defamation that otherwise would be actionable—if what you write is a matter of public or social interest. Privilege is a necessity in creating a climate of free-wheeling, thought-provoking argument. In this category are: judicial, legislative, public and official proceedings . . . However, when the press reports on the same situation, the privilege becomes *qualified* instead of absolute. It all depends upon how the situation is handled journalistically. . . [In one libel suit, a] newspaper responded that its report was an accurate account of the court proceedings. The court found in favor of the executive because sparring marital partners often make unfounded charges. . . .

Very little that a journalist reports is fact; most often—and this is especially true in the case of magazines—it’s information obtained secondhand. As one who has dealt with magazine writers and is one himself, I can tell you that it’s rare that a writer will be on the scene of an actual occurrence.

## Fair Comment

There is a notable exception to this, and that is when the journalist or writer becomes the witness—reads a book and then reviews it, goes to a movie or play and then writes about it, goes to a restaurant and passes judgment on it. The writer can condemn everything from architecture to zoos, and is at such times protected by the right to *fair comment*—or opinion. Opinions can almost never be proven, but nobody could write a column or article without them.

Fair comment is a complete defense—that is, it wholly defeats a recovery on the part of the plaintiff no matter how defamatory or injurious the opinion may be—provided that there is no proof of actual malice. The premise here, as elsewhere in the libel laws, is that it is better for the reputation of one person to suffer, even unjustifiably, than to squelch free expression on matters of public interest. We live in an imperfect world. . . .

You're fairly safe as long as you're stating an opinion that deals with a matter of public interest; as long as it is not presented as fact, but clearly as opinion; as long as the facts on which the opinions are based are truly stated; and as long as the opinion is fair and without malice.

## Truth

Truth of the published matter is an absolute defense in a libel action. It is difficult to attempt to prove, particularly in view of the fact that the writer most often has no real knowledge of the truth, but only what he has learned secondhand. It is not enough to say that you have quoted someone accurately, either; *if the utterance is libelous, the responsibility is always placed on the publisher* [italics added] . . . If there is any foolproof method of [proving the truth], it is to have incontrovertible documentary evidence. . . .

## Reply and Consent

Two other common forms of defense against potential libel suits are reply and consent. Reply is just what the word says: If someone attacks you in the press, you have a right to counter the attack . . . you could go to a newspaper or magazine and point out that the writer who attacked you had an axe to grind; you might further question his journalistic ability or fairness—in fact, you can even libel the person who libeled you, provided that it doesn't over-respond to the situation . . . A magazine under fire, especially one that feels that it may be in the wrong, may be willing to take some flack, even let someone reply in print if that will squelch any further action. Very often, regardless of whether there is a potential for action or not, the editor will publish a letter from the person in question in the letters-to-the-editor column.

Consent is a little different. It closes the barn door *before* the horse leaves. It means getting permission from the person about whom you have written something for publication. Naturally, this is not done by saying, "Say, I've just written an article about you that's kind of negative; mind if I publish it?"

It's done this way: "My magazine is doing an article about you in which certain statements are made. We thought you would want an opportunity to respond to these statements before we go to press just to set the record straight. . ." In cases like this, the person's response is tantamount to "consent"—that is, he or she has answered the charges and the piece achieves a certain balance through the implication/denial process. And if the person says "no comment," that's not consent, but at least it shows that the reporter attempted to give the subject an opportunity to reply . . . No magazine *needs* consent to publish material, of course. But it is a useful tactic in forestalling a libel action.

Becoming more and more prevalent is the idea that people have a right to privacy—"the right to be left alone," as Justice Brandeis once put it.

However, when people become part of a news event or part of a situation related to the public interest, they forfeit some of the right to be left alone. . . .

## Responsibility

The libel laws exist to protect not only those who might be defamed by the press, but the press itself. Only through the exercise of responsibility can the reliability and credibility of the press remain intact. There are magazines and newspapers in this country that are afraid to publish certain types of stories for fear of libel; however, the libel laws have enough flexibility built into them, and enough regard for the responsible operation of the press, to enable any legitimate journalistic organization to report candidly and without fear of reprisals on material that is in the public interest—so long as it reports in a responsible and fair manner, without malice and without invading anyone's purely private life.

Copyright © 1979 Art Spikol. Originally published in *Writer's Digest*, August, 1979, and September, 1979. Reprinted by permission.

## Protection

General liability insurance held by American Mensa protects members against liability claims arising from their activities on behalf of Mensa. This coverage is described in the *Local Secretary's Handbook*. Whether you are a local group or SIG editor, you are covered by the policy, with certain specific exceptions, the most pertinent of which (for editors) is the following: any liability arising from an insured's willful violation of a statute or intentional wrongdoing (e.g., publication of a libelous statement with knowledge that it is false). Further information on the insurance is available from your locsec or from the national Mensa office.\*

---

\* The information in this paragraph has not been verified since the date of original publication. Check with the national Mensa office for current information.