



The Breaking Muscle Writer's Guide

January 2017 Edition

Welcome to Breaking Muscle! We're excited to work with you to bring your message and content to our enormous international audience. To ensure the highest quality of content with a minimum of editorial interference, we've developed this style guide. Within, you will find technical rules to follow, as well as strategies that will help your writing be more professional, compelling, and engaging. If you have any questions, be sure to contact us via email or Facebook. We will be adding to and improving this guide over time, so your feedback is welcome.

Formatting

Your text submissions to Breaking Muscle should be in .doc or .docx format. We will be using Microsoft Word to proof and edit the file, so other formats can cause mistakes and formatting errors. Here are some details to look after:

- Ensure there are no automatic line breaks by selecting the "remove space after paragraph" option in Word.
- Do not format the text itself with bullets, bolding, italics, etc. Our web interface strips off all of those cues anyway. If you have ideas on how you want the piece to look, utilize the "Comment" feature in Word to leave us notes in the margins.
- This also applies to any hyperlinks you'd like to include in your piece. Add the link in a comment, rather than linking the text itself.

Speaking of hyperlinks, there are two kinds we allow:

- **Internal links**, to other Breaking Muscle pieces. We generally include 2-4 internal links per piece, so if you have ideas of which we should use, feel free to include them.
- **External, academic links**. These are links to studies, white papers, news articles, or statistics that help underline the points you are trying to make in your piece.
- In general, we do **not** link to competitor websites, your personal blog, or your business page. Doing so creates an impression to the reader that they are being sold something, which we want to avoid.

Now let's talk about references:

- References should be cited at the end of the article, using the Chicago style of citation.
- The good news is, all of that is automated! Websites like CitationMachine.net and Google Scholar will automatically generate correctly formatted citations for you, so all you have to do is copy and paste.
- Once you've created your references list, in-line citations should be made using the number of the reference(s) in brackets. For example: [5,7]

Notes about numbers:

- Numbers are typed out for single digits (zero through nine), and expressed as numerals thereafter (10+). Exceptions are:
 - In titles or section headers, all numbers are numerals.
 - Ordinals (first, third) are always spelled out.
 - Large, nonspecific numbers (360 million) will be a combination of numeral and spelled word.
 - Rounds, reps, and weights (3 x 12 at 55kg) are always expressed as numerals.
- Units of measurement are expressed in their abbreviated form (225lb, 150kg, 15min).

Structure, Grammar, and Punctuation

The overall structure of your piece is perhaps the most important element to its success in engaging our audience. Nothing loses a reader faster than a piece that is disorganized, rambling, or otherwise difficult to follow. Remember, while *Breaking Muscle* is an industry-leading publication, readers still have a plethora of choices when they're looking for fitness content. So with that said, here's how to structure your piece to keep your reader engaged from start to finish:

- Lead with a strong introduction:
 - Your first few sentences are when you convince the reader why they should care what you have to say. If you don't create that relationship there, nothing else you write will matter.
 - Introduce the problem you intend to solve. You can even start with a short, identifiable anecdote, if it's useful and compelling.
 - Don't define your audience (*this article is for those of you who...*) or yourself (*I've been coaching since 1974, and...*). The reader will decide if the content is for them (and if you're qualified to write it) based on the content itself.
- Lay out your points in a logical order, and then stick to each point until it's done. Scattering your message across an article makes your narrative hard to discern. If our editors have to hunt for your point and move whole sentences or paragraphs around to make them more cohesive, there's a greater chance your message will be lost in the process.

- Always write a conclusion that's as compelling as your introduction. Sum up your points, tie together the ideas you discussed, exhort the reader to take action, and let them know what's coming next. A good conclusion is like the final few notes in a symphony: it makes or breaks the whole piece, and is the emotion that the listener (reader, in this case) will leave with.

Now let's talk nuts and bolts: how to use punctuation to sculpt the flow of your piece.

- Breaking Muscle uses the serial, Oxford, or Harvard comma. (See what I did there?)
- Do not double-space after periods.
- Exclamation points are like hot sauce. A little bit can add flavor and excitement to your creation, but too much will overwhelm the other flavors. Use only when you have to.
- Be prudent with the use of less-common punctuation. They are not prohibited, but should be used sparingly and with accuracy in order to not disrupt the flow of your piece and distract the reader.
 - The em dash (—) is elegant, but in most cases a comma will do just fine.
 - Ellipses (...) are only appropriate if you are omitting a portion of a quote.
 - Parenthetical phrases (like this) are almost always better left out, or freed from their parentheses.
- Avoid the use of slashed expressions (and/or, he/she, etc.):
 - Choose the more appropriate conjunction, between "and" or "or."
 - The gender neutral pronoun is "they."

If you run into specific questions on grammar and punctuation use, our default standard is the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS).

Style

Everything you write for Breaking Muscle should be written to as specific an audience as you can imagine. Writing to a particular kind of athlete, or even an individual athlete that you know personally, creates a connection and an intensity that the reader can detect and identify with. Writing for a specific person is the single most important thing you can do to make sure your writing isn't boring, and that you make your points with clarity and concision.

Write with confidence and affirmation. You are an industry expert, so there is no reason to couch your ideas and assertions with words like should, maybe, and perhaps. People come to Breaking Muscle to seek knowledge from the best in the business, and you're it.

The length of what you write is entirely up to you. If your point is singular and can be made with power and clarity in 400 words, then don't add fluff just to make it longer. Conversely, if you have an

overarching principle to explain that requires nuance and detail, write until your point is fully made, no matter how long it is. A well-written deep dive on a subject could easily become a 10,000-word essay, and such a work can help establish your reputation as a coach, a writer, and a thought leader in the industry.

Finally, here are some ways to make your message stronger, no matter what you are writing:

- Avoid industry terms like client and trainee, as they disconnect you from the reader. Call your audience who they are: lifters, runners, athletes, etc. The exception to this is if you are writing a piece for Coaches Only.
- Avoid clichés like journey. *Especially* journey. Analogies are great, but clichés are not.
- Introductory clauses (however, therefore, before I begin, etc.) are fine, but don't abuse them. Overuse interrupts the flow of your message.
- Adverbs, in particular common ones (simply, only, very, etc.) are not your friends. If the sentence can stand without them, leave them out. At best, they make you sound wordy. At worst, they detract from the meaning of your piece.
- The gerund is the close, ugly cousin of the adverb. Gerunds are verbs ending in -ing that are used as nouns (lifting, running, etc.). Used in excess, they make your writing sound like a middle school book report.

A Final Word

These guidelines have been developed to help our writers raise the level of their content and reach more readers more effectively. Our goal as an editorial staff is to develop you as writers, just as you develop your athletes. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for this guide, we'd love to hear them. Thank you, and happy writing!