

BJA WRITER'S GUIDELINES – GENERAL TOPICS

There are no strict guidelines when writing about a general jazz-related topic. You may be writing about “the scene” in a particular genre of jazz, or about the general direction of jazz, or anything else related to jazz.

Just keep in mind general rules for good writing:

- (1) **Keep your audience in focus.** Are they professional working musicians? Are they jazz enthusiasts? Each audience may have a different interest in your topic. The non-musician audience may need to have some terms defined.
- (2) **Introduce the topic** in the first paragraph in a way that provides context and garners the interest of your main intended audience. A thesis statement might be helpful – that is, a sentence or two that provides a “road map” for the rest of the article. Usually a thesis statement includes two, three, or even four broad statements or claims that are then elaborated in the body paragraphs. Or you might just pose a provocative question or questions that are then answered in the rest of the essay.
- (3) **Write coherent body paragraphs.** Ideally, the paragraph topics will follow the “road map” set up in the introduction. Each paragraph should focus on a specific idea, which is introduced in a topic sentence. If the paragraph gets too long or begins to stray into a different idea, find a logical place to break it up. Today’s readers are daunted by long paragraphs.
- (4) **Conclude your piece** by summing up the main idea without repeating the same phrasing. There are several ways of writing a concluding paragraph. One is to broaden the perspective to place the topic within a wider context. Another way is to open the topic for further inquiry or discussion. Finally, you can express some overall judgement or evaluation of the issue.
- (5) **Vary sentence length and complexity.** Either too many long, complex sentences or too many short, choppy sentences become tedious to read.
- (6) **Choose your vocabulary carefully.** Some writers tend to load in a lot of cool-sounding adjectives that don’t really fit the nouns that they are describing. Try to avoid clichés.

These guidelines supplement those in the BJA Newsletter Writer’s Guidelines.