

Writing for Astronomy Now

Astronomy Now falls into the genre of ‘popular science magazine’. To get an idea of the general style and scope of the magazine, read through some recent back issues. Check that we have not already published an article on the subject you would like to write about in the last two years. We would be unlikely to repeat a topic so soon unless there has been a notable update.

Articles for *Astronomy Now* are prepared, commissioned and written several months in advance of their publication date. For example, articles for the June issue would be prepared and written in March and edited by April, if not earlier. Articles on upcoming major events (new space missions, significant anniversaries, astronomical events such as eclipses) are usually highlighted well in advance by the editor. Therefore, if you are interested in writing an article on such a topic you should pitch it to the editor four or five months in advance.

The article will be edited by the editor before going to the designer for layout. It is at the editing stage that the editor will make any changes if necessary. If significant changes are needed to be made the editor will contact you at this stage. Once the article has been designed, you will be sent an unproofed PDF of the article for you to check through. The design of the article at this stage is not necessarily final and we may continue working and tweaking it beyond this point.

Once the magazine containing your article has been published and we have received the magazine back from the printers, we will send a complimentary copy out to you along with a letter inviting you to send an invoice to us for the article so that we can pay you. Once we’ve received that invoice we can pay you. All articles are paid for upon publication, not before.

What we are looking for

Feature articles in *Astronomy Now* usually range between 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000 words, corresponding to two, three and four page articles. Many articles are either written by the *Astronomy Now* staff or are commissioned directly by the editor to freelance writers; however a substantial proportion of articles published in the magazine are the result of pitches to the editor by readers and freelance writers. *Astronomy Now* has always been a place for readers and amateur astronomers to publish their own work and we very much want to continue that tradition.

Feature articles for *Astronomy Now* should be, first and foremost, about astronomy. We cover all aspects of space and astronomy: planetary science, space exploration, cosmology, astrophysics, astronomy history, equipment reviews, all areas of amateur astronomy and to some degree articles on manned spaceflight.

We do not accept articles along the lines of “why I can prove that Einstein/big bang theory/quantum physics is wrong.” Any new theories discussed in *Astronomy Now* must be from a peer reviewed scientific paper and therefore open for discussion and appraisal in the scientific community. *Astronomy Now* is not a peer

reviewed journal and articles along these lines should seek publication in the appropriate literature instead.

Equipment and book reviews are usually commissioned by the editor and as such we do not generally solicit proposals for equipment reviews. Similarly, articles for *News Update* are generally written in-house or commissioned by the editor and we don’t generally require unsolicited proposals for news stories. However, there may be the odd occasion where a reader knows of a news story that may be of interest to our readers and that the editor may not be aware of. In such a case please e-mail the editor with a brief synopsis of the story and if it is of interest and isn’t already being covered in the magazine we will be in touch. Please note that news stories about local astronomical societies usually go into our *Society News* section, which is compiled in-house.

Writing styles

The writing style should be appropriate to the context of the article. Articles about space science, for example, should be written in a formal but relaxed style. Think of the easy style of great science popularisers such as Carl Sagan or Patrick Moore. Avoid a stiff ‘textbook’ style of writing. Articles about amateur astronomy techniques and/or experiences can sometimes get away with a more conversational tone as you are writing for fellow amateurs, your peers in effect, but be aware that this writing style can be more difficult to pull off successfully. But always, the writer’s voice on the page should speak directly to the reader and not talk down to them.

Astronomy is, unfortunately, a subject beset with scientific jargon, notation and nomenclature, much of which can be bewildering to the general reader. Try to avoid jargon – articles filled with technical phrases do not impress the readers or the editor as much as some may think. Wherever possible, explain jargon in non-technical language. Admittedly, it can sometimes be difficult to know what phrases need to be explained and what can be assumed to be understood by the reader. Scientific words and phrases that are in common usage shouldn’t need explaining. For example, you don’t need to describe exactly what a light year is, but you should explain the less well-known astronomical unit as the distance between the Earth and the Sun. It can sometimes be easier to include these explanations in a ‘jargon buster’ section at the end of an article.

If lengthy descriptions are unavoidable, or if there are sub-topics of your article that can branch off from it, these can be material for text boxes or sidebars. Writing material for such boxes is welcomed. Please look at past articles in the magazine to get a feel for the type of material that goes into a text box or sidebar.

Each article begins with a ‘strapline’, which is a short paragraph, just a couple of sentences, that introduces your article. The editor often writes this but, again, you are welcome to write this if you want.

At the end of the article, don’t forget to write a short biographical sentence so readers know who you are.

Who are you writing for?

Articles should be pitched at the level of the intelligent layperson. Most of our readers are armchair astronomers or amateurs, who have a fair grasp of astronomy but don't necessarily have a technical or scientific background. This ties in with the need for leaving out scientific jargon wherever possible. Also, remember that many of our readers will be beginners, or picking up the magazine for the first time, and your article shouldn't be completely inaccessible to them either.

Pictures

If there are specific images that you would like to illustrate your article with, please say what they are when you submit your article. Any images from NASA, ESA or public institutions and observatories generally are in the public domain and have free copyright. If you want to use some of your own photos, please send them in (digital copies or hard copies, which we can scan) and if they are suitable we will pay £10 for the use of each image. Please do not send in slides or transparencies.

If sending digital images, please send them at 300dpi resolution at a minimum size of 8cm wide, and larger if possible. This is the resolution that all magazines are printed at, and is much higher than the standard 72dpi used for websites. Lower-resolution pictures printed at 300dpi can look pixelated and fuzzy. The TIFF image file format is preferred for superior image quality once printed, but if using JPEGs please do not compress them. Larger resolution images will result in a larger file size. These are fine to e-mail to us, but you can send them on a computer disk if you prefer, which we can return to you if you include a SAE. Also, please do not embed pictures in word documents, but send them as separate files.

Hearing back from us

Once you have sent in your article (either via post or e-mail to the editorial address in the magazine), please be willing to wait up to three months for a reply. This time is to allow careful consideration of your article and the planning of future issues that may include your article. Don't forget to include your postal address, e-mail address and telephone number and it can also be helpful to include a few background details about yourself on a cover letter. We can only return articles if a SAE is included with your submission.

General points about writing your article

- Quotes from experts will help make your article feel more authoritative and allow a number of different opinions or sides of an argument to be expressed. The quotes, wherever possible, should be direct quotes, where the author personally contacts the expert and asks them questions or asks them to comment on something. Quotes should not be taken from articles published in other magazines, books or websites. Press releases are an acceptable source for quotes, but often these quotes won't contain the necessary information needed for your article and will also be used by other magazines, websites, etc and therefore they are not exclusive.

- Please use light years, not parsecs.

- Please refrain from using too many hyphens and capital letters (except for in names or the beginning of a sentence/

quote) as they can slow down the flow of a paragraph.

- Please don't litter sentences with commas.

- English spellings should be used rather than American spellings. One of the most common mistakes is the spelling of the American 'disk' instead of the English 'disc'. However, just to confuse matters, a computer disk is always spelt with a 'k'.

- Try and avoid the repetition of words too closely together.

- *Astronomy Now* uses arcminutes and arcseconds, not 'seconds of arc' or 'minutes of arc'.

- *Astronomy Now* uses metric units in most circumstances, i.e. kilometres, kilograms, millimetres and so on. The distance in miles can be expressed as well in brackets if you so wish. The exception to the metric rule is in eyepiece or telescope apertures, where the convention is still to use inches.

- We prefer digital copies of the article, rather than hard copies. Hand-written articles are only accepted in exceptional circumstances.

- Double check any facts that you include in your article.

- Please do not shorten words, e.g. yr instead of year, or ly instead of light year.

- Remember, an article has a beginning, middle and end. Have some kind of structure or plan in place before you come to write your article, so you know where you are wanting to take it. Consequently, the flow of the article will become easier for the reader to follow.

- Take care when writing your article. Remember, the spell check function on the computer is your friend! Articles that are properly and neatly presented with correct grammar and spelling are more likely to be accepted by the magazine. Read the article through several times once it is finished to make sure it all makes sense. Getting a friend or family member to read it too can also help add a fresh perspective. Double-check that the spelling of people and place names are correct.

- Finally, try and enjoy your writing. If the author enjoys writing their article, then that enjoyment is more likely to carry through to the reader who will enjoy reading your article. If you find your article boring to write, then the reader will most likely find it boring to read.

Good luck with your writing!

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