

# How To Write *Columns*

**OLIN HINKLE**

Associate Professor, School of  
Journalism, University of Texas

**JOHN HENRY**

Des Moines Register and  
Tribune. Author, "Our  
Own John Henry,"  
McClure Syndicate

Illustrated by

**Harry E. Walsh**



The Iowa State College Press  
Press Building, Ames, Iowa

Copyright, 1952, by The Iowa State College Press.  
All rights reserved. Composed and printed by  
The Iowa State College Press, Ames, Iowa, U. S. A.

PN478-1.C6

H592h

To the late J. J. Taylor, "State Press"  
of *The Dallas Morning News*. His  
memory endures as a benediction on  
the small-town press which he loved.

—O. E. H.

To Leon N. Flint of the University of  
Kansas, who guided me into columns.

—J. M. H.



## Foreword

THE ART OF COLUMN WRITING could be presented as a highly technical craft. Its trenchant tools of finesse might be analyzed: *Anachronism, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, alliteration, prolixity, pleonasm, periphrases* — these are some of the tools which might be illustrated and discussed.

These authors have chosen a less technical approach — and wisely. The result is a more readable and a more natural presentation. Their down-to-earth style is more interesting to the initiated and more helpful to the beginner. It is likewise more appropriate to the craft they are discussing.

Critics of the community newspaper are distressed about the declining vitality of the editorial page. A newspaper without vigorous editorials is likened to a man without a soul.

The growing popularity of the local column has helped to rejuvenate that soul and, more importantly, it has given many a community newspaper a heart. The authors explain in forthright manner how writers conceive, name, nourish and manipulate these periodical cardiograms of their communities. It is a book for and about columnists. It is a recognition of a thriving instrument of expression. It is a tribute to a growing army of some 8,000 philosophers who are attune to hinterland Americana. These community columnists are providing articulation for the philosophy of millions of readers. And they are having fun doing it.

Few people have studied columns and column writing as the authors of this book have. Their product is an entertaining and informative contribution to the journalist's bookshelf.

K. R. MARVIN

Head

Technical Journalism Department  
Iowa State College



# Preface

THIS IS A "HOW TO" BOOK on the writing of personal columns for the newspapers of the towns and smaller cities of America.

The authors have drawn upon their backgrounds as former columnists and as readers and collectors of column materials. They have tried to catch the spirit and transmit some of the methods of the non-metropolitan writers in ways which shall, it is hoped, prove helpful to columnists now active and others who yet shall discover the effectiveness and fascination of this lively journalism.

The authors have blended, too, an enthusiasm for the columning art which they readily admit. They have watched small-town editors, too hard-pressed for time to do extensive research, find in personal columns a flexible instrument of comment, reader amusement, and promotion peculiarly suited to their daily routines. They have noted a growing resurgence of personal journalism and of editorial influence at the grass roots of America.

Column writing is a subject of obvious values but elusive details. Many niceties of style and concept are more often derived from example than taught. But this volume has been written in the belief that columnists of the smaller papers would welcome a guide-book prepared especially for them. This is it — a report to these columnists, with ideas and examples chosen not because they are "best" but because they are representative of the better practices.

The authors gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to the many columnists who have permitted examples of their work to be used, and to others who have answered questionnaires and have written letters which enhance the value of this book.

For permission to use excerpts from copyrighted material, they wish to express their appreciation to the following:

Louisiana State University Press, publishers of *The Rural Press and the New South*, by Thomas D. Clark; the Curtis Publishing Company, pub-

lishers of the *Saturday Evening Post* articles, "Detroit's Sharpest Wit," by Robert M. Yoder, and "Panhandle Puck," by Jack Alexander; the Macmillan Company, publishers of *American Journalism*, by Frank L. Mott; Rinehart & Company, Inc., publishers of *Forty Years on Main Street*, by William Allen White; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., publishers of *The Column*, by Hallam Walker Davis; Dodd, Mead & Company, publishers of *Plain People*, by E. W. Howe; the Department of Journalism Press, University of Kansas, publishers of *The Paragrapher's Sprightly Art*, by L. N. Flint; Iowa State College Press, publishers of *How to Write for Homemakers*, by Lou Richardson and Genevieve Callahan; also *The National Publisher*, *The American Press*, *Publishers' Auxiliary*, and *The Quill*.

OLIN E. HINKLE

*University of Texas*

JOHN M. HENRY

*Des Moines Register and Tribune*

January, 1952



# *Table of Contents*

1. Background of the Newspaper Column . . . . .	3
2. Significance of the Personal Column . . . . .	14
3. Naming a Personal Column . . . . .	20
4. Typography and Position . . . . .	25
5. Column Content and Structure . . . . .	37
6. Well, Let's Get Started . . . . .	50
7. Style — and the Light Touch . . . . .	66
8. The Paragraph . . . . .	79
9. Anecdotes and Essays . . . . .	91
10. Column Verse . . . . .	121
11. How To Write Quotable Columns . . . . .	136
12. Editing the Column Copy . . . . .	148
13. One Hundred Column Ideas . . . . .	158
14. Developing a Column Personality . . . . .	182
15. Drawing Reader Responses . . . . .	195
16. Women as Columnists . . . . .	205
17. Handling Specialized Columns . . . . .	222
18. Guidance — Control of an Environment . . . . .	233
19. Press Columnist Organizations . . . . .	244
20. In Conclusion . . . . .	253
APPENDIX: Selected Full-Length Columns . . . . .	261
INDEX . . . . .	281



# *Table of Contents*

1. Background of the Newspaper Column . . . . .	3
2. Significance of the Personal Column . . . . .	14
3. Naming a Personal Column . . . . .	20
4. Typography and Position . . . . .	25
5. Column Content and Structure . . . . .	37
6. Well, Let's Get Started . . . . .	50
7. Style — and the Light Touch . . . . .	66
8. The Paragraph . . . . .	79
9. Anecdotes and Essays . . . . .	91
10. Column Verse . . . . .	121
11. How To Write Quotable Columns . . . . .	136
12. Editing the Column Copy . . . . .	148
13. One Hundred Column Ideas . . . . .	158
14. Developing a Column Personality . . . . .	182
15. Drawing Reader Responses . . . . .	195
16. Women as Columnists . . . . .	205
17. Handling Specialized Columns . . . . .	222
18. Guidance — Control of an Environment . . . . .	233
19. Press Columnist Organizations . . . . .	244
20. In Conclusion . . . . .	253
APPENDIX: Selected Full-Length Columns . . . . .	261
INDEX . . . . .	281

