

# THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

## Editorial Guidelines

August 2017

# GUIDELINES

The most important currency of **The Conversation** is trust.

The purpose of these guidelines, above all, is to protect and foster the bond of trust between The Conversation and its readers, and therefore to protect the integrity of the service and the editorial content it carries.

These guidelines reflect the way in which our independence and integrity govern everything we do. In so doing, they help protect the independence, standing and reputation of The Conversation.

All staff should be made aware of these guidelines. In conjunction with the Global Editorial Committee these guidelines will be updated from time to time as new issues arise and new policies are adopted.

## **The Conversation Charter**

The operation, management and publication of The Conversation should be conducted in accordance with [The Conversation Charter](#).

## **Editorial Independence**

The Conversation is driven by a commitment to serving the public good and operating with editorial integrity and independence. In reaching agreements with partners of funders from the corporate, higher education and philanthropic sectors, The Conversation seeks a commitment to those principles.

The Conversation will not be influenced by the agendas of funders and partners. Its funders and partners must acknowledge and uphold that editorial decisions are made on merit and without regard to the commercial, political or personal interests of partners or funders. The Editor/Managing Editor will have the final right to determine content for publication.

# CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

## **Editors - declarations of interest**

A commissioning editor must always declare an interest when editing something to which he or she has a clear connection. This includes holding stock (shares) in a company. The declaration of potential conflict should be made to the Editor/Managing Editor prior to starting on the work. Staff should be aware of potential conflicts of interest and take steps to avoid, negotiate, or disclose any possible conflicts that may arise.

## **Conflict of interest between representing TC and editorial duties**

Where a member of the editorial team is involved in representing The Conversation's interests in negotiations with a funder, stakeholder or partner, (or a prospective funder, stakeholder or partner), she or he should stand aside from editorial decisions relating to that party. Such decisions should be referred up to a more senior editor or another member of the editorial team who can make an independent decision and is not party to a conflicting relationship.

## **Academics – declarations of interest**

We ask authors to disclose any funding or affiliation that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing. This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and that of The Conversation. Authors who fail to disclose relevant information may be banned from contributing in future. For disclosure questions see Appendix 1.

# ACCREDITATION

## **Accrediting – institutions**

Accredited institutions include universities and all other research bodies, institutes or similar with a track record of quality peer-reviewed research and appropriate processes for academic oversight. Accreditation of an institution is at the discretion of the Editor/Managing Editor. If there is dispute over a decision it can be referred to the Editorial Board.

## **Accrediting – academics**

The Conversation will publish articles written by academics employed by or otherwise formally connected to accredited institutions (see above). Generally speaking academic authors will have attained the level of PhD candidature and/or have a teaching position and/or an active research profile. Non-academic staff without a track record of teaching or research will generally not be eligible to write.

The Editor/Managing Editor shall be responsible for deciding who is eligible to write with reference to these guidelines. If there is dispute over a decision it can be referred to the Editorial Board.

# CONTENT GUIDELINES

## Republication

A free and open flow of information is central to the Charter of The Conversation. All TC content is available free for republication via Creative Commons. For the full republication policy see [here](#).

Staff and users are expected to adhere to The Conversation's terms and conditions of usage. For the full terms and conditions see [here](#).

## News story writing guidelines

A news story at The Conversation is often (but not always) an article written under the byline of an editor about news, new research or some other current topic. News stories by staff authors should have at least three separate sources of information.

For example, a news story reporting new research findings might have the author of the research and two other sources on the significance of the research. When writing news stories, all quotes should be read back to the author of the quote to ensure there is no misrepresentation or distortion.

## Removal of content (including comments, author and reader profiles, and articles)

### IMPORTANT

Content will be removed from the site only if legally required or in the event of a full retraction.

For the full policy on removal of content (comments, articles and profiles) see [here](#).

## Guidelines for columnists

### IMPORTANT

As featured contributors on the site columnists have certain privileges that are not available to other academic authors. The most significant of these is that they will be able to post articles to their blogs without prior input from the editorial team.

This allows them to respond quickly to new developments and be part of a lively and fast paced online conversation. However, to minimize the risk of legal issues, columnists must comply with the guidelines for contributing columnists (Appendix 6).

# SOURCES & ATTRIBUTION

## Sharing work before publication

Author approval is a condition of publication, and a central idea to the charter of The Conversation. All work must be signed off and approved by the academic author before publication. When working on news stories sources should be informed of how they will be quoted and approve the quotations. If the story is on new research, it is advisable to get the author of the study, if interviewed, to provide feedback on the story to ensure accuracy.

## Sources and attribution

We seek to publish content that is accurate and fair. That responsibility extends beyond quoting sources accurately. We must also strive to determine whether the information itself is correct. And we must be forthright in giving site users the information they need to evaluate the credibility of sources. Sources promised confidentiality must be protected at all costs. However, where possible, the sources of information should be identified as specifically as possible.

## Anonymous contributions

Transparency is a core value of The Conversation: we believe readers have the right to know who is speaking as well as what they're saying. Anonymity should only be granted to commenters or sources only with the prior approval of the Editor/Managing Editor and where there is a compelling reason to do so. Anonymous articles will not appear on The Conversation.

## Errors and corrections

The Conversation strives for fairness and factual accuracy at all times, and we encourage users to advise us of any significant errors. If we discover a mistake has been made, we will correct it as soon as possible – fully, quickly and ungrudgingly.

## Fact checking guidelines

Editors at The Conversation are not experts and therefore must rely on academic authors to provide accurate information. However we owe it to our authors and readers to check every factual claim that can be checked. This includes checking that links support the claims made in an article and that all factual assertions are accurate.

## Global copy sharing

Creative Commons makes all copy available to all commissioning editors. Commissioning editors from different regions should endeavour to let other editors know about copy that might be globally relevant or shareable. Commissioning editors should think in terms of a global audience – and a global newsroom.

## Complaints

When an editor receives a complaint about the content of an article the first step is to assess the complaint and identify if there are any clear factual errors that require correction.

- If a correction or retraction is required the form and wording should be agreed with the author of the piece. If the editor and the author cannot agree about how to handle a complaint, or if the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken, the complaint should be referred to the Editor/Managing Editor.
- If the Editor is unable to resolve she or he may refer it to the Editorial Board **and further submissions will be requested if required. For the full policy see Appendix 2.**
- Once a correction is made republishers need to be notified and the fact of the correction disseminated to readers.

The second step in handling a complaint is to identify aspects of the complaint that do not give rise to a correction but are matter of legitimate critique or debate, for example a criticism that a piece uses a statistic in a way that may be misleading but not inaccurate.

These matters are best thrashed out through public debate in the comments stream and other fora. In such cases the complainant should be encouraged to respond via a comment. In some extreme cases where a party is affected by the content of an article a "reply" to the article may be pasted in at the end of the article, above the comment stream. In such cases readers should be notified of publication of the reply.

Once these two questions are addressed there is a third question of whether there was an editorial error in deciding to publish the article in the first place. With every complaint this question should be reviewed internally but not discussed outside the office. The reason is that having published an article we owe it to the author to stand by her or him, barring clear factual errors.

## Fairness

Any time a question of fairness or accuracy is raised about any aspect of our work, whether by an Author, subject or member of the public, the commissioning editors involved should discuss the issue with the Editor/Managing Editor to decide what response is warranted.

## Right of Reply

The more serious the criticism or allegations we are publishing, the greater the obligation to allow the subject the opportunity to respond. Anyone is invited to join the conversation about an article in its comments section, including to exercise a right of reply. The Editor/Managing Editor may, at the Editor's sole discretion, elect to elevate a right of reply to the first comment.

## Legal

Libel/defamation and contempt laws are complex, and constantly developing. The consequences of losing actions can be expensive (in time and money) and damaging for our reputation. Staff should consult their Editor/Managing Editor about specific concerns and seek advice from legal advisers.

# COMMUNITY STANDARDS

## Community management guidelines

Developing a constructive comments section is essential to reader engagement and maintaining our reputation. We want The Conversation to be a place for intelligent discussion. The Conversation community should be operated in line with the community management guidelines (Appendix 5).

## Community standards

Our community standards are in place in ensure a space for engaged, lively, respectful discussion. Commenters must be respectful of others, comment under their real name. Editors and Community Managers will conduct comment moderation, in accordance with the community standards. For the full community standards see [here](#).

## Audience reporting

All staff should comply with The Conversation's Audience reporting policy, when reporting audience numbers to stakeholders, funders, and publicly. See Appendix 7.

## Social Media guidelines

Social media is integral to The Conversation, including for traffic referral, audience engagement and brand building and awareness. The Conversation's social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook, should be operated in line with the social media guidelines (Appendix 4).

## Social Media for staff

Staff are encouraged to engage in social media and are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the Global Social Media guidelines. Staff should be aware that personal blogs and other social-media communications are not private. What you include will potentially reflect on The Conversation's credibility.

Discuss any potentially troublesome posting in advance with senior editorial management. For the full Social Media Policy, see Appendix 3.



## **Privacy**

Staff are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with The Conversation's **Privacy Policy**.

## **Race, religion and sexuality**

In general, we do not publish someone's race or ethnic background, sexuality or religion unless that information is pertinent to the article.

## **Treatment of privacy rights, especially of minors**

Commissioning editors should think carefully about the boundaries between legitimate journalistic pursuit and an individual's right to privacy. We recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Journalists should strive to minimize harm in their reporting, with compassion and sensitivity for those who may be adversely affected by news coverage.

Editors need to be especially sensitive to the treatment of minors (generally defined as anyone under the age of 18).

## **Outside work**

Staff must not undertake any outside employment likely to conflict with their professional duties at The Conversation, unless permission is given by the Editor/Managing Editor.

This includes writing for other print or online publications, whether or not the topic directly relates to The Conversation.

# APPENDIX 1

## Author disclosure statements


### Disclosure

We ask authors to disclose any funding or affiliation that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing.

This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and that of The Conversation.

### Disclosure

This will appear alongside your article

 We ask authors to disclose any funding or affiliation that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing. This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and that of The Conversation. Authors who fail to disclose relevant information may be banned from contributing in future.

Do you work for, consult with or own shares in any company or organisation that would benefit from this article?

Yes  No

Do you receive, or have you previously received, any relevant external funding, including government-funded, foundation or research council grants?

Yes  No

Do you have any other relevant affiliations that should be disclosed? This includes currently being a member of or volunteer for a political party, industry association, not-for-profit group, think tank or other politically active bodies.

Yes  No

If you have any questions about what you should disclose, please contact your editor.

## APPENDIX 2

### Complaints Policy

#### **Making a complaint**

Complaints should be emailed to the corrections address found on the **Contact Us** page.

#### **Corrections**

When a complaint is received, the commissioning editor responsible for the article will assess your complaint and discuss it with the author. If the commissioning editor and author agree there was an error, a correction will be published. If the author and commissioning editor find no significant error, your complaint will be rejected.

You will be notified of the outcome of your complaint.

#### **Complex complaints**

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, you may contact the Editor/Managing Editor.

If the Editor/Managing Editor is unable to resolve the complaint, the Editor may refer it to the Chair of the Editorial Board **and you will be invited to make a further submission, if required.**

#### **The Chair of the Editorial Board, at the Chair's sole discretion, may:**

1. assess the complaint and recommend a response;
2. refer the matter to the Editorial Board for determination;
3. convene an investigation panel; or
4. refer the complaint to the author's University for action.

An investigation panel may be convened when subject matter experts are required. An investigation panel will investigate complaints and provide its findings to the Editorial Board.

All decisions of the Board will be final.

#### **Right of reply**

Anyone is invited to join the conversation about an article in its comments section, including to exercise a right of reply. The Editor/Managing Editor may, at the Editor/Managing Editor's sole discretion, elect to elevate a right of reply to the first comment.

## APPENDIX 3

### Social Media Policy - Staff

As a Conversation employee it's your responsibility to consider how the social media postings you send out under your name will reflect upon you and The Conversation as an organisation.

We encourage staff members to engage on social media, but you need to remember that what you post is out there forever and can be used against you and The Conversation.

It's impossible to provide hard and fast rules that govern every circumstance. The key requirement is that you use your judgment to make sure that what you post online doesn't damage our reputation.

The following guidelines should help you think about when you should think twice.

- In a social media context where your role with us is apparent or traceable - that is any time you're using your real name - you are effectively speaking on behalf of our organisation and our authors, directly to a public audience.
- Each of your interactions needs to uphold our charter, editorial guidelines and values.
- Uphold our **community standards** in all your interactions. That includes: don't be crude, no swearing or aggressive language, be polite, don't call people names, no personal attacks on figures in public life, particularly academics and others in the media. Adhere to the same standards we ask others to adhere to.
- Ensure accuracy: cite evidence fairly.
- Beware anything that could indicate your political preferences or views. This doesn't mean you can't comment on particular policy areas, but don't deride or put down figures from any side of politics. Be careful of anything that will appear partisan or identify you as hostile.
- Avoid anything that is likely to alienate readers or supporters.
- Remember that your posts on a topic can be collected / curated or used out of context. This could have lasting impacts, including after your time as a Conversation employee.
- If in doubt, think twice before hitting "send". Speak to your Editor/Managing Editor or Social Media/Community Manager if you are unsure.

## APPENDIX 4

### Social Media Guidelines

#### Contents

1. About these guidelines
2. Importance of social media
3. Existing channels
4. Establishing new channels
5. Growing a Facebook community
6. Growing a Twitter community

#### 1. About these guidelines

These guidelines are intended to cover use of all conversation-branded social media (SM) channels. TC-AU's external relations manager oversees the global SM strategy. SM is the day-to-day responsibility of the regional audience development coordinator.

#### 2. Importance of Social Media

Three main reasons:

1. Social is a key driver of traffic, accounting for approximately 30% monthly traffic. Especially important as a non-profit with no marketing or advertising spend.
2. It is extremely powerful for brand-building, again important given no marketing /advertising budget.
3. We are "The Conversation" and SM is an obvious opportunity for reader engagement.

#### 3. Existing channels

Facebook and Twitter are our main channels. We have a Facebook and Twitter account for all our regional editions. These channels share content mostly from that region's edition, but also content-share on occasion from other TCs. Accounts are managed by that region's social media manager.

##### Regional accounts

AU: [facebook.com/conversationEDU](https://facebook.com/conversationEDU)

AU: [twitter.com/conversationEDU](https://twitter.com/conversationEDU)

UK: [facebook.com/conversationUK](https://facebook.com/conversationUK)

UK: [twitter.com/ConversationUK](https://twitter.com/ConversationUK)

US: [facebook.com/theconversationUS](https://facebook.com/theconversationUS)

US: [twitter.com/us\\_conversation](https://twitter.com/us_conversation)

Africa: [facebook.com/conversationAfrica](https://facebook.com/conversationAfrica)

Africa: [twitter.com/TC\\_Africa](https://twitter.com/TC_Africa)

CA: [facebook.com/TheConversationCanada](https://facebook.com/TheConversationCanada)

CA: [twitter.com/ConversationCA](https://twitter.com/ConversationCA)

Additionally, we have topic-specific global Twitter accounts. These channels share all topic-related content of interest to a global audience, and are jointly managed by all regions' social media managers.

##### Global channels and platforms

[youtube.com/conversationEDU](https://youtube.com/conversationEDU)

G+ and LinkedIn (but mostly not used)

## APPENDIX 4

### Social Media Guidelines

#### 4. Establishing new channels

We have decided on a focused channel strategy so consciously don't have accounts in channels such as Instagram, Pinterest and others. Please speak to AU's external relations manager if you wish to establish a new TC-branded SM account.

#### 5. Growing a Facebook community

- Highly curated content builds a loyal, engaged audience. Position your page as "curated highlights of TC".
- AU posts (and recommends others post) only 4 max 5 stories each day. Too-frequent posting risks over-populating readers' feeds which is likely to lead to lower engagement and/or them un-liking the page.

All social posts should achieve at least one of two aims:

1. Audience referral back to site (measured by click-through-rate).
2. Engagement and brand-building, where article clicks are low, but likes/comments/shares and reach is high. In this context, you've still made a successful post because you've engaged an audience, who you're building a brand with, who may go on to follow the channel with recognition later.

E.g. large reach, low clicks:

Time of day matters.

- Most successful times for AU posting are 7.45am, 11 or 12, 4.30pm, then between 7.30-9.30pm.
- Of course, if you've a news-breaking story post it when you get it (especially if debate is fast moving) but it can be better to hold a story to a peak time.
- When drafting, take time to get the tone right. You want something that can be easily understood. That has a clear message (so people know whether to "like" in support or not). And try and make the post self-contained, so that even if the reader didn't read the article, they would still know what the article is about (NB: this is the opposite of click-bait! Facebook algorithms are favouring quality content over the "junk food" memes and click bait, and our content plays well into this space.)

Other considerations:

- Use the "schedule" function for out of hours / weekend posts

#### 6. Growing a Twitter community

- Tweet out all stories on your regional account.
- Schedule next-day stories to run in key commuter time (7-9am). You can generate a functioning link on the article page.

## APPENDIX 4

### Social Media Guidelines

- Schedule some of the highlights of the day to run in evening. In AU, we run top ~15 stories from the day between 6-11pm.
- Try to include author and/or institute handles in tweets, especially in early post-launch days. This increases their buy-in with us, and communicates to our readers that we're part of the uni sector.
- When drafting: make sure you don't just tweet headline and link. You want to give people a value-add reason to follow us.
- Play around with answering Qs, responding to feedback as you see fit in your region.
- Additionally, tweet stories onto relevant topic-specific account. Don't worry about scheduling activities for these: these accounts will get good coverage thanks to the input of all the regional TCs.
- Success tweets have timely content, a clear message people can get behind and good use of a hashtag. Timely content and a custom graphic as a value-add. Note: retweets and favourites don't always correlate to click-through-rate.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

#### Contents

1. Community standards
2. Locking accounts policy
3. Community council
4. Author commenting guide
5. Day-to-day guide
6. Commissioned comments
7. Author Q&As
8. Email templates

#### Overview

The Conversation is a place for intelligent discussion and academic rigour. That doesn't end with our articles: our comments need to reach the same standard. That means moderating them.

This document provides a guide to and overview of our moderation practices. It details our expectations and offers advice about meeting them.

By following these guidelines and, over time, improving upon them, we can deliver a better product for authors, commenters and readers.

#### 1. Community standards

You'll find a copy of our community standards [here](#). All comments should abide by them, and those that don't need to be removed. We operate a post-moderation process.

Each region is responsible for moderating their comments. That includes articles commissioned by another region but running on your edition.

If, under special circumstances, a region needs help (e.g. they've received a deluge of abusive comments), assistance can be negotiated.

#### 2. Locking accounts policy

We reserve the right to lock accounts of people who repeatedly breach our standards. At some point, you'll need to officially warn someone or lock their account. Our policy is:

#### Warnings

Provide the reader with two warnings:

1. Specific with advice and reminders of our expectations
2. General/stock warning

Both warning should come via email. Warnings on-site are useful to set precedent and let others know we're paying attention but official warnings should be sent to whichever email account is tied to the reader's account (if they don't have one, on-site is fine). Checking and reading their emails is the reader's responsibility – "I didn't see it" is not an excuse.

If the reader keeps violating our standards after the two warnings, lock their account.

*When should people be warned?*

- 10–25% of posts removed
- [x] number of posts removed in a short period of time
- Particularly egregious offences
- After first violation of community standards
- If you think someone is using an alias / is in breach of our real name policy



## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

Use your judgement. Consider the context and the user's behaviour across the site: are they here to troll one subject? Are they good contributors across 90% of the site but problematic for the other 10%?

Warn the former and try to work with the latter, at least at first. Keep the kind of site we want TC to be in mind while moderating. We're working towards a goal: warnings and bans are tools to get there.

#### **Bans**

We have three levels for banning: one month, six months, permanent. They're issued either sequentially or as deemed appropriate. That said, favour permanent bans. Temporary bans are best used for the "90% good, 10% bad" users mentioned above. Get a second opinion before you ban someone: it backs you up if the reader complains.

#### **Instant bans**

Locking someone's account without warning is best done sparingly. If someone posts blatant/severe discrimination or abuse, lock his or her account. If someone signs up for an account on-site (not via social media) with an obviously fake name (e.g. Whothehell Cares), lock the account.

### 3. Community council

The Community Council is a group of academics and readers who help us moderate the site and improve the quality of discussions. They do this by hiding posts for review by us and by modelling and encouraging great conversations. This group is an effective way to encourage the community to take more responsibility for its own quality and to broaden our moderation coverage (i.e. the hours that the site is moderated).

Community council members have the ability to hide posts. When a post is "hidden", it's removed from public view. It'll appear under "Show comments awaiting moderation" in the "Manage comments" section of your dashboard. From there, editors are able to see what posts have been hidden and either remove or restore the post. (Readers will only receive a "Your comment has been removed notification" after editors have removed the comment. "Hiding" will not alert the commenter.)

The AU council contains a mix of authors and readers. We started with two authors per section and ten readers. This provides a combination of expertise, perspective and hours of coverage (readers are more likely to be online over weekends and evenings, for example).

Membership to the community council is invite-only. We invited people who have been contributing to The Conversation in a constructive way, who have offered up both quality content, who are passionate about The Conversation's goal of open and informed debate. Members' own opinions/views are not an influencing factor when extending invites: their behavior is more imp

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

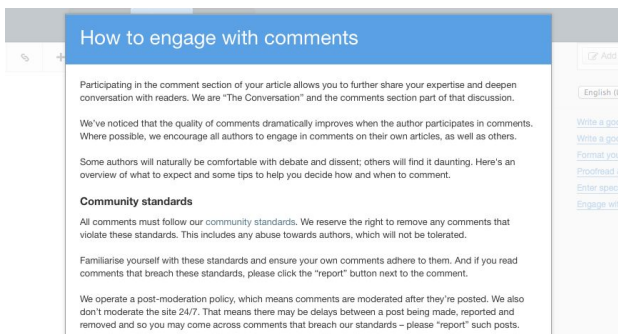
With academics, we sought members who were experts in particular fields and consistent contributors to their sections. This expertise is especially helpful when defining on/off topic discussions, e.g. in areas such a climate change.

#### 4. Author guide: how to engage with comments

We provide a guide to authors as an introduction to commenting. It can be on the article edit screen of their dashboard.

We've found that the overall quality of our comments is improved when the author is involved. The goal of the guide is to encourage and empower authors so they'll comment more often.

The guide explains what we expect from our community (themselves included, if they comment) and the support we offer. It also has a list of tips for participation, encouraging them to get involved in comments early, respond to questions and report abusive posters.



*The Conversation allows author to comment and engage with readers in a courteous manner.*

#### 5. Day-to-day

There are a few things you can do each day to make comment moderation efficient. Editors are expected to work with the region's community manager (if they have one) along the following guidelines.

The best thing you can do is set a high standard early, both across the site and on each article. Our community standards set a clear goal for our site; removing comments that violate our standards early and encouraging constructive contributions are the best way to go about meeting it.

#### Abuse reports

Users can (and will) report comments they think go against our community standards. You'll receive an email when this happens on one of your articles. These need to be read and responded to. Furthermore, encouraging readers to submit abuse reports will make your life easier.

#### Following comments

Abuse reports won't cover everything. Make time to periodically check in on your articles and see what's been posted. While helping to ensure comments meet our standards, it has the added benefit of revealing what our readers are interested in.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

#### ***Identifying problem areas***

This will become clear quite quickly. If you know a subject or an article could cause a problem, consider posting a general warning on an article – a reminder to follow our standards, for example, or what you expect discussion to be about. If you identify someone as a problem commenter, don't hesitate to warn them (see "Locking accounts policy" above).

#### ***Closing comments***

If a comment section is getting out of hand, close it down (add a post explaining why) and remove any comments that violate our standards. Not having the resources to moderate effectively is a perfect valid reason. If you're worried about how an article's comments will go while you're not watching, close them overnight or for the weekend (again, explaining why).

#### ***Editors commenting***

Editors are welcome and encouraged to comment on The Conversation's articles. They're expected to maintain and uphold our community and editorial standards. That means staying constructive, respectful and being careful of anything that could identify you as partisan or hostile.

#### ***Removing threads***

If a comment you remove has any replies, you may need to delete them. However, delete as few as possible. Remove replies that violate our standards or don't make sense out of context. This allows constructive comments to remain for as long as possible (and prevents trolls from dictating what does and doesn't appear on-site).

If the thread becomes off-topic, you may need to go back and remove it entirely. That should be a last resort.

#### **6. Commissioned comments**

We know that the quality of comments improves when academics participate in the comments thread. So we commission comments – essentially giving a handful of academics a heads up that there's an article coming in their field of interest and inviting them to participate in the comments if they wish.

The idea is to invite academics with subject expertise to contribute to the discussion. The more informed opinions we get on our site the closer we get to an informed, solution-driven discussion. Commissioning comments is also a good way to involve authors who have something to say on a topic but don't have time to write a full article.

To commission comments, pick three or four authors you think could add to the article's discussion. Consider diversity of authors when selecting. Send them a brief email explaining why we're commissioning comments and provide a link to the article.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

We've also found that a good first comment can set the tone for those that follow. If you're posting an article you think could be problematic, considering letting prospective commenters know the article is coming. This can help ensure the first comments are constructive.

Overall, authors are happy to get involved in the comments, so long as it's clear we're taking them seriously. Commissioning comments is an easy and structured way to make it clear we are while also nudging authors towards the site. See the examples of two commissioned comments to the right.

#### 7. Author Q&As

Want to take an article further than a word count will allow? It's time for an Author Q&A. It's an easy way for an author to get involved in our community and it provides readers an opportunity to interact with us.

Author Q&As involve an author setting aside an hour or two to respond to comments, ideally within 24 hours of the article going live. Unless the subject is particularly popular (and likely to receive comments quickly) it's best to leave three or four hours between publication and the Q&A beginning).

A typical Q&A session runs like so:

- Identify a story that you think will work well for a Q&A or will attract a lot of comments and arrange a time with the author.



Michelle Smith

Research Fellow, Centre for Memory, Imagination and Invention at Deakin University

Recommend

These same concerns apply with academic book reviews in scholarly journals and these are always attributed. Some fields can be very small and the same problem of discomfort may exist if you find yourself at a conference with someone whose book you have reviewed unfavourably. This puts the onus on reviewers to be measured in their criticisms, and to ensure that they provide some evidence or examples to support their negative assessments. Most scholars don't mind fair criticisms about errors, omissions and so on in their work.

Nevertheless, academia largely rests on anonymous reviewing for journal publications, book manuscript review, and research grants. As with anonymous internet comments, the sense of freedom to be nasty, vindictive, or petty (often without much justification) is relatively common in anonymous academic peer review.

Of course you could say that anonymity is what allows honest opinions, free from political influence, but it can also foster lazy, mean-spirited reviewing. And, as other comments here have mentioned, knowing who a reviewer is provides the reader with a guide as to whether his or her opinion is likely to accord with their own, whether it will be trustworthy, and so on.

about 13 hours ago • report • email • all comments • delete

Reply



Suzie Gibson

Lecturer in English Literature at Charles Sturt University

Recommend

Jane I just want to thank you for your really interesting article here. I've read the thread of discussions and I find it fascinating that the identity of the author is a point of contention. I didn't know that The Saturday paper publishes book reviews with only the author's initials—this is really odd. I know that Australia has a small industry and community of writers where reviewing friend's books or friends of friends books does happen and can make things tricky. But I agree with your argument and with some of the comments here that one should take their reviewing seriously. And when criticisms are made they need to be done properly and with the intention of enlightening the reader. I also consider reviewing a worthy genre in and of itself and so the author deserves a name/identity. Thanks again for your really great piece!

about 2 hours ago • report • email • all comments • delete

Reply

*Commissioned comments can stimulate a conversation between readers that might otherwise stay quiet.*

- If the author's schedule allows, pick the time when commenters are most active – this will give an opportunity for commenters and the author to have some back-and-forth discussion. Tag the story as an "Author Q&A" and add a note to the article alerting readers that a Q&A is happening.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

- Post the story on social media, mentioning that it's a Q&A.
- Keep an eye on the comments throughout the day: remove anything that violates our standards and can forward anything you think interesting to the author.
- Encourage the author to have a quick look over the comments on the article before the Q&A starts – it helps get the momentum going if they already have an answer or two in mind.
- If anything interesting is asked or said on another platform (e.g. Twitter or Facebook), run the comment by the author. You can either post the query onto the article's comment section or encourage the questioner to post it him or herself. If you choose the former, send the questioner a link to the author's response. Doing this adds another link to the site on social media platforms and helps bridge the gap between the on-site and social communities.
- See below for examples of this. "Controversial" articles (ones that dispel myths or challenge assumptions) work well for Q&As, as do stories that unveil new information in popular fields. That said, any interesting article with broad appeal can be a good source for discussion.

In AU, we aim for three to four author Q&As a week: that entrenches the idea into the audience mind and adds a point of difference to other media.

**Gabrielle M. Rose** Was drowning at sea more humane than the slow torture and damaged outcomes and impacts Asylum Seekers are experiencing now? The slogans seem to now be "drown at sea" or "experience a slow and painful death for you and your family" there are no in between.  
Like · Reply · 2 · 28 August at 15:53 · Edited

**The Conversation** Hi Gabrielle. Here's Alex's answer to your question:  
"I think this is an ethical question we have to take seriously. What pain are we prepared to inflict on individuals to stop the boats? It might be a lot, but there must be a limit."  
Like · 3 · Commented on by Cory Zanolli [?] · 29 August at 11:35

**Cory Zanolli**  
Community Manager at The Conversation

Sharyn O'Connell posted the following on Facebook:  
"I teach a VCE Linguistics subject and we discuss a range of language uses. By Year 11 most students have stopped using all the text abbreviations and conventions. They say it was something they did more as Tweens, but by about age 15-16 they tend to stop using it, unless they're being sarcastic or ironic."

**Nenagh Kemp**  
Senior Lecturer at University of Tasmania

In reply to Cory Zanolli  
It's interesting to hear how many young people say this - and they usually follow up with saying that the only person they know who writes like that any more is their mother.  
Our own research suggests that while contracted spellings are reducing over time, young people are still keen on adding emoticons, kisses, and elongated spellings (plllleeeeeaaaaase) to show emotion. It's seems that they're adding to their writing style, rather than taking anything away from it.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

#### 9. Email templates

Below is a list of email templates you may like to use. They cover warnings, locking accounts, commissioned comments and Author Q&As. Modify them as you see fit.

You can enable “Canned responses” in Gmail. Using these will automatically insert a template into an email.

##### **Warning**

Hi [name],

Following your recent posts on The Conversation/ [article name], this is a warning that your account will be locked if you continue violating our [community standards](#). This includes both personal attacks and off-topic comments.

You can read an overview of how and why we lock accounts [here](#).

Thank you for commenting,

[name]

##### **Locked account**

Hi [name],

Your account on The Conversation has been locked following repeated violations of our community standards, as warned against on [dates].

Regards, [name]

##### **Real names**

Hi,

Could you please update your name on The Conversation? Our community standards require our users display their real, full name on-site. You can update your profile here [\[add link\]](#). We lock accounts that violate this policy.

Thanks for posting,

[name]

##### **Commissioned comments**

Hi [name],

I'm [name], [title]. We're trying to improve comments on our articles and I was hoping you could help.

**[This morning/Tomorrow, we ran/we will run]** a story on **[subject]**. I was wondering if you'd like to post a comment on it – we've found the overall quality of an article comments improve when experts get involved.

If you'd like to read and comment, you'll find the article here. [\[link\]](#)

Regards,

[name]

## APPENDIX 7

### Audience reporting policy

To ensure accuracy, consistency of approach and safeguard the reputation for transparency all licensees are required to report readership and other metrics in the following consistent ways.

**Total monthly audience to be reported as onsite users, followed by creative commons reach.**

The creative commons reach should not be reported in isolation.

*Example (correct):* The Conversation has a monthly audience of 2.6 million users, and reach of 23 million through creative commons republication.

*Example (incorrect):* The Conversation has a monthly reach of 23 million through creative commons republication.

**When reporting readership that includes creative commons republication, it should be defined as such.**

*Example (correct):* This month, Uni X had Y readers including republication / including where published / including through creative commons etc.

*Example (incorrect):* This month, Uni X had Y readers.

Monthly numbers are the only ones that should be reported publicly. Daily and weekly metrics should only be used for internal purposes.

Standard monthly metric reports will be sent in the first week of the month to partner / endorsing institutes.

## APPENDIX 5

### Community Management Guidelines

#### **Author Q&As**

Hi ,

I'm **[name]**, **[role]** at The Conversation. I was wondering if you'd be interested in doing a Q&A session with our readers on your piece about **[topic]**. I've included an overview of how we run them, but the basic idea would be to have you set a time (generally an hour) to answer reader questions. It's a great way to expand on your article and get involved with our community.

Let me know if you're interested.  
**[Recommended day and time]**.

How we've run Q&As in the past:

Essentially, you read through the comments posted and respond to anything you think warrants a response. You may not get many questions, strictly speaking.

I'll keep an eye on the comments throughout the day and can flag anything I think pertinent/ interesting, if you'd like. If possible, I'd recommend having a quick look over the comments on the article before the Q&A starts – it helps get the momentum going if you already have an answer or two in mind.

If any interesting questions are posed on Facebook or Twitter, I'll run them by you. If you'd like to respond to them, I'll post them on the article.



## APPENDIX 6

### Guidelines for columnists

- Observe our basic [community standards](#).
  - It's more important to get it right than to get in first. If you have any doubts or any legal concerns about what you want to post, refer to an editor first. We're here to help.
  - Don't post anything defamatory, ie that would lower a person's reputation in the eyes of your readers. If you think a post may be defamatory please refer it to an editor before you post it.
  - If you're going to post on a topic, issue or dispute in which you're involved you must declare any interest/involvement. Please also refer the post to an editor before posting.
  - Beware any material that is before a court or likely to end up before a court. Always refer these topics to an editor before posting.
  - Never post on criminal matters once charges have been laid unless your work has first been checked by an editor/lawyer.
  - Watch out for anything involving children or the children's court, sexual abuse, adoption or family law. All of these topics should ring alarm bells and be referred to an editor before you post anything.
- If you receive a legal letter or serious complaint about a post please contact an editor to remove the article immediately. It should be our approach to remove any questionable material immediately, pending a further decision.