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The Main's Style Guide

Everything you need to know about the style, tone, and article structure on The Main.

The Main's style is a blend of approachable storytelling, cultural insights, and urban curiosity. Below are some examples of how this fits in with our content types:

- **Guides:** Informative, light, and fun guides with concise descriptions that spark interest.
- **Profiles:** Personal and reflective, delving into the subject's character and connection to Montreal.
- **City Features:** Descriptive and immersive, highlighting cultural vibrancy and a strong sense of place.

Focusing primarily on Montreal's local scene, our writing is conversational yet polished, offering narratives that connect readers to the city's arts, culture, food, and history.

Articles should focus on being descriptive and personal to reflect the city's diversity and vibrancy. Writers should aim for an engaging tone, balancing intimate subject knowledge with accessibility, making the content relatable to both locals and curious outsiders.

If you have any questions or comments regarding any of these points, don't hesitate to ask!

THE BASICS

Submissions should be engaging, conversational, and rooted in storytelling, while remaining concise and easy to read. Short paragraphs and clear, direct sentences are key to maintaining reader interest.

- **Titles:** Include a compelling title of around 60 characters or fewer (including spaces) that captures the essence of the piece without overstating anything; focus on titles that are engaging, descriptive, and specific, without overstating claims.
 - Please use down style for writing titles. In down style, only the first word of the title and any proper nouns are capitalized, i.e. "Exploring Montréal's art scene this weekend", not "Exploring Montréal's Art Scene This Weekend"
- **Subtitles:** Write a line that is conversational which builds off your title and would tempt prospective readers; avoid clickbait tactics, be personal.
- **Word count:** No more than 750 words unless absolutely necessary; always ensure the content remains engaging and avoids unnecessary padding.

- **Third/first person:** Stick to the third person or an impersonal narrative style in general, unless you are working on a strictly first-person opinion piece that includes substantiated arguments. Think of it this way: While most articles should use third-person, first-person pieces are allowed when...
 - The narrative directly connects to the writer's expertise or experience.
 - The tone remains reflective and relatable, avoiding excessive personal opinions.
 - The piece offers insights that align with The Main's storytelling ethos.
- **Links:** Apply where you can to support points/arguments being made.
 - Use inline hyperlinks sparingly to support key points, avoiding generic phrases like "click here."
 - Ensure links are up-to-date, relevant, and enhance the reader's understanding.
- **Go for facts, not superlatives:** Avoid unsupported superlatives unless presenting a verifiable fact.
- **Interview Guidelines:** For articles featuring interviews...
 - Prepare concise, open-ended questions that encourage storytelling.
 - Attribute quotes accurately, and confirm spellings of names and titles with the interviewee.
 - Incorporate quotes naturally to complement your narrative.
- **When it comes to promotion, show don't tell:** Avoid overly promotional language; instead, let vivid descriptions and specific details convey enthusiasm. Focus on authenticity and a sense of connection to Montreal's culture and people.
- **Fact-Checking Responsibilities:** Writers are responsible for ensuring accuracy in...
 - Dates, names, and locations.
 - Any statistics or data cited (provide links to sources).
 - Event or business details (e.g., hours of operation or specific offerings).

Examples include:

YES: The Festival International de Jazz de Montréal is the largest jazz festival in the world.

NO: Chez Lévesque is the finest French restaurant in Montreal. (This is subjective.)

YES: The café serves a carefully curated selection of teas.

NO: I was amazed by the selection of teas they serve.

LANGUAGE

- **Language use:**
 - Try to emphasize a conversational but polished tone.

- The style should be approachable and engaging while maintaining intellectual depth; use language that is accessible to a wide audience but avoids oversimplification.
- Avoid jargon unless it's integral to the subject, and provide context or definitions when used. If you drop a loaded term, briefly explain it.
- Articles should feel local and personal when possible; in this case, you can lean personal and rely on your expertise, but shoot for reliability.
- **Do's and Don'ts**
 - **Do:**
 - Showcase Montreal's local identity through vivid, sensory descriptions.
 - Include direct quotes from interviews where relevant to add authenticity.
 - Ensure factual accuracy by cross-referencing sources.
 - Shoot for highlighting diversity and inclusivity in perspectives, sources, and examples.
 - Use Canadian English spelling and grammar conventions.
 - **Don't:**
 - Overuse clichés or buzzwords (e.g., “hidden gem,” “must-visit”).
 - Rely on generic statements; specificity makes the article more compelling.
 - Insert overly personal opinions unless it's clear that it's commentary.
- **Spelling and Grammatical Style**
 - **Overall:** We follow [The Canadian Style](#).
 - **Spelling:** Use Canadian English (e.g., “favourite,” “neighbour,” “realize”).
 - **One weird thing:** When we started out, we were spelling Montreal without the *accent aigu* (i.e. ‘Montréal’) and it's been that way ever since, so please do the same.
 - **Use of French:** Unless it's a French term like ‘sauté’, we tend to use the anglicized version of the word, including Montreal and Quebec (without accents).
 - *This extends to business names, i.e. the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, not Musée des Beaux-Arts*, unless there is no English alternative to the French name.
 - e.g. La rue Sainte-Catherine → Sainte-Catherine Street
 - e.g. Le fleuve Saint-Laurent → St. Lawrence River
 - **Grammar:** Maintain clarity and conciseness. Avoid run-on sentences or excessive passive voice.

- **Naming conventions:** Please pay close attention to the names of events. Some are very particular (i.e. written all in caps, or partly in caps, for example such as MONTRÉAL COMPLÈTEMENT CIRQUE).
 - **Names of exhibitions, plays, works:** Italicize these, e.g. *Barney's Version*, *Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, a Journey, a Song*
 - **Formatting:** Follow The Main's house style for headings, subheadings, and body text (e.g., sentence-case headlines, bold for emphasis, italicized book or film titles).
 - **Punctuation:** Use the Oxford comma for clarity. Ensure proper punctuation for quotes, lists, and attributions.
- **Submission Standards**
 - **File Format:** Submit articles in a Word document or Google Doc format.
 - **Proofreading:** Double-check for typos, grammar, and flow before submission.
 - **Sources:** Provide links to primary sources or references used in research via hyperlinking in the text.
 - **Revisions:** Be open to feedback and revisions to align the piece with the publication's voice and standards.