

This document is a work-in-progress, shared in confidence with members of the web monetization community, prior to additional revisions and open-sourcing.

Widget's Equity and Diversity Guidelines for Comedy Publishing

OVERVIEW

[Widget](#) is a website that publishes comedy in the form of satire and humour pieces, lists, illustrations, and other formats from funny people of all backgrounds in monthly, themed collections.

Our tagline is “fart jokes and anti-capitalism.” Widget is building a community: a place where contributors become collaborators as well as fans of each other.

Through [Grant for the Web](#), Widget received funding for a six month-long process to pay their writers a fair rate, invest in these Equity and Diversity Guidelines for Comedy Publishing, and experiment with anti-capitalist thinking to create a sustainable publication.

THE SOMEWHAT SHORT VERSION OF THESE GUIDELINES

Widget is an attempt to widen the pipeline at the very start. We will take measures specifically designed to bring in first-time, emerging, and non-traditional writers. We will also take measures to identify and support a community of contributing writers that reflects the diversity of voices in modern humor, including class, gender, race, neurodiversity, disability, culture, and other underrepresented groups.

We publish in monthly, themed “collections” that curate a series of pieces on a broader topic. Each collection features the work of a guest editor and partner publication as well as outside writers.

For more established writers (for our purposes, defined as having published 5+ comedy pieces in several different outlets, worked with several editors and read several sets of guidelines), we will prioritize those from marginalised groups. Writers are expected to promote the work of the entire collection, not just their singular piece. Since one of the goals of this experiment is to support emerging and non-traditional writers, we will provide sample marketing tools such as pre-drafted tweets and social media assets that writers can tweak and use as appropriate, and general guidance on promotion expectations.

Writers who want to work with Widget will be asked to pitch ideas by sending a brief, 2 paragraph email first explaining their proposed piece to our editorial staff, and then a brief paragraph introducing themselves (including a few samples of published work, if applicable). There will be no fee associated with pitching Widget. Every writer may be published ONE TIME

ONLY during this first six month experiment. We pay \$200 for each approved piece. We pay within two weeks of publication. We respond within two weeks of every submission.

Our commitment to equity will also be reflected in the ability of everyone to access the work of our writers. We are dedicated to making sure our website is accessible to every reader, absolutely including those who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, and Blind readers. This includes launching with a baseline of accessibility measures that will be updated as we continue to evolve:

- Alt text on all images
- Transcripts for all podcasts
- Best practices as outlined [here](#)

Widget will continue to revisit and update these guidelines as our publication evolves. If readers or contributors want to offer their input on things we may have missed or things we can do better, we encourage them to contact us on our [website](#) or [on GitHub](#) to share their feedback and help us improve!

We've created free educational resources, such as a 90 minute recorded seminar called "Writing Topical Satire...Fast!" taught by Cailin Kunkel, the creator of The Second City's online satire writing program. Additional classes on heightening comedy and mining personal experience for comedy will be recorded and available to writers approx. Q1 2021. The goal of each of these is to teach a process to allow writers to use the form of short comedy and satire to express their personal beliefs and voice.

We've created [repeating formats](#) that newer writers can work in, so that they can see examples and have a clear structure to plug their own jokes and point of view into. This can be useful if you are newer to comedy writing, since there will be examples to refer to.

We share open source equity data of submissions and publications. We commit to using volunteered demographic data to ensure that each month's collection features diversity across a variety of spheres. We will post this information each month.

Widget is committed to publishing authors from underrepresented backgrounds in the humour world (for examples, people who work primarily in other fields like science or politics, people without a college degree, or those from lower socioeconomic status. This is not exhaustive!), and a part of that commitment is making sure that the work we publish does not further marginalise our writers or the communities they come from. We are committed to having diverse voices in our writing staff, and to not publishing work that could be deemed oppressive or offensive to marginalised people. This includes pieces that rely on "ironic" bigotry, slurs and insults against marginalised people, or work that parrots talking points from bigoted people without interrogating and delegitimizing them. We will always endeavor not to publish any oppressive content. If we do publish anything that our readers deem oppressive, we'll be transparent in how we evaluate and potentially remove it.

THE LONG VERSION: CHALLENGES TO EQUITY IN COMEDY WEB PUBLISHING AND INITIAL PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The world of comedy writing is not a meritocracy. Work on major outlets is overwhelmingly written by white authors (skewing male) and published by white editors. Many writers who go on to be in the “top” outlets (as defined by reach, prestige, or pay) often take expensive classes or had access to mentors at an earlier age (*The Harvard Lampoon*, for example). This leads to a homogenous voice that imitates and propagates itself, at the expense of new writers and new audiences.

We are creating a series of systems to attempt to level the playing field. We begin by detailing some of the challenges and our proposed solutions:

Challenge #1: Many writers have taken the same classes and received the same training — which all costs money and serves as a barrier to entry.

Proposed Solution: Free training classes for all potential Widget writers who want them. They’ll range in topic from Topical Satire Writing, to How to Structure a Piece of Comedy, to Mining Your Marginality for Humour. Free for anyone who signs up for our email list. Each of these classes is 90 minutes or less, and teaches a repeatable process that newer writers can try, and then customize as they continue to develop their own voices. The classes are pre-recorded and self-led, so can be taken at any time.

Challenge #2: Editors serve as gatekeepers, and tend to prefer writing and voices similar to their own.

Proposed Solution: Instituting collections with guest editors from partner publications, specifically working with populations outside of the Widget Editor’s experience. We will compensate and provide additional opportunities to writers for existing publications (for example, forming partnerships with prison journals or Indigenous publications). The Widget Editorial Team will also undergo training on equity in publishing, and commit to paid conversations with sensitivity readers when necessary.

Challenge #3: Humour and comedy writing can be coded as elitist.

Proposed Solution: Not untrue! Widget will be doing outreach (creating relationships with other editors, signal boosting and promoting the work of marginalised writers, creating active partnerships with existing publications) to underrepresented communities and writers to make sure they’re aware of the paid writing opportunity. We will be encouraging writers with experience in other fields to try their hand at comedy.

Challenge #4: New writers don't have a wide reach to share their pieces, but more established writers can get bylines elsewhere.

Proposed Solution: We will publish in themed collections, and every writer in a collection will be asked to promote the collection as a whole and their fellow writers. Established writers will be boosting the work of newer writers as they're featured in the same collection.

Challenge #5: Newer writers require more editing and explicit feedback along the way to their first set of publications.

Proposed Solution: Widget is dedicated to providing this editorial support, making time to work with newer writers, providing detailed feedback to help their work fit the voice of the site, and guide writers toward the goal of publication and payment. For that reason, whereas it's common in the humour/comedy world to review ONLY complete pieces (which benefits writers who already know the system), Widget will reverse that and ONLY review pitches (to help writers shape their ideas for publication on the site from the beginning). We are also creating repeating formats that every writer is welcome to pitch on.

Challenge #6: Many writers can't afford to write for free, and humour doesn't pay.

Proposed Solution: Our goal is that marginalised writers that contribute to Widget will benefit from our editorial guidance and the connections we can provide, but we also know that people need to be able to pay their rent. Marginalised writers who have to contend with the gatekeeping we detailed above often have even less access to paid opportunities than their colleagues.

Through their Grant for the Web, Widget pays EVERY contributor \$200 for their contribution. Payment is the same for each contributor, no matter their level of experience. By committing to working with marginalised writers, we are able to give them the chance to add paid professional writing experience to their resume in a field where it can often be difficult to gain.

We know we haven't hit anywhere near all the challenges or solutions, and we will be adding and updating this list as we go. Write in with your thoughts on our [feedback form here](#).

A NOTE TO OUR WRITERS:

You can find our process submission guidelines [here](#). Below is an overall note to writers:

Write about what you think is funny. We want you for your jokes and brain, not to exploit your trauma. Your experiences as a member of a marginalised group don't have to be part of your POV. They certainly **can be**, but we appreciate that you might want to talk about other stuff, too.

Words we like are: absurd, silly, quirky, asinine, risk-taking. We like things from a leftist/socialist/working class POV. Words we don't like: smug, patronising, centrist.

Check out our examples and existing formats. You're welcome to pitch on [existing formats](#), or use these examples of Widget's voice as a jumping off point to pitch your own unique idea.

How we're going to publish. We will publish in six themed monthly collections (January–June 2021), details on which you can find [here](#). They are: Myth & Legends, Food & Travel, Work & Money, Family & Community, School & Education, and Arts & Entertainment.

Each collection will have a partner organization.

All writers in a collection commit to promoting the collection as a whole, along with their individual work.

Who we want with us. Widget is dedicated to community building. Community is ever-evolving, but at this stage, community building to us means:

- Actively moderated comments — see our commenting policy [here](#).
- A moderated forum for the site's audience, with clear commenting rules, requiring registration with a real name and photo.
- Slack channel for contributors (or open-source equivalent)
- The implementation of a community voting system where pitches can be voted up, so there is not one gatekeeper.

This is an experiment. Join us, it's taking shape, it's evolving. Help us build something.

NEXT STEPS — INTERNAL:

1. This document is being reviewed (paid) by editors from a variety of publications and backgrounds. Edits will be made as their feedback comes in. It was reviewed once in December 2020, and is being reviewed for the second time in January, 2021. The third review will take place in March 2021.
2. Educational resources (classes and documents) are also being made. As of 1/23/21, one class has been licensed and sent out, one is being recorded, and the third is in talks with the teacher.
3. The Widget community is being set up.
4. Partner orgs for all collections are being set and outreach to non-comedy writers is occurring.