

Guidelines for Dakota Baptist Writers

In the eight pages that comprise The Dakota Baptist Newsletter we try to pack as much information and pictures about your church and region organization happenings as we can. Kim Aalberg, who does the copy layout, knows the joys and frustrations of trying to fit the articles she receives into a single issue. Grace Wisthoff copyedits each article for grammar and general style. If you have picked up a new issue of The Dakota Baptist and looked for your article, only to find it slightly or vastly different than the one you sent in, blame it on the editing. While we understand that the time you spent on your article may make its form precious to you, we urge you to do extra editing before you send articles. The guidelines below list a few basic and helpful editing items.

1. Check word length.

This is an item that should be consulted before you begin writing. The word lengths below are specific for The Dakota Baptist and should be followed. Most word processing programs have a “word count” feature under the “Tools” menu. If you are not writing on a computer, expect each paragraph to contain about 100 words.

Feature articles: **(Kim, you fill these in and add any art. types I forgot)**

Church news:

Pastor Portrait:

Other:

2. Cut the fat.

These words say nothing: “really,” “truly,” “genuinely,” “very”—*very* overused, and fancy sounding phrases like “it is interesting to note that”; “in a very real sense”; “it goes without saying”; or “at this point in time” (*now*). These words and phrases and others like them only take up space and add little meaning to your article.

Commonly used redundant phrases also take up space and need to be cut: personal friend, totally destroyed, plan ahead, eliminate altogether. Why use two words when one says it just as well?

Unnecessary extra words tell things that could already be known from the context.

For example: *The choir robes were mauve in color.*

Better: *The choir robes were mauve.*

Best: *The mauve choir robes...*

Wordy writing often contains the word “of” in many places. Check your article and look for the “ofs.” Is each one necessary? Some you will need to keep, some you will not.

For example: *He is the type of man who keeps confidences.* Better: *He keeps confidences.*

Example: *We will be on retreat for the month of May.* Better: *We will be on retreat for May..*

3. Be precise.

The purpose of your article is to clearly communicate news items, nothing more. Please don’t stop to tell us about the beautiful communion set Ethel Hoffeldinger gave the church in 1938 if your real purpose is announce the new pastor’s portrait (that happens to hang next to the communion set cabinet). Keep a single focus and your article will be much easier to read and comprehend.

Coordinate your singulars and plurals. Example: *The Angelitones is a great quartet, but their newest CD is less than angelic.* Is the group an *it* or a *they*? Choose either singular or plural and stick with it.

Do not dangle. Verify that your modifiers (words that tell more about) are modifying the right words: *Coming down the aisle the new piano was clearly visible.* A piano answering the pastor's invitation? Yet that is how the sentence reads. Better: *As we came down the aisle, the new piano was clearly visible.*

4. Watch the style.

We lean toward a more formal style of writing when editing The Dakota Baptist. Informal writing is characterized by phrasing that would be used in everyday conversations. While there is nothing wrong with the informal ways we may speak with each other, this style does not translate well to print and even detracts from the readability and information contained in the article.

Example:

My stars, the special music Ole Johansson offered up on his musical saw just wrung tears from my eyes. It just made the whole conference for me.

Much Better: *Ole Johansson's musical saw solos highlighted the conference.*

As you reread your article for editing items, look for phrasing that you often use in conversation and find shorter, clearer ways to rephrase.

5. Keep up the good work.

Finally, let us thank you for the time you spend writing news articles. There would be no Dakota Baptist without your work! Your articles are vital to the ABCD as news and as encouragement to other churches in the region. Because your writing is valuable, it is worthy of time editing for the items above and many others not mentioned. Thank you!