

Writing for MAA FOCUS

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As the MAA's news magazine, MAA FOCUS belongs to the members of the Association. We are always looking for interesting articles by and for MAA members. Whether it's a cool bit of mathematics, an account of some recent event or accomplishment, or an article sharing a new insight about the profession, consider writing it up and sending it to us.

I often get asked about what kind of things I'm looking for. Here are some hints:

MAA FOCUS is a news magazine, not a journal.

Articles for us should be interesting and informal. Don't use footnotes, and only include a bibliography if you absolutely must. If at all possible, include photos and illustrations. Keep in mind that you are writing for a wide audience of MAA members.

MAA FOCUS articles are short. With few exceptions, none of our articles runs more than two pages, which comes out to less than 2000 words. Most of our articles are actually considerably shorter, about half that size.

We like mathematics. That's why we're members of MAA. So don't be afraid to include some mathematics. On the other hand, we're not usually interested in publishing new proofs of old theorems (or, for that matter, new proofs of new theorems!). If you write about a new result, tell us the kind of thing you'd say to a colleague in the hallway to explain "what's really going on." If you write about an old result, embed it in a historical account or a personal reminiscence or something else. Think magazine, not journal.

We like pictures. If you have an interesting photo, we'd be glad to consider it for publication. If the central point is the picture, a one-paragraph caption will do instead of a full-blown article.

Remember our series. Over the years, we have started several article series. Many of them haven't had more than a couple of articles. But we're still interested. Send us a *What's the Best Textbook* article, or one about *What I Learned from....* Tell us about the latest technological toy you're excited about. Send us a bit of Found Math (a paragraph or less, from some news source or magazine or book that deals with mathematics in some interesting way).

Consult the editor. If you're wondering whether something will work, ask me!

Don't format too much. MAA FOCUS has its own house style, so it's useless for you to add heavy formatting (fonts, font sizes, paragraph layout, etc.) to your article. You'll only make the editor spend time removing it. Also, avoid features (such as bulleted lists and enumerations) that don't work well in a format with narrow columns.

Some elements of house style. Here are some rules for formatting:

Almost everyone referred to in MAA FOCUS has a PhD and/or is a professor. So we just use full names on first mention, last names after that. No Dr. This or Prof. That.

URLs are always given with the http:// part included. We're old-fashioned that way. They are printed in 10pt Optima, and they are not underlined. Tell Word to lay off when it tries to make the URL a hyperlink.

It's "email", "web site", "online" and not "e-mail", "website" or "on line."

Em-dashes used as punctuation have no spaces before and after.

No double spaces. Ever. For any reason. Search-and-replace space-space by space.

Use email. All of MAA FOCUS's production is done electronically. Feel free to use email to send me things. Email attachments are acceptable, but be careful about huge attachments, because many email servers will refuse them.

Be patient. The editor of MAA FOCUS wears lots of other hats. Sometimes it'll take a while for me to respond to your email, and it may take quite a while before an article appears. Please be patient. If you're worried that I forgot or lost your article, send me a note.

I'm looking forward to reading what you write!