

Creating New UA Literature: Style Guide

This is a set of guidelines for creating new literature for Underearners Anonymous, following the program’s principles and traditions.

Introduction

The primary purpose of the styles suggested within this style guide is to “keep it simple”—we want UA materials to be immediately accessible to the reader, with no further barriers to our understanding beyond our common problem of underearning.

The same material may exist in multiple formats—printed, ebook, tape—and may be translated into multiple languages. We expect that some members will need access to large type formats. We also anticipate that ebooks won’t just be read by the sighted, but will be used by the visually-impaired in e-readers.

Our publications will likely be printed in multiple countries, with conflicting standard paper sizes. We also need to remember that people using our literature will have different ethnic backgrounds, and cultural references we think of as universal may make no sense the other side of the sea.

Writing Styles—The Words We Use

Within the body of the text, we need to follow the stylistic standards below.

Anonymity

Anonymity is the cornerstone of UA. In keeping with this tradition, our literature itself is anonymous, not ascribed to any author or editor, and the copyright is held on behalf of the Fellowship by UA GSB, Inc.

If we need to refer to individuals for any purpose (for example, a collection of stories, or in quoting someone), then we strictly follow the First Name, Last Initial format (“Bill W.,” for example). Where we need to be more specific, we can add a city or region name (“Bill W., New York,” for example).

Inclusivity

As far as possible, we take pains to make our writing universal. The UA fellowship is made up of men and women of all faiths, of all sexual orientations, in every possible family relationship, of all levels of physical ability, from many different cultures, speaking many different languages.

We write our literature so as to be as inclusive as possible.

Where we are quoting someone's experience, strength and hope, then it is important that we accurately capture their direct words and particular turns of phrase. Nevertheless, we are sensitive to the issues noted above, and if the words we wish to quote seem insensitive out of context, then we ask their author to reword them.

Talking About God

This is a spiritual program, and the Steps and Traditions refer to God, yet we understand that each person has their own relationship with their Higher Power, and uses an almost endless variety of terms to describe this relationship.

So outside the Steps and Traditions, and quoted prayers, we refer to God as "our Higher Power," or "the Higher Power," depending on context, and let our readers decide for themselves what that means to them.

Gender Neutrality & Family Status

Our writing is gender neutral, both as far as the reader is concerned, and their sexual preferences and marital status. We do not make the case, implicitly or explicitly, that male or female, single or married, fecund or childless, or any particular sexual preference, is the preferred or expected choice.

When we are talking about people in the program, we are talking about ourselves, so it is easiest and best to refer to "we" and "us" and "our"—this avoids gender specificity entirely, and is a prime indicator of the inclusiveness we noted above.

On occasion, though, we will need to refer to third parties; in this case, as far as possible, we use the ungendered plural—“they.” If we must use the singular in a given circumstance, then we use “they” and “their” to refer back to them.

We refer to spouses and loved ones, not husbands and wives; the term “loved ones” also allows us to talk about family without any preconceptions as to how that family is composed, or whether it even exists. When we are talking about our children, we should remember our reader may have adopted or step-children, and may or may not be partnered, so we are careful to indicate no preferences for any particular relationship.

Clearly there are some few exceptions to this. As an example, a piece on returning to work after pregnancy might reasonably assume the mother is a woman; however, even here it needs to be borne in mind that she might be married, partnered or single, and any partner might be male or female. In any case, the reader may be any gender.

Cultural References

We also avoid cultural references. “Everyone” may celebrate Thanksgiving in the US and Canada, but it is entirely unknown in Europe and China. It’s possible to think of many other examples where a cultural reference will mean nothing to a foreign reader, and perhaps even someone from another part of this country or another religion.

Far better to find truly universal themes and non-specific references.

Suggestions

When we are giving guidance on how to work the program, we need to always make it clear we are making suggestions only, based on our collective experience, strength and hope.

In describing how to do things, we use phrases such as “some of us” or “many of us” to explicitly call out that different people have found different approaches helpful to their recovery, and that there is no unique path to recovery.

Document Formats & Styles—The Way Things Look

Caveat

Although we have drafted some formats for printing pamphlets, etc., we feel that it is too early to formalize them at this stage. Until we have been through the printing process a few times with a few different kinds of publication, it is unlikely we will be aware of the pitfalls in our designs, nor all the adjustments we will need to make to them to accommodate the exigencies of printing.

Specific style guides around formatting, etc., will be included in future versions of this document.