Writing for Ideas for Growth

Guidelines for authors

The International Growth Centre (IGC) aims to promote sustainable growth in developing countries by providing demand-led policy advice based on frontier research.
The International Growth Centre’s blog *Ideas for Growth* promotes frontier research on economic growth policies in developing countries. *Ideas for Growth* is an online platform for leading academics to present and apply their research to the policymaking and political world.

In writing for the IGC *Ideas for Growth* blog, we encourage our authors to be forthright in presenting new research and proposing new policy ideas.

**Audience:**

The *Ideas for Growth* blog is read by politicians, academics, policymakers, journalists, opinion formers, business leaders, students, campaigners and the general interest reader.

*Ideas for Growth* articles are distributed via our newsletter and social media platforms to our international network of policy makers, universities, NGOs and other interest groups and individuals across the world.

**Overview:**

- The pieces are designed to be short (800-1,200 words).
- *Ideas for Growth* articles should be written in an informed, accessible (non-technical) and forthright style.
- We encourage contributors, where appropriate, to draw out the tension between policy proposals and the political barriers to implementation. Articles should always lean toward presenting analysis as opposed to a simply descriptive background summary.
- Articles have more impact if the author clearly spells out the key argument or ‘hook’ at the introduction and conclusion of the piece.
- The *Ideas for Growth* audience is international so local knowledge should not be assumed. Please use British English spelling, for example –ise/-ising/-isation rather than –ize/-izing/-ization.
- References, if necessary, should be included as embedded hyperlinks or, if hyperlinks are not possible, as endnotes.

Please be aware that the editors need to retain a degree of flexibility regarding the final version of published material and regarding the publication of less time-sensitive pieces. The editors undertake to keep delays to a minimum and contributors informed of publication plans.
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General guidelines

Length and format:

- Blog articles should be between 800 and 1,200 words.
- Articles should be written with a wide audience in mind, including undergraduate students, as well as policy-makers and other non-academics.
- Articles do not have to be standalone pieces. If the research project it refers to is too complicated to summarise easily in a single article it may be better to focus on writing about one key element of the project, and/or writing more than one article.
- A sentence can always be too long but it can never be too short. Please use short sentences (maximum 35 words) and short paragraphs (maximum 5 lines). Try to use only one idea per paragraph.
- The Ideas for Growth audience is international so local knowledge should not be assumed. Please use British English spelling, for example –ise/-ising/-isation rather than –ize/-izing/-ization.
- References, if necessary, should be included as embedded hyperlinks or, if hyperlinks are not possible, as endnotes.

Writing style:

- No reader has ever complained that an article was “too interesting”. Nor has any reader ever said that an article was “too easy to understand”. Focus on reader centred writing (putting the reader first). The objective is not simply to write the article but for the target audience to read, enjoy, be informed, and influenced by the article.
- Ideas for Growth articles should be written in an informed, accessible (non-technical) and forthright style but (KISS) Keep It Short and Simple. Clear and simple writing is not the same as dumbing down. Keep jargon and acronyms to an absolute minimum, and explain their meaning the first time you use them. Please avoid complex or over-long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid using a long word where a short one will do. Similarly, avoid using a foreign phrase, a scientific term, or an academic expression if you can think of an everyday English equivalent. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Don’t write in the passive academic tense. Write warmly — as if you were addressing a friend — but in a professional context.
- Readers typically remember the beginning and end of an article but forget the middle (Primacy and Recency). As such, it is important that the article has a strong introduction and conclusion. Articles have more impact if the author clearly spells out the key argument or ‘hook’ at the introduction and conclusion of the piece. So, in the introduction, body, and conclusion of the article outline what you are going to say, say it, recap what was said.
• We encourage contributors, where appropriate, to draw out the tension between policy proposals and the political barriers to implementation. Articles should always lean toward presenting analysis as opposed to a simply descriptive background summary.
• Avoid introductory phrases like “In this paper I will...”, or “This paper aims to...”, and go straight into your discussion of the topic. Similarly, avoid phrases such as, “In my recent paper, I have shown that a key reform would be...”, and simply say, “A key reform would be...”.
• Minimise the use of italics, and avoid using bold type or underlining.

**Introducing an issue or topic:**

• The introduction is where the reader forms their first impression – it should be designed to grab the reader’s attention. The introduction should clearly spell out the key argument or ‘hook’ of the article. Where possible try in the introduction to place your article in context by highlighting the importance of the topic or issue to make it relevant to the general reader – What was the primary motivation for doing this study? This can be done via a NASH introduction (News, Anecdote, Surprise, or Historical) – that is, by linking your article to current or recent news headlines or topical issues that general readers will be familiar with, detailing an interesting anecdote, mentioning an attention grabbing fact or statistic, or using a relevant historical reference. As with journalistic pieces ‘lead with the best’ (BLUF - Bottom Line Up Front). Don’t save your main argument or analysis for the end of the post.

**Names:**

• Our full name is always “the International Growth Centre”. However, when using the abbreviated form, our name is “the IGC” if the International Growth Centre is the subject of the sentence, but simply “IGC” if the International Growth Centre is not the subject of the sentence, for example, when talking about “IGC research”.
• Unless an abbreviation or acronym is so familiar that it is used more often than the full form — for example, AIDS, the BBC, or the IMF — the first use of a name or term in a given blog article should state the name in full, followed by its abbreviation in parentheses. For example, “the International Growth Centre (IGC)”. The abbreviated form “the IGC” can then be used for all subsequent mentions.
• For individuals, the default practice is not to use professional and/or honorific titles (Prof., Dr., Rt. Hon etc.) unless the person in question would themselves expect it to be used. The use of some titles varies depending on local customs (Ms. can be considered either polite or sexist), some are misleading (all Italian graduates are Dr.), and some are impractical (Prof. Dr. Dr. Joe Bloggs). Do not therefore use titles unless it could seem offensive not to. If
using a title, be careful to ensure it is the correct title for all persons mentioned.

Graphs, charts, tables, and bullet points:

- We encourage the use of graphs and charts, both of which are preferable to tables, as they are easier for readers to interpret quickly. In all cases, please send us an Excel file of your data and a mock-up of your graph, chart or table in image form (.jpeg or .png) and with a minimum width of 630 pixels. Each chart needs a clearly labelled heading, labels for the X and Y axes or histogram bars, including units of measurement and a readable scale or background grid. The labelled heading should clearly explain the key point of the graph, for example “Female wages are increasing” instead of a generic summary title such as “Female wages in Ethiopia 1990-2015”. There should be a clear legend distinguishing multiple data series from each other and a brief note on sources. Lines must be thick enough and distinctively coloured enough to be easily read. Charts should use a numerical progression to make comparisons more visible.
- Use “1), 2), 3)” or “A), B), C)” not “i, ii, iii” superscripts to number bullet points.

Numbers:

- Use figures not written numbers. For example, “2 years” not “two years”, “½” not “one half”, or “50%” not “fifty percent”.
- Make sure that any mention of statistics can be clearly understood by the lay reader – Instead of saying “statistically significant (at the 10% level)...”, say “Only a 10% chance...”.

Methodology and jargon:

- From a policymaker’s perspective, the methodology used in conducting the research is less important than the study’s results and their policy implications. Keep the description of the evaluation design as short as possible — indeed, in many cases detailing the evaluation design may not be necessary at all — and avoid using academic jargon.

Titles and standfirsts:

- Authors are encouraged to propose a title (maximum 55 characters - approximately 8 words) and standfirst (maximum 380 characters - approximately 50 words) for their article.
- Descriptive titles work better than clever titles and puns. The more catchy the title and standfirst, the more likely the article is to be read. Avoid vague titles (for example, “Poverty in India”). Similarly, try to avoid using questions for
the title (for example, “How can India improve its education system?” — readers typically prefer certainty, so, “How India can improve its education system” would be better). Titles with numbers and lists typically prove popular (for example, “5 ways India can improve its education system”). If struggling to think of a title ask yourself what you would enter into your online search engine if you were trying to find this article? Please note that the editors reserve the right to change the proposed title and standfirst as they see fit.

• Titles and sub-headings set the tone of the article and are more read than anything else in the article. Think carefully about them and use them to draw readers in.
• Sub-headings should be used about every 200 words. Rather than being bland or generic, sub-headings should ideally signpost the forthcoming point by giving readers a logically sequenced set of narrative cues. For example, never label the beginning bit of text ‘Introduction’.
• Sentence case not title case - Only the first letter in a title or subheading should be capitalised, except if there is a name included in which case the first letter of the name is also capitalised.
• Standfirsts should outline the article’s main arguments and findings and any relevant background information for readers. Alternatively the standfirst could outline the most interesting finding. A good standfirst aims to highlight the premise of the article while further arousing the reader’s curiosity such that they will progress to reading the blog article.

Conclusions:

• The conclusion should reinforce the main message of the article – it is the last thing the reader reads and thus the first thing they will remember. Use it to keep the reader thinking about the argument made in the article.

Spelling and grammar guidelines

*Please carefully proof read your writing before submitting it for publication*

Spelling:

• Use British English spelling and grammar, for example –ise/-ising/-isation rather than –ize/-izing/-ization. We use the Oxford English Dictionary (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/the-oxford-english-dictionary) for reference.

Spacing and punctuation:

• Use single line spacing between sentences and no indentation at the beginning of paragraphs.
• Use the Serial Comma (also called the Oxford Comma) before “and” in a series. For example, “The IGC has offices in Europe, Africa, and Asia.”
• A dash like this one — denoting a break in a sentence or to set off parenthetical statements, should be an Em Dash (i.e. the length of two hyphens) with a single space either side.
• Use i.e. and e.g. not ie or eg

Referencing and citation rules

• Blog articles are not academic journal articles – only cite sources if they are absolutely crucial to the readers understanding of the blog article. If, however, references are unavoidable, they should be included as embedded hyperlinks. Links should direct readers to more detailed reports or other pieces of research, news items or other blog posts. Open access sources should be used instead of those behind restricted paywalls.
• Insert a hyperlink at the relevant point in the article to which it refers. For example “Joe Bloggs has said…” To do this click ‘ctrl-K’ if using Microsoft Word, or ‘Right click’ your mouse if using Apple Mac. Do not use expressions such as “click here” or “download” to identify hyperlinks.
• Use hyperlinks to external websites sparingly, and try to avoid overusing hyperlinks in general – this can be distracting and make the article hard to read.
• When submitting your draft article to the editor, please highlight any hyperlinks in yellow to make them easy for the editor to identify.
• Try to avoid using endnotes wherever possible and integrate material directly into the text but, if hyperlinks are not possible and a source must be referenced as it is crucial for the readers understanding of the article then use endnotes. Do not use footnotes. Use the Chicago citation style (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). Please be aware that many academic journals have slightly idiosyncratic citation styles, so do not just cut and paste citations from other papers.
• Use “1), 2), 3)” or “A), B), C)” not “i, ii, iii” superscripts to number endnotes.

Submissions

Document format:

• Please send your draft article in Word format, with your name, proposed title, and proposed standfirst at the top.
• Please ensure the text is in Arial typeface, size 12, single spaced, and left aligned with no indentations for paragraphs. Bullet points should be indented 1cm.
• When submitting your draft article to the editor, please highlight any hyperlinks in yellow to make them easy for the editor to identify.
• Please carefully proof read your writing before submitting it for publication.
• If this is your first article for the IGC please also include a short one or two line biographical note at the bottom of the article text and a small, formal portrait style, colour headshot photo with a minimum resolution of 150x150 pixels.

Our editing process:

• Please be aware that the editors need to retain a degree of flexibility regarding the final version of published material and regarding the publication of less time-sensitive pieces. The editors undertake to keep delays to a minimum and to keep authors informed of publication plans. However, due to time pressures, authors may have only a short period to approve any edits. In such cases, the editors may decide to proceed with publication without the author’s final approval but will consider any edits to the published article suggested by the author once the author has had the opportunity to review the published article.

Syndication policy

All use of web material is permitted under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License (CC-BY-SA), version 3.0, except published papers which are copyright of the IGC. Other blogs and publications are free to use Ideas for Growth blog articles, subject to receiving prior confirmation by email from the IGC’s Managing Editor (Email Seamus Nevin at: S.E.Nevin@lse.ac.uk) and the external publisher attributing the origin of their publication to the IGC. If authors do not wish for their article to be republished anywhere else, please let the Managing Editor know, otherwise, the IGC will assume that the author is happy for their article to be syndicated. The editors undertake to keep authors informed of any syndication plans. If the editors have not informed authors that an article has been syndicated and the author finds their work posted on any non-IGC site, please email the Managing Editor, Seamus Nevin, at: S.E.Nevin@lse.ac.uk.

Similarly, authors are expected to keep the Managing Editor informed if the author’s work is to be published by any other blog or publication outlet (including academic journals). In such cases please email the Managing Editor, Seamus Nevin, at: S.E.Nevin@lse.ac.uk.

Authors are encouraged to pitch blogs and op-eds referencing their IGC research to media outlets whenever appropriate. The IGC Communications team based at the London hub office would be happy to advise authors on how best to cater their pitch for media purposes.
For non-IGC publications wishing to syndicate Ideas for Growth articles the following attribution sentence, including a hyperlink to the original version of the relevant blog article on our website and a link to the homepage of the IGC website, should be included prominently at the bottom of the republished article:

The article ‘Insert the title with an embedded hyperlink to the original publication of the article on the IGC website here’ was originally commissioned and published by the International Growth Centre (IGC): [http://www.theigc.org/](http://www.theigc.org/)

Questions

As with any aspect of style guide rules, it is impossible to be wholly consistent all of the time — there are almost always exceptions. If you are unsure or have a question regarding these editorial guidelines please email the Managing Editor, Seamus Nevin, at: [S.E.Nevin@lse.ac.uk](mailto:S.E.Nevin@lse.ac.uk).