



Writing for MGA! Magazine

Introduction

Contributions from NAMGAR members account for a good deal of the material printed in *MGA!* magazine. We encourage everyone to send us MGA and MGA Variant stories, experiences, technical tips and thoughts. While we only publish six issues a year and limit the number of pages to approximately thirty-two per issue, we do make an attempt to publish most of what we receive — eventually.

Why wouldn't we publish your article? The material isn't timely. Perhaps you submitted something for an event that occurred a year ago and the material was covered in an earlier issue. Or, you submitted something for next month, and our mailing schedule will make the material obsolete before it arrives. material isn't suitable: sex, drugs and violence work well in books and on television, but doesn't pique the interest of NAMGAR members in the right way.

Unless it's a technical article, if the material is too "dry" or written in an uninteresting way, it's not likely to make it to the magazine; there are even limits for technical articles. We can provide helpful suggestions for many types of articles.

We would like publishing articles to be as painless as possible, for us and for you. We hope this brochure will help you understand our needs for a printed publication and how we can assist you in getting your material published in *MGA!* magazine.

Writing

The first thing that most everyone says about themselves is that they do not know how to write. What they really mean is that they don't know how to write well. Writing well comes with practice; few of us enjoyed our English classes in high-school and unless forced into jobs that required a lot of writing, few of us willingly nurtured the skill.

Step One

Just write! It's that simple. Don't think about how you are saying it, just write it down the way you would say it to a friend, warts and all. Get your thoughts on paper or into a word processing file. Once they are written down, you can edit, accentuate or exaggerate as required.

We suggest that you not complete your masterpiece in one sitting. Write it, put it down and come back to it over the course of several days. Writing is more tedious than difficult. Writing an article may require several review and rewrite iterations before you get just what you want.

If you need assistance with grammar and spelling, most computer software has tools that can help you; otherwise, there are dictionaries, thesauruses, and writing guides available from a bookstore, library or on the Internet.

If you have questions about how our work is progressing or general questions about the writing process, feel free to contact the editor or copy editor of *MGA!* magazine for suggestions.

Step Two

There is no step two! Proceed to step 1.

How Many Words Should I Write?

The number of words varies depending on the article type. There are basically four types of articles in *MGA!* — *Open Fire* (letters to the editor), Feature, *Local News* and Fill.

Open Fire: we like to keep letters to the editor small and compact. The length should not exceed one hundred (100) words, less is more here; occasionally a small image is acceptable if it is relevant to the material presented in the letter. Letters longer than one hundred words are usually edited, sometimes severely, to permit all letters destined for an issue to be printed.

Local News: this article is meant to inform the membership about the happenings in a geographically area, typically a Chapter or a Special Interest Group (SIG). This type of article should be between three hundred fifty (350) and four hundred (400) words. Images are encouraged because they add additional interest to the article.

Feature articles are the main event in *MGA!* They are typically between one thousand five hundred (1500) and one thousand seven hundred (1700) words: this is about two printed pages when accompanied by several pictures. They are typically in-depth, themed articles.

Fill articles are used to fill out the magazine with short interesting experiences, anecdotes, short stories, trivia, etc. These articles are typically between three hundred fifty (350) and eight hundred (800) words (between one-half and one whole printed page), with one or two images.

Article Submission

Submitting an article to *MGA!* magazine depends largely on how you wrote it. The method will be different depending on whether it was written by hand, typed on a typewriter or created with a computer and a word processing program.

Hand or Type Written Material

We recognize that not everyone has, or is comfortable using, a computer. When submitting hand written text, we suggest that you print, unless your penmanship is unusually good. If it's difficult to read, it will be difficult to transcribe and will delay its processing.

Articles created on a typewriter should be double spaced, just to make it easier for us to make notes and process it. We have tools that assist us in converting typewriter created material into a "soft" computer publishing format.

Unless you have figured out how to teleport paper, you'll have to use the postal service when submitting the article.

Computer Generated Material

For obvious reasons this is our preferred method of submission, but there can be issues, especially when your word processing application is different than the one we use in the editorial office.

Here are some tips to minimize the problems:

- Use a standard font like Arial, Helvetica, Times Roman or Verdana. Not all computers have the same fonts installed so if you use a "fancy" font in your text, it

may not be usable because the font is not available to us. All word processing applications have at least one of these four fonts.

- Use a font size of 11 points for your basic text and a size of perhaps 12 or 14 for headings, if required.
- Use a bold font to indicate headings and an italic font to emphasize.
- We can handle a number of word processing file types, but we prefer the following types, in order of preference: DOC, RTF or TXT. Most word processing software can create at least one of these types.

See the section "Sending Digital Material" for information on getting your files to us.

Pictures

Everyone likes to see pictures. Pictures really add to *MGA!* Could you image a magazine without pictures? We can. They call them scientific reports — *Zzzzz...* So you can imagine what a few pictures can add to an article.

Even if you aren't writing an article, but just submitting a picture, this section is for you, too!

First and foremost, the picture should be *in focus!* One can do a lot of things today with photographic software, but one can't make a bad picture good, especially when it comes to focus.

Second, when sending a picture, be sure to include a short caption so we know what we are looking at and how it relates to the article. Just sending a photo? We would still like a caption. If there are people in the photograph, it would be helpful if you provided their names. The ones we make up may not be very flattering.

Third, *don't* use your mobile phone's camera. Although these cameras are improving, the images that they create do not generate enough image pixels for printed material like *MGA!* magazine. Unless you know, for certain, that your trusty mobile phone can generate a three (3) mega-pixel image, grab your film or digital camera!

Here are some general picture taking tips, not necessarily specific to articles:

- If you are taking a picture on the hope that it may be on the cover, turn your camera so that the image will be vertical in the view finder. Try to insure there is nothing important towards the top of the picture. We have to put the magazine logo there.
- Force your flash to fire when subjects are backlit. If you know how to fill flash – better yet.

Read "Your Car On The Cover of A Magazine," *MGA!* magazine, Jan/Feb 2009, Volume 34 No. 3, page10, for a contributor's perspective.

Image Requirements

An image submitted for print has much tighter requirements than images displayed on a computer. Why? Printed media requires higher pixel or “dot” density to make the image appear well on a piece of paper. Where a website image only needs a pixel density of 72 pixels-per-inch (ppi), printed media needs a minimum density of 300 dots-per-inch (dpi); otherwise, the image looks out of focus or like it is constructed of little blocks. Pixels-per-inch and dots-per-inch aren’t quite the same, but for this discussion consider them synonymous.

You can send us images directly from your digital camera, as a print, as a negative/slide or as a scan from an optical scanner. Here are some things to remember.

Prints

If you send us your prints, they will not be returned unless you make a request. We assume that you have the negatives. The exception is usually old photographs. But unless you ask for it to be returned, we won’t know you didn’t have the negative, will we?

Negatives and Slides

Actually, we would prefer to have your negatives and slides rather than prints created from them. It gives us more latitude when creating the image for publication. We will always return negatives and slides.

It is best to send negatives and slides using a mailing service that provides tracking information about the package, unless you’re not particularly concerned about them getting lost. Whether you should insure them is your call.

Digital Camera Image Files

If you are going to send us digital camera image files:

1. First, make sure your camera can create a *three (3) mega-pixel image* and be sure that your camera is set to take the picture at three (3) mega-pixels or more. Many people set their cameras at lower pixel densities to get more on the memory card or to minimize file sizes for emailing. This can make the images unsuitable for publishing in a magazine.
2. If you are sending us the image from your camera, make sure it is *a copy!*
3. Do not make any alterations to the image using your photographic software. We will do that so we can make the corrections we require for publication. Images from digital cameras usually have camera data embedded in the file that can be useful in making corrections for printing. Some photographic software products may not preserve that information.
4. We have the ability to accept digital camera files in all digital camera formats.

We wished we could tell you how to set up your camera, but there are just too many models. This is one time you may be forced to read the manual. See the section “Sending Digital Material” for information on getting your files to us.

Optical Scans

Optical scanners are inexpensive and popular. Many homes have one, whether it’s a stand alone unit or part of a multi-function printer.

Scanning your prints, negatives or slides is an alternative to mailing them. As with any conversion from one form to another, there are things that need to be considered:

Make sure your scanner is set to scan at a density of 300 dpi! Figure 1 is a panel from the Microsoft Document Scanning Tool. This works as an example because most scanning applications have similar settings. Notice that the setting is called **resolution**.

Setting the resolution is usually an advanced setting. Scanning software typically defaults to 200 dpi. “Type” may be set at any value of eight (8) bits or more, but eight bits is all that is required, and it will keep the file size down.

You may be asked what format to save the final file as. We can accept most formats, but we prefer PSD, JPEG, TIFF or BMP. JPEG will usually generate the smallest file and PSD the largest.

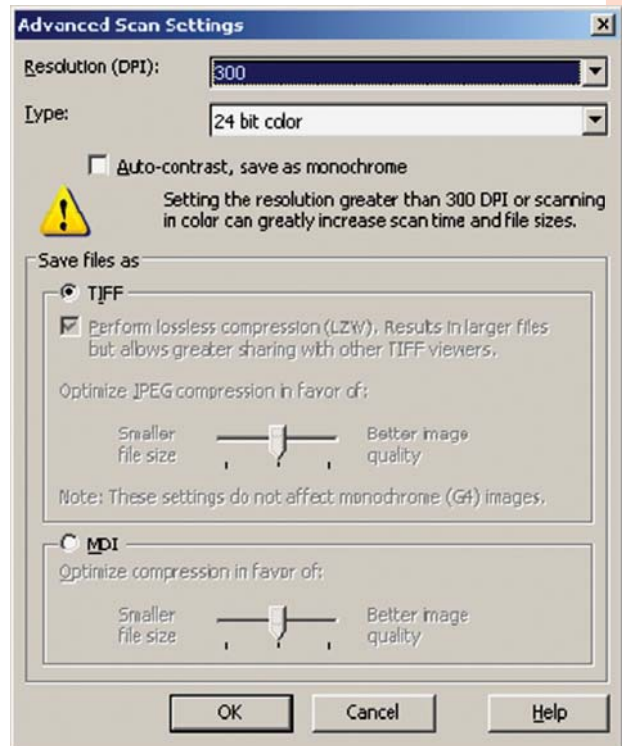


Figure 1: Setting Scanner Resolution

Sending Digital Material

Today, email is the way most people transmit material to the *MGA!* Editor. One or more files attached to an email usually works fine. We can handle email with total file sizes up to *5MB per email*. Sending more than one email to transmit all the files is acceptable. Just tell us that there are more emails coming so we can watch for them and compile them appropriately.

If you are sending multiple files in an email, consider sending a ZIP file. ZIP files can reduce the total size of all the included files, but more importantly, they group the files and make them easier to handle at the editorial office.

Please *do not imbed* the image in the body of the email: *attach* it to the email. Imbedding can subject it to modifications by the mail application which you might not intend.

You may also submit the material on a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM. But be sure that the disc you create is Microsoft Windows compatible. Check your disc burning application help file for the necessary settings, if using an operating system other than MS Windows. Macintosh users: if you cannot find a setting for creating a Windows compatible disc, use the ISO-9660 standard.

Legal Stuff

MGA! is the official bimonthly publication of the North American MGA Register, Ltd. (NAMGAR). Contributions from members are encouraged, and every effort will be made to use appropriate material. Unsolicited material from non-members is welcome. All materials sent must be free of copyright encumbrance and include release forms where applicable.

NAMGAR makes every effort to publish the material it receives, but submission to *MGA!* Magazine is not a guarantee of publication. All material published in *MGA!* becomes the property of NAMGAR. The editor reserves the right to edit for length and appropriateness.

Legal Stuff Continued

Copyright is a really tricky area and is really the domain of copyright lawyers. But we've been asked to clarify a couple of points.

Free of copyright encumbrance

If you didn't actually create the material yourself (text, photographs, drawings, etc.), then you must get permission from the person(s) who did. The permission must be in writing and specifically give permission to *MGA!* Magazine for publication. For example, an article was published which used a piece of artwork from a professional illustrator. The illustrator was required to send us a statement granting permission to use that illustration in *MGA!*

Even within this context, there are exceptions. So if you are unsure — ask!

Material Becomes the Property of NAMGAR:

What needs to be clarified here is that the material “as published” in *MGA!* magazine, becomes the property of NAMGAR.

You are free to submit the *raw* material as you submitted it to *MGA!* to anyone else you desire. However, you do not own the published work and you may not grant permission to anyone or any other publication to reprint the published work, as it appeared in *MGA!* Magazine.

By the same token, another publication may not print the material, as published in *MGA!*, without the permission of the *MGA!*'s Editor. Again, if you are unsure — ask!

From time to time, we receive published works and images from their authors for reprint in *MGA!*. If you are such a person and you wish to guarantee your copyright on the material, include a release form with your submission detailing the rights for use.

Computer Software

The computer software you use to create your articles and images can be as varied as the computers in the market place.

Most Microsoft Windows based computers come with one or more of the following word processing applications: Microsoft Word, Microsoft Word Pad and Microsoft Notepad. Any of these three are suitable for creating text document for *MGA!* articles. For Macintosh computers *Pages* is provided on the newer machines.

If you don't have a full-featured word processor on your computer system, consider an Open Source application like *OpenOffice* by openoffice.org. This application will run on either a Windows or Macintosh OS-X operating system.

For images on a Windows system there is *Microsoft Paint* and for Macintosh there is *iPhoto*. If you do not have full-featured photographic software on your system, consider products like *Picasa* or *Gimp*.

Most of these products can be found by searching the Internet and range in price from free to over one hundred dollars.

Questions and Suggestions

If you have any suggestions for improving this publication or questions about publishing in *MGA!* magazine, please feel free to write the editor at the email address listed below. Or, call or write to the contact information listed for the Editor in the masthead of the magazine or on the NAMGAR website.

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