Writing for The Combat Edge

Do you have a safety story to share with the world?
Do you need an EPR or OPR bullet?
Consider writing an article for *The Combat Edge* magazine.

The Particulars

- Provide your name, rank, unit, wing, base, phone number, and email address. We may need to contact you if we have questions.
- Use Times New Roman, 12-point font.
- Use two spaces after periods at the ends of sentences.
- Include the Oxford comma—the comma before *and* in a list.
- Write out any unfamiliar terms completely, then follow with the acronym in parentheses. Don't make your readers guess.
- Do not include any special formatting or effects such as borders, centering, using bold text, or embedding graphics. Documents are stripped of all formatting prior to being sent to the designer for layout.
- By all means, include any photos appropriate for inclusion with your article. The higher the resolution, the better. Most phone cameras take acceptable pictures. Real photos of the actual event or equipment involved makes the story more engaging. Don't embed photos into the Word document. Don't include images taken from an internet search, as these are usually copyright-protected. If you use a copyrighted image, you must provide written proof of permission. Be sure to include the name of the photographer, in order that we can give proper credit.
- There is no required length for articles. The average is around 750 words, but your story may be longer or shorter. One double-spaced page is probably the minimum. Simply tell your story completely, and stop when you've finished. Write in plain language, and don't be afraid to write dramatically. We do caution against being overly wordy, as you don't want to lose your audience.

Where to start

Start with the beginning—try writing a headline. Think of two or three words to sum up your story as concisely as possible. A brief summary of the article will work just fine, and we can always discuss it later. If you're stuck, don't worry – just start writing and come back around to it. Sometimes the headline doesn't develop until the story does.

Tell Your Story

- Tell us your story in your own words. Begin by organizing your thoughts: spend a few minutes thinking about what you want to say—what is the main point. Making a list or outline is very helpful, as it gives you a visual guide. Create an opening paragraph, in which you provide the background for the story. Next, tell us the details, writing clearly and concisely. Assume people don't know anything about your subject. Try to make it entertaining, rather than a dry reporting of facts. Toward the end, include a paragraph that illustrates the appropriate *safety lesson*. Finish with a concluding paragraph that sums everything up, and gives the reader a feeling of closure.

You might consider an outline like this:
        Introduction
        Setting up the scene
        Details of what took place
        Development of the situation (more details)
        Lesson(s) learned
        Conclusion

About the *safety lesson* that goes with your story: Think of ways to weave it into the body of the story, and then give some advice to the reader about how to avoid the situation. What did you do that created the situation, or made it worse? What could you have done differently? If it was a matter of equipment failure, how did you handle it? What did you learn? Most importantly, how can your story help others? Your story may save someone's life.

When writing, keep in mind that different people read on different levels, and some are new or unfamiliar to military service. We suggest writing at a high-school level, which should make your story accessible to everyone.

Remember the ABC's of writing: accuracy, brevity and clarity.

- *Accuracy* – Are you using the right words? Is there subject-matter on the topic? If not, do you have sources/subject-matter experts to back up your statements? Cite your sources and quote your experts—it will give your article credibility.
- *Brevity* – Get right to the point. There's no need to try to fill pages. Choose shorter words with the same meaning: "about" instead of "approximately." Work to create a good article that can include photos and other graphics to grab readers' attention.
- *Clarity* – Does the article make sense? Does it say exactly what you want to say? Avoid using acronyms, and spell them out if they're absolutely necessary. Avoid using jargon that only people in your field would understand. Write as though you're telling your story to people who don't know anything about what you do.

Finished
    After you've finished writing, take a day or two, and then read your story again. Have someone else read it. Does it still make sense to you? Does it make sense to your audience?

Extras
    Sidebars or additional information are a plus, but not required. For example, if you're writing a story about a distracted-driving incident, provide additional facts, official statistics, or helpful hints on how to avoid driving while distracted. Make absolutely certain the information you provide is accurate.

The final product
    Once the magazine is published, we will send you an author's certificate and two copies of the magazine – or more at your request, along with a letter of appreciation from the Director of Safety. We truly appreciate your help in keeping safe our most valuable resource—our Airmen. By sharing your experiences in *The Combat Edge*, you can prevent helps avoid future mishaps.

Still have questions?
    If you have additional questions about your article, please contact us by email at thecombatedge@us.af.mil, or call 757-764-8846 (DSN 574-8846)