COSP Wiki Style Guide

This style guide allows multiple COSP Wiki authors to write "as one", with a common "look and feel" and a common "voice".   The style guide purposefully de-personalizes the content in order to focus on facts and arguments rather than personalities.

Portions of the guide provide loose guidelines while other portions provide strict rules, as stated in each portion.

This guide also provides guidance to help make the documents readable and informative.

Wiki Purpose

Authors should understand the purpose of the COSP Wiki before writing. Please see the separate document "COSP Wiki Purpose".

Wiki Organization: "Hierarchy of Knowledge"

The COSP Wiki has a "top-down" organization. The top page of the Wiki delivers a very high-level summary of the COSP, similar to the "Problem", "Solution" and "Strategy" sections of the COSP website. The top article will also link to other parts of the wiki, such as links to sections of founding era documents.

Assertions made on the top-level home page contain links to sub-articles that explain and support the assertions with facts and arguments.   These sub-articles themselves refer to even further sub-articles diving deeper into the detailed arguments.

In some parts of the tree, there will be four, five, six or even more levels of articles.   The number of levels depends on the amount of content that must be organized.   With short articles, sections with more content will require more levels of articles to organize the content.

The lowest level documents will contain the greatest number of references to source documents and founding era documents.

Think of the organization as an upside down tree. The leaves of the tree are the lowest level details and arguments and they are summarized in the higher-level documents as you move up the branches of the tree until you return to the top-level document, which would be the trunk of the tree at the top.

Editors

A single editor will be assigned to each major section and sub-section of the wiki. As you are working on your articles, you should be coordinating with the editor for that section regarding the content, length and purpose of each article so that the articles fit cohesively into the overall outline of the section.

The Authoring Process

Preparation: Identify Your Topic / Scope

Use the COS Wiki outline to determine where your article fits into the overall COS knowledge hierarchy. (Problems, Solutions, Strategy, other areas). Identify the summary articles which will likely link to your article and the more detailed articles to which you will likely need to link. Identify the key questions you need to answer.   If you have questions about the scope of the article, ask your COS Wiki editor.

Preparation: Do Your Research First

Gather all of the information which other COS authors have already written on the same topic. Make a list of the key points and arguments you will make. If needed, perform your own original research. Original research should not normally be needed as most of the COS arguments already have deep research behind them. Note your sources, obtaining the internal or external URL's of your sources whenever possible. You can cite experts but you should ALSO follow the research of the experts back to the founding era documents and cite the founding documents whenever possible.

Preparation: Citations

Your citations should generally only point internally to other COS Wiki pages. We will take copies of external source documents and copy all of the text as complete articles in the COS Wiki rather than relying on external internet links. If you intend to cite an external document and cannot find that document within the COS Wiki, please notify your editor so that they can have that document copied into the COS Wiki directly.   Tell your editor which section of the document you are citing so that a link can be created within the original document for your citation. The COS Wiki article that contains the original document you are citing will contain a link out to the original source on the internet.   By doing this, we make sure our links always work and if a source website should change, we only have to change the reference within one place.

Writing: Write First, Organize Second

Do not get writer's block!   Start by quickly writing down all of your key points and arguments, putting words to your research. Editing while composing is difficult.   After you have the idea or concepts written down, go back and add a catch introductory paragraph that introduces your key point, organize your main points, and add a convincing summary, each with section headings.

Do not be skittish about dropping thoughts that do not belong in your article. That is why there is a Delete key.

Writing: Energize and Motivate in the Conclusion

It will be easy for the articles to become "bland", purely stating facts and arguments.   Each article should finish with statements as to why the conclusions are important and why the reader should take action based on the conclusions.

It is hoped that the wiki software will allow us to put links to cosaction.com and conventionofstates.com on every wiki article, thus we should not specifically have to add these links to each article.

Writing: Substantive Arguments Should Contain Citations

COS Wiki articles should not make assertions. They should explain facts. Assertions are substantive arguments which do not contain citations or which are not based on quotes from original sources. If one of the core arguments does not contain a citation, further research should be done to confirm facts.

The only exception to this rule is if the article refers to other articles that provide the needed substantiation and citations, such as will occur in the articles at the top of the COSP Wiki "hierarchy of knowledge".

Writing: Break Up Long Passages

Do not ramble. Make your points quickly and succinctly and then move on to the next point.

Your audience does not like reading long unbroken blocks of text. Try to keep your paragraphs to 50 words or less. If your paragraphs are more than a few lines long, your audience will fall asleep or just skip them.

Use headings to break up long passages and group paragraphs around core ideas. A section can contain one or more paragraphs. Some of your audience will be using a laptop, some a desktop, some a tablet, and some will be trying to slog through your writings on a smart-phone screen. Long paragraphs or many paragraphs without headings will drive some readers away.

Headings also help the reader see what is coming or index to the content they are most interested in finding within each article.

Writing: Addressing the Opposition

Many of the COS Wiki articles will be focused on addressing opposition points of view. We will use winsome arguments and kind words to win over our opponents.

"Snarkiness" and personal attacks will not be allowed. Be factual and plainspoken.

Do not assign motives to the opposition. Merely contradict their statements with facts.

Do not specifically identify opponents directly in the articles. Instead use words such as "one opponent says" or similar statements and then use a citation at the end of the article to identify the opponent.

When addressing the opposition, explain their point of view as clearly as possible, preferably with quotes from opponents, ensuring to provide citations.

Then clearly and succinctly state why the opposition's point of view is not accurate and does not fit with the facts.

Avoid bias. If there is an alternative, it should be discussed and solid reasons given for rejecting it or showing it is not an attractive approach. Some portions of the wiki will be devoted to alternatives solutions to a runaway convention.

Editing: Edit for Overall Length

COS Wiki articles, on average, need to be about a screen load or less on a computer or full-size tablet.   This equates to about half of a printed page or about 250 to 400 words.   This is not a hard and fast rule, but is our targeted average.   Some articles will simply take more space to write.

Stick to a single topic in an article. Put other related ideas in another article within the hierarchy. You can also create an article which lists the key points you wish to make and links out to separate, shorter articles for each of the key points.   The "parent" article should summarize each of the "child" articles, allowing the reader to choose to either read the summary or link out to the detailed articles if they wish.

Editing: Review for Reading Levels

Shoot for an 8th grade level of reading difficulty.   Most modern word processors provide means to measure your reading levels. This document measures on a 9th-10th grade reading level (see the end of the document).

Comment [NLB1]: We will need to tell people how to get their reading level.

After you have organized your content and have a solid first draft, review what you have written and explain things that might be unknown to the average reader. Sure, you know what supercilious means, but will your audience?

Editing: Review Grammar and Formality

The wiki will use a scholarly, formal presentation style. (This does not mean it has to be boring, just formal in presentation).   The following rules apply:

1) Do not use contractions.

2) Do not use slang words, vernacular words or internet abbreviations such as LOL.

3) Use an active voice.   Use action verbs, such as "said", "did", "explained", "stated" as rather than descriptive verbs such as "is", "are" or "were".

4) Avoid long sentences. Keep your sentences to 25 words or less.

5) Do not start your sentences with conjunctions such as "So", "Thus", "Therefore", "Because", "Since", etc.   They are unnecessary.   Your reader can make connections. You do not have to do so for them.

6) Quotes which go for more than one line should be set apart as a separate paragraph,

indented and italicized, such as the following:

"When quoting a passage of more than one line from another author, start another paragraph, indent and italicize the text to distinguish it from your own work." – note the author, date, and add a full citation to the end of the article.

Editing: Voice and Tone

COS Wiki articles will state facts and use reason to reach clear, unambiguous and unavoidable conclusions.   Think of the journalistic style and the questions, "What, When, Where, Who, Why."

The articles will not identify the authors (except as footnotes).   First person personal pronouns such as "I", "me" or "my" should not be used.

The articles will make professional observations but will not "lecture" to the audience with words such as "you should know" or "it is obvious" or "anyone above a 3rd grade level should know this" or "it is common knowledge' or similar statements.

Dogma is a very bad idea. Do not be dogmatic. If you cannot justify something, except by repeating it – its dogma. See how humor sometimes works in writing?

The COS Wiki is not a "blog". It is a professionally written and scholarly presentation, yet with an easy

Appearance and Readability

Fonts

Make your body text 12-point Arial font.

Make your headings 14-point Arial Bold font.

Level 2 Headings

In general, articles should not be so long as to require multiple levels of headings. However, if needed, level two headings can be inserted and should use 12-point Arial Bold font.

Bullet Points

When making a list of three points or more, use bullet points.   Each bullet point can be introduced with bolded introductory headline with explanatory text following the bold headline.

Tables

Use tables for extended comparisons or complex lists.   Readers are attracted to tables.

Identify	Column	Data
Put Topic Here	Value	Comment
Other Topic	Value	
Summation if needed	REMEMBER SMART-PHONE	SIZE & WIDTH

Now, be safe out there! Have a good time. Win over hearts and minds with compassion and logic.

Dale-Chall index 7.33 Edit time 0:39:40 Words 1904

Dale-Chall Readability Formula for This Passage =   (0.0496 * 12.55 Avg. Number of Words Per Sentence) +   (0.1579 * 19.46 Percent of Words in Sample Not Found on Dale Familiar Word List) +   3.6365 = 7.33 Raw Score = 9-10th Grade Level