Translator
The world overheard

Street Talk guidelines

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If you are interested in pitching a *Street Talk* to Translator magazine, please read these guidelines first to give your pitch the best chance of success.

We do call outs several times over the course of the year and will do a couple of pitching sessions with one of our editors. Watch out for these on our social media and online.

If you've already been commissioned, the guidelines should guide you through the editorial process.

Who writes Street Talks?

Street Talk writers are often writers and journalists, but they don't have to be, and often the best *Street Talks* are from people who can write observationally about something in their town/city/village/region, from a vantage point which isn't that of a journalist, but simply that of a curious and engaged resident.

While *Street Talks* are published, and generally written, in English, we will occasionally accept *Street Talks* written in a language other than English, which we will then translate.

Either way, *Street Talks* are edited by our editorial team, so if your pitch and subject is a good one, and you show us you have ideas how to bring it to life on the page, we can help you to make it work as a piece of written English for our magazine through the editing process.

What a *Street Talk* is

Street Talks are short, commissioned articles with a strong sense of place, written by people who live in those places, with few exceptions, outside the Anglosphere.

They go online or at the front of the printed *Translator* magazine.

The idea is to provide a sense of the hyperlocal story which is on everyone's lips on those places: what is being discussed on street corners, what's being whispered in cafés, what's the local news that may not carry much beyond the city, and certainly not into the mainstream English language media, but which matters hugely within it…

A *Street Talk* is about something happening now, not something five years ago. You can certainly help the reader by giving a little history, but above all it's about what people are talking about, something that's changed, in the present moment.

Maybe the story is about something you've noticed changing recently in your town, maybe it is about your own direct experience of something in your neighbourhood (but reflects a broader phenomenon where you live), maybe it's a local news story that everyone is talking about, a conspiracy, a question, a trend, a character, a social phenomenon, a construction project that has got everyone talking …. Imagine you are guiding a new friend around your hometown: what would you point out to a curious, engaged newcomer?

Ultimately, we want the reader to come away from your *Street Talk* with a real sense of what is taking up people's headspace and attention where you are: what's making people mad, what's making people happy, what's new, how people are living their lives, what new words are being used, what is the unwritten subtext of meet ups, a new phenomenon… things that only a locals can tell our readers about.

What a *Street Talk* is not

A formal piece of traditional journalism. We're not looking for something reported as a news item. And we're certainly not looking for a report which could be gleaned from other news reports.

Something written from a distance about a place you haven't been to or haven't yourself experienced. However interesting the subject, if you're not there or haven't experienced it directly that won't work. If you know someone who does live locally, or has direct experience, why not suggest they might pitch the piece?

A personal memoir. While we want you or your observations to be part of the *Street Talk*, it shouldn't be solely about your own individual experience – unless you can tie it convincingly to some broader phenomenon, event, happening, trend. Let us know what you think; but also let us know what you hear others saying.

A political statement – or a commercial one. *Street Talks* will often touch on the political or be political in some form or fashion. But they have to be more than an expression of a political position, or a puff piece.

A piece of fiction. Don't make stuff up. You can be creative in the way you write about the subject, but at the end of the day, it should be writing grounded in facts and experience rather than imagination.

What should be in your pitch

The idea: what's the story and how would you write about it? Your pitch needs to give us a sense of both what it's about and how you would go about writing and potentially researching it.

What's your connection to it? Maybe it's just something you've noticed, maybe you are more closely implicated, maybe it's something you work on professionally. Let us know.

Some information about you. Where are you based? What do you do? We want to commission broadly, and as much as possible, from people who are based in the place they are writing about.

Please write a pitch rather than a full *Street Talk*. We don't want you to waste your time. We receive a lot of pitches and can only accept a small portion.

Your pitch should be no more than 150 words.

Please include a 15-word bio.

How long is a *Street Talk*?

Street Talks are generally 600-800 words. Sometimes we cut somewhat in the edit or put in an extra line or two, but this is the standard length.

If I am commissioned, what should I include in my first draft?

Any first draft you write must stick to the word count above. If it doesn't, we may have to ask you to cut it down before we can start editing.

- Draft title and standfirst

Feel free to suggest a title (no more than five or six words) and a standfirst (no more ten or twelve words).

Here's a couple of examples:

The Wings of Tibetan Hip Hop
The Tibetan rap song that took over the Chinese internet

The price of now
The human cost of spiralling inflation and currency collapse

These aren't set in stone. We often change titles and standfirsts in the editing process, but if you have an idea then we'd be delighted to receive it. We find that sometimes putting a title on your work helps to clarify what it is you wish to say.

If you don't have a title or standfirst, that's okay too – we'll suggest one in the edit.

- Footnotes

The word count is for the body of the text, but your draft should also include footnotes on language, background, sources, additional facts where relevant and interesting.

These footnotes do not need to be written out in perfect English at this point - think of this as simply a place to put your sources, any additional observations, and suggest rough pointers to the editors which we can either decide to work into the piece or put in more formal, edited margin notes as part of the editing process.

Here are some examples of final margin notes to give you an idea of the kind of thing these might include:

    - 七夕 (*Tanabata)* – also known as "Star Festival", a Japanese summer festival with origins in Chinese Qixi Festival, which celebrates the ancient Sino legend about star-crossed lovers.
    - *Makanga* – a Kenyan Sheng term for person who collects bus fare in a matatu. Sheng is an ever-evolving creole language that originated on the streets of Nairobi, blending Swahili and English, while seamlessly incorporating various indigenous languages.

- Language

Please keep key words of particular interest or which are difficult to translate in the original language – and in the original script (with a transliteration) – and tell us what they mean either in the text or in a footnote.

How much does *Translator* magazine pay?

£100, paid on acceptance of the final *Street Talk* for publication.

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If you are commissioned, you'll need to submit your *Street Talk* to an editor at *Translator* along an agreed timeline and to a rough agreed length. We'll edit your *Street Talk* and communicate with you as we do. Generally, there are one or two iterations to editing. Sometimes we have an online call to deal with any final queries.

Things to remember, and remember again, when you're writing:

- Microsoft Word: If you can, please use Microsoft Word and send files as attachments. We find that this is the best programme for editing, and that using multiple programmes leads to formatting and other errors.

- Language: we love languages and words so if there's a particular word in a local language, please use the word in the original (including the original script, and its transcription) and provide a brief explanation.

- Margin notes: Please put sources and draft margin notes as footnotes. As noted above, these don't need to be in perfect, polished English at this point. We may well ask you for clarifications or expansions down the line. Marginalia often have to be cut or rewritten in the final editorial process. But it's important to put suggestions of possible margin notes in your draft, as this will speed up the editing process.

- Check your facts. If you're making an assertion or stating a fact, please check it as far as you can yourself – and let us know where they're drawn from so we can work with you to verify and further fact-check if need be.

- Give us your observations; don't give us an argument.

- While we're interested in how things got to where they are now, we're mostly interested in the now. Start there.

- You can write in the first person (e.g. "I first noticed the….") or in the third person (e.g. "For the last six months, everyone in Dakar has been talking about….").

- Above all, give us the 'feel' of where you are writing from, and what people are saying around you. The best *Street Talks* are ones that really take the reader to where you are.

Some examples

Here are some examples of *Street Talks* we have published in the past, to give you a sense of the range and tone of pieces.

The politics of street art in Colombia's second city

Medellin, Issue #1

Our first, and one of our favourite *Street Talks*: a personal view of a local news story, helping us decode something important which a casual, non-local, observer would be unable to understand.

Here the writer started her narrative based on an observation she made of graffiti appearing in her native city. Then she went on to explain what it meant – historically and politically – and what people are talking about now, and what reflections she herself has on it as a result.

https://translatormag.co/medellin-the-politics-of-street-art-in-colombias-second-city/

Surveillance, panic and chaos

Karachi, Issue #3

A classic *Street Talk* from our perspective: going into the kind of local news that can be maddening for people living through it, but which generally wouldn't get reported outside. The story is about a new traffic management system in Pakistan's biggest city. But we've got a hip hop beat, an AI hologram, and the buzz and energy of the city itself to describe how this is being experienced, what unrest (even panic) it is causing. The *Street Talk* is full of events – anecdotes, stories overheard and reported – which add up to a collective portrait.

https://translatormag.co/karachi-surveillance-panic-and-chaos-the-price-the-people-pay-for-safer-streets/

Many tongues, one fare

Bangalore, Issue #4

In this piece, the writer took us inside the multi-lingual taxi cabs of Bangalore, as a soft way of writing about city's language politics: who speaks what to whom and why. While this *Street Talk* didn't have a news hook of any sort, nor a first-person narrator, its immediacy came from the energy of the writing, and the universality of its subject matter: describing a set of experiences – riding in a cab – that many people in Bangalore might have in the course of any given day. In other words, it painted a multi-faceted portrait, in a way that felt alive and, given the importance of language politics in India, relevant.

It also has some great margin notes referring to local foods, something which we love at *Translator*: a sense of how a place looks, smells and feels.

https://translatormag.co/many-tongues-one-fare/

How genocide has transformed the daily lexicon

Gaza, Issue #4

This *Street Talk* does something really powerful. It finds a way to write about violence and destruction through how that is reflected in something else: changes in language. It brings us straight into daily lives, and the words through which they are lived. It has a clear sense of place and time, engaging with events that are horribly familiar from the daily news, but approaching it from a fresh and deeply humanising perspective.

https://translatormag.co/gaza-how-genocide-has-transformed-the-daily-lexicon/

The daily chant of political resistance

Nairobi, Issue #4

Here, the author literally talks about the word on the street, in buses, on the radio. In this case, it's a political slogan, which the author explains for us and physically situates it. But "wantam" isn't the only slogan which the article explores. The reader gets a real sense of the discussions taking place in Nairobi, the pattern of lives and the way they intersect. It's not in the first person, but it is based on observations which place the reader in the same place as the writer, experiencing imaginatively what they are experiencing directly.

https://translatormag.co/the-daily-chant-of-political-resistance/