

## Writing for PopAnth

Congratulations! You're going to write an article for PopAnth: Hot Buttered Humanity. We're pleased to have you on board. We're here not just to publish your work, but also to help you to write it (if you want). Here are some tips to get you started. Feel free to ask us if you have any questions.

### ***Guidelines for popular web writing***

**Start with what you know.** You don't need to have done a major fieldwork project, but what have you observed and who have you listened to? Present lively stories in a context, framing them with the insights of other anthropologists, and tying your story into contemporary issues.

**Let life unfold.** Give a sense of a place, the feel of interacting with people, and the social opportunities or challenges of that place and time.

**Have a core idea.** You probably want a core idea and a few examples or points that support it, or your piece won't feel like it's going anywhere.

**Engage the reader.** Because you're writing for a popular audience, *your primary goal here is not to prove an analytical point—it's to use your anthropological insights to engage people.*

**Say it aloud:** how would you describe childhood in the Gambia to a friend? Try telling the story to your mother's friend, then write that down. You'll find you've stripped away most of the academic words but can still convey the heart of the insights from your fieldwork or comparative reading.

**Develop your voice:** you already have a voice: a perspective, a way of speaking about the world. . . .so do the people you've studied. We don't want the voice you use to impress editors or grant committees. We want the voice you use when telling friends how anthropology helped you frame something you care about. You've got that voice, and those you study have voices, too... bring them into your writing.

**Add images or dialogue:** Bring in images that will flesh out your story, or share interactions that might grab the reader's attention and drive home why your work is relevant.

**Cut it out.** Writing is strengthened by what you leave out, so pick up a book on writing if you're really hoping to engage a popular audience (try *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* by Steven Pinker). The difference between knotty paragraphs and ones that move the reader along is often the difference between a shareable essay and one that stalls out. Our editors can help with this, moving this:

The expert anthropologist, who had years of experience conducting observations, walked into a bar in a distant corner of the Himalayas and instantly noticed the dynamics among the locals.

To this:

In a distant corner of the Himalayas, an anthropologist strolled into a bar. She instantly noticed that something was going on among the locals.

The lesson: Frame the action, an exotic location, a familiar space. Then draw the reader in. The sentences can be short. Keep the syntax simple. Job No. 1 is to capture the reader's attention and to keep the reader reading.

For those of us who come from academic backgrounds, here's a useful tip: Write your article, then **move or delete the first paragraph**. Normally the first paragraph the one that sounds the most academic. The second paragraph is often where the story begins—and in popular writing, that's a great place to start!

**Write for us... and others!** We're here to help you develop your popular writing, so please submit something to us and we'll work with you. If working with us is a good experience, you might also submit ideas to related venues such as [Sociological Images](#), [Matador Network](#), or [Sapiens](#). Taking online or community writing courses is another way to develop your anthropological writing and connect readers with your wonderful ideas!

## Story Forms

All writing has a structure! if you'd like to write for general readers, check out these "types" of popular articles, so that you have a framework in mind when developing your story or ideas:

**Personal experience:** share your experience or challenges in the field, or in engaging anthropological ideas in a broader community:

Example 1: [Performing gender as a promotional model](#), by Sara Snitselaar

Example 2: [Unmaking spirits? A case of witchcraft in Cuba](#), by Diana Espirito Santo

**Profile:** share the details of someone's life (with their permission) and tie it in to broader social ideas or experiences.

Example 1: [When tourists want to kill](#), by David Picard

Example 2: [U900: A cute Japanese 'character' band with real people inside](#), by Debra Occhi

**Narrative essay:** reflect on a cultural phenomenon, potentially drawing together interviews, observations, your own experience, or comparative reading on cultures.

Example 1: [Inside connections: Building networks and communities behind bars in Bolivia](#), by David Thompson

Example 2: [The politics of migrant material culture: How archaeologists find the stories in our refuse](#), by Corey McQuinn

**Interview:** ask engaging questions and record the answers, which you present in a transcript edited down to 1000-1500 words for impact and easy reading. This is an easy way to start writing for popular audiences.

Example 1: [Anonymous and trolling in context: An interview with Gabriella Coleman](#), by Crystal Abidin

Example 2: [Playing the hero: How games reflect life - An interview with Nick Mizer](#) by Celia Emmelhainz

**Review:** Draw them in with a hook and keep it short and snappy. Out of a half million new books or hundred thousand new films released yearly, why immerse yourself in this one? What insights does it have that a broader audience needs, and how does that connect to anthropological ideas?

Example 1: [Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream](#), reviewed by Lara McKenzie

Example 2: [Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy](#), reviewed by Maka Suarez

**Photographs:** A series of 5-10 photographs you've taken in a community or cultural context can also make for a compelling essay, especially when combined with thoughtful captions.

Example 1: [Memories in the forest: WWII and archaeology](#), by Dawid Kobialka,

Example 2: [Why can't cyclists read maps? Place-making on two wheels in Brisbane](#), Australia, by Lachlan Summers

**Infographics, Videos, and more:** We're open to other formats that engage the audience, so if you've produced a short ethnographic film, infographic, etc that you're especially proud of, we're happy to share!

... **Next steps? Try it out!** Choose a popular writing form that's a good fit for what you hope to say, and then study the tone, structure, and style of these or other examples. As you pay attention to structure, you'll improve the flow of your own piece, and there's nothing wrong with imitating structures while you're learning. Absorbing the style of the best authors can, over time, help you develop an engaging writing style of your own!

## **More writing from PopAnth**

### Archaeology

- [Women as leaders in early Christianity: Fairy tales?](#) by Rosemary Joyce,
- [The boulevard of death: Ghost bikes and spontaneous shrines in New York City](#), by Paul Mullins

### Contemporary culture

- [When the city is your urinal](#), by Jen Barr
- [Cultural differences, global trends: In search of bien-être in today's Japan](#), by John McCreery

### Language and communication

- [Gender rolls: Highlighting normative gender rules through food-centered media](#), by Molly Bearman
- [In whose interest? Language shapes how we think about money](#), by Mauro Rodrigues

### The human body

- [Are we apes? No, we are humans](#), by Jonathan Marks
- [Behaviour evolves, but evolution is a lot more than 'survival of the fittest'](#), by Agustín Fuentes