Style guide for Firstlinks articles

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We publish fresh ideas, great writing, quality journalism, well-researched opinions and accurate arguments. You are welcome to comment on existing articles or contribute an original piece.

Firstlinks accepts both solicited and unsolicited articles on a wide range of subjects relating to investing and superannuation. However, you should be a market expert in your field, not someone who simply wants to promote their own blog and access our readership. Contributions should not be written in highly technical language which the majority of non-professional investors would struggle to understand. Articles must be independent and not promoting or advertising a specific product. However, they may take a view on a type of structure, security or product which may have specific or general application, and examples are acceptable if we do not consider the context overly promotional.

Articles must be original content not widely published previously. We accept the content may already have appeared on the author's own website and distributed to their own clients, but not in other newsletters.

We are not trying to dumb down our content to the lowest common denominator, but articles must be interesting, relevant and understandable for readers who are not market professionals but are engaged in managing their investments.

When writing an article for Firstlinks, please follow these guidelines to make the editing and review process as seamless as possible. Articles can be emailed to firstlinks@morningstar.com.

A quick run-down

A simply formatted Word document works best – no headers, footers or footnotes. Headline in bold as the first line, author's name as the second line, followed by the body text. At the end, the author's short bio with a link to a company homepage or personal website. Following that, a summary of the article (around 30 words) is welcome, which will appear as the excerpt on the website.

The ideal length for articles is around 1000-1200 words.

For more detail, read on…

Headline and sub-headings in sentence case and bold

Headlines work better for the website if they fit on one line. Typically, this would mean using around 40-45 characters. Use of sub-headings is encouraged to separate the different ideas presented and break up the text for readers. Make the sub-headings trigger interest.

Grammatical rules for consistency across the website

There are a few rules adopted by Firstlinks to ensure that there is consistency across the website as much as possible. These include:

- Remove dashes unless they work well in the context.
- Take care not to slip between first, second and third person. It can also become confusing working out who 'you' is meant to be.
- Watch for unnecessary words, such as 'With this knowledge in hand', which is filler.
- For numbers: one, two, three, four, … 10, 11, 12 etc.
- For percentages, use 25% instead of 25 per cent.
- When mentioning millions and billions, write it in full: $15 million, not $15M or $15 Bn.
- Use hyphen when words such as 'long-term' and 'short-term' are used as adjectives, no hyphen otherwise (the long-term outlook is grim, or, we're in this for the long term).

Quotation marks

Use single quotes for emphasis and words like 'roboadvice' but double quotes when exactly quoting someone.

"Longer quotations should be in a separate paragraph and in italics."

Footnotes

Footnotes are difficult to incorporate when posting to the website. Instead, add a hyperlink to the relevant text for the reader to access if they want to.

Tables, charts, graphs and pictures

Detailed charts or graphs retain better clarity when saved in .png format, otherwise .jpg or a chart from Excel is fine. Try to avoid images that appear blurry or contain text that is too small or difficult to read.

A table is better left as a table (rather than converted into a picture) so that it can be formatted to suit the look of the website. If the table has been copied from a report, then .jpg or .png format is fine.

Ensure all data sources are properly attributed. Where pictures or photographs are used, they should be free of copyright restrictions, properly purchased, or used with permission.

Concluding

The author's bio information is included at the end of the article, in italics, and should be no more than three lines of text. A link to the author's company's home page is usually included. If the article contains anything relating to investment advice, a suitable and succinct disclaimer should be included.

Leisa Bell is Assistant Editor of Firstlinks. The material in this article is general information only and does not consider any individual's investment objectives.