

nighthawks™

# Contributor Guide

Content guidelines for the
Nighthawks Music review website

Version 1.3

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# Submitting Written Articles & Curated Playlists

## Below is a brief overview of how Nighthawks Music prefer to receive written article submissions and playlists.

### Overview

Nighthawks is an editorial music publication and curated playlist resource. It started as a run of Friday posts and turned into something bigger: a place about connection, and about what a song does to a person that a whole conversation sometimes can't.

We publish articles for deep dives and music memories, and playlists for moods and occasions. This guide covers the articles. It exists so that everything on the site sounds like it came from the same place, without sounding like it came from the same person.

### The Four Rules

Everything else in this guide hangs off these.
They're the same four rules on our About page, so if a reader has been there, nothing here should surprise them.

**1. Only write about good shit.**

We're not in this to dump on creative peeps. Choose subjects you rate.
A mixed bag is fine, write the mixed bag honestly, but don't pick a record just to take it apart.

**2. Write like you're talking with your best mate.**

Not your editor. Not your lecturer. Your mate.
The one who'll happily sit through the long version of the story because you're both into it.

**3. Be honest, but don't be a douche bag.**

Say what you actually think.
Criticise the work, never the person who made it.

**4. Keep perspective... it's only a website about music.**

Big feelings, small ego.
A record can change your life and still not need to be called the most important thing ever made.

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## The Voice

Nighthawks sounds like someone who genuinely loves music, knows a fair bit about it, and doesn't need to prove it. Curious, warm, observant, a little wry. Honest, without swinging a bat.

First person is welcome. So is a mix of short sentences and long, winding ones. An aside in [square brackets] or a well-placed ellipsis is part of how we talk, but treat them like salt: a pinch, not a handful.

You can be well read without sounding like a footnote. If a sentence would fit in a press release, rewrite it.

| Instead of... | Maybe lean more toward... |
|---|---|
| "This is an incredibly important album that changed music forever." | Say what it did / Who it influenced / What sounded different afterwards. Let the reader decide it's important. |
| "A sonic tour de force of genre-defying brilliance." | Tell us what you actually heard. The moment the drums drop out and the whole song leans forward. |
| "The band have really matured on this record." | Matured how? Maybe point to a song and give context. |
| "As an avid music lover..." | Cut it. Start with the music, or the moment it found you. |

## Make it Personal, then Bring it Back to the Music

Our best pieces start with a person: where you were, who you were with, the state you were in when the record found you. That's the connection the whole site is built on. Our Alt-J review opens with kismet and gets to a muddy Splendour in the Grass in 2014 before it gets to a single song, and it works because the story is about the music.

Your story is the way in. The music is the room you're in.
Two quick tests:

- Take yourself out. Is there still something worth reading about the music? If not, add more music.
- Take the music out. Is there still a story? If so, you've written a memoir. Lovely, but wrong website.

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## What we Publish

### Articles

Articles on the site sit in six categories.
Pick the one that fits, or tell us what you think it is and we'll sort it out together.

| Category | What it is | Rough Word Count |
|---|---|---|
| **Feature** | Deep dives, movements, scenes, an angle on music that hasn't been done to death | 1,000 to 2,000 |
| **Artist** | Who they are, why they matter, where to start listening | 600+ |
| **Album** | A record from start to finish, or just the part that matters | 600+ |
| **Song** | One track and why it lands and a chance to dive deep into the lyrics | 400+ |
| **Lists** | Ranked or unranked, always with a reason behind every pick | 400+ |
| **News** | Something happened that Nighthawks readers will care about | 400+ |

Lengths are guides, not quotas.
Don't pad. If you've said it in 600 words, stop at 600. If the subject needs 2,000, take 2,000.

### Playlists

Playlists on the site also sit in six categories.
If you feel as though you'd like to create a playlist to share on the site, get in touch and to open a discussion for sure.

| Category | What it is | Open to Contributions |
|---|---|---|
| **MX Tapes** | Simple, Mixed tapes based on a theme, mood, genre etc. | Yes |
| **Flavourites** | A favourites playlist specifically for a single artist | Yes |
| **Timestamp** | The best songs of every year from 1950 to today | No |
| **Countdown** | The top 50 [insert idea here]. The 100 most awesome [insert idea here] | Yes |
| **Next** | New music. | No |
| **Momento** | Occasion specific playlists. Like a quirky Xmas or a Sunday BBQ playlist | Yes |

We treat playlists like artworks. The songs are the colours that some of us paint with. The art of the playlist is something we both cherish and acknowledge in others. Not all playlists are compatible with the Nighthawks approach, and we're particular about what we offer up under our name, but we are always happy to chat about what is important to you and how we can help bring that to a larger audience.

Currently, we don't have the scope to pay our contributors for their articles or playlist submissions. We hope at some stage this will not be the case, so we want to be super clear about how much we are in appreciation of any content is supplied for us to use, whether we actually use it or not.

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## The Shape of a Piece

There's no formula really, and a five-part template will make everyone sound the same.
In our experience, most good pieces do four things, in roughly this order:

**A WAY IN**
A moment, a memory, a question, a sound. (Try to skip a lot of the throat-clearing).

**WHERE IT SITS**
Just enough context for the reader to place it: the artist's story, what came before, what was going on around it.
Be mindful not to turn it into a biography.

**WHAT YOU HEAR**
The heart of it. Songwriting, voice, rhythm, production, atmosphere, lyrics, how it changes over the length of a record.

**WHY IT MATTERS**
To you, and to someone who has never heard it. Then leave them with a reason to press play.

Most pieces don't need any "Introduction" and "Conclusion", the nature of online articles centres around a more concise approach.

We're not saying we're not interested in anything you have to scroll to read, but we maintain an approach from all our writers that focuses on the specific human experience...**your** human experience with the music. In this way, we are able to publish multiple articles about the same artist/album etc as they will be entirely unique to the writer themselves.

Stats and numbers can always play a part in any article. We're just looking for why that matters to you as opposed to simply reeling off data.

## Opinions, Not Scores

Have a point of view. A review that sits on the fence is a press release with better manners. But there are no stars, no numbers and no grades on Nighthawks. The verdict lives in the writing. By the end, the reader should know how you feel without needing a score to tell them.

When you say something works, or doesn't, show your working:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Observation** | The production is unusually sparse. |
| **Evidence** | The arrangements keep leaving big gaps around the vocal and the rhythm section. |
| **Interpretation** | That space creates an intimacy the artist's earlier, denser records never had. |

That beats "the production is great" every time.

If a record lets you down, you've got options. Say what you hoped for and where it went a different way. Or write about a different record.
Our Alt-J piece calls the later albums "amazing and quietly disappointing" and then explains why. That's the register: honest, specific, still fond.

Keep it to the work. Leave an artist's looks, intelligence, personal life and mental health out of it, unless it's directly relevant, properly sourced and there's a good reason to raise it. Although you may or may not like a certain piece of music, every artist creates with love, and there is someone, somewhere who is moved by it. We're here to start a conversation, not finish it.

**Rule of Thumb** If the artist you are writing about was to read the article you are writing, would they leave feeling positive?

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## Names, Titles and House Style

**AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH**
Organise, recognise, colour, favourite, centre, catalogue, travelling.
Quotes, official titles and proper names keep their original spelling.

**SONG, ALBUM AND EP TITLES**
These go in single quotation marks: 'Breezeblocks', 'An Awesome Wave'.
Films, books and publications go in italics.
Artist names stay plain.

**NAMES**
Use the artist's own styling (Alt-J, not Alt J).
Give the full name on first mention, then use the shorter form the way a person would.

**NO LONG DASHES.**
No em dashes and no en dashes, anywhere. Use commas, full stops, colons, ellipses, asterisks or hyphens. For ranges, write "1,000 to 2,000".
If a draft is full of long dashes, we'll assume a chatbot wrote it.

**BE CONSISTENT**
Whatever you pick, pick it all the way through.

## Facts, Quotes & Sources

Readers often know the subject better than you do. Check everything before it reaches us: artist names, titles, release dates, personnel, producers, songwriters, chart positions, awards and anything you're calling history. If a fact is easy to check, check it. Don't lean on memory.

Go to the original where you can. If an artist said something in an interview, find the interview, not the site quoting the site. Quotes must be accurate, attributed and never bent to sound better. Never pass off someone else's words as yours.

We aren't gonna be super anal about it, but if any backlash comes our way, we have to back our writers. Much easier to do if the information is correct. Also why bringing your experience to the article matters. Your facts. Your lived moment with the music. More engaging, less argumentative.

## Images

Every article opens with a big landscape header image, so images matter. We craft our publications in-house, so we tend to choose images that suit the article. We are open to receiving images alongside your submissions, but please don't grab something from Google Images and assume it's fair game.

**GOOD SOURCES**
Photographer-supplied images, artist or management press images, label press kits, properly licensed images, public domain material, and Creative Commons where the licence allows publication. For every image, send the creator, source and licence or rights if you're able. Send the biggest version you've got, and don't crop or edit it in any way. If you can't show where an image came from, we have to source the image credit ourselves.

In Australia, we have the Fair Dealing framework. This means our use of copyrighted material is only legal if it falls into a specific category and is deemed "fair". To safely use an image under Fair Dealing, a newsroom should be able to answer "Yes" to all three of these questions:

1. Is the image itself intrinsically tied to the news event being reported, or are we actively reviewing/critiquing the image?
2. Are we clearly attributing the photographer and the title of the work where possible?
3. Is our use of this image avoiding commercial harm to the photographer's right to sell or license their work?

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## Music, Links & Tags

Tell us which tracks or albums the piece is about so we can embed or link them.
Every article also carries an Artists in this piece tag, so give us the artist names exactly as they should appear.

**LINKS SHOULD HELP THE READER GO DEEPER**
The artist's official site, the label, a great interview, another Nighthawks article or playlist that genuinely connects. Not a link for every noun.

## Headline, Subtitle & Excerpt

Every article on the site has the same front of house. We suggest write for people first. Name the artist and the title naturally in the headline, subtitle and opening lines, and leave it at that. Don't keyword-stuff. We'll handle the rest, and we may tweak your headline, subtitle and excerpt before publishing. We'll ask you for:

H **HEADLINE**
Clear, specific and honest about what's inside. Often the name of the thing itself. If you get playful, clarity still wins. No clickbait.

S **SUBTITLE**
One short line saying what this is.

E **EXCERPT**
One or two sentences that make someone want to read on. Keep it under about 160 characters, because it also doubles as the search description.




## Original Work, & AI

Everything you send must be your own. Don't copy reviews, bios, press releases or interviews without quoting and crediting them. Don't rewrite another publication's review. Don't borrow another critic's argument because it's convenient. Listen, read widely, then work out what you actually think.

AI tools are fine for research nudges and proofreading. They are not fine for writing the piece. The whole point here is one human telling another what a piece of music did to them, and you are responsible for the voice, the facts and the originality of whatever you send.

# Written Articles & Curated Playlists Guidelines

## Sending It In

**CONTRIBUTOR SUBMISSION TEMPLATE.**
Depending on the stage of submission, fill in the Contributor Submission Template based on the below scenario.

**PITCHING**
Complete parts 1 to 3 and we'll come back to you.

**FINISHED PIECE**
If you're sending in a completed/finished piece, fill in the lot.

**DELIVERY**
We prefer the articles to be delivered as either:

- Word file (.docx)
- Google Doc
- PDF

Please send to mykel@nighthawks.music.

- Name the file clearly: Artist - Title - Nighthawks - Your Name.docx. Not "finalFINAL2".
- Expect some edits for tone, length and fit. We're not precious, and we hope you won't be either.
- Include a bio of 50 to 80 words. Your byline links to a contributor profile on the site, so tell readers who you are and why you care about music. There is also a list of 10 questions all our contributors get asked that we'd appreciate you answering in a few words.

## Before You Send

**THE PIECE**
- Is it actually about the music?
- Would I say this to a mate?
- Do I rate the thing I'm writing about?
- Is there a point of view, with no score attached?
- Is it the right length, with no padding?

**STYLE**
- Australian English
- Song and album titles in single quotes
- No long dashes anywhere
- Opening gets to the point
- Ending leaves something behind

**FACTS**
- Names, titles and dates checked
- Credits and personnel checked
- Quotes verified and attributed
- Historical claims checked

**EXTRAS**
- Headline, subtitle and excerpt supplied
- Images sourced, with creator, source and licence
- Tracks, artist names and links supplied
- Bio supplied

We're not after articles that tick a checklist. We're after writers who care about music enough to have something to say about it.
Something that makes a reader listen again, look up an artist they'd never heard of, dig out an old record, or simply think about a song differently.

We're not precious about the site, we just like talking about music.
Keep listening and keep connected.

nighthawks


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