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What You Absolutely Need to Know

Cast in Concrete

A seasoned veteran of the stage, when asked his professional secret, once gave this classic piece of advice to a young actor: “Remember your lines and don’t trip over the furniture.” Metaphorically, that admonition applies equally well to the task of the editor. The lines you have to remember are those appropriate to your editorial role, as both you and the group you serve define it. (Chapter 9 is devoted to the topic of editorial role.) The pieces of furniture you don’t want to trip over are the ground rules. As long as you abide by those rules, what you do with your newsletter is *up to you*. Here they are:

- The law of the land
- The Constitution of Mensa, the American Mensa bylaws, and your local group bylaws (or SIG bylaws, if any)
- The actions of the American Mensa Committee (AMC)

The first means that you must avoid violation of the laws of copyright and libel and you must observe the postal regulations that apply to your method of mailing. These matters are covered in Chapters 3 and 5.

The second means that you must comply with the laws that govern Mensa, including those adopted by the particular segment of Mensa served by your publication. Copies of the international Constitution of Mensa and the American Mensa bylaws are available from the national office. Your local group can furnish a copy of its bylaws; most Special Interest Groups (SIGs) do not at present have bylaws. You should keep copies of all these documents. Read them.

The third means that you must conform to such actions as may be taken by AMC that directly or implicitly affect the publication you edit. Pertinent AMC actions in effect are listed in Chapter 10. In this category there are two items that warrant elaboration here.

The Mensa Logo*

As chairman of the Committee on Use of Mensa Name and Logo, Susan Wantland provides the following information:

"Mensa's name and logo are registered and thus are subject to certain restrictions on their use. There is an AMC Committee on Use of the Mensa Name and Logo that rules on cases of use of either name or logo in local group fund-raising projects and by individual members. Permission is routinely given when name and logo are used for appropriate purposes and in reasonable designs. An individual member may use the logo on personal items, such as stationery or business cards, if clearly identified as a 'Mensa Member.' Camera-ready logo sheets of either the 'official' or the 'Mensa Member' type are available from the national office.

"As a Mensa editor, you are certainly entitled to use Mensa's name and logo in the course of your work and in your publication. This is, after all, the usage for which such registered marks are designed. There is a long-standing tradition, based on the wishes of the logo's designer, that the emblem not be broken or altered in any way and that it not be used to replace the letter 'M' in a word."

Calendar of Events**

For many years, local groups were required to publish calendars of events in order to qualify for financial assistance from National. In 1982 a new Local Group Funding Support Program was inaugurated; under that program, most of the provisions affecting local group newsletters have been dropped (see Chapters 7 and 10 for AMC requirements). Publication of a calendar of events continues as a custom; in practical terms, it is the most efficient way of notifying members of the group's meetings and other activities. The value of timeliness in publishing a calendar and its service function in facilitating contact among members, while not a matter of rules, have a direct bearing on the worth of the newsletter to its readers and are discussed elsewhere in this manual.

* This was Mensa logo policy in 1982. Editors should obtain current information and guidance on this topic from the appropriate sources.

** Requirements have changed. See note in Chapter 3.

Why Are We Doing This?

Part of the necessary definition of a task is awareness of the reason or reasons for performing the task.

At its most simplistic, the reason for publishing a newsletter is the same as the reason for doing anything else in Mensa: to enhance the value of Mensa for its members. In addition to stating the three aims of Mensa, the Constitution defines the nature of Mensa as providing “a forum for intellectual exchange among members,” one of the specified means being “journals.” By fulfilling this self-definition, Mensa gives return for the membership dollar.

Mensa is people and not much else. Dues essentially purchase access to those people. Mensa’s many publications constitute the primary avenue of access: they furnish information that permits members to meet in person, they provide a channel for remote communication among members, and they serve as tools in administering the business that keeps the organization functioning at all its levels.

It has been the practice in recent years to ensure that every member of American Mensa can receive a local group publication—that of either the group to which he is assigned by ZIP code or the group with which he has chosen preferential affiliation. For many members, the local group *is* Mensa, and the identity of the local group centers in its newsletter. For many others, SIG participation is a prime attraction, and most SIGs carry out their activities through the medium of a newsletter.

Whichever sort of Mensa publication you edit, therefore, your main function is to further the goals for which it exists. How to perform that function is the substance of this manual, which offers both facts for your guidance and opinions for your consideration.

Mensa’s reasons for sponsoring its many publications do not answer the question you will ask yourself at times: “Why am I doing this?” You must have your own reasons for devoting personal time, talent, energy, and care to the task of producing a publication for Mensa. Whatever they may be—and there are many valid ones, from the satisfactions of giving service to the gratification of the ego (not a bad thing when it stimulates worthy results)—they boil down to this: it pays you more than it costs you. The importance of this equation is only what it means to you; what that is, you owe it to yourself to know.

What Is Publishing?

The editor’s function can be thought of in its most basic form as getting it in and getting it out: accepting material for print, preparing it, and publishing it.

We use the terms “publication” and “publishing” rather loosely to signify the total process, from the act of receiving or generating copy through the printing stages to the distribution step. Technically, however, publication means actually releasing a work to the public (your public). A more specific discussion of the meaning and implications of publication appears in the section on copyright in Chapter 3.

The organization or individual that assumes responsibility for publication, including financial responsibility, is the publisher. American Mensa Limited, through the office of the AMC Publications Officer*, is the publisher of national periodicals such as the *Bulletin*, the *Register*, *InterLoc*, and the *Editor’s Handbook*. The local group is the publisher of the local group newsletter, whether or not the group’s structure provides for a publications officer or designated publisher. The Special Interest Group is

* Now Communications Officer.

the publisher of a SIG newsletter. The relationship is essentially one of business, in which context the publisher is the editor's "boss." Local group bylaws usually specify to whom the editor is answerable in practice: the local secretary or the executive committee, for example, or the membership at large.