

Dear potential story sources:

You don't know me. My name doesn't appear in the staff box on page 2 or as a byline under a headline. But 60 reporters, whose names you may have read, call me on the telephone, write me notes or scream at me daily. These budding young journalists are striving for a good grade in their Reporting and Editing II class (JOUR 303), and most are hoping to get a few stories published in *The Battalion*.

Some of you university, research, campus activities and community leaders have been really cooperative with these reporters when they approached you for stories.

But others — unfortunately, many others — have slammed the door on these sometimes “green” reporters. I know you are busy and have several commitments, but just a few minutes of your time could make a lifetime of difference for some of these students.

I heard “My source is out of town” literally a hundred times this semester. Granted, some of those are excuses, but many are legitimate. It would probably be to both the reporter's and your advantage if you call him or her immediately upon your return or, better yet, let them know you're leaving town if the reporter notifies you before you leave.

For those of you who still think you're too busy to better journalism at A&M or to help a student learn, I have a saying for you: “Get a life!”

Sincerely,

**Curtis L. Culberson, Assistant City Editor**

Dear Readers:

You know, as city editor of *The Battalion*, I handle most of the phone calls concerning story ideas, complaints and anything else no one else at the paper wants to deal with.

Yep, when I answer the phone, I could have the biggest news story of the decade on the other end of the line. I emphasize *could* have. While I get lots of legitimate news tips, like bonfire violence, plane crashes and bank failures, most of the calls I get are for more mediocre events, such as the presentation of the Brazos Valley “Best Photograph of a UFO From Another Solar System Award” and the ever popular “Cockroach Pet Show.”

OK, I know that these things are seen as having gargantuan importance to the goofball . . . uh . . . I mean caller, but I have to trust my feeble news sense to decide what deserves coverage in the pages of the paper. And that sense tells me that stories on, say, the development of a superconducting superserum for the prevention of AIDS and presidential incompetence is more important than the UFO photograph award or the cockroach pet show. So that's why so many messages on a caller's so-called “good story” end up in the circular file, i.e., the trash can.

Oftentimes though, folks don't have nifty story ideas. Instead, they have complaints. While I listen to complaints with an open mind and serious attitude, I find I usually let the complainer unwind himself like an old-fashioned alarm clock and occasionally utter one or two “uh huh”s and “I understand”s. This usually calms the caller down and allows everyone to forget the whole ugly confrontation.

You see, these irate people just don't understand subtle differences between a quote and a paraphrase. A quote, by the way, has these marks around it — “ ” — and the contents therein say exactly what a source of a story said. A paraphrase, on the other hand, doesn't have quotes around it. It explains to readers what the source said, but it doesn't say it in his words. A paraphrase keeps the *context* of the source, not the *actual words*.

Please, gentle readers, remember that this letter is lighthearted and not meant to discourage anyone from calling with ideas or complaints. After all, it is part of my job. But don't be surprised if, while on the phone with *The Battalion* city editor, you hear the faint sound of crumpling paper — and muffled laughter — in the background.

Not sincerely at all.

**Rodney Rather, lame duck City Editor**

Dear Readers:

As reigning “queen of stress” on the *Batt* staff, I don't deal with last-minute requests too well. But my job as photo editor carries the stigma of UNENDING requests for photos that should have been taken yesterday.

Yes, it would be nice if I could snap my fingers and a photographer would appear to immediately cater to my every whim. But that is sadly untrue. My photographers have a mysterious talent for disappearing each time I need them desperately. If Air Force One crashed at Easterwood Airport, two of my photographers would be in class, one would be in the kitchen of a local restaurant and the last would be in his dorm room asleep (with the phone unplugged).

So to those of you who think it would be REALLY neat to have a picture of your club president's presentation on his trip to a convention in Montana — call at least 24 hours in advance. And let ME decide if the subject is really worthy of a photo — don't try to convince me that the paper needs that picture. I've had such hot photo tips as

- some student “just got this big scholarship, and I think it would be so neat to have him standing in front of the Sul Ross statue” (I've heard THAT one at least five times this semester).

- “I saw the *cutest* squirrel running up a tree by the Academic Building. It was the fourth tree to the left of the sidewalk by . . .”

You get the picture.

And if you come in with a photo you'd like to submit, DON'T say “I've got a photo I want printed in *The Battalion*.” I'm paid to decide what to print in the paper.

I DO appreciate the numerous photo tips (and even the complaints) I received this semester. If you called and I sounded pretty peeved, it's probably because I was in the middle of one of my daily stress fits (prompted by my discovery that I am also a *student* and not just a newsroom slave). And for that, I apologize.

Next week, you can totally disregard the above comments and make any last-minute photo requests for ANYTHING you please — because my stint as photo editor is officially finished Friday. Don't ask for me, though — ask for Sam Myers. If he's not asleep in his dorm room with the phone unplugged. Or on a highway somewhere taking a half-dead cat to the pet emergency room. Or on top of one of the buildings on campus.

Stressfully,

**Tracy Staton, Photo Editor**

Dear Readers:

“Howdy, Ags” — Texas A&M football coach and athletic director Jackie Sherrill.

Now that I've broken the ice with a few words from our leader, let me introduce myself. I'm the friendly neighborhood sports editor here. I mainly work at night putting the sports section together, so I miss most of the irate callers my other staff buddies have been complaining about. But don't get me wrong, I still get a few. I get a lot of calls that begin with, “Excuse me, but I've been looking for some information about an article you wrote in 1972 concerning the scientific uses of gerbil pelts.” You know, stuff like that.

One of my complaints is that we on the sports desk don't get enough feedback from readers. I hear a few things like, “Why don't you run the Top 20 rankings or the NFL standings?” but that's about it. I'm always open to suggestions and am willing to listen to anything.

One of my sports writers told me his friends were wondering if they could write guest columns and I replied, “Sure they can.” The next day we ran a little blurb providing information for people who wanted to submit columns and we sat back and waited for the submissions to pour in. And we waited . . . and waited . . . and, well, you get the picture. To this day we have received one, ONE letter from a prospective guest columnist. Frankly, our feelings are hurt. Come on, Ags — all you have to do is bring your column to Room 216 in the Reed McDonald Building to one of our friendly sports guys, provide basic info. like name, classification and phone number, and you're in. Terribly simple.

Another complaint I have is directed toward the people who participate in many of the various sports clubs on campus. We would love to cover all, and I mean *all* sports groups on campus, but we simply don't have the time or the sheer staff numbers to accomplish that goal. I'd be happy to print results of events off campus if someone would call them in to us, but I mean all results and not just state or national championships. News is news, after all. We do make every effort to run profiles or features on some of the extramural sports. Heck, our semi-annual archery feature has become somewhat of a fixture around here. Best of luck to the guys in their never-ending quest for the national championship.

But that's about it for complaints. Now the mushy part. I get a big kick out of working here on the sports desk, and a big thrill comes from working with talented young people like Anthony “Nuke the 12th Man Kick-off Team” Wilson, Tammy “You tell me I write good stories because I'm a girl” Hedgpeth, Doug “the Dean of Southwest Conference Sports Writers” Hall, and Hal “Wordiness: The Big Lie” Hammons. A special note of commendation needs to be given to Doug Hall, who has been a sports guru at *The Batt* since I was in the seventh grade. No, just kidding folks, he's only been around a year longer than I have. Congratulations, Doug, for a job well done after many semesters of valuable service. Everyone is invited to a special ceremony sometime this spring when Doug's computer terminal will be retired.

It's been a rewarding semester guys, and I'll look forward to next semester's staff, which should be even more efficient with the arrival of Curtis “The Big Man” Culberson, a city desk defector who will join the sports department in the spring.

Thanks everyone, for making my first try at top dog a truly unique experience. Now I can sit back and watch the men's and women's basketball teams as they march to the Final Four.

Sincerely,

**Lloyd “Spokespud/Charlie Brown” Brumfield, Sports Editor**

Dear Readers:

I'll close out this Mail Call with a short farewell note. At this time last year I took over the helm of *At Ease*, and this issue marks the end of my career as editor of this weekly tabloid. In one very short year I've learned much more than a mere college education could teach me. I've learned about responsibility, about dedication, about perseverance. But, most importantly, I've learned about people. I've learned about myself, about my peers and even a little about human nature at large.

And I've had fun doing it.

I know this is sounding pretty sentimental about now, so I'll get to the point. I never could have had this opportunity to learn and grow if I hadn't taken chances. And I'm *no different from you*. I'm a strong believer in the addage that says you can accomplish anything if you set your mind to it. Make the most of your college education. Make the most of your life.

And have fun doing it.

Thanks for your contributions, suggestions, and even your complaints over the past year. Throughout the course of your college education I hope we've been able to make to put you a little more “at ease.”

Good luck,

**Karen Kroesche, At Ease Editor**