Brainwashed - Guidelines for Submitting a Review

Written by Staff
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It is now easier than ever to contribute to Brainwashed. The following FAQ is intended to guide you in the writing and formatting of your review before sending it to us. Before submitting anything to Brainwashed, you should read through this FAQ completely. Read more for all the information you'll ever need.

This FAQ will continue to grow and change as new problems and issues are found and addressed. If there are any technical problems concerning the submission of a review, news, event, editorial, or link, please refer to the FAQ, "Having problems submitting a review?"

- **What does Brainwashed do and why do we need writers?**

Brainwashed always needs new writers. We are a community service of peers: we write about music for our peers. We are not some unattainable music critics holed up in a chic smoke-filled downtown office, we're all over the world and service readers from all over the world. If you become a regular contributor, we'll be able to send you free music from a number of different labels and genres. There are more things being released than we have people to cover, and a lot of good music goes unmentioned. We'll never be able to stop that, but we do need good writers to keep things fresh.

- **Requirements, Expectations, Demands, and Limitations**

We need people who can commit to 2-3 reviews per week and are technologically competent enough to upload sound samples and cover images for each review. If you're unable to do this, stop reading right now, return to your home and nobody will get hurt.

It's no secret there are a number of under-represented genres on *The Brain* and we could use writers who specialize in them. We could use well-versed experts to cover abrasive electronic stuff, dark ambient, metal, underground hip hop, free-jazz/improv, and noise.

However, because we are based in the USA and very poor, we can't afford to send promos overseas. Once approved, an overseas regular contributor can be sent materials directly from labels in their country. We will solicit the music, however, to avoid duplication and irritation.

- **There are goals to keep in mind when writing a review.**

A review is *your point of view*. Reviews are the writer's view of a recording or

performance. They should be written in a way you would both write to and read from your peers. They are not a place to flaunt vocabulary not used in conversational English nor are they a place for you to try and sell somebody a record. There is a clear difference between the way critics (us) should write and the way press agents, record labels and music stores write. Please keep this in mind at all times.

Recording reviews should be approximately 200-300 words long. Obviously they can be less for singles and EPs and longer for boxed sets, compilations, or reviewing a multitude of releases from one artist in one review. Generally try your hardest to not write anything less than 150 words or more than 500 words. Concert reviews, however, can be longer, as there can be multiple bands covered in one concert review.

Keep the review personal! Avoid quoting press releases and liner notes as much as possible. Reading each is helpful to you, the writer, but should only be used if absolutely necessary. Don't ever fall on them if you're unfamiliar with the artist's work, it's too easy. *Don't get too personal, though*
! Nobody cares about the girl or guy who just left you. There are ways to relate the personal experience of listening to the music without referencing yourself and your life.

Also, don't be afraid to get a little adventurous with your writing. Being creative while writing about music is encouraged. The occasional abstract painting method works fine occasionally, it's good for variety and to make for an entertaining read, but you need to bring the topic back to the music at-hand before long.

- **Approaching Your Review**

Be sure to make a clear statement about the music being reviewed. Be bold. Try not to meander around statements with wishy washy vocabulary. For the sake of good writing, avoid the following redundancies as much as possible:

- Do not make a statement the begins with, "In my opinion,..." Of course it's in your opinion, that's what a review is!
- It's unnecessary to repeat the artist and title in the first sentence or two of the review as it's clearly listed in the line above it!
- It is unnecessary to list the first name of the artist along with the last name every time you mention their name. (Ex: instead of "Nick Cave has decided this time to put his demons to rest," write "Cave has decided,...")
- Avoid using a passive voice when writing; Keep the music and the musicians as the subject. Don't say "this is what one might expect from a marimba quintet," but "expectant from a marimba quintet." You may have to re-write a number of sentences, but it will be worth it in the long-run.
- **AVOID USING THE SECOND PERSON!** Don't say "you will like this if you,..." Comment on the music from your (the writer's) perpective. Each time the second person

"you blah blah" is used, it looks like a statement from the record label, distributor, or store who's trying to sell somebody on a product. You are not a salesman when writing a review, you are a listener relating your point of view.

   - Try not to name-check other bands in a review. Using band names is something stores and labels do to try and sell consumers. Don't say "it sounds like a cross between Aphex Twin, Sonic Youth and Nurse With Wound," but actively think about more inventive ways to describe music than using other bands as a reference point.

   - Keep unnecessary phrases out of your review. Don't write "in conclusion...," just finish your review and submit it, already!

   - **There are restrictions concerning what kind of reviews we will take.**

      We will not review an album from any major label record company. If you are unsure what labels are considered major, just refer to the following list we've made. If the album your writing about is related to one these companies, scrap the review and don't bother giving it to us. We don't care about them and you'll be wasting our time.

1. Warner Music
   Includes Atlantic, Elektra, Reprise, Sire, Maverick, London, Warner Bros.
2. Capitol EMI Industries
   Includes Capitol, Virgin, EMI
3. Sony Music / BMG
   Includes Columbia, Epic, Arista, Jive, RCA, V2, and Sanctuary

4. Universal
   Includes Geffen, Interscope, MCA

      Why don't we want to review anything released by these companies? Here are just some reasons:

1. Mom-suing
2. Shareholders of multimedia corporations make final decisions
3. Price fixing lawsuits
4. Illegal Payola practices

5. Wealthy companies that don't give health benefits to all their employees
6. Wealthy companies in the most expensive cities in the world that don't pay most of their employees a living wage
7. Unnecessary spending on lawyers, RIAA, music videos leaves little left for artists
8. In-house publishing clauses in contracts
9. Multimedia ownership of film, radio, and concert industries gives an unfair advantage
10. Brainwashed poses a true alternative to other publications and websites (as basically every other publication will review major label music)
11. Our time is better spent covering things which get less coverage. Why review something every other website and publication on the planet is going to give their space and time to?

Style, Editing, and etc.

Before you hit the submit button and save your review to Brainwashed's database, do the following:

1. Spell check
2. Grammar check
3. Trim sentences that go on far too long
4. Remove excess prepositional phrases
5. Try to make sure sentences have a variety in length and are easy to read

Avoid incomplete sentences in your writing. For example, "Awesome!" or "A fine effort" should not appear anywhere in the review. These are classic quotes from movie trailers and not full sentences anybody writes. Don't ever think that things like these are complete sentences. In a similar way, try not to open a sentence with the words "But" or "And."

When checking over your grammar, make sure to look out for common errors:

- Know the difference between its and it's.
- Know the difference between their, they're, and there.
- Know the difference between you're and your.

Check syntax as well and make sure you're always doing the following:

- Spell out numbers under 10 (one, two, three,...).
- Capitalize days of the week and months of the year.
- Pluralization never gets an apostrophe (ie: CD's, LP's, 1980's).

Punctuation, spacing, and the proper use of italics are important, too:

- Song titles are always in "double quotes."
- Album titles should be *italicized*.
- Follow a full stop with one space—not two. Full stops include periods, question marks, and colons.
- Many instances of hyphenation have been eliminated. Examples include "online" and "cochair." Hyphenate elements such as these only to advance clarity.
- Acronyms should never be punctuated.
- Abbreviations, such as CD, LP, EP, USA and UN, should never be punctuated.
- The "am" and "pm" following times of day should never be punctuated.
- Do not use the ampersand (&) unless it is included in an established title.
- An apostrophe points to the missing information in a year, as "Morgan Forster '77."
- Periods and commas are placed inside quotation marks.

Sometimes artists will decide not to capitalize anything on their sleeve artwork or track lists, but band names and song names should always be in mixed capital case: "Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark," "The Postal Service," etc,... Don't ever use all lowercase and all uppercase as these are typesetting choices.

- **Titles and Exceptions**

Do not include the format of a release (CD, EP, 7", LP) in the header (ex: Antony and the Johnsons, "I Fell In Love with a Dead Boy" 7" EP - remove 7" EP). If an album, such as the Wolf Parade EP, has no title or is self-titled, simply type the name of the band in as the title and do not include anything else! For instance, the Four Tet album is

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properly listed as follows:

  - Four Tet, "Everything Ecstatic"

     If you are submitting a review by a band who has not given their album a distinct name, just include the band's name and nothing more:

  - Wolf Parade

     It's really that easy.

  - **Technical Formatting**

     Sound files:

  - should be 60 second excerpts in MP3 format
  - should be three per review (more if it's a compilation or multiple releases, two if it's only a two-song single, obviously)
  - should be named in all lowercase letters and completely spelled out using underscores as spaces and dashes to separate artist from title and remix artist (ex: kid_606-my_kitten-hrvatski_remix.mp3)

     Cover images:

  - should be in jpeg format
  - should be 100×100 for standard CD and LP covers, 100×90 for digipack releases and 100× whatever (scalable) for oddly shaped items
  - should use truncated names for easy referencing and file maintenance, but should always be a part of the artist and title (ie: Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, "No More Shall We Part" should be cavenomore.jpg)

  - Do's and Don't's

     We're a US-based publication and don't follow the spelling and punctuation of British

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English. Use "catalog" instead of "catalogue." Avoid using the word "upcoming" and use "coming" or "forthcoming," instead.

And try to avoid the following words altogether:

- interesting (it's too vague)
- really (it's unnecessary)
- sophomore (referring to a second album)
- moniker (it's used way too much)
- deliver, serve (bands are not UPS workers nor waiters)
- electronica, emo, ethereal, psychedelic, post-rock, two-step, jungle, drum 'n bass, or any other abstract subgenre that not everybody can agree on (these are reserved for record store clerks to make "sections for dummies")
- curb your desire to use tired prefixes like alterna-, avant-, death-, post-, or suffixes like -core, unless it's used for parodical reasons.

This set of guidelines has been built using various ideas from *All About Jazz*, *AP Styleguide*   ,

Chicago Styleguide
,
Chunklet
, and the
Harvard University Library Publications Style Guide
.

Thanks for reading this entire FAQ. If you're ready now to submit a review for approval, please click on "Submit Review" and send it to us! We'll get to it as quickly as we can. In the case of submitting a news article, release schedules, or blog article, please refer to the FAQs provided concerning those topics.