

Multilateralism in Action



Multilateralism in Action - Blogging Guide

Last updated 1 October 2024

ABOUT MULTILATERALISM IN ACTION

What is Multilateralism in Action?

Multilateral processes and institutions are engaged in all of today's major challenges with regard to climate action, human rights, peace, security, humanitarian relief, sustainable development, gender, technology, youth, education, healthcare, migration and displacement - to name just a few.

Multilateralism in Action provides a platform for think-pieces on cutting-edge issues regarding multilateralism and global governance written by leading experts in both practice and research. While the blog includes posts on a diverse array of topics regarding multilateral cooperation, its hallmark is a focus on multilateralism *in action*. Thus, beyond the analyses of international relations (IR) in a narrow sense, **the blog aims to establish a conversation on the determinants, modalities, and outcomes of multilateral activities**. This includes both actions at the global level and equally multilateral activities at the regional, national, and sub-national levels. In addition, **the blog provides a forum to discuss various aspects of UN reform and features advice on careers in international organizations**.

Multilateral processes of interest include the entire United Nations family, Bretton Woods and International and Development Financial Institutions (IFIs/DFIs), regional organizations, and other forms of multilateral processes.

Multilateralism in Action is hosted by the [International Organization and United Nations Studies](#) specialization at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Audience

The blog's principal audiences include:

- **UN practitioners** and experts interested in new content and cutting-edge discussions;
- **Scholars and researchers** attracted to innovative ideas, publications and events on multilateralism;
- **University students** in search of a deeper understanding of international organizations and global affairs;
- **The media and the general public** interested in multilateral cooperation/UN affairs.

Multilateralism in Action publishes stories in a variety of formats, including news stories, opinion pieces, and book reviews.

Who can write for Multilateralism in Action?

SIPA and Columbia faculty, researchers, staff, students, and alumni can write for *Multilateralism in Action*, provided that the proposed piece fits our editorial requirements. In addition, the blog features posts by SIPA guest speakers, practitioners, and scholars.

What is the process for writing and submitting a blog post?

Before you write a blog post, it is best to pitch your idea to Professor Daniel Naujoks, director of the IO/UN Studies Specialization at SIPA (iouns@columbia.edu). In your pitch please:

- Summarize the main point of your article in one complete sentence (with subject, verb, and object);
- Provide other sources of information that may help us understand the story you have in mind, including reports, publications, links;
- Let us know if there is a specific date (international day, report/book launch, UN debate, etc.) that would be important for the timing of the publication.
- Add a 60-word short self-description/bio of the author(s) and highlight any relevant information on why you have specific knowledge to write about this topic.

If the idea is approved, please then submit your draft as a Word document to iouns@columbia.edu. All blog posts will undergo an editorial process before they are published.

CHECKLIST FOR BLOG POSTS

Before submitting the draft blog think-piece, please go through this checklist:

- Is the text **under 1,000 words** (or 1,500 for book pieces)?
- For **think-pieces based on books**: Do you **distill key insights** and strategically focus on principal lessons and implications?
- Does the text follow the **style guidelines** spelled out in this document? Especially:
 - Does the think-piece have a **compelling headline** (see tips below)?
 - Does the think-piece **start with the main message/finding**? Please don't keep your main conclusion until the end. Please put it up front in the beginning.
 - Does the text have **sub-headings that structure the text**?
 - Does the think-piece **avoid jargon**?
 - Can the think-piece be understood by a **broad audience**?
- Are you sending the text **in MS Word format**?
- Does the text include the **author(s) short bio** note? (1 author < 60words, 2 authors <80 words)
- Each think-piece is accompanied by a photo. Do you, or does your organization, have a **photo that you want to suggest** accompanying the think-piece and that we can use free of royalty?
- Do you want to share **social media information**, especially a Twitter/X or BlueSky handle, LinkedIn profile, etc. that we can tag in our promotion of the blog piece?

For more information on each of these points, please see the below explanations.

HOW TO WRITE A MIA THINK-PIECE

Think about the multilateral component of your analysis. International Organizations work on many important aspects of climate change, gender, development, etc. *Multilateralism in Action* focuses on the meta level: what is the role of multilateral institutions (UN, IFIs, DFIs, regional organizations, etc.) in this area? How does a certain UN program or new approach address gender inequities? What role does the UN Resident Coordinator play with regard to development planning in the country? In what ways does the UN work with Small Island Developing Countries or indigenous communities to reach a certain objective? These are just a few examples to illustrate that the *focus should lie on the role of multilateral institutions and processes, not merely on the broader areas of work in which they operate.*

Be clear about the focus of your think-piece. You should make this clear in the headline and near the beginning of the piece, before you dive into the details. This is like a signpost, telling the reader where you are going to take them over the course of the article. This is typical for Op-Ed style pieces: put your main argument up front, instead of building up to it. You want to grab the readers' attention right away and tell them from the start what your key argument is.

Consider your target audience. *Multilateralism in Action* stories are mainly geared toward people who are interested in multilateral organizations, but who do not necessarily know the jargon or have a deep background in the work of intergovernmental organizations or international relations. Always think about what the reader wants and needs from each post. Ask yourself: will my audience be interested in this topic? Will they understand the term I just used?

Show the reader why they should care about this story. Maybe it affects them personally? Or maybe it is just a really interesting, or important discussion. If you are stuck, it helps to reflect on why you are motivated to write the post.

Avoid jargon. We want everyone to be able to understand and enjoy our articles. To simplify your language, it may help to imagine how you would explain this topic to an inquisitive eighth-grader and write it that way. If you cannot avoid using a technical term, please define it.

Keep your sentences short. The human brain can only process so much information at once. Aim for sentences that are 25 words or shorter. (Tip: Read your story out loud. If you need to gasp for breath midway through a sentence, it is probably too long.)

Avoid passive voice. Passive voice means something was acted upon (“the milk was poured”; “mistakes were made”) instead of someone performing an action (“she poured the milk”; “we made mistakes”). Use an active voice whenever you can. It will make your sentences clearer, shorter, and more engaging.

Add sub-headings. Sub-headings are generally helpful for readers to quickly understand the structure and main points of your think-piece. Each sub-heading should have a clear meaning and be self-explanatory. Thus, instead of choosing a topic name, e.g. “Coordination”, turn the subheading into a meaningful statement, e.g. “Coordination within the UN Country-Team strengthens its Impact.” Imagine someone skimming your text by reading the sub-headings only. What information would that reader get?

For **think-pieces based on books**, it is important that they **distill key insights** from the book.

- Please do not simply provide an overview of the book. It is less important (and should take less space) to 'set the scene' and provide background information. Instead, think-pieces **should focus on key lessons and implications** that may be relevant for both scholarly debate and analysis, or for practitioners.
- Most books have multiple angles and if they do not all fit meaningfully into the short format of a blog post, authors should **consider leaving some aspects out** so that the blog post can focus on others that are particularly important and relevant for the target group.
- We ask that authors start **blog posts with key insights**, instead of making the reader wait for the grand reveal at the end of the piece. However, repeating key messages and implications at the end of a blog piece is recommended; it just should not be that the first time the author mentions them.

Add a short bio note to the end of the post. Bios typically include the author's name and work title, organization, and substantive areas of work or research, or important previous positions to help the reader contextualize the author's background and unique perspective. The short-bio can also include a brief note on why you ended up being involved in your think-pieces topics and it can include a link to a recent publication (book, report, ...) of yours that this think-piece draws on. The bio note can also include social media information (“X tweets at @...”).

For one author, this can be up to 60 words, for two authors, a total of 80 words, and for three authors or more, 30 words per author.

... More [good tips here](#)

WORD LIMITS

Word limits vary depending on the type of story. Research, news, and opinion pieces should range from 600-1,000 words. Book pieces can include up to 1,500 words.

STYLE GUIDE

Multilateralism in Action uses mixed cap style for headlines. This means major words like nouns, verbs, etc. are capitalized; prepositions with four or more letters ("with," "through," etc.) are capitalized; and less significant words like "a" and "the" are lowercased.

In general, avoid the capitalization of a person's title. (Example: Elazar Barkan, professor of international and public affairs, gave the lecture). However, named professorships need to be capitalized in any format. (Example: Jeffrey D. Sachs, Quetelet Professor of Sustainable Development, also attended). In the few cases where a person's title precedes that person's name, it is capitalized, as long it is a proper title (as opposed to "writer" or "researcher"). (Example: Secretary-General António Guterres visited Malawi.)

Do not use Dr., Mrs., Ms., Mr. or Rev. to refer to an individual. After initial identification, the individual's last name is sufficient.

Use only one space between sentences.

Information about references, course information, where to get more info, etc., should be hyperlinked within the article. We do NOT use in-text numbered references or citations in the way we would for an academic paper; we use hyperlinks.

HOW TO WRITE A HEADLINE

1. Many people read a headline and then decide, based on that, whether to keep reading—or not. So, your headline must engage the reader immediately. If you neglect the headline (or "hed," in journalistic jargon), your effort at writing the post may be wasted. The hed cannot be an afterthought; it must be the first order of business.
2. Heds must be concise. Try to limit them to around 10 words or less.
3. A good hed is usually NOT just a topic (boring!); it is a TAKE on the topic: what is new, interesting, informative or otherwise worth reading BEYOND the topic. A good hed may encapsulate the idea of the piece; or may just hint at it; or it may include attention-grabbing language that refers to something in the piece but does not necessarily reveal its meaning straight off.
4. Heds can come in many forms: a question, a statement, a pun, a command, a list.
5. Do not use Columbia-specific acronyms (ex: MPA, SIPA) in headlines. These are a form of jargon that will limit your audience.
6. Identify heds that you like. Study how they work and use them as models. Examples of great heds can be found in anything from *The New Yorker* to the *Washington Post*.
7. Here are several online guides to writing heds. Some are aimed at the casual blogger; others, for the professional copy editor. Check out www.copyblogger.com/how-to-write-headlines-that-work/ and <https://jprof.wpenginepowered.com/writing/•-headlines/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Multilateralism in Action is indebted to Sarah Fecht and the team at the *State of the Planet* blog at Columbia's Climate School, the guidelines of which have informed much of our guidelines. For more information on the State of the Planet, visit <https://news.climate.columbia.edu>.

Multilateralism in Action Blog
Editor: Daniel Naujoks, Director
International Organization & UN Studies Specialization
School of International and Public Affairs
Columbia University International Affairs Building
IOUNS@columbia.edu