

Inskriba Submission Standards

What we ask of every piece that enters the archive

Why these standards exist

A submission to Inskriba is not content. It is an entry into a record of how people live.

Most platforms ask one question of a piece: will it perform? We ask three, and they are harder. Is it true? Is it rooted? Will it still mean something when someone reads it in twenty years, trying to understand what this place and this moment were actually like?

That last question is the one most people forget. It is also the one that makes us a cultural-intelligence platform rather than a magazine. Everything we publish becomes a data point in a longer study of Nigerian and African life: what people remember, what they inherit, what they obey, what they leave, what they cannot say out loud. The archive is only as honest as the pieces inside it. Standards are how we protect that honesty.

These are not hoops. They are the things that distinguish writing that documents a life from writing that merely describes one. We hold writers to them because we hold the archive to them, and the archive is the thing that outlasts all of us.

The cultural standard

This is the heart of it, and the part most writers get wrong, so read it slowly.

SPECIFICITY IS THE WHOLE GAME

The fastest way to kill a piece is to write *about* a culture instead of *from inside* it. "Nigerians value community." "Family is central to African life." "Respect for elders runs deep." These are not observations. They are summaries of observations someone else already made, and they tell the reader nothing they could not have guessed.

We do not publish the general. We publish the particular: the specific aunt who calls on the first of the month, the exact amount, the silence that follows when you say you cannot send it this time. The general is a press release about a culture. The particular *is* the culture. A reader does not learn what obligation feels like from the word "obligation." They learn it from the texture of one real demand, named precisely.

The rule: if a sentence could be true of a hundred million people, it is probably not worth writing. Find the version that is true of one room, one person, one Tuesday.

WRITE AS A WITNESS, NOT A TOUR GUIDE

Do not translate Nigerian life for an outsider. The moment a piece starts explaining what *jollof* is, or pausing to gloss a common phrase, or framing an ordinary thing as exotic, it has chosen the wrong reader. It is performing the culture for someone outside it instead of documenting it for someone who already lives in it.

We write for the person who recognises the thing, not the person who needs it introduced. This is a deliberate inversion of how African life usually appears in writing: narrated outward, for a foreign gaze, with the writer playing translator and the culture playing spectacle. We refuse that posture. The reader who matters is the one who reads a piece and thinks: *yes, that, exactly that, I have never seen it written down before.*

If something genuinely needs context, trust the reader to carry it, or let the meaning sit inside the scene rather than in a footnote. Recognition is the goal, not education.

ROOT IT IN PLACE AND TIME

Lived experience happens somewhere, on some date, under some specific conditions. A piece that floats free of place and time is usually a piece that is hiding the fact that it never happened to anyone. Ground it. The market had a name. The year had a feeling. The price of the thing was the price it actually was. Detail is not decoration here; it is evidence. It is what separates testimony from opinion.

CARRY THE WEIGHT OF HOW THINGS CAME TO BE

The strongest work understands that nothing in a life is only personal. The "good child" is not a personality; it is an inheritance, a thing assembled over generations and handed down with the expectation that it be carried without complaint. Migration is not a decision; it is a long pressure finally giving way. The best submissions feel the history underneath the moment; they know that the small thing on the surface is connected to something older and larger, and they let the reader feel that connection without lecturing them about it.

NO STEREOTYPE, NO EXOTICA, NO FLATTENING

There is a lazy version of "African writing" that trades in the same handful of images and the same uplift, and there is a lazy version of "Nigerian commentary" that flattens a whole country into a punchline about suffering or hustle or corruption. We publish neither. Cultural rootedness is not the same as cultural cliché, and specificity is the cure for both. A real life is always stranger, quieter, and more contradictory than the stereotype of it. Write the real one.

The editorial standards

ORIGINALITY

The work must be the writer's own: their experience, their thinking, their voice, their sentences. We do not publish rewrites of things already widely said, and we do not publish another person's work passed off as one's own. Drawing on others is fine and often necessary; attribute it. The test is simple: does this piece know something, or does it only repeat things?

TRUTHFUL CLAIMS

If a piece states something as fact, it must be true, and the writer must be able to stand behind it. Memory is allowed its imperfections (we are documenting lived experience, not filing affidavits), but invention presented as fact is not. Where a writer is reconstructing or compressing, the writing should be honest about that. We would rather publish a smaller true thing than a larger thing that bends.

LIVED EXPERIENCE AND THE PEOPLE IN IT

Much of what we publish involves real people: family, neighbours, lovers, the dead. This carries an obligation. Write about real people with care, and do not expose someone to harm, shame, or identification they did not consent to for the sake of a stronger paragraph. When a piece touches private lives, the writer should have thought about consent, about what is fair to reveal, and about who might be hurt. Where identity needs protecting, protect it. Confidentiality is not censorship; it is the condition under which people trust us enough to be documented at all.

DEPTH OVER COMMENTARY

We are a slow platform by design. We are not chasing the take, the thread, the thing that is hot this week and forgotten next. A submission should show evidence of having been *thought about*: sat with, revised, made more honest over time. Reflection beats reaction. The question is never "is this timely?" but "is this true, and will it still be true?"

REVISION IS PART OF WRITING HERE

Submitting is the start of a conversation, not the end of one. Our editors will often come back with suggested edits or a request to revise. A writer who treats that as an attack is a poor fit for Inskriba; a writer who treats it as the work is exactly who we want. Revision culture is non-negotiable; it is how good pieces become true ones. (How the revision loop works in practice is covered in the contributor workflow, not here.)

Craft standards

These are the baseline expectations of form. They are looser than the standards above, because craft can be taught and a strong true piece with rough edges is worth more than a polished empty one. But they matter.

Length. Essays generally run 1,000–2,000 words. Shorter can work if it is complete; longer needs to earn every additional paragraph. Length should be set by the piece, not padded to a target.

The opening. Begin inside something (a scene, an image, a specific moment), not with a thesis statement or a windup about the topic. Earn the reader's attention in the first lines and never explain what the piece is "about." Let it be about it.

Structure. A piece should move. It should know where it is going even when it wanders, and the wandering should be deliberate. Aimlessness is not depth.

Clarity. Dense is good; murky is not. We value writing that thinks hard and reads clearly. If a sentence is complicated because the idea is complicated, keep it. If it is complicated because it is hiding that there is no idea, cut it. Plainness is not the enemy of seriousness; pretension is.

Voice. Write in your own register. We are not looking for one house style imposed on every writer; we are looking for the real voice of a real person who has noticed something. Quiet, observational, and exact beats loud, performative, and vague every time.

What we will not publish

These are red lines. A piece that crosses them is declined regardless of how well it is written.

- **AI-generated thinking.** Work where the ideas, the experience, or the voice are produced by a machine rather than a person. (See the note below; this is narrower and more careful than it sounds.)
 - **Plagiarism or undisclosed reuse.** Another's work presented as one's own, in whole or in part.
 - **Fabrication presented as fact.** Invented events, quotes, or details offered as true.
 - **Viral bait and hot takes.** Writing built to provoke or trend rather than to document or understand.
 - **Motivational filler.** Inspiration, life lessons, and uplift dressed as cultural writing. We are not that platform.
 - **Stereotype and exotica.** Flattened, clichéd, or outsider-facing renderings of Nigerian or African life.
 - **Harm to real people.** Exposure, identification, or humiliation of named or recognisable individuals without consent and without justification.
 - **Cruelty without purpose.** Discourse that demeans rather than examines. We hold strong views and hard subjects, but the register is respectful even in disagreement.
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On AI assistance

We need to be precise here, because the easy version of this rule is unfair and we refuse to be unfair.

The line is not "no software touched this." Spellcheck, a dictionary, a tool that helps you tighten a clumsy sentence: these are fine, the way a thesaurus has always been fine. The line is about **authorship of the thinking and the experience**. The noticing must be yours. The memory must be yours. The voice must be yours. If a piece's ideas, observations, and lived texture were generated rather than lived and thought, it is not a submission; it is a machine wearing a person's name, and it has no place in an archive of how people actually live.

Now the fairness part, which matters as much as the rule. We are aware that automated "AI detection" is unreliable, and that it is unreliable in a specific, biasing way: it routinely misflags writing that is formal, careful, or written in English by people for whom English is a second or third language. Many of our best writers fit exactly that description. So we do not let a detector make this decision. Our editors read for it the way editors always have, by listening for whether a real person is on the other side of the page, whether the specifics are too lived to be invented, whether the voice holds. The burden is on the writing being *real*, not on the writing passing a tool. A careful non-native stylist has nothing to fear here. A person who outsourced their thinking does.

If you used AI in any meaningful way, tell us. Honesty about process is never held against a writer; concealment is.

What every submission must carry

The revamped submission system asks for a few things alongside the piece itself. These are not bureaucracy; each one feeds the standards above or the archive that depends on them.

- **Sector.** Which part of the map this belongs to (Law, Money, Health, Education, Work and Hustle, Love and Marriage, and the threads that cut across them). This is how the piece enters the record and how it connects to everything else.
- **The lived-experience source.** A line on where this comes from: your own life, someone you know, something you witnessed, something you researched. Not for publication; for our understanding of what kind of testimony we are holding.
- **A consent confirmation** where real people appear: that you have considered who is in this piece and what is fair to reveal, and that you will work with us where identities need protecting.
- **An originality and AI declaration:** that the work is your own, that anything borrowed is attributed, and an honest note on any AI assistance used.

A submission that carries these enters review. One that does not is incomplete, not rejected; we will ask for them.

The compact, plainly

We ask a great deal: specificity, honesty, care for the people you write about, willingness to revise, and the discipline to write from inside a life rather than about it from outside. In return, we give the work a serious home, real editing, fair pay, and a place in an archive built to outlast the news cycle that everyone else is chasing.

These standards are not a wall around the platform. They are the definition of the thing itself. A writer who meets them is not clearing a bar; they are doing the actual work of Inskriba, which is to document how people live, truthfully enough that it survives.

That is the whole ask. Write the true, particular, rooted thing. We will take care of the rest.