

Evolve Contributor Guidelines: Writing for Today's Readers

1. Purpose and Voice

Evolve is a space for *ideas that challenge, deepen and renew Jewish thought and practice*. Essays should:

- Encourage dialogue rather than demand agreement.
- Respect the diversity of belief and experience within Judaism.
- Strive for clarity, honesty and compassion—even when addressing disagreement.
- Speak to both head and heart: combine intellectual rigor with moral or spiritual resonance.

Tone: conversational, thoughtful and grounded in Jewish values. Avoid jargon unless you define it.

2. Content and Structure

- **Opening Paragraph:** Start with something vivid—an image, a question, a real moment. Today's readers decide within seconds whether to continue.
 - **Thesis Early:** Within 2–3 paragraphs, make clear what you're exploring or arguing.
 - **Sections:** Use short sections or subheadings. Modern readers skim first, then read more deeply.
 - **Length:** 800–1,500 words is ideal. If your topic requires more, break it into a series or include a brief sidebar summary.
 - **Links:** Include links to relevant texts, sources or prior Evolve essays.
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3. Style Tips for the Digital Age

- **Keep paragraphs short** (3–5 sentences).
 - **Write for scanning:** use bold for key phrases and bullet lists for complex points.
 - **Avoid dense footnotes:** hyperlink or integrate your sources directly into the text.
 - **Use “you” and “we”** where appropriate—it creates connection and immediacy.
 - **Edit ruthlessly:** clarity beats eloquence every time.
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4. Titles

Your headline should:

- Spark curiosity without resorting to clickbait.
- Reflect your core idea clearly.
- Use active language and avoid abstraction.

Examples:

- “When Dialogue Becomes Sacred” (vs. “Thoughts on Communal Discourse”)
- “Why I Still Light Shabbat Candles After Losing Faith” (vs. “Reflections on Ritual Practice”)
- “The Torah of Disagreement: Learning to Argue Like Jews”

Checklist:

- 6–10 words max.
 - Aim for one emotional or action word (e.g., “heal,” “wrestle,” “reclaim,” “listen”).
 - Consider including the word “why” or a clear benefit: “Why Arguing Makes Us Whole.”
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5. Email Subject Lines (for more info, see below)

Email subject lines should be **clear, short, and compelling**—think of them as invitations, not labels.

For newsletter or social promotion:

- “What Happens When We Disagree Well?”
- “Can Healing Begin in Disagreement?”
- “Three Ways Judaism Teaches Us to Listen Again”

Tips:

- Keep under **50 characters** if possible.
 - Avoid “cute” puns that obscure meaning.
 - Use **verbs** and **questions** that evoke curiosity.
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6. Visuals and Formatting

- Include 1–2 relevant images if possible (with credit).
- Provide a **bio** and optional headshot.

- If quoting Hebrew or liturgical text, include English translation and context.
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7. Submission Checklist

- ✓ Clear headline
 - ✓ 800–1,500 words
 - ✓ Defined thesis or question
 - ✓ Conversational tone
 - ✓ At least one takeaway or question for readers
 - ✓ Author bio + contact info
 - ✓ Suggested subject line for editorial correspondence
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8. Editorial Philosophy

Evolve essays are part of a broader conversation—*not* the last word. The goal is to open hearts and minds, not close them.

When you write, imagine someone across the table, not across the aisle.

Email Subject Lines & Previews: Writing for the Modern Inbox

Why It Matters

The subject line is your *first impression*. In today's inboxes—where people get 100+ emails a day—the subject line determines whether your thoughtful essay even gets opened.

Your audience is scanning, not reading. A good subject line:

- Sparks curiosity or emotional resonance.
- Feels personal or conversational, not institutional.
- Promises value, insight, or relevance—without being sensational.

Think of it as your essay's "doorway." It should *invite*, not *announce*.

1 Core Principles

1. **Keep it short.**

Aim for **6–9 words** or **under 50 characters**—so it doesn’t get cut off on mobile.

Example: “Why Arguing Well Is a Jewish Practice”

(Not: “Thoughts on How Disagreement Can Strengthen Our Communities”)

2. **Lead with meaning, not category.**

Don’t start with “Evolve Essay:” or “New Article.” Readers skip “labels.”

Start instead with a question, emotion, or tension.

✓ “Can We Still Disagree and Stay in Community?”

✗ “Evolve: New Essay on Disagreement”

3. **Speak to the reader.**

Use *you*, *we*, or *us* to make it relational.

“What If Listening Were a Spiritual Practice?”

“How We Can Heal the Fractures Among Us”

4. **Ask or imply a question.**

Questions engage curiosity and signal humility—key to Evolve’s ethos of dialogue.

“What Does It Mean to Be a People Who Argue?”

“Can Love Survive Political Difference?”

5. **Avoid clickbait—but borrow its energy.**

A subject line should feel human, not like a headline.

“The Torah of Disagreement Feels Different This Year”

“When Dialogue Hurts—and Heals”

2 The Preheader (the little gray text after the subject)

The **preheader** is your secret advantage. It’s the 1–2 short lines of preview text most email platforms show next to the subject.

Use it to **expand the story**, **add context**, or **pose the deeper question**.

Example pairings:

Subject	Preheader
“Can We Still Disagree and Stay in Community?”	A rabbi reflects on how sacred argument can heal us.

“The Torah of Disagreement Feels Different This Year”

When the world is divided, what does Judaism teach us about repair?

“What If Listening Were a Spiritual Practice?”

Reclaiming curiosity and compassion in polarized times.

3 Emotional & Thematic Categories

Rotate between a few styles to keep your newsletter fresh:

Type	Tone	Example
Reflective / Spiritual	gentle, open	“When Doubt Becomes a Form of Faith”
Provocative / Conversational	curious, challenging	“Should Jews Be Talking About Power Differently?”
Topical / Timely	relevant to headlines	“After the Headlines, What Can We Still Hope For?”
Communal / Inclusive	warm, relational	“We’re Learning to Listen Again—Together”
Personal / Story-Driven	intimate, human	“The Moment I Stopped Being Afraid of Disagreement”

4 Formatting & Technical Notes

- Use **Title Case** or **Sentence case** consistently—avoid all caps.
 - Emojis are rarely appropriate for Evolve’s tone, but a **single symbol (like an em dash or question mark)** can add rhythm.
 - Test your subject lines: send drafts to a few readers or editors to see which one feels more inviting.
 - Avoid trigger words that reduce deliverability (e.g., “urgent,” “free,” “click”).
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