

## DEAR READER: Results are in for the Missouriian's comment moderation survey

By [Shaina Cavazos](#)

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Of the 102 people who took the time to answer [Saturday's comment moderation questionnaire](#), many of whom never comment, 36 said they think the Missouriian's comments section is overwhelmingly negative, often aggressive and discourages them from participating.

This is just the kind of feedback we were looking for.

The goal of the questionnaire was to find out what Missouriian readers think is acceptable and unacceptable as far as commenting practice and moderation. After going through pages and pages of responses, I compiled some general themes from the feedback and picked out a few figures that stood out.

- **Thirty-six** people generally agreed with one survey responder's view: "There seem to be a few people who comment all the time. Many are aggressive and contemptuous of any opposing views." Another response stated, "The comment section often makes me feel ashamed of my community."
- The Missouriian's [comments policy](#) requires people to [use first and last names](#), and some people thanked us for that. Others, however, said they would feel more comfortable stating opinions if they did not have to sign their full names. Some listed a fear of problems at work as a reason they were opposed to using full names.
- The policy prohibits personal attacks, and we asked people which of the examples we provided qualified as a personal attack. **Eighty-eight** people think calling someone a moron is considered a personal attack, and **74** think stereotyping by ethnicity is, too. However, only **seven** people think saying an opinion is "uninformed and biased" qualifies.
- **Ninety-eight** people answered as to how frequently they commented on the Missouriian's website — and 43 of them said they never do. Since we were hoping to hear from people who don't usually join the conversation, we appreciate that they shared their views.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of information we were hoping to receive. The better we can get to know our audience, the better we can make sure we are moderating effectively.

## **Now that we've collected this data, what will we do?**

The Missourian has already instituted a [new strategy for moderating comments](#), whereby a commenter's first comment must be approved before he or she can continue to comment. So far, this has helped cut down on both spam comments and people trying to use fake or incomplete names.

[Joy Mayer](#), our director of community outreach, and I have talked about some ways our team could respond to the feedback we've received. Our goal is to increase the civility of the conversation within the community and encourage more people to get involved.

### **Some ways the Missourian could help:**

- Some people said that too off-topic comment threads kept them from participating. Our staff could help direct errant threads back toward the original topic by posing questions or offering other sources of information that are relevant.
- Mike Martin, a Missourian reader, said in a [comment on Saturday's Dear Reader column](#) that a past Columbia Daily Tribune blogemphasizing a closer reader-reporter relationship resulted in readers feeling "more of an obligation to show intelligence, panache, and civility given the relationship with the reporter." If you would welcome that kind of exchange, we could do more to foster it. It's easier on a blog, written by one person, to feel a personal connection with a reporter. But even on news stories, our reporters could take charge of fact-checking comments and interject new information or answers to questions. Other news sites have found that the continued presence of the journalists in comment threads can help with civility.
- We could also try to drop in occasionally and remind commenters of our policy and make sure the conversation is remaining civil. One survey responder said too often, people resort to name-calling when they have no facts to support their arguments. "Rational discourse does not mean belittling the person with whom you disagree; rather, it means offering facts to support your own viewpoint," the response stated.
- To reward commenters who are making positive contributions to the conversation, we could feature a comment of the week.

Which, if any, of these options would you support? Are there more ways you'd like to see us interact in the forum?

If you are interested in the full results of the survey, you can find the image in the related media box. Look for the red numbers to see how many people selected each answer. Thank you to everyone who participated.

*Shaina Cavazos is a member of the community outreach team and an Assistant City Editor at the Missourian. Feel free to [take a look at her past work](#) or follow her on Twitter [@ShainaRC](#).*

