A ‘Contributions’ Section

WHAT IS IT?
De Correspondent's “contributions” section is like a comments section with guard rails and a how-to guide. Featured beneath all stories on the site, the contributions section explicitly invites readers to share their “experience and knowledge” — instead of their opinions. “This may seem like a minor detail,” publisher Ernst-Jan Pfauth wrote, “but the first step to great reader contributions is an articulation of your expectations.”

WHO'S BEHIND IT?
De Correspondent is a Dutch news startup that launched in 2013 after crowdfunding $1.7 million, making it at the time the most successful journalism crowdfunding campaign in history. The company now has more than 50,000 paying members in the Netherlands and is working with New York University professor Jay Rosen and the Membership Puzzle Project on plans to launch an English-language edition in the U.S.

DOES IT WORK?
An experiment by The Atlantic’s Adam Felder found that the comments change how people see the article itself — for better or worse. De Correspondent editor-in-chief Rob Wijnberg says he sees “a lot less” toxicity in their comments section than elsewhere. Articles on the site often receive 100 or more contributions, many of which add context or additional information to the original reports.

HOW TO DO IT
Only De Correspondent’s paying members, using their real names, may leave contributions. They are asked to “share what you know” — one of 10 “house rules” — as well as to stay on topic and not to treat De Correspondent as a diary. The outlet’s correspondents participate and redirect conversations that veer off course. When a violation occurs, editors delete the comment and email the offender to remind them of the rules.