

NEWS STORY BASICS

As in all writing, the three steps apply:

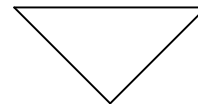
- 1) **Collect** - Do your reporting: interviews, phone calls, research.
- 2) **Order** - Decide what information is more important; decide story's form
- 3) **Clarify** - Write simply with strong verbs & nouns. Be Accurate: Get facts, names, titles, places & quotes and get them right. Be Brief: Say what you mean, and say it quickly. Omit needless words. Be Fast: News reporting is done on inviolable deadline.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

This is the basic form of a news story. The most important fact begins the story, and other facts follow in order of importance:

Why this format?:

- 1) To make stories instantly clear to the reader.
- 2) To satisfy the reader's curiosity.
- 3) To allow stories to be cut at any point during production process.



THE LEAD

The two purposes of the lead are to summarize the story and to get the reader's attention. There are two basic kinds of leads:

Hard News Lead: This is a summary of the story. It includes what is known as "The Five Ws and an H": who, what, where, when, why and how. It should be limited to fewer than 30 words (or as much as you can read aloud in one breath). **Hard news leads answer the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?**

Feature, Soft, or Delayed Lead: Instead of a summary, a story can start with a gracefully written paragraph or two, designed to lure the reader in. It should contain at least one "hard" fact, and should avoid cliché. News stories seldom have feature leads. If you use a feature lead, -make sure your story has a "nut graf" - a single paragraph that summarizes the story and orients the reader - high up.

THE BODY

A news story should have unity - everything should flow from the lead. The body of the story should answer the questions the lead provokes in a reader. As you write, think like a reader. (What would you want to know next?)

Other rules for the body of a story:

Follow the Lead: A story should be about what you said it would be about.

Short Paragraphs: Unlike an academic essay, one- and two-sentence paragraphs are preferred in newswriting.

One Topic Per Paragraph: Each paragraph may have a single fact, or "subtopic" related to the lead.

Paragraphs in a news story can be interchangeable - in other word, their order may be changed without harming the coherence of the story.

Use direct quotes: Let the subjects of the story tell the story. Quotes enliven writing. The voice of someone involved in a story is always more powerful than the reporter's voice. If a quote, as often happens, is not clear on its own, set it up with background information.

The silent "W": Every reader asks this about every story: "Why should I care?" Make the facts in a story accessible to the average reader, and make it clear to the reader why this story is important to him or her.

The ending: News stories don't have endings. They simply stop. Don't worry about a "summary,, or "concluding" paragraph - it would probably just get cut in the production process, anyway.

OTHER RULES & TIPS:

- Every fact in a news story that is not commonly accepted information or that the reporter did not see himself or herself must be attributed. The most common attributions are "according to..." and `` he said" or "she said." Avoid such nonsensical tags as `` she grinned` ' or "he lamented.

- The toughest (and most important) decision is choosing the lead; a good reporter often spends more time on the lead than the rest of the story. It must be the most important fact, a summary, and the statement from which the rest of the writing flows.

- A reporter is always learning, so a reporter should always ask questions - a lot of them. Ask about anything you don't understand. If you don't understand the fundamentals of a story, how can you communicate them? Never be afraid of "looking dumb." It's better to appear dumb to an interview subject than to prove your ignorance in print.

- Deciding what to leave out is an important as deciding what to include. Use only the essential facts. If you are in doubt about the accuracy of anything, leave it out.

- Be aggressive. Don't be afraid to approach strangers, call people (repeatedly), challenge statements, ask questions, or bother librarians. It's your job. Facts don't come to you; you go get them.

Headings

News and feature stories are typed or word-processed using a uniform heading, called a slug. A slug consists of the story name, the reporter's name and the date. Next to it is the page number.

Jones
Robbery
9/3/01

11111

A man with a bomb taped to his chest robbed the First National Bank on Milton Street yesterday. Police said he made off with Over \$300,000.

Officer Tom Brennan said the man was erratic during Robbery. "He kind of lurched around and shouted quite a bit according to the Bank tellers," Officer Brennan said.

Bank officials said the bank is offering a reward for information about the robbery.