

TOPIC 3: WRITING STRUCTURE STYLE

(continued...)

"The Lead": The most important info

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

Approximately 30 words (1-2 thin paragraphs)

May include a "hook" (provocative quote or question)

"The Body": The crucial info

Argument, Controversy, Story, Issue

Evidence, background, details, logic, etc.

Quotes, photos, video, and audio that support, dispute, expand the topic

"The Tail": extra info

Interesting/Related items

May include extra context

In blogs, columns, and other editorials: the assessment of the journalist

Inverted Pyramid

News articles are written in a structure known as the “inverted pyramid.” In the inverted pyramid format, the most newsworthy information goes at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information goes at the end.

News stories are organized using the inverted pyramid style, in which information is presented in descending order of importance. This allows the audience to read the most crucial details quickly so they can decide whether to continue or stop reading the story. From an editing perspective, using the inverted pyramid style makes it easier to cut a story from the bottom, if necessary

After you have written your story’s lede (lead), order the information that follows in terms of most important to least important. There is NO formal conclusion in a journalism article the way there is in an essay or analysis paper.

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Lead “the most important info”

- The lead (or lead) of a news article is the first sentence, usually written as one paragraph, that tells the most important information of the story. When writing a lead, it is helpful to use the “tells a friend” strategy. Imagine you had to sum up to a friend, in one sentence, what your story is about. How would you sum up quickly what happened?
- A story’s lead answers the “Five W’s” in a specific order: Who? What? When? Where? Why?
- A lead should have not less than 20 and not more than 35 words

Example: One person was killed and three injured when a car and truck collided yesterday on an icy section of Street Road in Bensalem



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Body “crucial info”

Attribution

- In news story the body contain more information and details and they are most from sources All information in a news story MUST be attributed to the source where the reporter got his/her information. The reporter must indicate in his/her news where material was obtained from – from an interview, court documents, the Census, a Web site, etc. Direct quotes and paraphrasing can be used to attribute information obtained in an interview with a source.

For example:

According to a police report, the suspect threatened the cashier with a gun before running away with the money.

In a 500-page government report, investigators reported evidence that the army had committed crimes against humanity.

- The first time a source is introduced in an article, you should use that source’s full name and title. After this initial reference, use the last name only.

For example:

“The swine flu vaccine is an incredible advance in modern medicine,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

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- When attributing a direct quote, always use the verb “said” and never any other verbs such as “explained,” “whispered,” etc

For example: “The housing crisis is growing out of control,” Bernanke said.

- Even when information from a source is not used in a direct quote and is paraphrased instead, it still must be attributed to that source.

For example:

Bernanke said the recession is probably over.

The recession will most likely begin to recede in six to eight months, Bernanke said.

Quotation

- A quote is the written form of the words which people have spoken. Occasionally it will also apply to words they have written down, perhaps in a book or a press release. In print journalism, quotes are shown surrounded by quotation marks, either single (‘) or double ("). These are sometimes called *inverted commas*. The alternative to using a quote is to rewrite the sentence into what we call *reported speech*. We will discuss how to move between quotes and reported speech later in this chapter.

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Why use quotes?

There are three main reasons why you should use quotes in print journalism:

- If you repeat the exact words which people themselves used you will reduce the risk of misreporting what they say
- When we give a person's exact words our readers can see both the ideas and the way they were presented
- People often use lively language when they speak. Quotes allow you to put that lively language directly into your story.

Attribution is stating who said something. Attribution is essential in all the media, including radio and television. Journalists do it so that your readers or listeners can know who is speaking or where the information in the story comes from. You can use attribution for both spoken and written information, so that you attribute information gathered from interviews, speeches, reports, books, films or even other newspapers, radio or television stations. In a moment we will discuss when you need to use attribution. First, however, we will look briefly at how attribution works in reported speech



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Reported speech

- In the previous chapter, we mainly looked at attribution as it applied to quotes. However, attribution should be used whenever you want your readers or listeners to know where your information comes from.

For example,

in reported speech the attribution is still part of the sentence, although it is not as distinct as when you use a direct quote. In both of the following sentences, we attribute the words to Ms Mar. In the first, her words are in quotes; in the second they are put into reported speech. The attribution is in italics:

Quote:

Ms Mar said: "Students can expect no special treatment if they go on strike."

Reported Speech:

Ms Mar said that students could expect no special treatment if they went on strike.

Notice how, in the reported speech, we had to change the verb "can" to "could" and the verb "go" to "went". This is because, although quotes must be word-for-word, reported speech is a report of something which was said in the past, so the tenses have to be changed.

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The use of the linking word "that" is usually optional in reported speech. It is often left out to reduce the length of the sentence, but should be included whenever it makes the meaning of a sentence clearer. It is often used to separate the verb of attribution from a following verb. Compare the two examples. Notice how including "that" in the second example makes the meaning clearer:

The doctor felt many women worried about their health.

The doctor felt that many women worried about their health.

How often should you use attribution?

The good journalist has to strike a balance between the need to make clear attribution of statements and the risk of boring the reader with too many phrases such as "he said".

It helps to change the word "said" occasionally, in attributing both quotes and reported speech. Some useful alternatives are "warned", "suggested", "urged", "asked" and "disclosed". But beware: each of these has a specific meaning. Check that it is the correct one for what your speaker said and the way they said it.

The phrase "according to" can be used in attributing reported speech, but do not use it more than once with any single speaker. Although it is usually a neutral term, not suggesting either belief or disbelief, if you use it too often it can give the impression that you doubt the information the speaker has given.

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There are other, more obvious danger words to avoid. Words such as "stated" and "pointed out" both imply that what the speaker said is an undisputed fact. You can, for example, point out that the world is round, but you cannot point out that this cake is delicious, because that is an opinion.

Also avoid the word "claimed", which suggests that you do not believe what is being said. Be especially careful when reporting court cases. Lawyers and the police like to use the word "claimed" to throw doubt on opposition statements. You must not do the same.

The exact balance of attribution depends on the kind of story you are writing or the material you can use. If the statements are reliably factual throughout, you only need to attribute occasionally. If, however, the story is heavy with opinion or unreliable statements, you should attribute at least once every two sentences.

Attributing facts and opinions

One of the greatest dangers facing young journalist is accepting what people say as the truth. Just because someone tells you that something is a fact does not make it so.

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There are some things which are universally accepted as true, for example that the world is round, that Tuesday follows Monday, that Fiji is in the Pacific. But there are also things which people want you to believe are true but which are either not provable or are lies. These people may not knowingly tell a lie, but many people are careless with the truth.

Also, situations may change; so that the truth at one moment may be wrong the next. Attribution helps you to overcome some of these problems. Attribution is the act of specifying who said what.

If you attribute the words to the person who said them, you do not have to prove or disprove the truth of their words; you simply report them. Also, people judge what is said by the person who says it. Statements made by people in authority carry more weight than statements made by other people.

Look at the following example. The attribution is the phrase said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar:

Striking students who miss exams will be given fail marks, said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar.

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In this case, you may have very little doubt that this is exactly what will happen.

But there is always the chance that Ms Mar will change her mind and give the students a second chance. By attributing the statement to Ms Mar, you protect yourself against this possibility. Thus, if the students do get a second chance, you can say to your critics: "We didn't say it, Ms Mar did."

In any case, your readers will be interested to know what public figures believe to be true. Even if it is later found that Ms Mar was mistaken, it is interesting to know that she once believed she would fail the students. As soon as you find out she has changed her mind, you can carry a news story saying so, recalling the previous story attributed to Ms Mar.

