

NEWS WRITING

DESCRIBE THE STANDARD STRUCTURE OF NEWS STORY IN NEWS WRITING

- + Describe the standard structure of news story in news writing (inverted pyramid)
- + Explain the importance of standard structure of news story in writing and reporting story
- + Identify major parts of news story
- + Describe types of intros in news writing (summary descriptive staccato, multiple element)
- + Mention the most commonly used types of intros in writing news stories

✚ Standard structure of news story in news writing (inverted pyramid).

Inverted pyramid in news writing is a storytelling structure that arranges information from the most important to the least important. It's called a pyramid because the "broad base" (the crucial facts) comes first, and the "narrow tip" (minor details) comes.

The **inverted pyramid** is a writing style commonly used in journalism to structure information in a way that prioritizes the most important details at the beginning of the article. This method is visualized as a triangle pointing downwards, where the widest part at the top represents the most substantial and interesting information.

It inverted pyramid structure mostly have three parts

Lead The opening sentence or paragraph. It delivers the most critical facts — the *who, what, when, where, why, and how*.

Body/Key Details Expands on the lead with supporting facts, quotes, statistics, and background. This section adds depth but still prioritizes important information.

Tail/Less Important Information Contains minor details, side notes, or extra commentary. Editors can cut this part if space is limited without losing the essence of the story

Structure and Purpose

In the inverted pyramid structure, the **most critical information** is presented first, followed by details of decreasing importance. This approach ensures that readers can quickly grasp the essential points of the story, even if they do not read the entire article. The initial sentences typically answer the **who, what, when, where, why, and how** of the story.

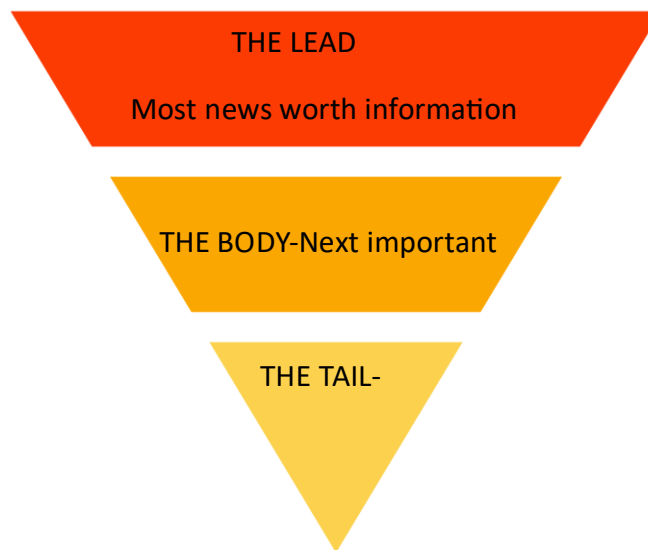
'Who, what, when, where and why' is a framework used by many journalists to help them communicate the key details of a story effectively. By following this checklist, they can be sure that the most relevant information is included in the lead (first sentence) of an article.

- **Who** is the story about?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it take place?
- **Why** did the story occur?

- **How** did the events in the story come about

The inverted pyramid is valued for two main reasons:

1. **Reader Convenience:** Readers can leave the story at any point and still understand the main points.
2. **Editing Flexibility:** Editors can easily trim the story from the bottom without losing essential information



+ Importance of standard structure of news story in writing and reporting story.

- **Clarity and Accessibility** News stories must be easy to read and understand. A standard structure like the **inverted pyramid** ensures that readers get the most important facts first — the *who, what, when, where, why, and how* — before diving into supporting details.
- **Reader Engagement** Many readers skim headlines and the first few paragraphs. By placing critical information at the top, the structure respects modern reading habits and keeps audiences informed even if they don't finish the article.
- **Editorial Efficiency** Editors can cut stories from the bottom without losing essential meaning. This is especially useful in print journalism where space is limited.
- **Trust and Credibility** A disciplined structure signals professionalism. Readers trust that the story is factual, objective, and organized according to journalistic standards

Major parts of news story

Headline

is a short, attention-grabbing phrase that summarizes the core message of the story. It is designed to entice readers to engage with the article while conveying the main point quickly

Byline

Identifies the journalist responsible for the story, providing transparency and accountability. It usually appears at the beginning or end of the article

Lead (Lede)

The opening sentence or paragraph that presents the most important information, often answering the Five Ws: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. A strong lead hooks the reader and sets the tone for the rest of the story

Nut Graph

Explains the significance of the story, providing context and summarizing why the news matters. It often follows the lead in feature or analytical pieces

Body

Contains the detailed information, organized using the **inverted pyramid** structure, where the most critical facts appear first, followed by supporting details and background information

Quotes

Are the exact words of sources, used to provide credibility, perspective, and human interest. They are typically enclosed in quotation marks and integrated into the body of the story

Captions and Subtitles

Describe images or videos, providing context and identifying sources. **Subtitles** may appear in videos to translate or clarify dialogue

Additional Elements

Other elements include the **dateline**, which shows the location and date of the story, and **vox pops**, which are short interviews with members of the public to capture diverse opinion

✚ Types of intros in news writing (summary, descriptive, staccato,)

A lead is the opening paragraph of a news or feature story. It gives readers the most important information in a clear, concise, and interesting manner while also establishing the voice and direction of the entire article. If your lead fails, your story fails – it's that simple. Most readers won't push past a weak opening, no matter how strong the rest of the piece is.

1. Straight lead (or Summary lead)

The summary lead is the most common and traditional form of lead in journalism. It's the backbone of hard news reporting and the foundation of the inverted pyramid structure, where the most critical information sits at the top of the story and the less important details follow in descending order.

A summary lead works by answering the most important of the Five W's and H right in the opening sentence. The idea is straightforward: if a reader stops after just one paragraph, they should still walk away with a complete understanding of the story's core facts. This lead is ideal for breaking news, government coverage, police reports, court proceedings, and any story where *facts are the most important element*

Consider this example: "City council rejected a proposed 5% budget increase during a late-night session at City Hall on Tuesday, citing concerns over a lack of public transparency." In one sentence, the reader knows the who (city council), what (rejected a budget increase), when (Tuesday), where (City Hall), and why (lack of transparency). The rest of the article merely expands on these facts with quotes, context, and analysis.

A good summary lead doesn't try to cram all six elements into a single sentence – that would make it unwieldy. The writer identifies the two or three most newsworthy elements for a given story and leads with those. For a crime report, it might be "what happened" and "to whom." For a natural disaster, it could be "what" and "where." The key is editorial judgement about what the reader needs to know first

2. Descriptive lead (painting picture with words)

If the summary lead is about cold facts, the **descriptive lead** is about atmosphere. Instead of telling the reader what happened, it shows them a scene. It uses sensory details – what things looked like, sounded like, smelled like – to transport the reader into a specific time and place. The goal is to make the reader feel like they are present in the story before they even know what the story is about.

Descriptive leads are the natural fit for *feature stories, profiles, travel writing, and narrative journalism*. They work best when the “who” or “why” of a story is more important than the “what,” or when the central element is a person, a place, or a feeling.

One important caution: because a descriptive lead delays the main facts of the story, it must be followed quickly by a **nut graph**— a paragraph (usually the second or third) that summarizes the story’s central point and explains why it matters. Without that transition, the reader may enjoy the scene but never understand what the article is about

3. Question lead

The **question lead** does exactly what the name suggests – it opens a story by asking the reader a question. The intent is to hook readers by making them wonder, reflect, or desire an answer that the rest of the article promises to provide.

A question lead aims to create an information gap. It presents a problem or a puzzle and positions the article as the place where the answer lives. For example: “What happens when a city’s entire water supply is contaminated and no one tells the residents for three months?” The reader immediately wants to know the answer, and so they keep reading

This approach can be particularly effective in opinion columns, explainers, and investigative pieces that tackle complex issues. The question frames the story’s central theme as something personally relevant to the reader.

Despite their appeal, question leads are *one of the most debated tools in journalism*. Many editors and journalism instructors advise against using them, especially for inexperienced writers. As open journalism textbook points out, readers come to a news story to learn something, not to be quizzed. A question lead can feel like a lazy shortcut when a more creative or direct lead would serve the story better.

4. The punch or caption lead

Sometimes the most effective opening isn’t a detailed summary or an atmospheric scene – it’s a verbal punch. The **punch lead**, also known as a **caption lead**, is a short, abrupt, and often dramatic statement. It can be a single word, a short phrase, or a very brief sentence. Its power lies in its starkness and surprise

A punch lead breaks the usual rhythm of reading and forces the reader to stop and react. It creates immediate suspense. The reader encounters something unexpected – a dramatic declaration, a blunt statement, an isolated word – and is compelled to read on to understand the context. Punch leads are most effective for stories with a high degree of *drama or suspense*

5. Staccato lead

staccato lead is a melodic line played in a way where each note is **short, detached, and clearly separated** from the next. The word *staccato* itself comes from Italian, meaning “detached” or “separated.”

The idea of a *staccato lead* borrows from music: it’s about **short, sharp, detached sentences or phrases** that immediately grab attention. Instead of flowing, complex sentences, the lead is broken into crisp fragments that deliver impact quickly.

Fire. Smoke. Panic. A market in Dar es Salaam went up in flames yesterday, leaving dozens injured.

6. The delayed lead

In a delayed-identification lead, the person at the center of the story is not named in the first paragraph. Instead, they are described by an identifier – their occupation, age, city of residence, or role. The actual name appears in the second or third paragraph. This approach works when the person’s identity is less important than what happened to them.

most commonly used types of intros in writing news stories

1. The summary lead

This is the most common type of intro in journalism. A summary lead gives readers a concise overview of the story in a single sentence. It packs in the key facts – usually the most important of the 5Ws + 1H – and gets straight to the heart of the matter. According to journalism educators, there are three main types of news leads: the basic news lead, the summary lead, and the delayed-identification lead

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What makes a good intro

Knowing the types of intros is only half the battle. The real skill lies in execution. Several principles separate a strong intro from a weak one.

Brevity

A good intro is short. As the *purdue online writing lab* notes, leads are generally 25 to 30 words long and should rarely exceed 40 words. Readers won't wait around for you to get to the point. One sentence is ideal. Two is the absolute maximum for a hard news lead.

Active voice

Strong verbs written in the active voice make intros lively and direct. Passive constructions sound dull and often leave out critical information – like who performed the action. “The budget was approved” is weaker and less informative than “The city council approved a \$5 million budget.” Active voice adds clarity and energy.

Specificity

Vague intros kill reader interest. Instead of writing “a lot of people were affected,” specify the number. Instead of “an incident occurred,” state what happened. Concrete details make a story feel real and trustworthy. The more specific your intro, the more credible it sounds.

Newsworthiness

Your intro must highlight the most newsworthy aspect of the story. Factors like **timeliness, proximity, impact, prominence, and conflict** all influence what belongs in the opening line. A story about a local school's funding cut is more newsworthy than a routine board meeting – so the funding cut should lead, not the meeting itself.

Common mistakes to avoid

Even experienced journalists sometimes fall into intro-writing traps. Here are the most common mistakes beginners should watch out for.

Burying the lead

This happens when the most important information is hidden in the third or fourth paragraph instead of being presented upfront. The concept of “burying the lead” is the single most common criticism in newsrooms. If your reader has to dig through background details to find out what actually happened, your intro has failed.

The “duh” lead

This is an intro that tells the reader something obvious and not newsworthy. For example: “The City Council held a meeting at City Hall on Monday night.” Of course they did – that’s what city councils do. The news is what happened at the meeting. New writers often fall into this trap because of their essay-writing habits, where introductory context comes before the main point.

The question lead

Starting a news story with a question (“Do you think textbooks are too expensive?”) is generally considered a weak choice. Readers pick up a news story to learn something, not to be quizzed. It’s also a somewhat lazy approach – instead of stating the news, you’re asking the reader to guess at it.

The attribution lead

This mistake occurs when a writer begins the intro with the source of information rather than the information itself. For example: “The mayor told the audience Tuesday that a new stadium will be built next year.” A better version flips the sentence: “A new stadium will be built next year, the mayor announced Tuesday.” The news – the stadium – should come first. The source is important but secondary.

The quote lead

Opening with a direct quote might seem dramatic, but it's risky. A quote lead drops readers into the middle of a conversation without context. Most quotes need an introduction to make sense, and very few quotes are compelling enough to launch an entire story on their own.

Overloading the intro

Trying to stuff all six of the 5Ws + 1H into one sentence creates a clunky, unreadable paragraph. A good intro includes the three or four most important elements and saves the rest for later. As many journalism instructors advise, one common mistake is trying to put too much into a single lead.