

Fundamentals of News Writing

The opening paragraph of a news story is referred to as the LEAD. A key fundamental in writing a news story is to answer six basic questions about the event. They are: WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? AND HOW?

It is necessary to answer all these questions in the lead, but you should attempt to answer several of the more important ones.

A good lead may be a single word, a single sentence, two sentences, a paragraph, or even two paragraphs. Whatever form it takes it must answer the questions a reader would normally ask: "What has happened or is about to happen?" "Who is involved?" "When and where did it happen?" And, sometimes, "How and why did it happen?" You as the writer must determine which of the five Ws and H is the most important to your story, and then place those elements in the lead.

This method of news writing packs the most important facts, together with the barest necessary explanatory material, into the first paragraph and then moves into the detailed portion of the story by concerning the facts in diminishing order of importance.

The foremost advantage to this kind of news writing is the fact most readers have neither the time nor the desire to read every word of every story in the newspaper. By placing the most important elements in the first or second paragraph you have focused the reader's attention on the news, aroused his interest, and allowed him to swiftly skim important facts. The reader can decide for himself whether to continue reading the details or to go on to something else. But even if he stops there, your style of writing has given him the essential facts.

Use a style guide. In news writing the word style refers to the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, and similar mechanical aspects of grammar used in preparing copy. News media usually follow a set style contained in a style book. Obtain a copy and follow it.

Some ABCs of Writing You Should Remember:

-) Keep your story brief. Make a few words do the work of many.
-) Be accurate. As mentioned earlier editors don't have time to check accuracy.
-) Be objective. In order to report news impartially, you must remain detached from whatever is happening.
-) Report only legitimate news of your Post and its activities. This will be news that is of interest or benefit to the people of your community.
-) Include as many names of local people as possible. This is proximity. Names make news at the community level.
-) Look for the unusual. In news jargon this is called "slant", and simply means making the article as interesting and appealing as possible, while following the basics of good news reporting.

This and other material can be found in the Public Relations handbook for the Post PR Officer.