



UNIT-03

Writing for the News

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Draft a new story on the basis of the six most important components of a good news report
- ✓ Explain why the introduction is the most important part of a new story and discuss what a good intro must contain
- ✓ Understand the concept of the inverted pyramid approach to writing new stories and why it is the most common format for hard news reports

Unit 3

Writing for the News

Every journalist is expected to develop and hone their news writing skills over time. The art of news writing is based on a set of techniques or parameters. And, despite the fact that each news organisation has its own style of news presentation, they all use the same basic techniques. Learning the structure of a news story or news report is the first step in mastering this technique.

A News Story's Structure

A news report has the following components at its most basic level:

- **Headline** - an indication of what the story is about
- **Credit line/Byline** - details of who wrote the story
- **Dateline** - date and time of the story's publication
- **Lead** - the most important fact of the story (the Ws and H)
- **Body** - the main bulk of information and in-depth details
- **Conclusion** - a sign off that gives the reader something to think about

The final element, the conclusion, is only present in soft news stories. There are no conclusions in hard news reports.

The lead is the most powerful of all of these elements. Because the lead or introduction is what draws the reader into the news story. So, let's talk about the characteristics of a good introduction:

- Any news story's 'intro' is the most important part. It should be straightforward and attention-grabbing. It should include the most crucial elements of the story. The specifics will be discussed later. It should pique the reader's or listener's interest and be brief. For print media, it should be one sentence of no more than 20 words, and for radio and television, it should be even shorter.
- The most newsworthy aspect of the story, the essence of the story, the sharpest angle of the story should be the focus of the introduction. As a result, the introduction should be brief (ideally around 40 words), uncluttered, and pertinent to the main plot. The introduction should entice the reader to continue reading the story. To begin writing an introduction, you must first determine what makes the story newsworthy. There could be several things in the story that are newsworthy. However, you must identify and decide which angle of the story is the most important or sharpest; it is at this point that your professional abilities will be put to the test.
- Your readers or listeners will be given the most important information right away in this manner. They will have a good idea of what the story is about, even if they stop reading or listening after the first one or two sentences.
- Another thing to keep in mind is that you shouldn't try to include too much information in the introduction. The six main questions that journalists attempt to answer must be answered in

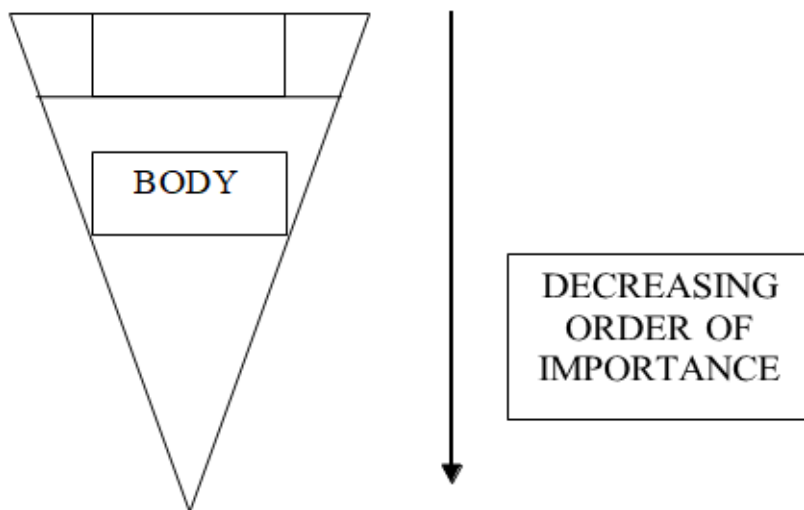
your news story, but they do not need to be answered in the introduction.

The Inverted Pyramid Style

Inverted Pyramid style news stories are arranged in order of importance. Every media organisation follows this formula. The Inverted Pyramid structure is most commonly used in hard news stories, and most hard news stories adhere to it religiously.

However, feature stories and other soft stories can be written in this style on rare occasions. In this style, the most important points of a story are told first, in the lead, followed by the body, in which the rest of the pertinent information is presented in descending order of interest or importance. Of course, there is no conclusion in this style.

The most important or interesting facts are presented first or immediately after the introduction, while the least important points are presented last.



The "5 W's and H" principle should be followed when writing a news story. The lead or intro, according to the Inverted Pyramid structure, contains the most important of the 5 Ws. The Ws and Hs that are less important are addressed in the body. When writing the news, it's important to remember that once the intro captures the essence, the rest of the questions will be answered in the following sections of the story. If these questions are not adequately addressed, the reader/viewer/curiosity listener's will not be fully satisfied.

When it comes to writing the news, this is the standard procedure. If the news is to be classified as straight or interpretative reporting, the first four Ws- Who, What, When, and Where- reflect the hard facts of the story (straight news or hard news), while the answers to the Why and How- introduce an element of interpretation.

In this context, it's worth noting that, in contrast to "hard news," the concept of "soft news" is more concerned with background information, and it aims to capture not only the event but also the process that leads up to it.

The term "soft news" is also linked to the rise of infotainment, in which all news is treated as "soft" to the point of being entertaining. In a nutshell, hard news is "event-centric," while soft news is "process-centric."

Hard news is a "hard event," while soft news can be a feature that captures the human side of the event. Another distinction is that hard news is also known as spot news or breaking news, because news organisations publish the information as soon as it occurs, without delay.

How Do You Write Your Copy?

Now that we've learned about the structure of a news story, let's move on to actual news writing, also known as 'writing the copy' or 'copy writing' in journalistic terms. You will be able to write the entire news story easily and confidently if you understand the basic principles for writing each of the elements that make up a news story. So, let's examine them one at a time.

Newswriting Principles:

Headline:

The headline should be written with the intention of not only introducing and summarising the news story, but also attracting the reader's attention. As a result, it must be concise and precise, and it must clearly convey an appropriate perception of the story while using the fewest words possible.

Here are some basic guidelines for writing effective headlines:

- Create a headline that revolves around a strong verb.
- Avoid using articles and helping verbs such as a, an, the, is, were, and so on.
- Never use a nostalgic feeling. Use both the present and future tenses.
- Make use of active voice. It helps to cut out unnecessary words while also giving the impression of being present.
- Don't use too many abbreviations. Even if headlines have a limited amount of space, avoid using arbitrary or uncommon abbreviations.
- Wherever possible, include the subject in the headline. Use the name if it is known; otherwise, use another title that identifies the subject.
- When parts of direct speech are important enough to use in the headline, they are put in quotes.
- In contrast to the use of double quotes in the main body of the news story, only single quotes are used in the headline.
- At the end of the headline, there is no 'period' or 'full stop.'
- Always try to summarise the story and highlight the most important/striking element in it in the headline.

- When writing attractive/smart headlines, the clarity of the information should not be sacrificed.

Credit Line/By-line:

Depending on their own style book, different newspapers have different rules for writing the by-line or credit line. Even within the same newspaper, credit lines can differ. 'By a staff reporter', 'from a staff reporter', 'from a correspondent', 'by our special correspondent', 'by our reporter', 'from our correspondent', and so on are some of the more common styles.

It's usually found on the report's left side, beneath the headline. It's sometimes left aligned, and other times it's centre aligned above the first paragraph.

Dateline:

The dateline almost always has two parts: the location and the date. The location comes first, followed by the date. 'London April 9', for example. However, some newspapers have begun to omit the dateline altogether, or only mention the location in the dateline.

This is mostly done in the case of feature stories or other soft news stories where the time factor isn't as important. It's also done when there are multiple editions of the same newspaper, and the news item may appear on a different date in each edition.

Lead:

In most cases, the lead should contain all of the elements—five Ws and an H. However, if it is impossible to include all of the elements in the lead, the remaining elements should be included in the following paragraph.

The reporter, on the other hand, should try to include as many elements as possible in the first paragraph. If the incident is significant in terms of impact and importance, it becomes difficult to include all of the elements in the lead itself, as the lead may become cluttered. The body should deal with the rest of the elements in such a situation, particularly the 'why' and 'how' elements.

When it comes to describing the event in the body of the news story, however, the inverted pyramid style is always used, with the most important details coming first, followed by the less important details. As a result, the lead effectively summarises the story in three to four sentences. The lead should ideally contain no more than 30 to 40 words, which should include a summary of the event.

And the lead should try to include all five Ws and a H as much as possible in those 30 to 40 words. Otherwise, because it deals with the story's details, the 'how' element is usually carried forward to the following paragraphs in the body.

Body:

The body, as previously stated, is the section of a story that deals with the details of events. After summarising the story in the lead, there are still a number of important details about the story that readers may be interested in learning about. This is carried out in the body part.

The body is designed in the same inverted pyramid style as the lead. That is, arranging the facts in order

of importance and relevance in time. In descending order, the most important aspects are highlighted at the beginning of the body, followed by the less important facts. However, because the body of the article deals with the event's description, most readers are hesitant to read the entire description and instead skip to another news item after skimming the lead. A clever writer, on the other hand, would know how to keep the reader's attention until the very last line of the story. For that reason, the writing should be engaging and beautifully presented, making it difficult for readers to abandon it halfway through. Due to newspaper space constraints, the reporter should always try to say more with fewer words.

It's important to remember that the language used in news differs from that used in other types of writing. In the case of news language, there are a few very basic guidelines to follow.

1. Use simple language and short sentences whenever possible.
2. Use simple words, metaphors, figures of speech, adjectives, and clichés sparingly. Dispel technical jargon.
3. Wherever possible, use active voice in your writing. It shortens and directs sentences.
4. Write in numerals after you've spelled the numbers up to nine.
5. Identifiers that come after a name, such as age, address, job title, or other information, should be separated by paired commas. Mr., Mrs., Dr., and other honorific titles are not to be used.
6. When directly reproducing speech, use double quotes rather than single quotes as in the headline. In direct speech, you can write full sentences or just significant words or phrases at times.
7. The importance of time in a news story cannot be overstated. The past tense is used in news stories about events that have already occurred. As a result, they use active verbs like elected, injured, killed, damaged, awarded, and so on, rather than passive verbs like was elected, injured, killed, damaged, and so on.
8. To emphasise timeliness, the present tense is frequently used. Avian Flu, which has resurfaced in parts of West Bengal for the second time in a month, has broken out in Jalpaiguri district, prompting authorities to order mass culling today.
9. The present perfect form of the verb is used in stories where the exact time of an event is unknown or irrelevant. Say, for example, that someone has been named, that someone has said, that someone has announced, and so on.
10. The use of the auxiliary verb will – will come, will speak, will arrive, etc. – is used in news stories about future events.

Objectivity and Authenticity

Journalism is a profession in which people report on events, and reporting on events is a serious business. As a result, newscasters must present facts as they occur, without tampering or adding personal views or opinions. The term "news" refers to the presentation of information in a factual and non-judgmental manner. Journalism requires a high level of objectivity. Objectivity in reporting and

presentation of news is a virtue that every professional in this field should strive for. When dealing with news, one must be cautious and vigilant against any personal bias or opinions that might creep in. While reporting, the reporter must maintain a higher level of objectivity. Because when an incident occurs, the reporter is dispatched to the scene first to gather information. He not only gathers firsthand information on the scene, but also interviews witnesses and investigates by delving deeper into the incident in the hopes of uncovering any hidden facts.

As a result, it's expected that the reporter sticks to the facts and figures while also being wary of the interviewees' biased viewpoints. They must not, under any circumstances, allow their personal opinion to be reflected in the report.

In the newspaper, there are specific columns, such as the editorial page, where writers' comments or viewpoints are published. If the reporter wishes to express an opinion on an event, he or she can write an editorial piece for the editorial page. While writing his report, the reporter should avoid mixing news and opinions. If a reporter deviates from his objectivity in an ethical manner, the newspaper's image is tainted. As a result, the reporter should strive for complete objectivity in his or her reporting.

However, the reporter may not always be able to remain completely objective or unbiased. The reporter, as a human being, is vulnerable to a variety of emotional and professional risks, and can easily succumb to subjectivity. And the reporter's personal bias or opinion is frequently reflected in the newspaper. In some cases, the reporter's credibility, as well as the reputation of the entire newspaper, may be jeopardised. Nonetheless, the reporter should strive for objectivity in his reporting as much as possible.

When a reporter is investigating a specific incident and needs the opinions of other people who may have witnessed the incident, the other person may try to pass his own judgement. In such cases, the reporter should always double-check information and, if possible, confirm it with other sources to ensure that the readers receive the truth and nothing but the truth. As a result, objectivity is preserved at all costs.

Being objective can also help you be more genuine. The term "fact" refers to information that is believed to be true. When a reporter, or anyone in the news business for that matter, strives for maximum objectivity, it helps to be authentic in terms of information. In journalism, facts are sacred. As a result, the journalist should avoid diluting it by combining it with personal opinions.

In today's profit-driven media environment, media organisations are increasingly attempting to influence the presentation of facts or news. When it comes to news, the owners of media companies are always looking for a way to make money. They do not want to jeopardise their sources of profit by writing against them, even if they have solid evidence of their involvement in criminal activity. The media organisations may also have a favoured group of people in society that they don't want to offend at all costs, putting the concept of objectivity to the test. On the other hand, news organisations may try to smear the reputations of those who do not fall under their good graces by publishing malicious articles about them. This type of behaviour on the part of organisations sends a very negative message to the public, and there is a good chance that people will lose faith in society in the long run.

As a result, objectivity and authenticity are virtues that all media organisations, as well as professionals

working in this field, should strive for if they want to stay in business for a long time.

General News Writing Guidelines

General Guidelines for News Reporting and Writing

- It is not your responsibility as a reporter or writer to pass a verdict or make a judgement. Simply gather the story's facts, present them to your audience, and let them choose which side they want to support.
- Editorializing is not a good idea: Leave the editorialising to the editors. News reports should be as objective and straightforward as possible.
- Avoid using unfamiliar jargon: Don't assume that your audience knows what the unfamiliar jargon you're using means. Always use words that you are familiar with.
- Keep yourself and other reporters out of the story: Unless you and your colleagues are a vital part of the story, keep yourself and your colleagues out of the story.
- Avoid using the phrases "told me," "told this writer," or "told our reporter" in interviews. Instead, use the phrase "in an interview."
- When writing and reporting, absolute accuracy is required: if in doubt, leave it out.
- There must be no deliberate misrepresentation of facts in news or headlines: Never tamper with the facts of a story, regardless of the benefits you may gain as a result. In journalism, this is an unforgivable offence. Any reporter who tampers with or fabricates the "facts" of a story is considered "finished" in the industry. You turn leprous, untouchable, and jobless.
- Protect yourself from libellous statements being published: A good reporter is one who lives to write another report and see the fame of previous reports come back to him. If you don't want to end up in jail, don't write it down. Libelous statements should be avoided because they have the potential to land you in jail and force the closure of your media company due to insolvency caused by failure to pay court fines.
- Always use simple words: News writing and reporting aren't the places to impress people with big words and long-sounding sentences. Always use the simplest word available. A good news report is one that the average person can read and comprehend.
- All news copies must be typewritten and double-spaced: Handwritten copies are no longer in use. As a result, a reporter must be able to type his story on a computer. It must also be typed in double space so that copy can be edited by sub-editors and editors.
- The reporter's surname, a slug line, and the date must all appear in the top left corner of the first page: Slug lines should be one word or less.
- Begin your story in the middle of the first page: Allow plenty of room for your superior editorial team to work on your copy.
- Each page should have a one-inch margin on the left, right, top, and bottom: Make sure the pages aren't too crowded. As needed, leave appropriate margins.
- Each page must be numbered or lettered as follows: "B copy next" or "page 2 next" is the correct

letter or numeral. Except for the last page, this type of numbering must appear in the bottom right corner of each page. A centred "30," "****," or "#" must be used to indicate the end of a story.

- Make your lead interesting at all times: Keep an eye out for leads that are misleading. Leads are the people who sell a story. As a result, the lead must be interesting in order to capture and hold the attention of your audience.
- When writing your news story, use the inverted pyramid format: Because it presents the most important elements of a story in the first few paragraphs, this is the widely accepted format for writing news reports. The format also makes it simple to cut stories from the bottom without sacrificing the story's substance.
- You must accurately quote: Use quotes only when they are absolutely necessary to add colour to your story. Please don't go overboard with this in your copy.
- If you want to write in the present tense, use "said"; if it's reported speech, use "said that": This format keeps the copy current and alive.
- Before submitting your work, read it thoroughly and correct all typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors: Even in ordinary or everyday writing, this is a basic rule. A sloppy copy could not be justified by any amount of haste.
- Both copies of your copy must be properly edited and submitted in duplicate.
- In your copy, never underline words, phrases, or book titles.
- Don't exaggerate, don't over-dramatise, avoid adjectives, use the active voice, and write in a natural, conversational tone.

What Makes A Good Writer?

A good reporter must be a good writer first and foremost. This is due to the fact that his writing skills are required for his job as a journalist, which entails news writing and reporting. A bad writer will never be a good news reporter or writer. Understanding the elements of good writing and applying them to our writing assignments is the first step toward good news writing.

Components of Effective Writing

Precision

The rule of precision must always be followed by a good writer. Words should be used, and they should have the exact meaning that you intend. You should never say "uninterested" when you mean "disinterested," or "further" when you mean "farther." For example, if you say a house was destroyed by fire, you're implying that it needs to be rebuilt rather than repaired. If you say fire fighters wore oxygen masks to enter a burning building, you're either questioning their or your own intelligence. When there is a fire, oxygen is dangerous, so firefighters use their tanks. Words are your tools of the trade, and a writer can only use specific words in specific situations. Furthermore, the writer has a large number of words from which to choose. That liberty can be both liberating and perilous.

Clarity

All news reports and stories must be written in a clear and concise manner. When attempting to write clear stories, every reporter should be aware of the following.

- Use simple sentences and words that you are familiar with.
- Make sure to use proper grammar and punctuation.
- Create a beginning (lead), middle (body), and end for your story (conclusion).
- Use the active voice whenever possible.
- Exaggeration and adjectives should be avoided.

Pace

The pace of good writing must be appropriate to the content. Sentences and words set the tone for a story. Action, tension, and movement are conveyed in short sentences. The reader is slowed down by a series of long sentences, which conveys a more relaxed mood. There are sentences of various lengths in between these two extremes, and good writers use them all. Not every sentence needs to be long or short. They shouldn't all be the same length, either. A sudden change in the length of a sentence draws attention to it. It's worth a shot now and then.

Transitions

Transitional devices are used in good writing to guide the reader from one thought to the next. A transition is a link that assures the reader that the writer knows where he or she is going. A transition can take the form of a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. "And," "but," and "however" are common transitions.

Sensory Appeal

The reader's senses must be appealed to in good writing. The five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch are all stimulated by good writing.

Analogies

Analogies are used in good writing. Writers can use analogies to show similarities and differences. Similes and metaphors are frequently used to accomplish this goal. A metaphor says one thing is another, whereas a simile compares one thing to another. Writers use similes and metaphors to create word pictures.

What is Considered Bad Writing?

- **If the story has dull writing:** Dull copy is never good copy. Always use active voice and make your writing conversational and lively to avoid this.
- **If the story isn't engaging:** Interest is a constant factor in determining whether or not a story is good. Any uninteresting story will undoubtedly be mistaken for poor writing.

- **If the story is too abstract, vague, or unclear:** On the basis of poor writing, vague and abstract stories will always be rejected. It must be clear and unambiguous to make your stories interesting.
- **If there are already too many stories on the subject:** If you write about what everyone else has written about, your story may be rejected as poor. This is made worse by the fact that you failed to include any new or fresh information in your writing. As a result, if you don't want your report to be considered poor, avoid writing on what everyone else has written on.
- **If the story is or appears to be propaganda:** Any attempt to pass off propaganda as a news report or story will be rejected outright as poor writing.
- **If the story is unimportant:** Poor writing or evidence of it is likely to be rejected for trivial and unimportant stories. Write about important issues that the majority of your audience will be interested in.
- **If the story isn't in good taste:** Any writing that offends public morality or demonstrates poor taste in the choice of words and phrases will be dismissed as poor writing.
- **If the story goes against the newspaper's policy or style guide:** Every news organisation has a style guide, which is a set of rules that governs how the news organisation intends to present its reports and stories. Any violation of the style guide will result in your paper being discarded by the editor.
- **If there are too many figures and statistics in the story:** People despise stories that are overburdened with figures and statistics. If your story is about a budget proposal, for example, come up with a unique way to present it.
- **If the story is a free publicity stunt:** A free publicity stunt attempts to deceive readers by presenting an advertisement in the form of a news story. Such stories are usually ignored by readers and editors.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Broadcast News and Writing Stylebook, by Robert A. Papper | Jul 2, 2020*
- ✓ *News Reporting and Writing by Missouri Group | Oct 7, 2016.*

