

TOPIC: BASIC BROADCAST NEWS WRITING



Objective: Students will write focused news stories for print and broadcast using style rules appropriate to audience and purpose and including the “five W’s and H”.

Broadcast Writing: Keep It Short, Simple, and Conversational Style Include the 5 W’s and H Rule

The Lead is the most important part of a news story because it sets the tone for what follows. The lead must “grab” or “hook” the audience’s attention in as few words as possible. The hook can be an exciting or dramatic sentence, a clever phrase, an intriguing fact, or a startling quote. Unless the story is a feature, the lead must include at least one element of the news if not more.. The lead is the foundation of the story.

- **Use a strong Lead-in Sentence-** Most broadcast news stories start with a lead-in sentence that is fairly general. Broadcast news writers do this to alert viewers that a new story is being presented, and to prepare them for the information to follow.

The type of lead you write, will determine how the rest of the story will be written. Avoid using “No” or “Not” in a lead—someone may miss it and reach the wrong conclusion. Update and rework your lead until it is just right! More about leads later~.

- **Keep It Simple**

Fancy words do not work on broadcast writing. Broadcast stories must mimic conversational English and must be as simple as possible. Viewers are not *reading* what you're writing, they're *hearing* it. Keep your sentences simple and use basic, easily understood words. If you find you've put a difficult or awkward word in a sentence, replace it with a shorter one.

Example:

Print: *Knoebel's Amusement Resort announced its 2010 Knoebel's Scholarship recipients.*

Broadcast: *Knoebel's Amusement Resort announced scholarship winners for the 2010 season.*

The Knoebel's Scholarship Award is given to student employees of the park based on written applications and work performance.

- **Keep it Short.** Shorter sentences are more easily understood than longer ones. Broadcast copy must be read out loud. If you write a sentence that's too long, the news anchor will be gasping for breath just to finish it. Individual sentences in broadcast copy should be short enough to be easily read in one breath.

- **Keep It Conversational**

Many sentences found in newspaper stories sound very awkward when read out loud. So use a conversational style in your broadcast writing. Doing so will make it sound more like real speech, as opposed to a script someone is reading.

Standards/Anchors:

1.5.10.B: Develop content appropriate for the topic.

Gather, organize, and determine validity and reliability of information.

Employ the most effective format for purpose and audience.

Write fully developed paragraphs that have details and information specific to the topic and relevant to the focus

C.E.1.1.1: Write with a sharp controlling point and an awareness of the audience and expository task.

- **Use One Main Idea Per Sentence**

Sentences in newspaper stories sometimes contain several ideas, usually in clauses that are broken up by commas. In broadcast writing keep it to one main idea per sentence or the sentence will be too long.

- **Use The Active Voice**

Sentences written in the active voice just naturally tend to be shorter and more to the point than those written in the passive voice.

- **Put Sources at the Start of the Sentence**

Print news stories usually put the sources of the information (attributions) , at the end of the sentence. In broadcast news writing we put them at the beginning.

- **Leave Out Unnecessary Details**

Print stories tend to include a lot of details there isn't time for in broadcast news.

- **More about Leads**

Types of Leads:

Hard Lead: A lead that places important info in the first sentence.

Soft Lead: a subtle lead in which the most important fact is not given immediately and alerts the audience to news to follow.

Emotion Lead: using the right tone in a lead to convey the message

Quote Lead: starting the story with a quote; but use sparingly.

Shotgun or umbrella lead: Combining two or more related stories in a lead to eliminate writing three short, back-to-back stories.

Suspense or delay lead: keeping the important info until the middle or end to create suspense.

Here's an example of a broadcast news item. Note the use of a lead-in line, short, simple sentences and a conversational style. Try reading it aloud:

There's more bad news from Iraq. Four U.S. soldiers were killed in an ambush outside Baghdad today. The Pentagon says the soldiers were hunting insurgents when their Humvee came under sniper fire. The Pentagon hasn't yet released the soldiers' names.

Sources:

"Media Toolkit For Youth Tip Sheet ." Media Awareness Network. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Sep 2010.

http://www.mediaawareness.ca/english/resources/special_initiatives/toolkit_resources/tipsheets/writing_news_story.cfm

Rogers, Tony. "Tips for basic Broadcast Newswriting." About.Com. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Sep 2010.

<http://journalism.about.com/od/writing/a/broadcast.htm>.

White, Ted. Broadcast News. 4th ed. Burlington, MA: Elsiever, Inc, 2005. 32-42. Print.

Practice Exercises:

1. From a recent issue of your local newspaper, select three stories and rewrite in broadcast style.
2. Write a paper comparing and contrasting newspaper style with broadcast style.
3. Choose a current school news topic and write three styles of stories, print for newspaper, print for the web, and a broadcast style story.

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