



WRITING NEWS STORIES

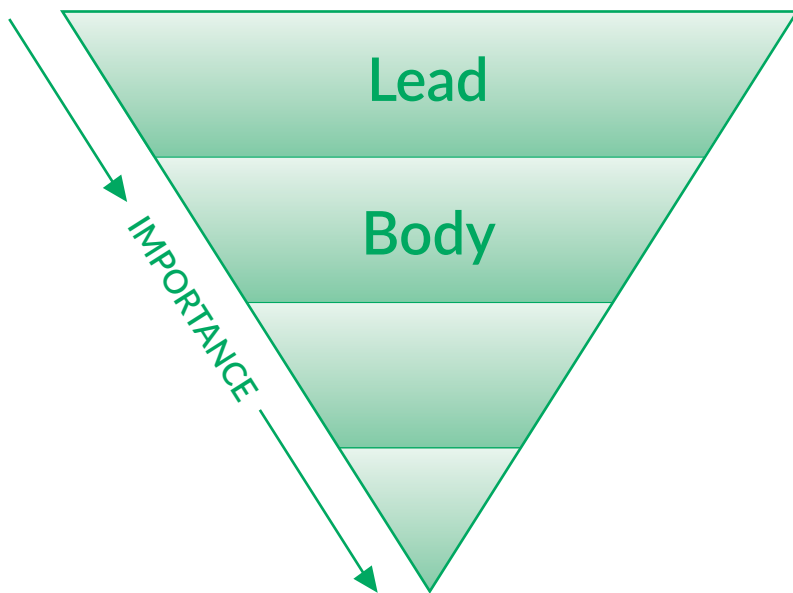
Tips for Club Reporters

- News must be timely, immediate or near the present, and relative (physically or psychologically) to the audience. Be punctual with your stories. Get your report submitted to the media as soon after the meeting, activity or event as soon as possible.
- Editors prefer local or personal news. Check with newspaper, radio or television stations for requirements they may have for submissions.
- Structure your story using the 5 w's and the h. Include details/plans your club has for future meetings, activities or events.
 - » Who: Who said it? Who is it about? Use full names.
 - » What: What happened? Importance counts.
 - » Where: Where did it happen or where is it going to happen?
 - » When: When did it happen or when will it happen?
 - » Why: Why is it important?
 - » How: How did it happen? Was it unusual?
- Be clear—make your story readable. Here are some tips to improve readability:
 - » Short sentences. News stories average 15 and 20 words per sentence. Sentences longer than 30 words may be hard to understand.
 - » Short paragraphs. Keep paragraphs short and varied in length from one to five average sentences. Remember a 100-word paragraph looks long in a narrow newspaper column.
- » Easy words. Use short, simple words in place of longer, multi-syllable words with the same meaning. When you have to use technical or difficult words, explain it as simply as possible.
- » Personal words. Pronouns like 'you' and 'we,' a person's name or a direct quote make your story more interesting. This personalization is more often used in "feature" news stories, and is a good technique for holding reader interest.
- » Active verbs. Keep stories moving and "grab" the reader more than "to be" verbs that show little action. Action verbs include: tackle, gallop, scramble, etc.
- Get to the point... FAST! Most people whiz through newspapers, reading headlines and maybe only the first paragraph or two. Put important facts in the first paragraph; first sentence is even better. Make sure your story essentials are not at the bottom of your story, because it may not make it into print. Editors chop from the end of the article to make them fit in available space.
- Be neat. Type your report in a font that is easy to read.
- Be accurate. Spell names correctly, be sure to have correct names of each person involved. Also make sure dates are correct.
- Be objective. Leave out personal opinions when writing a report. Report only the facts and remain completely impartial.



News Story Structure

The basic writing structure used by newspapers is the upside-down pyramid. Unlike books, where each chapter builds to an exciting conclusion on the last page, the conclusion of a news story is in the first one or two paragraphs.



Start with the information needed most—enough information to give a good overview of the entire story.

Body is support—information that is second in importance.

Continue with additional information to complete the story.

The first one or two paragraphs, known as the lead, sum up all the important elements of the story. Each paragraph that follows contains details that are less important. Why is this structure used? It makes editing easier. Editors correct any errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling; then they write a headline to go along with the story and size it to fit the available space on the page. To fit the story on the page, the editor may lop off whole paragraphs at the end without destroying the essential part of the story.

Take a look at the front page of a newspaper. Read one of the stories all the way through. Cover the last paragraph with your hand, then the one above it and the one above that. If the story follows the upside-down pyramid style, it will still be clear and understandable when you've covered most of it with your hand.

News Story Structure, cont.

The Lead

The most important part of a story is the lead - the opening paragraph or two. Spend some time working on your leads because they should summarize your story. The lead should be one or two simple sentences summarizing the most important information. It should answer some—if not all—of the following questions:

- Who is the story about?
- What are they doing?
- Where did the story happen?
- When did it take place?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

The lead should capture the attention of the reader, so work to make it as interesting as possible. Since you are writing a newspaper article, it must be entirely factual. You can't make up any information, but you can try to make what information you have sound interesting. How long should it be? Not long at all. About 50 words is a good rule of thumb.

The Body

The rest of the story is called the body. It explains the lead and provides more details. In the up-side-down pyramid structure, details are added in order of importance. The more important details go near the top of the story. Less important ones follow.

Writing the Story

When you write your story:

1. Write complete sentences.
2. Write short paragraphs, no longer than 50 to 60 words.
3. Use full names the first time you mention people. If they have a title or hold a position in the club, that title should follow the person's full name the first time you use it. "John Jones, president of Sunnyside 4-H Club..." The second time you refer to the club member, use just his or her first name, unless someone else in the story has the same first name. In that case, repeat the full name.
4. Be absolutely certain of your facts. Check and double-check.
5. Proofread your story after you are finished. Correct any errors. Don't assume your spelling of names is correct just because the name is simple or common. A "Smith" may be spelled "Smythe."

News Story Structure, cont.

Photos

A good news photo is something more than a simple snapshot. A snapshot is an informal picture usually taken in a hurry. A family group picture taken during a holiday is an example. Good news photos are usually informal as well. However, they usually record events while they are happening, people in action, rather than pictures of people who have gathered to have their picture taken. Here are some tips to help you take better news pictures.

1. Strive for action. Action may be implied rather than actual. A picture of a club member grooming a horse is more interesting than a picture of the same club member standing beside the horse.
2. Go for a natural look. Subjects should concentrate on what they are doing rather than looking at you and your camera.
3. Move up close. You usually don't need to show a person's entire body. The face and hands are the most important things. Have members hold small animals near their faces so you can get a close-up of both. The same goes for a cake that has just come out of the oven.
4. Avoid distracting objects in the background. Telephone poles, for example, will look like sticks growing out of people's heads if you're not careful.
5. If you use a flash, don't pose your subjects in front of a window or a mirror. The flash will be reflected in the glass, causing a distracting "hot spot" in the picture.
6. Don't expect too much from your flash. Know its limits. It may not provide adequate lighting much beyond 7 to 10 feet.
7. Make sure your flash is synched to the correct shutter speed before using it. When you remove it from your camera, take the shutter off its synch position.
8. Avoid pictures of large groups. Two or three people in a news picture is an acceptable group.
9. Each picture should have a caption or cutline. A caption is a brief description of what is happening in the picture. Check with your club volunteers to make sure EVERYONE in the photograph has given media consent before submitting any news report.
10. Submit photographs to media outlets in the required format (usually .jpg files) along with your report. At the bottom of the report, indicate the filename of the photograph(s) you are submitting.

What is Media Consent?

Media consent is obtained from volunteers and members at the time of enrollment. Before volunteer or members' names or pictures can be used in a report, consent must be obtained first. For various reasons people may not choose to have their name or picture used. We have to make sure we respect their wishes.



This photo brings all the essential story-telling elements together: the girl, her horse, and the ribbon they just won.



This photo would be better if the background were less distracting. This might have been done by waiting for people to walk out of the picture, finding another place, or using a wider f-stop to blur the background.



Group shots are sometimes unavoidable. Get the group close together and get everyone looking at the camera at once. Take several shots, because someone will undoubtedly blink when you snap the shutter.