

HARD NEWS VS. FEATURE STORIES

Hard news articles are written so the reader can stop reading at any time, and still come away with the whole story. This is very different from an essay, which presumes that the audience will stick around to the end, and can therefore build to a finish. There is no need to put a "conclusion" on a news story. Each individual reader will "end" the story whenever he or she gets bored. A particularly interested reader will keep reading to the end.

The Headline: Convey the general message in as many words as will fit (usually quite a small space). A headline should be informational, and can be clever, as long as the cleverness does not interfere with the information or earn groans from readers.

The Lead: The lead, or the first sentence of the story, is arguably the most important part of the article. Based on the content of that first sentence, a reader will either look deeper into the story, or move on to the next one.

Therefore, how you craft your lead is very important. There are some basic rules one can follow:

- The who, what, when, where, how, why lead.
- Basically, just like it sounds. This lead tries to answer the 5 w's and one h in one sentence.

A 15-minute operation involving a forklift, 20 firefighters, seven police officers and one scared pig ended a two-hour traffic delay on Interstate 94 Sunday morning.

- Experimental leads. If you answer the "5 w's and one h" on the second or third sentences, you can be more creative with the first. The results can flounder and die, or have a great impact. Some examples for the pig story:
 - Tailgate the pig lay snoring in the middle of Interstate 94, oblivious to the fire trucks and squad cars that had gathered around him.
 - Geoffrey Saint never could have imagined what he'd meet in the middle of Interstate 94 during his drive to church Sunday morning.

Journalism Example

Wild pig causes two-hour traffic delay on I-94

By Joe Student

(MyTown

January 24) A 15-minute operation involving a forklift, 20 firefighters, seven police officers and one scared pig ended a two-hour traffic delay on Interstate 94 Sunday morning.

The wild pig, whom the fireman affectionately nicknamed "Tailgate," apparently wandered onto I-94 around 8 a.m. and fell asleep in the middle of the two-lane freeway.

St. Paul resident Geoffrey Saint was the first to come upon the 200-pound animal.

"He practically took up the whole road," Saint said. "I barely slammed on my breaks in time." Saint said the cars behind him followed suit, each stopping short after reaching speeds of up to 70 mph.

Saint stayed in his car and phoned area police, who responded at 8:20 a.m.

Lieutenant Terry Frank was the first officer on the scene.

"I couldn't believe my eyes," Frank said. "Here was this huge, sloppy pig, just napping in the middle of the road, oblivious to what was going on around him."

Frank said she attempted to rouse the pig by poking him with a stick.

"He just kept on snoring," she said.

By 9 a.m., three fire trucks and four patrol cars had responded to the "sleeping pig" call.

"We just sat there and wondered what in the world we could do," Frank said.

<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/journalism/news.htm>

Direct Quotes: Quotes breathe life into a story, but can be abused. Don't quote material that isn't quote-worthy. For instance, if Frank had said, "Officers arrived on the scene at about 9:00 a.m.," you wouldn't quote that.

If she had said, "That huge pig just sat there with tears running down his face and I thought my heart would burst," well, that's far more quote-worthy.

Paraphrased Quotes:

Here is where you could use what Frank had said and rewrite it: Officers arrived on the scene around 9:00 a.m., Frank said. No quotes needed, but the information still needs to be attributed to Frank-- she's the one who said it.

Additional Information:

Inverted Pyramid

In a straight news story, it's best to **get the most important information in your story up to the top**-- your reader will often stop reading after the first few paragraphs, so it's important that they have a good grasp of the story. Put the least important stuff at the end, and leave the unimportant stuff out altogether.

Length of Paragraphs

This is different than a term paper for English class. **Keep your paragraphs short** (one or two sentences) and make each of your points concise. Readers grow tired of big blocks of text, so it's best to break it up a bit.

Objectivity vs. Opinion

Your readers aren't interested *your* opinion on the latest Clinton scandal --so keep yourself out of the story. **Attribute every claim or opinion you report to someone else**, and don't editorialize. If you do, you take the entire element of **objectivity**-- and thus, truth-- out of your story.

Hard Vs Soft News

All media provides two different types of news: **hard news** and **feature news**. Feature news is also called soft news. The following compares the two types of news.

Hard news...

tells about a current event that affects the audience.

Some examples are:

- ▶ Gas prices up again
- ▶ Rash of murders in a two-mile radius
- ▶ School bus driver gets a D.U.I.

These articles:

- ▶Are timely and concise
- ▶Include all key information (who, what, where, why, when and how) in the first paragraph
- ▶Present the more important information first and the less important details toward the end

Feature news (soft news)...

appeals to the emotional side and doesn't directly affect the audience.

Some examples are:

- ▶A day in the life of an Iraqi soldier
- ▶A child that saves four puppies from drowning
- ▶A town's history
- ▶A person getting an award

These articles:

- ▶Do not need to be timely or concise
- ▶Can be written less formally than a hard news story
- ▶Might include an interesting, odd or heartwarming story
- ▶Are presented in a variety of journalistic styles

<http://www.fif.org/olt1b/olt1bnewsvfeature.htm>

Feature

The newspaper term for a piece of nonfiction intended to involve, teach or amuse the reader by giving him information of human interest rather than news. Features may use some of the conventions of fiction, including plot, symbolism, character and dialogue. They are colorful pieces that deal with real events, innovations, trends, issues and processes, placing an emphasis on the people involved.

Feature writing is not concerned so much with formula (as in the inverted pyramid structure of "hard" news writing) as it is interested in impact. The gamut of subject matter and writing style employed by feature writers is nearly endless, as "feature" becomes an umbrella term for many literary structures. Personality sketches, narratives, interviews, essays, exposes, how-to's, columns, miniature anthologies and reviews may all be considered features.

Ideas for writing features come from having a keen news sense, an awareness of human interests and a healthy curiosity. A successful feature story's coverage must be suited to its news value. Its tone and slant must be appropriate to the article's intended effect. For example, features that grow out of a slumping economy reflect the anxiety and despair of the individuals who are most affected.

Besides local newspapers as potential outlets for feature writing, the annual *Writer's Market* lists thousands of magazine markets for freelance articles.

Writer's Encyclopedia

<http://www.writersmarket.com/encyc/f.asp>

Narrative hook

A literary device used at the beginning of a story or a novel for the purpose of arousing a reader's curiosity and encouraging him to read further. A narrative hook may take any number of forms—a startling quotation, a mention of murder or disaster, a vivid description of a fascinating character.

Anything that stimulates a reader's curiosity and promises action to come makes an effective hook; but it should be accomplished in approximately the first two hundred words. Other than that, there are no rules.

Compare the narrative hooks of two classic novels: *Moby Dick's* "Call me Ishmael" and the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

The two hooks have nothing in common except that each is a single sentence—yet no one who has read either one can forget it.

Writers' Encyclopedia <http://www.writersmarket.com/encyc/n.asp>

Show me don't tell me

<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative/showing.htm>