

# 7

## IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN:

- 1 How to translate news values into leads.
- 2 How to organize a story using the inverted pyramid.
- 3 How to increase your

**T**he inverted pyramid—a news story structure that places all the important information in the first paragraph—has written the first draft of history in the United States for generations. Here is the Associated Press lead on the first use of the atomic bomb in 1945:

An atomic bomb, hailed as the most destructive force in history and as the greatest achievement of organized science, has been loosed upon Japan.

And here is how the AP started its story of the first moon landing in 1969:

Man came to the moon and walked its dead surface Sunday.

When terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in 2001, the AP informed the world this way:

In an unprecedented show of terrorist horror, the 110-story World Trade Center towers collapsed in a shower of rubble and dust Tuesday morning after two hijacked airliners carrying scores of passengers slammed into the side of the twin symbols of American capitalism.

As these examples show, journalists have been using the inverted pyramid for generations to record the daily history of world events. When the country waited for 40 days in 2000 to learn who its next president would be, thousands of journalists recorded every step of the controversy, from the recount to the Supreme Court decision. Mark Barabak, a political writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, worked long hours nearly every day. He told Nardo Zacchino, the *Times* reader representative, “Two or three nights post-election, I called my 9-year-old to tell her I wouldn’t be home before she went to sleep because I had to write. I explained this had never happened before, that it was like writing history. She replied, ‘Wow, it’s really an honor, isn’t it?’”

“Yes, it really is,” Barabak replied.

Now specialized news delivered to customers online—one of the hottest new services in the new century—relies on the inverted pyramid, one of the most traditional story forms. So do newspapers, despite many editors’ emphasis on encouraging new writing forms. So do radio, television and newsletters. Businesspeople often use the inverted pyramid in company memos so their bosses don’t have to read to the end to find the main point. Public relations professionals use it in news releases to get the attention of news editors.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE INVERTED PYRAMID STORY

Frequently misdiagnosed as dying, the inverted pyramid has more lives than a cat—perhaps because the more people try to speed up the dissemination of information, the more valuable the inverted pyramid becomes. In the inverted pyramid,

information is arranged from most important to least important. The king in *Alice in Wonderland* would never succeed in the electronic news service business. When asked where to start a story, he replied, "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop." Reporters, however, often begin a story at its end. Subscribers to Reuters, Dow Jones News/Retrieval and Bloomberg, for instance, react instantly to news about the financial markets to get an edge over other investors. They don't want narration; they want the news.

So do many newspaper readers, who, on average, spend 15 to 25 minutes a day reading the paper, and online readers, who spend even less time reading than newspaper subscribers. If a reporter were to write an account of a car accident by starting when the driver left the house, many readers would never read far enough to learn that the driver and a passenger were killed. Instead, such a story starts with its climax:

Two people died Thursday when a backhoe fell off a truck's flatbed and sliced the top off an oncoming vehicle near Fairchild Air Force Base.

The inverted pyramid was fairly common by the turn of the 20th century. Before then, reporters were less direct. In 1869, the *New York Herald* sent Henry Morton Stanley to Africa to find the famous explorer-missionary David Livingstone. Stanley's famous account of the meeting begins:

Only two months gone, and what a change in my feelings! But two months ago, what a peevish, fretful soul was mine! What a hopeless prospect presented itself before your correspondent!

After several similar sentences, the writer reports, "And the only answer to it all is (that) Livingstone, the hero traveler, is alongside of me."

Stanley reported the most important information so casually that today's reader probably would not have learned that Livingstone had been found. Today's reporter would probably begin the story like this:

David Livingstone, the missionary-explorer missing for six years, has been found working in an African village on the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

The inverted pyramid saves readers time and editors space. It saves time by allowing readers to get the most important part of the story first—the climax of the event, the theme of a speech, the key finding in an investigation. It saves space by allowing editors to shorten stories by deleting from the bottom up. But if an editor had cut Stanley's story from the bottom, we would never have had the now-famous lines that end the story:

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"  
And he says, "Yes."

Most journalism history books attribute the introduction of the inverted pyramid to the use of the telegraph during the Civil War. Forced to pay by the

//Because a story is important, it doesn't follow that it must be long.//

— Stanley Walker, city editor

word, newspapers supposedly instructed their correspondents to put the most important information at the top. Researchers at the University of Southern California have found that the inverted pyramid was used even earlier. Whatever its origins, the inverted pyramid lead, the first paragraph or two, is presented as simply and clearly as possible. It sets the tone. It advertises what is coming in the rest of the story, and it conveys the most important information.

The lead sits atop other paragraphs arranged in descending order of importance. These paragraphs explain and provide evidence to support the lead. That's why editors can quickly shorten a story; the paragraphs at the bottom are the least important. The need to produce multiple newspaper editions with the same story running different lengths in each one makes it important that stories can be shortened quickly. The inverted pyramid serves that need well. On the Internet, space is not a consideration, but readers' time is. That's why the same inverted pyramid that is used in newspapers is the most common story structure found on such news Web sites as CNN.com, MSNBC.com, CBSNews.com and ABCNews.com.

In Chapter 20, you will learn details about writing news for the Web. You will find that most news Web sites rely on the inverted pyramid to present information quickly. For example, when a bus accident killed three students, CNN used the inverted pyramid as it followed the story the second day:

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama (CNN)—National Transportation Safety Board investigators were in Huntsville on Tuesday, trying to determine what caused a school bus to plunge off a highway overpass the day before.

The bus, carrying 43 students from Huntsville's Lee High School, fell 30 feet to the street below the overpass and landed on its front end before flipping over.

—CNN

Later that day, however, a follow-up story on the *USA Today* site put casualties back into the lead as another student died. The investigation angle was moved further down into the story:

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (AP)—A fourth high school student died of injuries she got when her school bus nose-dived off an interstate overpass, the police chief said Tuesday. The bus driver, who was found critically injured on the overpass, was among 15 who remained hospitalized, authorities said. Four were listed as critical. . . .

Debbie Hersman, a spokeswoman for the National Transportation Safety Board, said investigators were trying to determine how the driver ended up on the overpass, escaping the devastating impact that crumpled the front of the bus.

The inverted pyramid does have some shortcomings. Although it delivers the most important news first, it does not encourage people to read the entire story. Stories stop; they don't end. There is no suspense. In a Poynter Institute study

## TIPS

### The Inverted Pyramid

- Puts the most important information first.
- Arranges the paragraphs in descending order of importance.
- Requires the writer to rank the importance of information.

([www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)), researchers found that half of the 25 percent of readers who started a story dropped out midway through the story. Interest in an inverted pyramid story diminishes as the story progresses. But the way people use it attests to its value as a quick form of information delivery. Readers can leave whenever their needs are met, not when a writer finishes a story. In an age when time is golden, the inverted pyramid still offers value.

The day when the inverted pyramid is relegated to journalism history is not yet here and probably never will be. Perhaps 80 percent of the stories in today's newspapers and almost 100 percent of the stories on news services for target audiences such as the financial community are written in the inverted pyramid form. The trend is changing, but it's changing slowly. Some of the new media will require other forms. For instance, tailored stories for news-on-demand services that will reach a general audience need not use the inverted pyramid. Nor will those sites devoted to literary journalism ([www.Esquire.com](http://www.Esquire.com)). Still, as long as newspaper, electronic and broadcast journalists continue to emphasize the quick, direct, simple approach to communications, the inverted pyramid and modifications of it will have a role.

There are many other ways to structure a story. You will learn about some of the options in Chapter 9. Before you get to the alternatives, however, you should master the inverted pyramid. As you do, you will master the art of making news judgments. The inverted pyramid requires you to identify and rank the most newsworthy elements in each story. That is important work. No matter what kind of stories you write—whether obituaries, accidents, speeches, press conferences, fires or meetings—you will be required to use the skills you learn here.

## FINDING THE LEAD

### TIPS

#### The Six Basic Questions

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?
4. Where?
5. Why?
6. How?

More questions:

- So what?
- What's next?

To determine a **lead**—a simple, clear statement consisting of the first paragraph or two of an inverted pyramid story—you must first recognize what goes into one. As you read in Chapter 1, you begin by determining the story's *relevance*, *usefulness* and *interest* among readers. One way to measure these standards is to ask "So what?" or "Who cares?" So what if there's a car accident downtown? If it's one of hundreds a month, it may not be news. Any holdup in a community of 5,000 may be news because the "so what" is that holdups are uncommon and some residents probably know the victim. Neither newspapers nor radio or television stations would report the holdup in a metropolitan area where holdups are common. But if the holdup appears to be part of a pattern or if someone is killed, the story becomes more significant. One holdup may not be news, but a holdup that authorities believe is one of many committed by the same person may be news. The "so what" is that if the police catch this robber, they stop a crime spree. To determine the "so what," you have to answer six basic questions: who, what, when, where, why and how?

William Caldwell, winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1971, remembers the best lead he ever heard. He tells the story in an Associated Press Managing Editors "Writing" report:



One summer afternoon in 1922, I was on my way home from school and my daily stint of work as editor of the village weekly, unhonored and unpaid. Like my father and two uncles, I was a newspaperman.

My little brother came running to meet me at the foot of our street. He was white and crying. A telegram had come to my mother. "Pa drowned this morning in Lake George," he gasped, and I am ashamed to be remembering my inward response to that.

Before I could begin to sense such elements as sorrow, despair, horror, loneliness, anger—before all the desolation of an abandoned kid would well up in me, I found myself observing that the sentence my brother had just uttered was the perfect lead. Noun, verb, predicate, period, and who-what-when-where to boot.

The information from every event you witness and every story you hear can be reduced to answers to who, what, when, where, why and how. If the answers add up to a significant "so what," you have a story. Consider this example of an incoming call at fire headquarters.

"Fire Department," the dispatcher answers.

"Hello. At about 10 o'clock, I was lying on my bed watching TV and smoking," the voice says. "I must have fallen asleep about 10:30 because that's when the football game was over. Anyway, I woke up just now, and my bedroom is on fire. . . ."

That dialogue isn't informative or convincing. More likely, our sleepy television viewer awoke in a smoke-filled room, crawled to the telephone and dialed frantically. The conversation at headquarters would more likely have gone like this:

"Fire Department."

"FIRE!" a voice at the other end yells.

"Where?" the dispatcher asks.

"At 1705 W. Haven St."

When fire is licking at their heels, even nonjournalists know the lead. How the fire started is not important to the dispatcher; that a house is burning—and where that house is located—is.

The journalist must go through essentially the same process to determine the lead. Whereas the caller served himself and the fire department, reporters must serve their readers. What is most important to them?

After the fire is over, there is much information a reporter must gather. Among the questions a reporter would routinely ask are these:

- When did it start?
- When was it reported?
- Who reported it?
- How was it reported?

“Writing is easy; all you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead.”

— Gene Fowler, author

- How long did it take the fire department to respond?
- How long did it take to extinguish the fire?
- How many fires this year have been attributed to smoking in bed?
- How does that compare with figures in previous years?
- Were there any injuries or deaths?
- What was the damage?
- Who owned the house?
- Did the occupant or owner have insurance on the house?
- Will charges be filed against the smoker?
- Was there anything unusual about this case?
- Who cares?

With this information in hand, you can begin to write the story.

### Writing the Inverted Pyramid Lead

Start by looking over your notes.

*Who?* The owner, a smoker, Henry Smith, 29. The age is important. Along with other personal information, such as address and occupation, it differentiates him from other Henry Smiths in the readership area.

*What?* Fire caused damage estimated by the fire chief at \$2,500.

*Where?* 1705 W. Haven St.

*When?* The call was received at 10:55 p.m., Tuesday. Firefighters from Station 19 arrived at the scene at 11:04. The fire was extinguished at 11:30. Those times are important to gather even if you don't use them. They show whether the fire department responded quickly.

*Why?* The fire was started by carelessness on the part of Smith, according to Fire Chief Bill Malone.

*How?* Smith told fire officials that he fell asleep in bed while he was smoking a cigarette.

If you had asked other questions, you might have learned more from the fire department:

- This was the eighth fire this year caused by smoking in bed.
- All last year there were four such fires.
- Smith said he had insurance.
- The fire chief said no charges will be filed against Smith.
- It was the first fire at this house.
- Smith was not injured.

Have you figured out the "so what"?

Assume your city editor has suggested you hold the story to about four paragraphs. Your first step is to rank the information in descending order of importance. There are lots of fires in this town, but eight this year have been caused by smoking in bed. Perhaps that's the most important thing about this story. You begin to type:

A fire started by a careless smoker caused an estimated \$2,500 in damage to a home.

Only 16 words. You should try to hold every lead to fewer than 25 words unless you use more than one sentence. Maybe it's too brief, though. Have you left anything out? Maybe you should include the time element—to give the story a sense of immediacy. Readers would also want to know where the fire occurred. Is it near their house? Is it someone they know? You rewrite:

A Tuesday night fire started by a careless smoker caused an estimated \$2,500 in damage to a home at 1705 W. Haven St.

Just then the city editor walks by and glances over your shoulder. "Who said it was a careless smoker?" she asks. "Stay out of the story."

You realize you have committed a basic error in news writing: You have allowed an unattributed opinion to slip into the story. You have two choices. You can attribute the "careless smoker" information to the fire chief in the lead, or you can omit it. You choose to rewrite by attributing the opinion. You also revise your sentence to emphasize the cause instead of the damage. You write:

Fire that caused an estimated \$2,500 in damage to a home at 1705 W. Haven St. Tuesday was caused by smoking in bed, Fire Chief Bill Malone said.

Now 28 words have answered the questions "what" (a fire), "where" (1705 W. Haven St.), "when" (Tuesday) and "how" (smoking in bed). And the opinion is attributed. But you have not answered "who" and "why." You continue, still ranking the information in descending order of importance.

The owner of the home, Henry Smith, 29, said he fell asleep in bed while smoking a cigarette. When he awoke about 30 minutes later, smoke had filled the room.

Firefighters arrived nine minutes after receiving the call. It took them about 26 minutes to extinguish the fire, which was confined to the bedroom of the one-story house.

According to Chief Malone, careless smokers have caused eight fires this year. Smith, who was not injured, said the house was insured.

You take the story to the city editor, who reads through the copy quickly. As you watch, she changes the lead to emphasize the "so what." The lead now reads:

Too many numbers bog down a lead. Focus on the impact of the figures in the lead, and provide details later in the story.

### TIPS

#### When Writing the Lead, Remember

- Always check names.
- Keep the lead short, usually fewer than 25 words, unless you use two sentences.
- Attribute opinion.
- Find out the who, what, where, when, why and how. If any of these elements have no bearing on the story, they might not have to be included.
- Write a sentence or a paragraph telling readers what the news means to them.
- Report basic information even if it's routine. Not everything you learn is important enough to be reported, but you'll never know unless you gather the information.

A smoker who fell asleep in bed ignited a fire that caused minor damage to his home on W. Haven Street Tuesday, Fire Chief Bill Malone said. It was the city's eighth fire caused by smokers, twice as many as occurred all last year.

The lead is 44 words, but it is broken into two sentences, which makes it more readable. The importance of the "so what" changed the direction of the story. The fire was minor; there were no injuries. However, the increase in the number of fires smokers caused may force the fire department to start a public safety campaign against careless smoking. The city editor continues:

The owner of the home, Henry Smith, 29, of 1705 W. Haven St., said he fell asleep in bed while smoking a cigarette. When he awoke about 30 minutes later, smoke had filled the room.

The editor then checks the telephone book and the city directory and uncovers a serious problem. Both the telephone book and the city directory list the man who lives at 1705 W. Haven St. as Henry Smyth: S-m-y-t-h. City directories, telephone books, and other sources can be wrong. But at least they can alert you to possible errors. Confirm spellings by going to the original source, in this case, Mr. Smyth.

Never put a name in a story without checking the spelling, even when the source tells you his name is Smith.

Look at Figure 7.1 to see the completed fire story.

There are several lessons you can learn from this example:

- Always check names.
- Keep the lead short, usually fewer than 25 words, unless you use two sentences.
- Attribute opinion. (Smoking in bed is a fact. That it was careless is an opinion.)
- Find out the "who," "what," "where," "when," "why" and "how." However, if any of these elements have no bearing on the story, they might not have to be included.
- Write a sentence or paragraph telling readers what the news means to them.
- Report information basic to the story even if it is routine. Not everything you learn is important enough to be reported, but you'll never know unless you gather the information.

When you are learning to write an inverted pyramid story, the process is mechanical. You'll check your notes to be certain you have the six basic questions answered. Eventually, though, you will mentally check through those questions quickly. Of course, you will not always be able to find answers immediately to "how" and "why." Sometimes, it takes experts time to analyze accidents, crimes, fires, and so on.

After you've checked your notes, ask yourself, "What else do readers need to know?" Using the news values of relevance, usefulness and interest, decide which



## The Inverted Pyramid Story

The identification of "who" is delayed until the next paragraph because the person is not someone readers would recognize and because his name would make the lead unnecessarily long.

Also in the lead are the "what," "when," "how" and, most significantly here, the "so what?"

The performance of the fire department is monitored.

Least important: If someone else had been hurt and charges had been filed, this information would move higher in the story.

→ A smoker who fell asleep in bed ignited a fire that caused minor damage to his home on W. Haven Street Tuesday, Fire Chief Bill Malone said. It was the city's eighth fire caused by smokers, twice as many as occurred all last year.

The owner of the home, Henry Smyth, 29, of 1705 W. Haven St., said he fell asleep in bed while smoking a cigarette. When he awoke about 30 minutes later, smoke had filled the room.

← The fire department, which received the call at 10:55 p.m., had the fire out by 11:30.

Malone said the damage, estimated at \$2,500, was confined to the bedroom. The house was insured.

Careless smokers caused only four fires last year in the city. Malone said that he is considering a public awareness campaign to try to alert smokers to the hazards. Those four fires caused total damage of \$43,000. This year, fires started by careless smoking have caused total damages of \$102,500, Malone said.

→ No charges will be filed against Smyth because no one other than the smoker was endangered, Malone said.

← The "who" is identified. More details on the "how" are given.

← Details on the "so what" are given. The impact question is answered with the possible campaign.

Figure 7.1

The inverted pyramid structure dictates that the most important information go in the lead paragraphs. It's the job of the writer and editor to identify the most important information.

answers are the most important so you can put them in the lead. The rest go in the second and third paragraphs.

In the example above, the editor changed the emphasis from the fire, which was minor, to the number of recent fires. She knew that the number of fires was more relevant and more interesting than one minor fire. That angle also answers the question of usefulness by pointing out for readers and public safety officials alike that there is a bigger problem than one minor fire. The angle also answers the "so what" question. There was a minor fire. So what? There are lots of little fires. Eight fires this year caused by smoking is a "so what" that will grab attention.

Compare the fire story in Figure 7.1 with the accident story in Figure 7.2. In what order are the key questions answered in the fire story? In the accident story? Why is the order different?

## The Classic Inverted Pyramid Story

The lead identifies the "what," "where" and "when." The "so what" is that people were killed. → A four-vehicle accident on eastbound I-70 near Stadium Boulevard ended in two deaths on Sunday.

The second paragraph provides details to support the lead and answers "who." → Barbara Jones, 41, of St. Louis died at the scene of the accident, and Juanita Doolan, 73, of St. Joseph died at University Hospital, according to a release from Springfield police. Two other people, William Doolan, 73, of St. Joseph and Theodore Amelung, 43, of Manchester, Mo., were injured in the accident.

This paragraph shows impact beyond deaths. → Both lanes of traffic were closed on the eastbound side and limited to one lane on the westbound side as rescue workers cleared the scene.

Authorities said a westbound late-model Ford Taurus driven by Lan Wang of Springfield was traveling in the right lane, developed a tire problem and swerved into the passing lane. A Toyota pickup truck in the passing lane, driven by Jones, was forced over the grassy median along with the Taurus. The two vehicles entered eastbound traffic where the truck struck an Oldsmobile Delta 88, driven by Juanita Doolan, head on. ← The "how" is less important than the "what," "where" and "when," so it appears later in the story.

Wang and the one passenger in his car, Kenneth Kuo, 58, of Springfield, were not injured. ← An eyewitness account adds sensory details that make the scene more vivid.

John Paul, a tractor-trailer driver on his way to Tennessee, said he had to swerve to miss the accident.

"I saw the red truck come across the median and hit the blue car," Paul said. "I just pulled over on the median and called 911."

What's next? This would be higher if the driver, rather than a tire, appeared to be the cause of the accident. → Jones, who was wearing a seatbelt, died at the scene, Officer Stan Williams said. Amelung, a passenger who had been in the truck, was out of the vehicle when authorities arrived, but it was unknown whether he was thrown from the truck or was pulled out by someone else, Williams said.

No charges have been filed, but the investigation continues.

**Figure 7.2**

Note how this story, typical of the inverted pyramid structure, delivers the most important news in the lead and provides less essential details toward the end.

### Emphasizing Different News Values

In the lead reporting the house fire, the "what" (fire) is of secondary importance to the "how" (how the fire started). A slightly different set of facts would affect the news value of the elements and, consequently, your lead. For instance, if Smyth turned out to have been a convicted arsonist, you would probably emphasize that bizarre twist to the story:

A convicted arsonist awoke Tuesday to find that his bedroom was filled with smoke. He escaped and later said that he had fallen asleep while smoking.  
Henry Smyth, 29, who served a three-year term for . . .

That lead emphasizes the news value of novelty. If Smyth were the mayor, you would emphasize prominence:

Mayor Henry Smyth escaped injury Tuesday when he awoke to find his bedroom filled with smoke. Smyth said he had fallen asleep while smoking in bed.

### What, So What and What's Next

You know that the answer to "what" is often the lead. The preceding examples also illustrate the "so what" factor in news. A \$2,500 fire is not news to many people in large communities where there are dozens of fires daily. Even if you crafted a tightly written story about it, your editor probably would not want to print or broadcast it.

In small communities, the story would have more impact because there are fewer fires and because a larger proportion of the community is likely to know the victim.

The "so what" factor grows more important as you add other information. If the fire occurred during a fire-safety campaign, the "so what" would be the need for fire safety even in a community where awareness of the problem had already been heightened. If the fire involved a convicted arsonist or the mayor, the "so what" would be stronger. Oddity or well-known people increase the value of a story. If someone had been injured or if the damage had been \$250,000 instead of \$2,500, the "so what" factor might even push the story into the metropolitan press. As you've seen above, once you have answered all six of the basic questions, it's important to ask yourself what the answers mean to the reader. That answer is your "so what" factor.

In many stories, it is also important to answer the question "What's next?" The City Council had its first reading of its budget bill. What's next? *Members will vote on it next month.* Jones was arrested Monday on a charge of passing bad checks. What's next? *The prosecuting attorney will decide whether there is enough evidence to file charges.*

A reader in a focus group once told researchers that she just wants to be told "what," "so what" and "what's next." That's a good guideline for all journalists to remember.

### VARIATIONS ON THE INVERTED PYRAMID LEAD

No journalist relies on formulas to write inverted pyramid leads, but you may find it useful, especially in the beginning, to learn some typical types of leads. The labels in the following sections are arbitrary, but the approaches are not.

“Selecting the quotes isn't so hard; it's presenting them that causes the trouble. And the worst place to present them is at the beginning. Quote leads deserve their terrible reputation. Yet they still appear regularly in both print and broadcast journalism.”

“We can make three generalizations about quote leads. They're easy, lazy, and lousy. They have no context. The readers don't know who's speaking, why, or why it matters. Without context, even the best quotations are wasted.”

— Paula LaRocque, former assistant managing editor,  
*The Dallas Morning News*

## The "You" Lead

Regardless of which of these leads journalists use, they are trying to emphasize the relevance of the news to the reader. One good way to highlight the relevance is to speak directly to the reader by using "you." This informal, second-person lead—the "you" lead—allows the writer to tell readers why they should care. For instance:

You will make more money buying Savings Bonds starting tomorrow.

The Treasury boosted the semiannual interest rate on Series EE Savings Bonds to 5.92 percent from 4.7 percent effective Tuesday.

Readers want to know what's in it for them. The traditional approach is less direct:

The Treasury boosted Savings Bonds interest Tuesday to the highest rate in three years.

As with any kind of lead, you can overdo the "you" lead. You don't need to write "You have another choice in the student president's race." Just tell readers who filed their candidacy. However, you may use those words in writing for radio and television news as a setup for the story to come.

## The Immediate-Identification Lead

In the **immediate-identification lead**, one of the most important facts is "who," or the prominence of the key actor. Reporters often use this approach when someone important or well-known is making news. Consider the following example:

Agence France-Presse

Former "Seinfeld" star Michael Richards apologized days after unleashing an expletive-laden racist tirade during a stand-up performance at a famous Los Angeles comedy club.

Names make news.

When writing for your campus newspaper or your local newspaper, you would use names in the lead that are known, not necessarily nationally but locally. The name of your student body president, the chancellor, the city's mayor or an entertainer who has a local following would logically appear in the lead. None of these names would be used in a newspaper 50 miles away.

In any accident, the "who" may be important because it is someone well known by name or position. If so, the name should be in the lead.

In small communities, the "who" in an accident may always be in the lead. In larger communities, names are not as recognizable. As a rule, if the name is well-known, it should appear in the lead.

//Language is a very difficult thing to put into words.//

— Voltaire, philosopher



### The Delayed-Identification Lead

Usually a reporter uses a **delayed-identification lead** because the person, people or organization involved has little name recognition among readers. Thus, in fairly large cities, an accident is usually reported like this:

MADISON, Wis. — A 39-year-old carpenter was killed today in a two-car collision two blocks from his home.

Dead is William Domonske of 205 W. Oak St. Injured in the accident and taken to Mercy Hospital were Mary Craig, 21, of 204 Maple Ave., and Rebecca Roets, 12, of 207 Maple Ave.

However, in a smaller community, names almost always make news. If Domonske lived in a city of 10,000, his name probably would be in the lead.

By the same token, most people know that IRS stands for "Internal Revenue Service." But many don't know that AARP is an organization for people age 50 and over. This story about AARP features a delayed-identification lead:

The nation's largest senior citizens organization paid \$135 million to settle a dispute with the IRS over the income it earns from royalties.

However, the settlement leaves open the question of whether future income earned by AARP will be taxed, said the group's spokesman, Peter Ashkenaz.

Because so many people over 50 belong to AARP, the reporter could have written the lead using "you":

If you are one of 33 million members of the nation's largest senior citizens organization, you just settled a bill with the IRS.

AARP has agreed to pay \$135 million to settle a dispute with the IRS over the income it earns from royalties.

AARP, which still has \$19.6 million in cash reserves, says the settlement will not affect any of your services.

There are two other occasions when the reporter may choose to delay identification of the person involved in the story until the second paragraph. One occurs when the person is not well-known but the person's position, occupation, title or achievements are important or interesting. The other occurs when the lead is becoming too wordy.

As Andy Warhol said, people have their 15 minutes of fame, but fame can be fleeting. While Terry Anderson of the AP was being held captive from 1985 to 1992 by the Islamic Jihad in Lebanon, even casual consumers of the news recognized his name because of daily coverage. By early 2000, when a court ruled that Anderson was entitled to damages, a delayed-identification lead was appropriate.

WASHINGTON—A former AP newsman was awarded \$341 million from Iran on March 24 by a federal judge who said his treatment during his nearly seven years of captivity in Beirut was “savage and cruel by any civilized standards.”

U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson ordered Iran to pay \$24.5 million to Terry Anderson, \$10 million to his wife, Madeleine Bassil, and \$6.7 million to their daughter, Sulome. The judge also ordered the Iranian Ministry of Information and Security to pay the three \$300 million in punitive damages.

A name that would appear in the lead in one city would appear in the second paragraph in another. The mayor of Birmingham, Ala., would be identified by title and name in Birmingham and by title only in Bridgewater, Conn.

Some titles are bulky: “Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission” assures clutter even before you add the name. “United Nations ambassador” quickly fills the sentence. When dealing with these types of positions, writers often choose to use the title alone and delay introducing the name until the second or third paragraph. When the title is better known than the name, writers usually use the title alone and delay the name until the second paragraph.

When AP newsman Terry Anderson was released in Lebanon in 1992, his was a household name. Eight years later, during his court case, not many readers would have recognized his name.



## ON THE JOB

### Thinking in the Inverted Pyramid



Anyone who has stared at a blank screen 15 minutes before deadline knows the importance of the inverted pyramid. It's the quickest, simplest way to organize your notes and thoughts.

When a posh suburban country club caught fire nearly an hour before the early edition's deadline, Stacy St. Clair was assigned to the story. As she drove to the scene — located almost 20 miles away — she wrote a mock story in her head and made mental notes about people she needed to speak with and information she needed to gather. As she drove back to the news room, she filled the holes in her prewrite. It was a classic inverted-pyramid, 12-inch story, which she pounded out in about 15 minutes. She finished the piece with a few minutes to spare and used the extra time to add some color to the story.

"Because the inverted pyramid has become a natural reflex in both my reporting and writing, I had enough time to go back and tell readers about foursomes who finished their rounds rather than seek shelter and panicked members who tried to save their Great Big Berthas from a fiery locker room," she said.

St. Clair, now the chief narrative writer at the *Daily Herald* in the Chicago suburbs, believes the inverted pyramid suffers from an unfair stereotype. "Editors and professors regularly call the writing style uninspired or elementary, but it doesn't have to be. Using the inverted pyramid does not release reporters from the responsibilities of good writing. Pacing, word choice, description, anecdotes — they all have a place in the inverted pyramid. Initial reports of the World Trade Center disaster, for example, were written in the inverted pyramid, yet they contained incredibly powerful anecdotes and heart-wrenching detail," she said.

The inverted pyramid forces you to prioritize and ask yourself, "What's important here? What's the story really about?" As St. Clair notes, "Once it becomes second nature, the inverted pyramid teaches you how to focus on a story, whether it's a 60-inch feature or a 9-inch car crash story."

### The Summary Lead

Reporters dealing with several important elements may choose to sum up what happened in a **summary lead** rather than highlighting a specific action. This is one of the few times when a general statement is preferable to specifics.

When Congress passed a bill giving family members with emergencies the right to unpaid leave from work, the writer had to make a choice: to focus on the main provision or to write a summary lead. The writer chose the latter:

A bill requiring employers to give workers up to three months' unpaid leave in family emergencies won Senate approval Thursday evening.

Several other provisions in the bill are explained later in the story:

The unpaid leave can be for medical reasons or to care for a new child, and employers would have to continue health insurance benefits and restore employees to their previous jobs or equivalent positions.

You can also show the readers the "so what" with the "you" lead:

The Senate voted Thursday to allow you to take up to three months' unpaid leave in family emergencies without losing your health benefits.

Likewise, if a city council rewrites city ordinances, unless one of the changes is of overriding importance, most reporters will use a summary lead:

MOLINE, Ill. — The City Council replaced the city's 75-year-old municipal code with a revised version Tuesday night.

Summary leads do not appear only in reports of board meetings. A Spokane, Wash., reporter used a summary lead to report a neighborhood dispute:

An Idaho farmer's fence apparently was cut last week. It set off a chain of events Friday night that landed three people in the hospital, killed a cow and totaled a vehicle in the eastern Spokane Valley.

The basic question you must answer is whether the whole of the action is more important than any of its parts. If the answer is yes, a summary lead is in order.

### The Multiple-Element Lead

In some stories, choosing one theme for the lead is too restrictive. In such cases the reporter can choose a **multiple-element lead** to work more information into the first paragraph. But you should write the lead within the confines of a clear, simple sentence or sentences. Consider this example:

PORTLAND, Wash. — The City Council Tuesday ordered three department heads fired, established an administrative review board and said it would begin to monitor the work habits of administrators.

Notice that not only the actions but also the construction of the verb phrases within the sentence is parallel. Parallel structures also characterize the following news extract, which presents a visual picture of the scene of a tragedy:



BAY CITY, Mich. — A flash fire that swept through a landmark downtown hotel Saturday killed at least 12 persons, injured 60 more and forced scores of residents to leap from windows and the roof in near-zero cold.

We are told where it happened, what happened, and how many were killed and injured.

Some multiple-element leads consist of two paragraphs. This occurs when the reporter decides that several elements need prominent display. For example:

The Board of Education Tuesday night voted to lower the tax rate 12 cents per \$100 valuation. Members then approved a budget \$150,000 less than last year's and instructed the superintendent to decrease the staff by 25 people.

The board also approved a set of student-conduct rules, which include a provision that students with three or more unexcused absences a year will be suspended for a week.

This story, too, could emphasize the "so what" while retaining the multiple elements:

The Board of Education lowered your real-estate taxes Tuesday. Members also approved a budget \$150,000 less than last year's and instructed the superintendent to decrease the staff by 25 people.

Simpler leads are preferable. But a multiple-element lead is one of your options. Use it sparingly.

Many newspapers are using graphic devices to take the place of multiple-element leads. They use summary boxes to list other actions. Because the box appears under the headline in type larger than text, it serves as a graphic summary for the reader who is scanning the page. The box frees the writer from trying to jam too many details into the first few paragraphs (see Figure 7.3).

### Other Council Action

In other action, the council:

- Voted to repave Broadway Ave.
- Rejected a new sign ordinance.
- Hired four school crossing guards.
- Expanded bus hours.

**Figure 7.3**

A summary box can take the place of a multiple-element lead.

Breaking stories into small segments increases readers' comprehension and retention.

Another approach is to break the coverage of a single event into a main story and a shorter story called a **sidebar**. This approach offers the advantage of presenting the information in short, palatable bites. It also allows the writer to elevate more actions into lead positions. Researchers have found that breaking stories into small segments increases readers' comprehension and retention. For instance, in the example above, the angle about the superintendent's having to decrease staff could be spun off into a short sidebar.

Both methods of presentation have advantages over the more complicated multiple-element lead.

## Danger Signals

Here are some leads that understandably raise red flags to editors:

- **Question leads.** Readers don't know the subject, don't know why they are being asked a question and probably couldn't care less. So the next time you are writing a weather story and are tempted to begin with "So, how hot was it yesterday?" lie down until the temptation passes. Either tell readers the temperature or open with an anecdote of a specific roofer sweating on the job. That's showing how hot it is.
- **Leads that say what might happen or what might have happened.** News organizations try to report what happened. Stay away from leads like this: "Springfield residents may be looking forward to warmer weather." Or they may not. Talk to people. Don't speculate.
- **Leads that overreach.** Report what you know. You may think it's harmless to write, "Springfield residents warmly greeted spring yesterday," but you don't know that *all* Springfield residents were happy about it. Maybe the guy who runs a snow-removal business would rather see winter last longer.

## Leads with Flair

Although the inverted pyramid tells readers the news first and fast, not all stories begin with the most important statement. When the news value you want to emphasize is novelty, often the lead is unusual.

When a group of suspected drug dealers was arrested at a wedding, the Associated Press focused on the novelty:

NARRAGANSETT, R.I. (AP)—The wedding guests included drug suspects, the social coordinator was a narcotics agent, the justice of the peace was a police chief, and 52 officers were party crashers.

For the unsuspecting bride and groom, the ceremony Friday night was truly unforgettable—a sting operation set up by state and local police that led to 30 arrests.

That's not exactly your traditional wedding or your traditional lead. Yet the essential information is contained within the first two paragraphs. A less imaginative writer would have written something like this:

Thirty suspected drug dealers, including a couple about to be married, were arrested at a wedding Friday night.

**"The lead should be a promise of great things to come, and the promise should be fulfilled."**

— Stanley Walker, city editor

That approach is like slapping a generic label on a Mercedes-Benz. The inverted pyramid approach is not so rigid that it doesn't permit fun and flair.

What is the difference between the two-paragraph, multiple-element lead on the board of education mentioned earlier and the two-step lead on the wedding story? In the first, the reporter was dealing with several significant actions. In the second, the reporter was dealing with only one, so she used the first paragraph to set up the surprise in the second.

## STORY ORGANIZATION

Like the theater marquee, the lead is an attention-getter. Sometimes the movie doesn't fulfill the promises of the marquee; sometimes the story doesn't fulfill the promises of the lead. In either case, the customer is dissatisfied.

The inverted pyramid helps you put information in logical order. It forces you to rank, in order of importance, the information you will present.

### The One-Subject Story

As we have seen in this chapter, constructing an inverted pyramid news story involves a series of judgments based on classic news values and the specific news outlet. A fire or an accident in a small community is bigger news than a fire or an accident in another, larger area. Earlier events will also influence how a story is written.

Figure 7.4 shows a story about the arrest of a suspect in an assault case. Police say drugs were involved. If there had been a string of assaults or a pattern of drug-related violence, the writer probably would have emphasized different aspects of the story. For instance, the writer could have emphasized the suspect's criminal record with this lead:

A Columbia man who was convicted of assault three times was arrested again Thursday night for an attack on his girlfriend.

There is almost always more than one way to write a story. The version that is published or broadcast is the result of the judgments of the writer and the editor. If the story in Figure 7.4 had already appeared on the Web or had been on television or radio, the newspaper probably would have chosen another angle, as in the example highlighting the suspect's criminal record, to make the story different.

## Anatomy of a Single-Subject Inverted Pyramid Story

## Man Arrested in Attack, Charged with Child Endangerment

By Elizabeth Phillips  
Columbia Missourian

Police arrested a Columbia man in connection with an attack on his girlfriend Thursday night.

Darrell Vanness Johnson, 37, was arrested on suspicion of second-degree domestic assault, unlawful use of a weapon, felony possession of a controlled substance, misdemeanor possession of a controlled substance and endangering the welfare of a child at about 9 p.m. Thursday in the 1500 block of Greensboro Drive.

Johnson and his girlfriend began arguing over drugs Thursday evening, Columbia Police Sgt. Ken Hammond said. Johnson choked her and held a revolver to her head before she was able to escape and call 911 from a neighbor's house, Hammond said. Three children, two 9-year-olds and a 4-year-old, were in the home during the attack, Hammond said.

When Columbia police arrived, Johnson was driving away from the Greensboro Drive home with the three children in the car, Hammond said. When police arrested Johnson, they found marijuana and cocaine, Hammond said.

The victim was taken to an area hospital by ambulance for treatment of bruises and scratches to the hands, neck and back, Hammond said. Her injuries were not life threatening.

According to Missouri Case.net, Johnson has pleaded guilty to third-degree domestic assault three times in the past four years in Boone County Circuit Court, serving close to seven months in jail for those charges. He has also pleaded guilty to theft, first-degree trespass and second-degree property damage in Boone County Circuit Court, serving 75 days in Boone County Jail for the theft charge and receiving two years of unsupervised probation for the trespass and property damage charges.

Johnson violated his probation on the trespass and property damage charges and was scheduled to appear in Boone County Circuit Court for a probation violation hearing in December. He was charged with theft last October in Boone County Circuit Court.

He faces up to 40 years in prison and up to a year in jail in connection with the attack.

The arrest, not the assault, is the latest development, so it is emphasized.

Details of the charges are in the second paragraph because the list is too long to put in the lead.

The writer adds details, attributed to the police, on how the assault occurred. This information includes the "why."

This paragraph continues the chronology of the assault and capture.

Now that the basic facts are established, the writer adds background on the suspect, attributed to a public safety Web site.

Writer gives the "what's next."

The lead gives "who," "what" and "when."

The name is not in the lead because most readers would not recognize it.

"Where" is identified. "When" is made more specific than in the lead.

Information about the children is pertinent because it adds to the "so what" — the children were also endangered.

The writer offers evidence of the injuries and attributes this information.

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**Figure 7.4**

This typical one-subject story written in the inverted pyramid features a delayed-identification lead.



## TIPS

## Checklist for Assembling the Rest of the Inverted Pyramid

- Introduce additional important information you were not able to include in the lead.
- If possible, indicate the significance or "so what?" factor.
- Elaborate on the information presented in the lead.
- Continue introducing new information in the order in which you have ranked it by importance.
- Develop the ideas in the same order in which you have introduced them.
- Generally, use only one new idea in each paragraph.

## The Multiple-Element Story

Multiple-element stories are most commonly used in reporting on the proceedings of councils, boards, commissions, legislatures and courts. These bodies act on numerous subjects in one sitting. Frequently, their actions are unrelated, and more than one action is often important enough to merit attention in the story. You have three options:

1. **You can write more than one story.** That, of course, depends on permission from your editor. There may not be enough space.
2. **You can write a summary box.** It would be displayed along with the story. In it you would list the major actions taken by the council or the decisions issued by the court.
3. **You can write a multiple-element lead and story.** Your lead would list all the major actions at the board meeting. The remainder of the story would provide more detail about each action.
4. **You can write a single-element lead and cover the other elements further on in the story.** Your lead would focus on the element you found most interesting, relevant and useful to readers.

Let's go back to a multiple-element lead we saw earlier:

The Board of Education Tuesday night voted to lower the tax rate 12 cents per \$100 valuation. Members then approved a budget \$150,000 less than last year's and instructed the superintendent to decrease the staff by 25 people.

The board also approved a set of student-conduct rules, which include a provision that students with three or more unexcused absences a year will be suspended for a week.

Four newsworthy actions are mentioned in those two paragraphs: (1) changing the tax rate, (2) approving a budget, (3) cutting staff, (4) adopting conduct rules. In this and all stories that deal with several important elements, the writer highlights the most important. Sometimes several elements are equally important, as in this example. Most of the time, however, one action stands above the rest. When that is the case, it is important to summarize the other, lesser, actions after the lead.

If you and your editor judged that changing the tax rate was more important than anything else that happened at the school board meeting, you would approach the story like this:

Lead

The Board of Education Tuesday night voted to lower the tax rate 12 cents per \$100 valuation.

Support for lead

The new rate is \$1.18 per \$100 valuation. That means that if your property is assessed at \$300,000, your school tax will be \$3,540 next year.

Summary of other action

The board also approved a budget that is \$150,000 less than last year's, instructed the superintendent to cut the staff by 25 and approved a set of rules governing student conduct.

Notice that the lead is followed by a paragraph that supports and enlarges upon the information in it before the summary paragraph appears. Whether you need a support paragraph before summarizing other action depends on how complete you are able to make the lead.

In every multiple-element story, the first two or three paragraphs determine the order of the rest of the story. To ensure the coherence of your story, you must describe the actions in the order in which you introduced them.

In Figure 7.5, you see a more detailed example of a multiple-element story. Notice the order in which the writer answers the questions “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why” and “how.” Do you agree that the lead contains the most important elements? Could the story be cut from the bottom up, if necessary?

### CHECKING ACCURACY AND ATTRIBUTIONS

All of us can improve our accuracy. Some improvement comes with experience, but most of the errors journalists make involve routine facts. In Chapter 4, you learned the importance of accurately capturing the words for quotes. Here are additional procedures you should use to produce more accurate stories.

#### Ensuring Accuracy

This correction is from *The Detroit News*: “Three million Americans are eligible for a low-income subsidy through Medicare Part D. A front-page story on Friday erroneously said 3 million Michigan residents were eligible.” Corrections such as this routinely run in newspapers and on Web sites. The errors shouldn’t be routine. In *Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope wrote, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” However, readers are not apt to forgive. We all make errors, but our job as professional journalists is to be as accurate as humanly possible. There are several habits you can develop to improve your accuracy.

One is to go over your notes at the end of every interview. Read back the quotes and the facts as you have written them down. Don’t assume anything. As you read earlier in the chapter, if someone tells you his name is Smith, ask how to spell it.

Another is to carefully check your story against your notes and the documents you have collected to be certain you didn’t introduce any errors while writing. We all make typing errors. We all make errors because of background noise and interruptions. If you recognize that you are not infallible, you will be a more accurate journalist.

When sources give you facts, if possible, check them. During an interview, the mayor may tell you that the city has 50 police officers. Check with the police department. The mayor may have the number wrong.

Another way to increase accuracy is to perform a prepublication check of some sort with your sources. Some journalists object to such accuracy checks because they believe that it gives sources too much opportunity to object to what

## Anatomy of a Multiple-Element Inverted Pyramid Story

## U Earns C Average in Student-Access Report

By Norman Draper  
Star Tribune

The University of Minnesota does better than most of the nation's major public universities in admitting minority students. But it fares poorly in both graduating them within six years and in admitting low-income students.

Those are among the findings of a report issued Monday by the national Education Trust. The report measured how well the nation's 50 flagship state universities are serving the nation's racial minority and poor students.

Overall, the report's findings described the nation's top state universities as looking "less and less like America — and more and more like gated communities of higher education." Too many, the report stated, aren't pushing hard enough to enroll more minority and poor kids.

The U of M generally fared relatively well in the report, though it earned only a C average based on six criteria. That's better than many state universities, which got Ds and Fs. Other universities in the survey included the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of North Carolina-Chapel, the University of California-Berkeley and the University of Texas-Austin.

The U of M got an A in minority student access because the percentage of black, Hispanic and American Indian students in its fall 2004 freshman class — 7.7 percent — was identical to the percentage of those students in the state's spring 2004 high school graduating class. Asian students were not counted as minority students in the report because they are not considered underrepresented.

The U got a D in minority student success because of the gap in graduation rates between white students (63.7 percent) and minority students (41.4 percent).

It also got a D in access for low-income students. That's because the number of such students at the U is lower than at all other Minnesota colleges and universities, as measured by the percentage of students who get federal grants.

"The University of Minnesota has long been concerned with issues of access for students from all walks of life," U spokesman Daniel Wolter said

(continued)

The writer chooses two elements to put in the lead along with "who" and "what."

In order to tell the "what," the writer had to delay revealing the source of the report and the answer to "when."

Having established the most important elements, the writer summarizes the rest of the report.

Now the writer summarizes the local details.

Any of these details could have been in the lead. The writer and editor had to make judgments about the most important details.

Here and in the next two paragraphs is the university's response to the report.

Are there any elements in the fifth paragraph that you think should be in the lead?

This is the context against which readers can measure the local university's performance.

Note that the writer offers not only the findings but also the reasons for the findings in this and succeeding paragraphs.

Notice that the letter grades used in the report give the reader a way to understand the results.

The terms *black*, *Hispanic*, *American Indian*, and *Asian* are preferred by the AP Stylebook.

Figure 7.5

The writer for the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* took a national study and localized it for readers. The study produced multiple findings, so the writer and editor had to rank them from most important to least important.

**Figure 7.5**  
(continued)

in an e-mailed response. "The issue of access for underrepresented minorities has been an important one for the U . . . and our A grade underscores that we're doing a good job on that front."

Wolter also cited the creation of a new administrative position—vice president for access and diversity—and the U's raising of \$150 million in private gifts to support student scholarships as evidence that the U is committed to academic and racial diversity.

In regard to the two Ds, Wolter said, "We recognize those as areas for improvement," but he added that overall U graduation rates have doubled over the past decade.

The background helps  
readers understand who  
issued the report.

The Education Trust is a Washington, D.C. nonprofit organization dedicated to improving student achievement, with a special emphasis on low-income and racial minority students.

Note how the writer  
handles the e-mail from  
the spokesman.

you will print. In some competitive situations, they are afraid sources may alert other media to get their version of the story out even before you publish. But those situations are rare.

In a study published in the *Newspaper Research Journal*, researcher Duane Stoltzfus found that more newspapers than formerly believed were willing to permit their reporters to check stories or portions of stories with sources before publication. In all cases, sources were told that they were being asked to check the accuracy of the information. No journalist should cede authority for decisions about what goes in a story and what does not. But at the same time, no journalist should be afraid to take every step possible to ensure accuracy. Some read back quotes; some read back facts gathered from that source. Some even describe information obtained from other sources.

The *New York Times* has a Credibility Group that recommends that the paper encourage "the practice of reporters' interim and final checks with sources to verify specific points." However, the group also says, "We do not advocate having sources look over entire articles." Stoltzfus also reported that *USA Today*, among many other newspapers, permits its reporters to decide whether to check with sources before publication.

If you are at a publication that permits prepublication checks, you do yourself and your profession a favor by performing them. Verify everything you intend to publish or broadcast. In the online world, where speed is king, verification is sometimes sacrificed to be first. Being first and wrong is never right. The bloggers will be the first to tell you that.

### How and When to Attribute

Attribution is our way of telling readers that we aren't making this stuff up. Your first obligation is to go to primary sources whenever possible. The mayor is an official source, but he isn't the primary source for how many police officers the city employs. The police chief or someone authorized to speak for the department would be a primary, and more accurate, source. So would someone in the city personnel department. So would city records. However, not all facts need to be attributed. If you are reporting that there was a fire in a five-story building, you do not need to attribute that fact because it is verifiable to anyone who sees it. However, if you are gathering the information about the fire in another community, you should attribute it if you are unable to confirm it.

Witnesses are good sources for firsthand accounts, but they are not always accurate. One witness may say that the Toyota driver hit the Ford. Another may say the Ford hit the Toyota. Your primary source is the police officer. If the officer can't sort it out, you may need to report the conflicting versions with attribution to all the parties. When you are reporting on deadline, you often have to deal with uncertainty. An Associated Press reporter dealt with one such instance this way, "The bus driver was either ejected or escaped from the vehicle before it fell, NTSB investigator Debbie Hersman said Tuesday."

Always attribute opinions. "Augusta is the most livable city in the United States" is an opinion regardless of who says it. If *Money* magazine publishes a list of the most livable cities in the United States, attribute that opinion to the magazine.

Tell readers how you obtained the information. If you are using information from an e-mail sent to you by your source, tell readers that the source gave the information in an e-mail. If you are using instant messaging, tell readers. If someone is revealing something to you from a document that he or she will not let you see because it is confidential, say the source obtained the information from the document. Be transparent about your sources.

### Suggested Readings

Brooks, Brian S., Pinson, James L. and Wilson, Jean Gaddy. *Working With Words*, Sixth Edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006. This book, a must for any journalist, provides excellent coverage of grammar and word usage and a strong chapter on "isms."

Gillman, Timothy. "The Problem of Long Leads in News and Sports Stories." *Newspaper Research Journal*, Fall 1994, pp. 29-39. The researcher found that sentences in leads were longer than sentences in the rest of the story.

Kennedy, George. "Newspaper Accuracy: A New Approach." *Newspaper Research Journal*, Winter 1994, pp. 55-61. The author suggests that journalists do prepublication accuracy checks with proper safeguards built in.

Stoltzfus, Duane. "Partial Pre-publication Review Gaining Favor at Newspapers." *Newspaper Research Journal*, Fall 2006, pp. 23-37. The researcher surveyed the 50 largest newspapers to determine policies toward prepublication review. He found that the trend is to permit it.



## Suggested Web Sites

[www.regrettheerror.com/2006/12/crunks\\_06\\_the\\_y.html](http://www.regrettheerror.com/2006/12/crunks_06_the_y.html)  
 Regret the Error is a Web site that chronicles errors made in all media. It is valuable in that it shows how fallible even professional reporters are.

[www.stateofthenewsmedia.com/2006/](http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.com/2006/)  
 The Project for Excellence in Journalism produces an annual "State of the News Media" report that examines journalistic trends and economic trends.

[www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/index.html](http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/index.html)  
 Paul Brians, a professor of English at Washington State University, will answer your questions about the English language.

## Exercises

1. Identify the "who," "what," "where," "when," "why" and "how," if they are present, in the following lead:

The United Jewish Appeal is sponsoring its first-ever walk-a-thon this morning in Springfield to raise money for The Soup Kitchen, a place where the hungry can eat free.

2. Here are four versions of the same lead. Which of the four answers more of the six questions basic to all stories? Which questions does it answer?

- a. What began 12 years ago with a federal staff investigation and led to hearings and a court fight culminates today with a Federal Trade Commission rule to prevent funeral home rip-offs.
- b. The nation's funeral home directors are required to offer detailed cost statements starting today, a service they say they are now ready to provide despite nearly a dozen years of debate over the idea.
- c. A new disclosure law going into effect today will make it easier for consumers to determine the cost of a funeral.
- d. Twelve years after first being proposed, a federal regulation goes into effect Monday to require funeral homes to provide an itemized list of services and materials they offer, along with the cost of each item, before a person agrees to any arrangements.

3. Rewrite two of the leads in exercise 2 as "you" leads. Which are better, the third-person or second-person leads? Why are they better?

4. From the following facts, write a lead.

*Who:* a nuclear weapon with a yield equivalent to 150,000 tons of TNT.  
*What:* detonated.

*Where:* 40 miles from a meeting of pacifists and 2,000 feet beneath the surface of Pahute Mesa in the Nevada desert.

*When:* Tuesday.

*Why:* to test the weapon.

*How:* not applicable.

Other information: Department of Energy officials are the source; 450 physicians and peace activists were gathered to protest continued nuclear testing by the United States.

5. From the following facts, write the first two paragraphs of a news article.

*Who:* 7-year-old boy missing for three years.

*What:* found.

*Where:* in Brick Township, N.J.

*When:* Monday night.

*Why:* not applicable.

*How:* A neighbor recognized the child's picture when it was shown after the movie *Adam: The Song Continues* and called police.

Other information: Police arrested the boy's mother, Ellen Lynn Conner, 27; she faces Alabama charges of kidnapping and interference with a custody warrant.

6. From the following facts, write the first two paragraphs of a news article.

*Who:* 40 passengers.

*What:* evacuated from a Northwest Airlines jet, Flight 428.

*When:* at the LaCrosse, Wis., Municipal Airport.

*When:* Monday following a flight from Minneapolis to LaCrosse.

*Why:* A landing tower employee spotted smoke near the wheels.

*How:* not applicable.

Other information: There was no fire or injuries; the smoke was caused by hydraulic fluids leaking onto hot landing brakes, according to Bob Gibbons, a Northwest spokesman.

7. Describe picture and information-graphic possibilities for the story in exercise 6.

8. Cut out six leads from newspapers. Determine which basic questions are answered and which are not. Identify the kind of lead used.

9. Read the Education Trust report at [www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/Engines+of+Inequality.htm](http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/Engines+of+Inequality.htm). Write a local story for your school paper.