

## Better newswriting, or "last week I couldn't even spell journalist and now I am one"

### The Story (So far...)

Stories are generally assigned by the News Editor after the Friday afternoon staff meetings (which you are all cordially invited to attend). Remember, if you accept an assignment, you have made a commitment. WE ARE DEPENDING ON YOU TO PRODUCE.

When you are assigned your story, ask the Editor:

- How many words (s)he wants (no, this is not a trick question)?
- If (s)he has any contacts?
- When the deadline is?
- What 'angle' (s)he wants?

Don't be afraid to use your own initiative. Try and come up with an interesting story on your own. All we ask is that you get your facts straight.

### Researching the Story

Be objective. This means getting both sides of the story.

Use the telephone if you must, but remember that a face-to-face interview is far more effective. Don't forget the little things--a misspelt name can undermine the credibility of the story. If in doubt, FIND OUT.

Oh, and by the way, NOTHING is 'off the record.'

### Writing the Story

#### The Intro

The introduction (or lead) is the most important component of a news story. It should be short and snappy. It should contain the nub of the story while enticing the reader to look at the subsequent paragraphs. Try to avoid cliches. And it should not be more than 30-35 words long.

This is NOT a good intro:

girls, aged three and five, was killed by a speeding motorist who was rushing to get to the annual general meeting of the Robert Burns Appreciation Society on time.

This is much better:

A UNB student was killed by a speeding motorist last night.

Try to follow a natural progression. Ask yourself the following questions: who did what, where, when, how and why?

List the facts in order of importance. This makes life a lot easier for the editors during layout. If a story is too long, the editor(s) should be able to cut paragraphs FROM THE BOTTOM.

Don't write a news story like an essay (perhaps saving some juicy bit of information til the last). If it is important, STICK IT AT THE TOP OF THE STORY.

And don't write conclusions. Save that for your professors.

### Points of Style

Try to write in plain English. By this, I mean:

a) use simple words

b) don't use five words when one will do. In my vocabulary, an 'optical deep space surveillance system' is a telescope.

c) avoid jargon (unless absolutely necessary for economy of language.

d) try to use active verbs--they put a spark of life into the story.

e) use short sentences.

f) use short paragraphs. Remember what your grade school English teacher said about one idea per paragraph.

g) choose your words carefully and learn to value them.

h) unless you get a particularly juicy quotation, avoid using them in the introduction.

i) assume that your reader has the IQ of a fencepost--a fairly safe bet at UNB--and therefore explain everything as clearly as possible.



*Join in and help us help each other.*

*We can't ignore it anymore.*

*La maladie d'Alzheimer,  
il faut y voir.*

Meetings the 4th Wednesday of  
each month at 7:30 pm in the Day Lounge  
of the Pine Grove Nursing Home.

Contacts: P.O. Box 3126, Postal Stn. B  
Fredericton E3A 5G9 or phone (506) 453-0892  
(24 hour answering service)

## Do you like to play

## with knives?

## Join the *Bruns*.



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