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This story is adapted from an article by Robert Chodos (Last Post magazine) which was printed in The Chevron, Waterloo. In it Chodos compares different journalistic styles and concludes that a "myth" exists which incorrectly attributes objective value to North American "pyramid" reporting. His conclusion is that such a style should be avoided in order to provide the best news coverage - that admittance of some bias in news coverage is imperative in delivering good, honest journalism.

While you may or may not agree with what Chodos says, he still raises valid questions concerning the manner and content of news stories ... and we want to know what you, as our readers, think about Chodos' conclusions and your general feelings on the subject of news reporting. If you have constructive thoughts, either write them down and send them in - or drop by our offices at SUB 282 and give them to us face-to-face.

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When I first joined the McGill Daily (the McGill University student newspaper) in 1963, I was taught a set of extraordinarily rigid values.

Paragraphs, I was told, are between three and four typewritten lines long. They generally consist of one sentence, at most they consist of two. The first paragraph of a story is invariably one sentence, of no more than 30 words. Elsewhere sentences are as short as they can be made. Subordinate clauses are frowned upon; the passive voice is banned outright.

Adjectives and adverbs are used only when absolutely necessary. Short words, like short sentences and short paragraphs, are preferred to long ones.

The first paragraph of a story contains the most important fact in the story. The second paragraph contains the second most important fact, the third, the third most important fact, and so on down the line. This is without regard to chronology, continuity and similar conditions.

This arrangement of information was compared to an inverted pyramid, becoming steadily narrower and less significant as it goes down. From this image came the term for the whole style of writing: pyramid.

The first paragraph, known as the lead, should answer three of the five W's: who, what, when, where, why. If it answers fewer than three, it will not have provided the reader with enough information; if it answers more, it is likely to be too long and cluttered.

The reporter writing in pyramid style keeps himself so far in the background as to be invisible.

A story written by one Canadian Press (CP) reporter should read very much like a story covering the same event by another one.

## For example ...

Santa Clara, Calif. (AP) - A woman gave birth to seven babies Friday, a doctor said. Two of the infants born two and one half-months prematurely were still born.

Dr. Anthony Damore said he delivered the babies, four girls and three boys, between 2:04 and 2:12 p.m. Friday.

Two of the surviving infants, he said were taken to the Stanford University Medical Centre in Palo Alto, about 20 miles north of Santa Clara.

Three babies remained at Santa Clara hospital in critical condition.

The infants, considered by Damore to have the best chances of survival, were the two girls taken to Stanford.

There was no immediate comment from officials on whether the woman had been taking fertility drugs.

# Pyramid Newswriting

## and ...

London (Reuter) - A Labour MP Thursday night advocated the reprisal execution of outlawed Irish Republican Army officers for every person killed by a bomb or sniper in Northern Ireland.

Reginald Paget, who was a Labour Party spokesperson on the army from 1961 to 1964, said in a Commons debate there were several hundred IRA men who were acknowledged officers.

"I would say that for each person who is killed by a bomb or sniper, then, within 72 hours, one of these men is going to be executed unless the guilty party is surrendered," he said.

Paget suggested there should be a list of those to be executed in order.

Milan, Italy (AP) - A terrorist trying to halt Milan's streetcar system and black out its streets was killed by the premature explosion of his own dynamite, police reported yesterday.

The man, about 45, was blown apart as he attached more than 15 pounds of explosives to a 50-foot pylon supporting the powerlines for streetlighting and transit in this city of two million, officers said.

There are several things to be noticed about these stories. The first is that almost every one of the rules mentioned above is violated at least once. The lead of the septuplets story has two sentences. In its fourth paragraph it uses the passive voice. The story of the Milan bomber is replete with subordinate clauses.

Nevertheless, all three perform the basic functions of the pyramid story. In each, the reader is presented with the essential information, in a form in which he can absorb it over the breakfast table or as he travels home on the bus. If he is only moderately interested in the birth of the septuplets, he can read only the first three or four paragraphs of that story and still get the important details (this particular feature of pyramid style makes it especially useful to editors, who may be faced with a deadline. If the story is written in true pyramid style, the editor can "cut from the bottom" secure in the knowledge that he is eliminating the least essential part of the story).

Second, the writers of these stories are very careful not to say anything on their own authority; they merely report what others say. It is not the reporter saying IRA officials should be killed; it is the Labor MP. The details of the Milan incidents are all attributed to the police.

Even so straightforward a matter as that "a woman gave birth to seven babies Friday," is not stated flatly; it is only reported that "a doctor said," she gave birth to the babies.

Third, pyramid style is as specialized and artificial a language as that used by seamen, jazz and rock musicians, or political science professors.

It has its own peculiar phrases and sentence structures - "no immediate comment from officials" being an example of the first and the use of a "a doctor said" or "police reported yesterday" at the end of a sentence being an example of the second.

But unlike the specialized jargon of most professions, pyramid style is read by everyone. Despite its artificiality it passes right by people, and they take it for granted. Whatever purpose it serves, it serves quietly, subtly, and hence effectively.

## The myth

Pyramid style is closely linked with the myth of objectivity, pyramid stories are often called "objective stories".

According to the myth, news stories are supposed to be totally free of any bias or value judgment. The reporter's

only function is to record the facts as he sees them; the only judgment he is allowed to make is what is important and what is not.

The news pages of a newspaper do not depend on whatever political alignment the paper might have. The paper expresses its corporate opinion on the editorial page and individual writers express their individual opinions on the open pages. To varying degrees, objectivity is accepted as a standard by all English-language North American metropolitan daily newspapers.

It is not accepted by most European newspapers or by the French-language North American (Quebec) press.

The following is part of a story that appeared in *Le Devoir*, March 17, 1972:

Milan (AFP) - The tension suddenly mounted in extra-parliamentary extreme-left circles, and also in the Italian Communist Party. The horribly mutilated body of Milanese leftist publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was discovered at the foot of a high tension pylon, at Segrate, at the gates of Milan.

He was dressed in a military-looking outfit and was wearing paratroopers' boots. Two charges of 15 sticks of dynamite had been placed on one of the four cement bases of the pylon. Near the body could be found three haversacks containing 13 stick of dynamite.

While investigators, before having even identified the body, supposed that the man must have committed a fatal error in handling the explosives, Mr. Feltrinelli's colleagues for their part, are explicit: the publisher was the victim of a "monstrous assassination" for which they held responsible "international reaction and the right."

That is how high-pitched the emotion is in political circles, particularly in the extra-parliamentary groups of the extreme left...

The story goes on to discuss recent demonstrations organized by the extra-parliamentary left and the current situation of the Italian Communist Party, and speculates on the effect "L'affaire Feltrinelli" might have on both groups. A sidebar article describes Feltrinelli as "an intellectual engage" - a committed intellectual.

It is perhaps not immediately obvious that Feltrinelli is the nameless "terrorist" of the AP "own dynamite kills bomber" story.

If the two stories are vastly different, it is because the one reported for AFP (Agence France Presse) spoke to "extraparlimentary of the extreme left", and understandably did not receive the same information as the AP reporter, who spoke to the police (The discrepancy can't be accounted for by saying that the AFP reporter may have had more time to gather information. The stories appeared on the same day.)

But it is not only the content of the AFP story that is different, the story is not written in anything remotely approaching pyramid style. The AFP story begins with tension mounting suddenly - more the technique of the short story writer rather than a pyramid reporter.

There is no inherent reason why a person can't be at once a "terrorist" and a "committed intellectual". However, most of us look favorably on the latter, and few of us look favorably on the former.

This is not to suggest that either *Le Devoir* or AFP is especially sympathetic to the extreme left of which Feltrinelli

*The following essay was written by Tom Baker, who used notes gathered by Gateway staffers Mary MacDonald and David Oke from three political meetings held last week on and around campus. Any opinions expressed below are the author's alone and do not reflect the views of this newspaper.*

Angola - until its formal independence on November 11, 1975 - was the oldest colony in the world, having endured 400 years of Portuguese colonial rule.

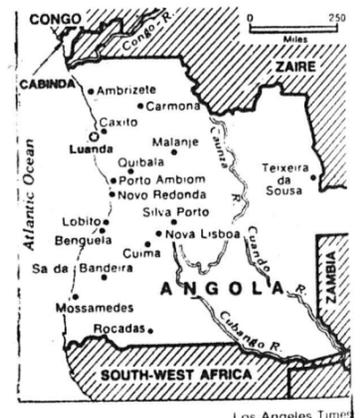
Today that country is racked by internal strife as three military factions fight for control: the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the FNLA (Angolan National Liberation Front), and the UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

The civil war in Angola has become an extremely divisive issue beyond its national boundaries, fomenting debate within groups as divergent as the United States State Department, the Organization for African Unity (OAU), and leftist groups throughout the world. The questions which arise and are debated circle the legitimacy of each group, the interference of major world powers in the internal affairs of a developing nation, and the possible future effects this battle will have on Angola.

## The Historical Situation

To understand the present Angolan situation, it is first necessary to examine the historical situation which gave rise to it.

For the first three hundred



years of Portuguese rule, Angola's main export was humans - four million exported slaves. Under the rule of Portugal, the colony remained weak and undeveloped. Although Portugal had always been a weak imperialist power (save a brief period in the late 15th century), it was able to use the "scramble for Africa" period of the late 19th century to maintain and extend its control over Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Martinique. In the two decades preceding the first world war, Portugal's rule was consolidated in a series of battles against armed African resistance.

The weakness of the Portuguese economy helps explain the tenacity with which it hung onto its African colonies. It did not opt for neo-colonialism, but rather maintained direct control