

Steps To Better Newswriting

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Let the story tell itself, crisp and lively. Express yourself simply and use color sparingly.

In the rush of news writing you will find little time for second runs at fancy phrases and starchy description. If you do stall you will wind up with complicated reader-roadblocks and awkward construction.

Work your facts and background so that the stir and the flow of the story move smoothly. And don't leave doubts. Tell the reader you could not get the engineer for comment and that information was not immediately available on the extent of the damage. While the rule should always be "when in doubt, cut it out" never use this as an excuse for ditching an angle without thorough checking.

This all presupposes that the writer has first been a good reporter, collected all the facts available, dug out the background. So before you leave the scene of the story be sure you can answer the reporter's vital five "W's" - who, what, where, when and why.

In other words, when you arrive at the telephone to dictate, or the typewriter to type don't slow down the process with incomplete material.

Most green cubs start out with the unwieldy intro that tries to tell the whole story in a sentence. And the greener the cub the more complicated his vocabulary of adjectives.

The cub with the most adjectives is usually the most stubbornly sensitive and pays scant attention to tough intelligent editing. Therefore he never becomes a good writer.

Get hold of a Canadian Press stylebook the purpose of which is to stimulate the production of news-not to raise barriers. This Blue-Bible is a good guide for any writer and some of its observations should be included here:

For instance, there is an emphasis on being reliable, which is more important than being fast. Straight-forward writing, with well-known words and simple construction assures clarity. The most forceful stories are frequently a recital of the facts.

The intro is the most important part of your story. It is the key to the editor's headline, it whets the reader's curiosity to read further. Nothing annoys an editor more than a dull intro that doesn't inspire and

eye-catching head. Nothing loses a reader faster than a dull first paragraph that buries a good story.

Thus in competition for headline play and news space in the paper you have to put an extra punch in your opening and then maintain the interest throughout. If you can't accomplish this with facts as they are, no amount of tricks and fiction will; and you might as well as console yourself to a cap head on page 42-if the editor does not ditch the story altogether.

A good story doesn't need dressing up but it can be spoiled in the telling. Facts arranged to taper from the opening sentence to the end in the order of their importance and interest tell the most impressive story. As the Blue Bible adds, "brief and simple statement, vital phrases thrust into sharp relief and precision of word selection provide clarity and force." The fledgling writer should bear in mind meaningful quotes, an original approach to descriptive and illuminating glimpses of background and biography.

By meaningful, I mean you should avoid routine recitation of fact but use quotes to illustrate exciting action or a dramatic phrase in a dee or word. Quotes often serve a touch of humor-possibly the only light bi in a column.

The descriptive part of the story gives full scope to the originality of the writer and often his copy stands apart, giving its ring and pitch a unique flavor. Avoid cliches, don't mix metaphors and don't copy someone else. Read the crisp

reports of CP, AP and Reuters carrying Ottawa, London, Cape Kennedy placelines as good examples of well-organized writing.

When your research provides a significant bit of background that aids the reader in picturing the man, the place or event you have really accomplished an important aspect in telling a story.

Some cardinal rules must be followed: Get the initials. Be explicit with identity, geographical location. Above all be accurate. When you don't know how many were on board the freighter at least be able to say that a ship of that size usually carries 32 men or a

plane has passenger space for 100 and a crew of eight.

Help the reader visualize what you are writing about. Idaho is many times bigger than Prince Edward Island but it has the same size potato marketing problem. This treatment can be used most effectively in interviews but it is also useful in comparing people: "He looks like George Drew", or places "It's laid out similarly and has the same traffic problems as Montreal."

A good rule of thumb in handling either spot news or newsfeatures is to follow your provocative or arousing intro by an uncomplicated intro by a simple and direct recitation of

the facts. Use easy descriptive simple and direct words to round out the picture and

Personally, as an editor, I'll settle for a good intro followed by an uncomplicated narrative brightly or dramatically told. And don't forget the drama is best spelled simply. You can bury it under a weight of adjectives. And few readers and even fewer editors appreciate the recordings of cuss words to emphasize a quote.

And now for my punch line: Choice of the precise word or the vital phrase, as contrasted with a careless, dull recording, means the difference between the front page and the waste basket.

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