

Writing for Newspapers

Dear students,

Welcome to the course on Writing for Mass Media. Today we are discussing the topic of Writing for Newspaper. Who all can write for newspaper? It's not just journalists who can write for newspapers. Even a common man can write for a newspaper. Let's discuss what all writings in which all format can be done while writing is done for a newspaper. Editorials, opinion pieces, letters to the editor are various components of a newspaper along with the main component of a news story. Through this module let's understand how the writing for newspapers can be done.

The major points discuss in this module are:

- Introduction to newspapers and news
- Writing for a newspaper
- Factors that determine the writing for newspaper:
- Styles of writing for mass media
- Writing a news story
- Writing feature story
- Writing letters to the editor

What is a newspaper?

In its most simple definition, a newspaper can be defined as sheets of unstapled papers printed with information like news, sports, entertainment and so on. Initially newspapers were in the handwritten format and now it is in the printed format. Newspaper carries not just news stories. Features, letters to the editor, opinion pieces are all part of a newspaper.

You are aware of the fact that the way you write a letter to your mother will be different from the way you write a letter to your teacher. Let's discuss in detail some ways which we can write for newspapers.

Writing for a newspaper

Writing for a newspaper requires a standard and style of news writing. These set standards of rule are followed all across the globe by the practitioners of journalism. The style used in journalism for writing a news story is called journalistic style, news style or news-writing style. As a journalist you are supposed to follow this standard procedure of news writing. This style of writing news goes parallel with the style book of the newspaper that you are working with. Television, newspaper, radio and even online media is supposed to follow this style. Each media has its own ways of writing as well. Writing for media is also called as journalese. Writing for newspapers is not about writing a story aesthetically. It is about writing a story with the benefit of imparting specific information to people in the definite time frame. Writing for newspaper is not exclusively about maintaining the vocabulary or sentence structure. It is about information dissemination.

Factors that determine the writing for newspaper:

- Proximity
- Prominence
- Timeliness
- Human interest
- Oddity
- Consequence

It is based on these factors that the nature of news stories is determined while writing.

Proximity

The distance between the place where the incident occurred and the place of reporting is called proximity. E.g. A newspaper printed and published in Hyderabad will have more interest on incidents happened in Hyderabad than incident happened in Jaipur.

Prominence

The prominence factor reflects what a news story should be. The death of a common man may make space in the obituary column of a newspaper whereas the death of a celebrated actor will make it to the front page of the newspaper.

Timeliness

It is one of the major determining factors of what constitutes a news story. There is no point in publishing something happened long time before. Who breaks a story is what determines the news worthiness these days. A news story that is not done on the right time is a stale news story.

Human Interest

Not every story can be of interest to the readers. The classic example given for this instance is a dog bites the man is not news. But a man bites the dog is a news. The human interest factor determines the readability of a news story.

Oddity

Not every instance can be news. There should be an odd factor for it. This odd factor determines the readability of a news story.

Consequence

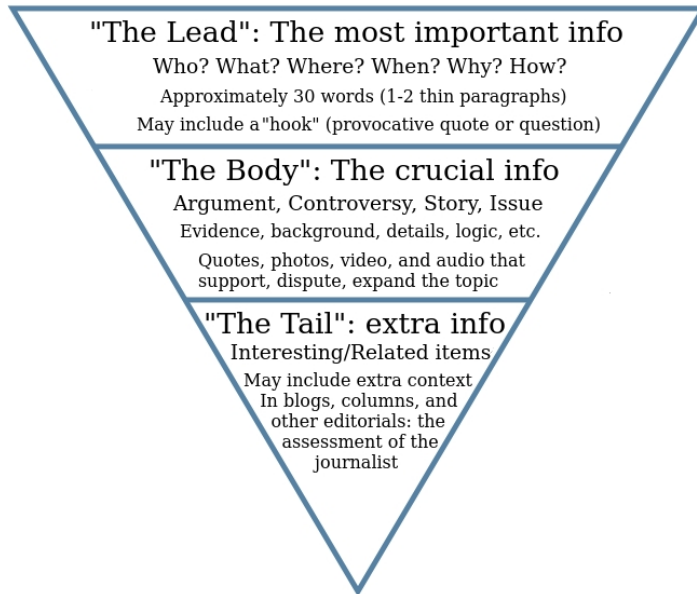
The consequences of a news story determines its readability factor. It is highly valid in the case of sting operations and investigative journalism.

Styles of writing a news story

The different styles of writing a news story are used based on these factors.

Now let's discuss various styles of writing for mass media

1. Inverted Pyramid Style



What is inverted pyramid style? Let's discuss.

Inverted pyramid is one of the most important aspects of journalism. It refers to the structure of a story planned in the hierarchy of importance of events. In inverted pyramid style the most important factor of a story is written at first where the least important at last. The story starts answering these: 5 Ws and 1 H

They are:

1. Who
2. What
3. Where
4. When
5. Why

6. How

The term inverted pyramid is used to denote the placing of important factors of a story in the topmost section of a news story. This style of writing provides the conclusion at first itself. There is no suspense factor in inverted pyramid style. The descending order of information is provided through inverted pyramid style. A reader especially of today will find it difficult to find the content in a news story. By sticking on to an inverted pyramid style the author of the story can read it quickly. Another advantage of using an inverted pyramid style of journalism is that during the time of editing, a story written in an inverted pyramid format will be helpful while editing. If space issues occur during the last minute the cutting out of the extra portion can be done easily by the editors so that it can be used for page making. This type of story has the ability to support all types of readers; whether it be a quick reader or the one who is an avid reader.

Advantages of using an inverted pyramid style:

Comprehension:

Using inverted pyramid style can help in the creation of a mental image of the story quickly by the readers. A general understanding of the article is also given by these kind of stories on a faster pace.

Interaction Cost:

The interaction cost of news stories can be cut short by using inverted pyramid style. The main point of the page can be understood without much efforts while using the inverted pyramid style.

Scrolling

The scrolling of audience's eyes to the entire sheet of newspaper can be ensured by using this technique.

Content structuring

Another important feature of inverted pyramid deals about the structure of content. There is a logic in which the content is arranged in inverted pyramid stories.

Skim Friendly

Inverted pyramid news story can be easy to read as it is structured in a way that it supports people who are comfortable in skimming the story.

How to write in Inverted Pyramid?

- Key points

Make sure to identify the key point of your news story. Including the key points that summarizes the content of the story.

- Secondary information

The secondary information must be made into an order. The least important details must be kept at last.

- Concise

Always make sure that your story is concise in nature. The concise details of a story must be written well.

- Highlights

Highlights can be used in an inverted pyramid story. Even bulleted list can be given at the end of the story to give the further details.

- Summary

A summary of what have been written is given at the very beginning of the news story itself. Thus the size of the article will not scare the reader.

The inverted-pyramid style is widely used in the internet as well these days. It is an essential element for the Business writings including product descriptions. It helps in engaging and informing the audience. Not every news story need not be following the inverted pyramid style. Usually hard news is where inverted pyramid style is mostly used. There are journalists who believe that following the inverted pyramid style can be a hindrance to their natural style of writing. A kind of artificiality is attributed to this kind of writing. There are also some who believe this style as the most essential form required while writing as the modern reader is fast paced and do not have the luxury to invest more on reading. Reading hard news story from a

newspaper can make you enable to identify the stories with inverted pyramid style. The structuring of lead stories are also important while dealing with this kind of news.

The Hourglass

The Hourglass is an important form of writing for news writing. It is basically constructed on the inverted pyramid. Along with an inverted pyramid story in hourglass a combination of a narrative is done as well. This style of story writing is basically used in breaking news and narration of stories. The initial four to six paragraphs of a news story will in an hour glass style will have a summary lead. This summary lead itself will answer the basic questions answered by newspaper. After that a definite chronological style will be followed by the story. This stage is called transitional phase of the story. Later as well the chronology of the story is maintained throughout the story. For example “Some believable sources said that the occurrence of the incident was after the party at the house”, following this the entire sequence of the story will be narrated.

It is considered as a form of story writing that can serve the news and serve the reader. Narratives constitutes the primary core of the hourglass style of story writing.

The Nut Graph

The Nut Graph is a form of story writing developed by the *Wall Street Journal*. It was initially used in the 1940s. An anecdotal lead constitutes the core of the nut graph style of writing. It is basically used to grab the attention of the reader. This anecdote is followed by a bigger paragraph. This paragraphs acts as the foundational premise for the entire story. Later on the

article is moved in this direction of writing. The reporter gets a chance to explore larger causes and reasons behind any incident. For example, a nut graph article might begin with the story of lights, then move into a discussion of government allowance in light industry like candle making, their present condition, condition of Indian small scale industry and so on.

The Narrative

The Narrative is another popular form of news story writing format. A narrative has a beginning, middle, and end. It has one of the most common formats for writing. For the modern times a narrative must be kept short in a newspaper as the modern reader doesn't have time to read the while news story. It should be used in circumstances where such stories are a necessary. One of the important newspapers that use narrative form of journalism internationally is the *New Yorker*. In India *The Hindu* newspaper uses a lot of forms of narrative journalism.

The Five Boxes Story

The Five Boxes Story is a combination of the forms of writing stories listed above. It is a widely used method while your news story has many data. This method is commonly used in data journalism. "Box 1 contains the lead, Box 2 contains the nutgraph, Box 3 tells the story begun in Box 1, Box 4 contains supplemental details such as statistics or expert opinions, and Box 5 contains the "kicker" or the quote, image, or comment that ends the story on a strong note", says journalism experts

Writing a feature

Feature stories are an important part of news writing. It is often seen in newspapers and supplements usually given along with newspapers. If you want to see feature articles you can turn into page number five or six of your newspaper and get an idea of what a feature article is. Let's discuss some of the important points to be taken care of while writing a feature story.

1. Find the right hook to open your story
2. Detail the lead in the second paragraph
3. Make an outline. Strictly follow that
4. Bravely show with your words
5. Restrain from using too many quotes
6. Opt for a language that is comfortable for the potential reader
7. Always maintain the objectivity in writing
8. Try maximum to avoid opinions out of article
9. Re read and revise what you have written
10. Have the mind to make the necessary changes.

While starting an article make sure you have an idea. The desire in you situating to be converted in to writing must be the basis for your writing. Find the appropriate subject and topic. Add convincing premises to it. Make sure never to deviate from your desired theme and outline. The writer should be able to bring in a summary of what is being written in a sentence or two.

2. Research

Research provides the foundation for an article. The basic purpose research are:

1. The relationship between research is about hypothesis. It can either reaffirm your hypothesis or expand your hypothesis. It can also make you understand that whether you are on the possible track or is deviating from it.
2. The required information to blocksomething you have written in the early stages of your writing is done by research
3. The crux of your article is formed through research. Interviews, information through online and offline sources, references and citation all can be example of research.

3. Query letter

If you are a freelancer writing a query letter is as important as writing an article. The aim of the query letter is to send your article to any editor or publishing firm. It is more like a sales call. While drafting a letter proper structure should be followed.

1. In the introduction mention the editor about your basic details like personal credentials, reasons for writing, and the subject of your article as well.
2. Next mention how your article will be a contribution to the newspaper. Like you cannot imagine the editor of a sports weekly to publish something on Bollywood news.
3. A description about the contents of the article must be given in detail

4. The qualification that you possess to write this article must be mentioned. The knowledge that you have on writing this must be mentioned in this section.

5. Always make your last paragraph seeking for action. It should be polite and not too demanding. This must reflect as an action statement.

Computer

Care must be taken while using computers for writing. Whatever you write it must be saved from time to time and backed up.

Write

The most complicated part of any article is to write. A proper outline should be given to your article. With introduction paragraph 1 2 and 3 following into conclusion. Every paragraphs must have proper relationship with each other.

Edit

A good writer should be a good editor as well. If you are not able to do this alone you can seek the help of your friends. Typos, grammatical errors, repetitive words, and awkward phrasing should be taken care off. Editing gives the larger framework of the article. Along with the details and fixes the glitches to polish the prose. The form of an article is determined through proper editing.

Always be confident in sending manuscripts. You can even do follow up calls. At last the onus is upon the media management to decide whether to publish your story or not.

Letter to the Editor

Letter to the editor is an important part of any newspaper. It gives space to all readers for opinion expression. Letters to editor can be found in page four or five of newspapers. Let's discuss in this section on how to write letters to the editor.

Reasons to write letters to the editor:

- The frustration you have about an issue
- Your need to inform it to others
- To appreciate and congratulate someone
- For the expression of support to any cause
- The correction of information in any article
- Suggesting innovations and ideas to readers
- The influence of public opinion
- Extreme cases of lobbying and propaganda
- Reacting to makers of policy and other officials.
- Establishing ongoing works of any organization or firm with any current issue.

Instructions to follow while writing the writers to the letters

Topic and newspaper

This is the first decision that you need to make while choosing the newspaper and the topic. It should be a response to a specific issue. It can also be about some important issues happening in your locality and your community as well.

Choose the topic and the newspaper to publish your article wisely.

Responses

Responses to already published stories have higher chances to get published. Make use of this chance always. But one must always be prepared for rejection as well.

Local Newspaper

Your local newspaper has the highest chance of publishing issues pertaining to community and event related issues. There are higher chances for getting published in local newspapers than in the bigger ones.

Checking on examples

Always keep a tab on other Letters to the Editor sections. This will give you a clear idea about the content and the style or writing. The difference in style between various newspapers must be taken into consideration. The style, tone and length of publications varies from newspaper to newspaper. While writing letters to a specific newspaper make sure you have a clear idea of what you are writing.

Guidelines

There will be specific guidelines for every newspaper. Before sending your opinion make sure to go through these instructions. Like in certain newspapers you will have to send your details through common email where as in some it could be send by using posts.

The rule regarding the length of the letters also must be taken care off. Care must be taken include your name and contact and personal details for verification. Depending on newspapers there will be other guidelines. Newspapers take measure to avoid political endorsements and detailing. The number of entries per individuals can submit may be curbed as well. Make sure to go through the guidelines before you do the submission. Calling up the publication to know the publication details can also be done. If at all you are confused. The reason for writing the letter must be considered as your primary objective. The approach that you can choose for writing the letter is depended upon the reason for writing the letter. The accomplishment and result of writing the letter must be kept in mind while writing.

The time frame of writing.

The time frame of writing the letter is another important task to be kept in mind. The letter writing should not exceed two or three days of publishing the article. The timeliness of sending the article must be ensured while writing an article. The freshness of the article will determine should you continue with it or not. If it's a weekly magazine or fortnightly make sure it will reach three days in advance of its publication day.

Details of the sender

Always make sure to include your return address and contact information. It must be placed on top of your letter with full contact information. All details including postal, email, phone number should be included. At times certain newspapers pay money for writing these. If your letter is chosen, the editors will use this information to get in touch with you. Always make sure enter the date as well.

The editorial team will get back to you if your letter is published.

Details of the receiver

The format of a standard business formal letter must be followed while writing a letter to the editor. The recipient's name, position, company, and address must be included as details. If you are unaware of the personal details of the editor like his name it can be found from the newspaper or the salutation can be done just by writing "Editor."

Anonymity

A writer has every right to write a letter in an anonymous way. It should be posted correctly that the letter should be published anonymously. If you feel like you need a space to express your opinion and not to publish your name you can ask for the same. After writing with your own name and details a note can be kept along with the letter to state that it should be published anonymously.

Normally newspapers used to follow if you are in need of anonymity. It can also be done if you are in need of some privacy. If it's sensitive information also you can bring in anonymity. But always make sure to give the exact credentials even if you seek anonymity.

Salutation

Should you use salutation or not while writing a letter to the editor? It mostly depends on the style of the newspaper that you desire to publish. Always make sure to go ahead and use the style of your newspaper that you wish to write. A simple The Editor or Dear Editor will be more than enough in many cases.

Following a standard format while writing a letter to the editor will be always good. It helps to organize the information to its readers.

Conclusion

Dear all

Hope you all had a great time learning different styles, tactics, guidelines, principles and methods to be used while writing for newspaper. One should remember that you cannot apply all these styles in a single newspaper story. It will take years to practice all these varieties in your journalism practice. While working for a newspaper you should not be thinking of using which method to use and which method not to use. A style which is natural and flowing will happen to you automatically. As a task all of you try to find all these styles from today's newspaper and try to find the above mentioned styles. Rather than cramming what is said above it will be easier to comprehend.

