

Tips for writing a news article

Most of us are familiar with the way news articles are written to both present news and be engaging. Writing a news article is different from writing other articles or informative pieces because news articles present information in a specific way, following a specific structure. There are a range of tips and tools used by journalists to write news stories:



Structure

The headline

News articles always start with a short, punchy attention-grabbing headline. Headlines often use:

- **Alliteration** (using the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words). For example, “Fed up with festive food waste” or “Harry’s health sees him hurry for home”.
- **Abbreviations**. For example, “Deficit expected to deepen in MYEFO report”.
- **Casual language/slang**. For example, “‘Intimidating’: 100 brawling youths terrorise at Maccas”.

Headlines are typically short, partly to keep them punchy, and partly because of a shortage of space.

The leading paragraph (lead)

The first paragraph of a news article is called the lead. The lead is usually fewer than 25 words, and gives an overview of the event or story. The lead will often explain WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY. The reason for this is that when many people read newspapers, they often only read the first few paragraphs of a story, so journalists try to present all the important information first.

- Who - who was involved?
- What - what happened?
- Where - where did it happen?
- Why - why did it happen?
- When - when did it happen?
- How - how did it happen?

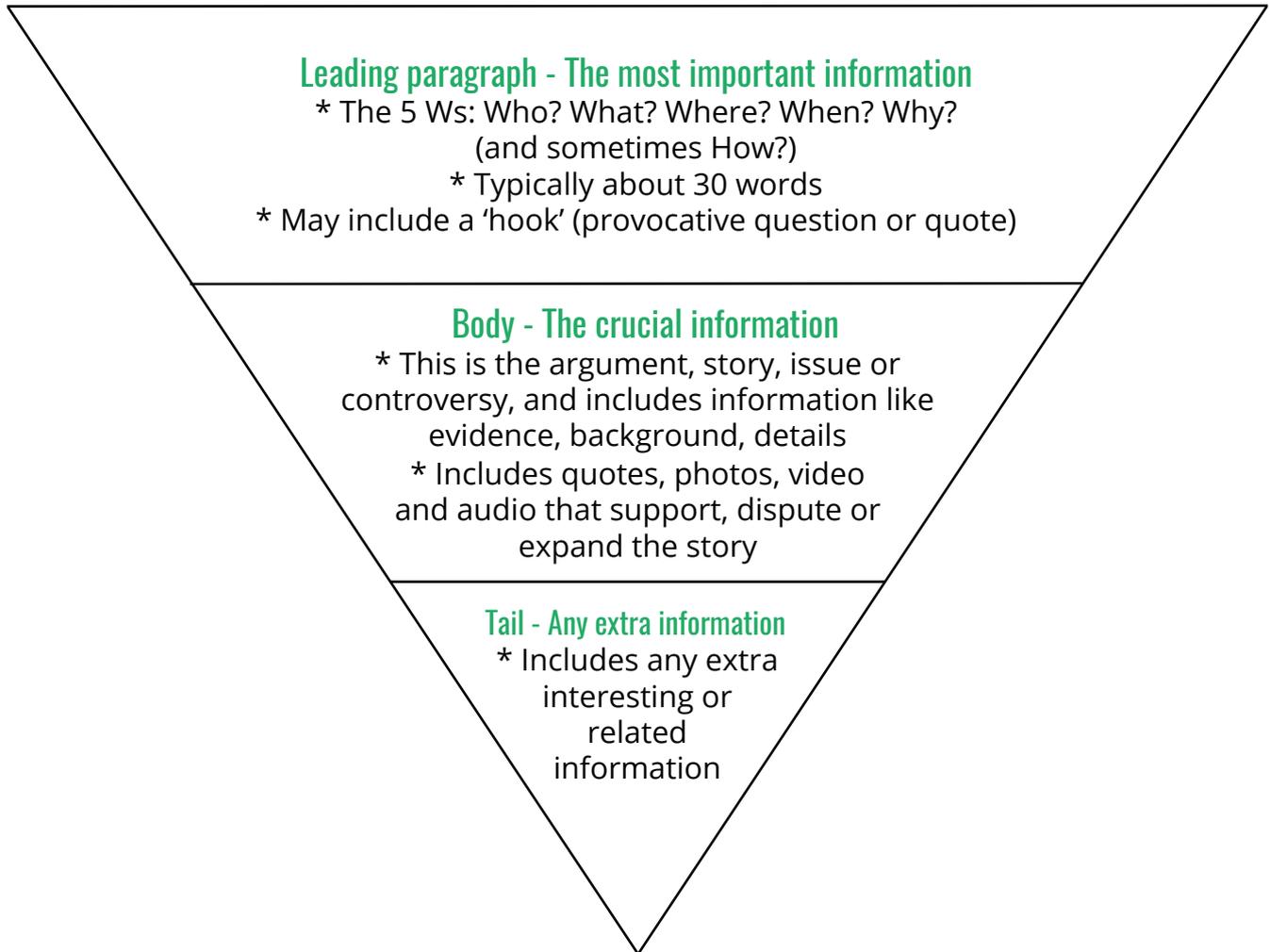
The body

After the leading paragraph, the rest of the article should be written from most to least important information. You can organise your information according to the inverted pyramid (see following page).

After you’ve listed all the most important facts in your news article, include any additional information that might help the reader learn more, such as contact information, additional

facts about the topic or people involved, or quotes from interviews. When writing a quote in a newspaper article, always put the attribution – the ‘he said’ bit – after the quote.

Inverted pyramid model of journalistic writing:



The tail

Conclude your article by giving it a good concluding sentence. This is often a restatement of the leading statement or a statement indicating potential future developments relating to the article topic. Where appropriate, you can direct readers to places where they can find out more information or can get help.

You can include web addresses or phone numbers.

Planning your article

Compiling your information. When conducting research for your article, or compiling the information you want to go into your article, organise your information into three categories:

1. those that need to be included in the article
2. those that are interesting but not vital
3. those that are related but not important to the purpose of the article.

The length of your article will determine which of the categories you include in your article. For a short article you will want to include everything in category 1; for a long piece you should include all the information from category 1 and some of the information from category 2, so long as it adds to the story and makes the story more engaging and interesting for the reader.

Writing your article

Newspaper articles are written in clear, direct language. Avoid long sentences, confusing grammar or fancy turns of phrase. You should also try to:



- Avoid using too many conjunctive sentences (sentences tied together with 'and'). Instead break any long sentences into two or three sentences. Avoid starting sentences with But or And. Anytime you write a sentence starting with But or And, take those words out and see if your sentence just as well without them. If not, try reworking the sentence.
- Avoid starting a sentence with 'There are', 'There is', 'There was' or 'There were'. By writing all sentences as subject, verb, object sentences, your sentences will be sharper and the idea you are trying to convey will be clearer.
- Write with descriptive nouns and verbs. Avoid the 'to be' verbs: is, are, was, were.

Paragraphs should usually be kept short and to the point. Big blocks of text will turn off your reader.

Think about your audience. In order to write a great news article you need to know exactly who you are writing for. Your audience will dictate the voice and tone of your article and help you to know what you should include.

Find an angle. Why is this article unique to you? What is your voice? Do you have a personal experience that relates to your topic? These questions will help you to make your news article unique and something that only you could write.

How to make your article great. A good news article will outline facts and information. A great news article will allow readers to engage on an emotional level.