



WRITING THE ADVANCED ONLINE STORY

Chapter 12

“All the News: Writing and
Reporting for Convergent Media”

Multimedia Reporting Course

MULTIPART STORYTELLING PREMISE

- ▶ The online environment offers unprecedented opportunities for journalists to tell compelling stories
- ▶ Multipart storytelling means breaking a long story into at least two pieces
- ▶ The Web is all about the interconnectedness of documents
- ▶ The same techniques that allow readers to click from one site to another also make it easier for writers to break stories into multiple pieces so they are more easily digestible and offer readers a variety of ways to proceed through the story
- ▶ This practice is known as “chunking”- two main points:
 - ▶ Online readers will read longer stories IF they are well written (67 vs. 59 percent-online article read-through rate compared to broadsheet newspaper rate)
 - ▶ Readers find it psychologically easier to get through a 5,000 word article if it is broken into chunks

CHUNKING DOWNSIDE

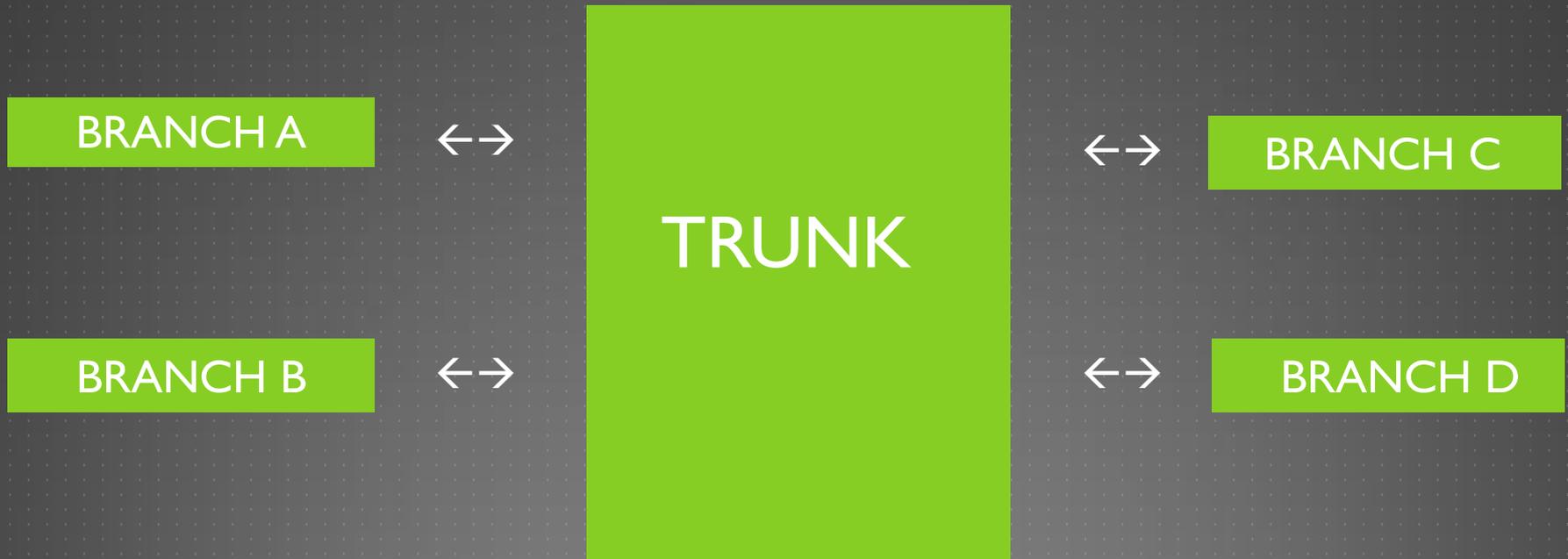


- ▶ Can be that readers stop partway through the story
- ▶ To encourage readers to continue, the writer needs to make the links connecting one chunk to the next so interesting that readers will have no choice but to click
- ▶ Example from Fray.com, a [ghost story](#) by Adam Rakunas (page 210)
- ▶ Only a person with no curiosity could pass up the chance to click that link and move deeper into the story!
- ▶ So think about giving the readers some incentive to stay engaged with your story and storytelling

LINEAR AND NONLINEAR STORYTELLING

- ▶ Traditional linear narratives have logical beginnings, middles and ends and are designed to be read consecutively
 - ▶ Point A>>>> Point B>>>> Point C>>>> Point D
 - ▶ To take the fullest advantage of the Web, writers need to think in terms of nonlinear narratives
 - ▶ These offer readers several different possible paths
 - ▶ Rather than saying “Start here, then read this, then that” the writer hands over some control to readers and lets them make decisions about how to pursue the story
 - ▶ The most common nonlinear structure is “trunk and branches”
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A typical nonlinear narrative consists of a trunk that offers an overview of a story and branches that provide background and further explanation



Interested readers can follow these links, and others who are pressed for time or don't have as much interest in the topic still can get the basic message of the story
(see example of this structure p. 212-214)

MORE COMPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

- ▶ Even the “trunk and branches” packages can be improved with the addition of complementary material that can help readers more fully understand all the fine points of a story and its background
- ▶ There are at least three types of such content:
 - ▶ Primers- an overview of an area or topic. Example: a primer on [affirmative action](#) that gives its history, scale and scope that would be linked with a current story on some aspect, challenge, issue or ruling pertaining to affirmative action; can also include a section of resources and links, text and/or video links to relevant speeches, events or programs
 - ▶ FAQs- a list of frequently asked questions can help readers understand complicated stories and get up to speed on complex issues they may be joining “in progress.” FAQ writers should think in terms of the most basic and common questions people may have and create a list with the most common, obvious questions first (example: p. 217-218)
 - ▶ Timelines- these are good for stories that have developed over time, whether a few hours or several years; they help readers quickly see the sequence of events; timelines can be text or graphic based; programs such as Adobe’s Flash allow even technically-challenged journalists to create eye-pleasing timelines (see Alzheimer’s disease and Lance Armstrong timelines examples on pages 219-220)



MULTIMEDIA



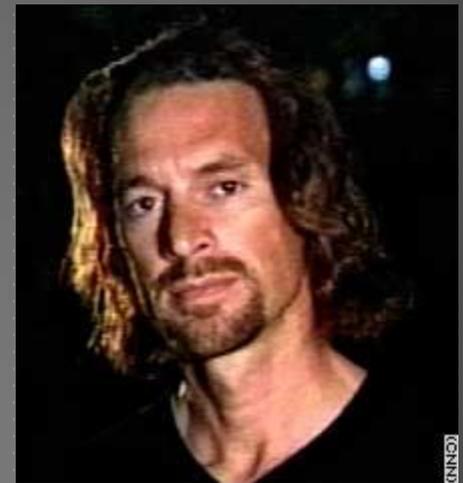
- ▶ Few online writers are masters of multimedia- most find it challenging enough to create compelling text stories let alone incorporating audio, video, animation and other elements
- ▶ Still, more writers today are finding themselves as collaborators in creating multimedia or as maestros orchestrating multimedia packages
- ▶ Multimedia Types: audio clips, video clips, slide shows, captions
- ▶ Audio clips- can help the audience get a sense of the people in and behind the news
- ▶ Video clips- serve same purpose as audio clips but many writers avoid these because they find it difficult to shoot content that is both technically good and interesting
- ▶ Slide shows- are a unique form of storytelling and when properly constructed can present a story with power and grace
 - ▶ A slide shows may run one minute in length and contain six to 12 photos with captions
 - ▶ Just as with any other form of storytelling, a slide show should have a clear central theme and be tightly edited
 - ▶ Captions can be used with photos to: explain what is going on in the pictures, identify the people in the photos; point out significant details the viewers might overlook



BOTTOM LINE



- ▶ By blending alternative story forms with photographic, audio and video elements, the writer can create powerful and immersive story packages that go beyond what any single medium can provide
- ▶ Kevin Sites was/is a pioneer in multimedia reporting
- ▶ He was hired by Yahoo in 2005 to cover war and conflict around the world
- ▶ He came to prominence in the early 2000s with his Hot Zone reports from the Iraq war and other conflict-filled regions around the world
- ▶ Interviewed by a Cal-Berkeley journalism student
- ▶ Sites' "thought we were going to die" article
- ▶ He talks about his "one year/20 wars" experience



Kevin Sites