



WRITING THE BASIC ONLINE STORY

Chapter 7

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

Multimedia Reporting Course

ONLINE NEWSWRITING FACTORS

- ▶ Stories can be harder to read online than on paper (due to lower resolution) so readers can fatigue quickly
- ▶ Print readers usually pay for their publications while online readers have no investment in most news sites so they may more easily move to another site in an instant
- ▶ Online readers are more likely to be multitasking, searching for news and information while working, watching TV, sending messages, etc.
- ▶ For these reasons, online readers are best served by stories in which the main points and key facts jump off the screen

ONLINE WRITING TIPS

- ▶ Stories written with summary leads and structured in the inverted pyramid format can help the key facts be absorbed more easily online
- ▶ Keep sentences short and punchy
- ▶ Keep paragraphs short, as you would newspaper stories (or even shorter)
- ▶ Keep stories short to hold the reader's interest
- ▶ BBC News, for example, tells writers for its online site to limit main stories to no more than 400-500 words, and other stories to 250-350 words

ONLINE NEWS STORY ELEMENTS

▶ Headlines

- ▶ Good ones help the writer and reader narrow the story's focus
- ▶ In as few as three or four words let the reader know what the story is about
- ▶ Online headlines don't do as much play on words- they are more simple, straightforward
- ▶ This is because in the online environment, headlines often appear independent of their stories on home pages, in indexes, and on search engine results
- ▶ Are often written in present tense to let the reader know what's happening now

▶ Blurbs

- ▶ Sit just below headline and in 20-50 words summarize the story
- ▶ Can be used on a news homepage to link to the full story
- ▶ Blurbs help readers decide whether they should take the time to read the full article

▶ Subheads

- ▶ These can be inserted to break up longer stories
- ▶ They help break down the story into bite-sized chunks
- ▶ Guide readers to pertinent sections of an article
- ▶ Offers skimmers a sense of the overall content of the article

▶ Examples:

- ▶ [MSN.com](#)
- ▶ [Huffington Post](#)
- ▶ [Charleston Currents](#)

MORE ONLINE ARTICLE ELEMENTS

▶ Bullet Point Lists

- ▶ Help present more information to readers in a way easy to comprehend
- ▶ They can help introduce the major aspects of the story, with each aspect addressed in the body of the story
- ▶ And they are well-used for listing multiple things that in a regular paragraph would be more difficult to absorb

▶ Finding and Adding Links

- ▶ Hyperlinks are the basis of the online universe
- ▶ In the early web days, they weren't used so much in news because of fear that readers would not return
- ▶ But well-selected links enhance the value of your own news service to users, increasing loyalty and repeat traffic to your site
- ▶ Using links can help preserve limited resources by not, for example, sending a reporter to cover something that many other news organizations are already covering and that citizen journalists may be blogging about— link to some of these postings instead

WHERE AND HOW TO LINK READERS

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Previous stories
- ▶ Related stories
- ▶ Resources for further research
- ▶ Source documents
- ▶ Related websites
- ▶ Related audio, video, animations
- ▶ Forms or email links to contact the reporter, editor, producer
- ▶ Choose precise link words to help readers not only determine where they're headed but also to interpret the information once they get there
- ▶ Links should be transparent and compelling
- ▶ Avoid the phrase "click here"
- ▶ Link words should give readers a sense of what's around the corner should they choose to go there
- ▶ Example: "The National Association of Poodle Breeders offers 10 suggestions on choosing a pet."

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT BLOGS

- ▶ We are seeing the emergence of blogs as a unique form of online writing
- ▶ They can be used to provide breaking news, commentary, corrections and background on items in the news
- ▶ A typical blog post runs two to five paragraphs, though some take no more than a sentence and others go on for 10 paragraphs or more
- ▶ Blog posts are as different as the individuals who write them
- ▶ A blog template of sorts:
 - ▶ A snappy headline grabs the reader's attention
 - ▶ A lead summarizes a recent news report or other online posting and includes a link to that item
 - ▶ One or two paragraphs provide pertinent quotes from the item
 - ▶ One or two paragraphs offers comments from the blogger
 - ▶ A link to comments others have made on the blog entry

WAYS WRITERS AND REPORTERS DO OWN BLOGS

- ▶ To relate stories from their own beats that do not make it into their regular stories or publications
- ▶ To give “behind-the-scenes” look at the reporting process
- ▶ To engage readers in discussions of story topics
- ▶ To seek story and coverage ideas
- ▶ Blogs, even by trained journalists, can tend to be:
 - ▶ Written less formally, more conversational
 - ▶ Have more first person opinions (even by journalists)
 - ▶ Be edgier, more risque
- ▶ Post and Courier [Blogs](#)
- ▶ Charleston City Paper [Battery Blog](#)
- ▶ Other notable news, communications and PR blogs:
 - ▶ [mediabistro](#)
 - ▶ [Drudge Report](#)
 - ▶ [RepMan](#) (Steve Cody, Peppercom/CofC communication advisory council)
 - ▶ [Fits News](#)- founder/editor [Will Folks](#)