



STORYTELLING AND WRITING FOR BROADCAST

Chapter 6

“Television News: A Handbook for
Reporting, Shooting, Editing &
Producing”

IT ALL BOILS DOWN TO STORYTELLING



- ◉ In preparing to write an effective story, the broadcast reporter makes careful analysis of the news situation and information
- ◉ The background work must be in place, and the importance of the story must be clear
- ◉ The reporter should identify the central characters, select an appropriate storytelling style, and decide what should and should not be in the story
- ◉ As the words begin to come together, the storyteller must convey information in a way that is clear and easy to understand, choosing appropriate ways to begin, develop and conclude the story
- ◉ Visual reporters must apply certain rules that pertain specifically to television and online video reporting

PREPARING TO WRITE



- ◉ You need complete command of the information before you can tell the story
- ◉ Review journalism's 5 Ws and H: who, what, where, when, why and how to ensure basic information is covered and included
- ◉ Identify the central characters- any story has these (quint mother example, p. 145); seek experts and those affected to create more meaningful and compelling stories; try to “personalize” and “humanize” complex stories
- ◉ Determine story angle (or peg)- the approach reporter takes in explaining story to viewers
- ◉ Diamond effect- think of a diamond’s shape to help structure a personalized story; begin with an affected person’s viewpoint, expand to the broader issue/implications; then return to that person introduced in the beginning

LEAD WITH THE LEAD



- ◉ A news story's lead needs that “Once upon a time” storytelling impact
- ◉ The lead can be considered the most important sentence because it must draw the viewer's attention and anticipation, set the story's tone
- ◉ If you do not get the viewer's attention, your story will never be heard
- ◉ Broadcast leads are often best when kept to 12-15 words: “He was the quiet Beatle who left the loud legacy.” (CNN lead when George Harrison died)

TYPES OF LEADS



- Summary or central point leads- often used with hard, breaking news stories; most common type of lead; need to concisely state most important fact(s)
- Hard leads are straightforward, it's very clear what the subject is and where the story is going
- When the information is serious, the writer doesn't worry about building in surprises or suspense and doesn't try to be too clever/cute
- Don't try to answer the 5 Ws and H all in the lead, just the most important facts, often the what and where

DETERMINING THE LEAD- ASK YOURSELF:

- ◉ What is the most important information? What is the story's central point?
- ◉ What was said or done about the topic? What happened or what action was taken?
- ◉ What are the most recent developments? What happened today or yesterday?
- ◉ Which facts are most likely to affect or interest readers?
- ◉ Which facts are most unusual or out of the ordinary?



SOFT OR FEATURE LEADS

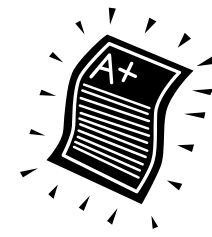


- Hard news leads get right to the point, but “soft” leads may give a more general idea what the story is about, or may attempt to build suspense, curiosity or tension.
- Such leads often are used in profile, human interest, trend, and less time sensitive stories
- But they can be used in hard news stories that personalize or humanize by relating a person’s reaction and impact to a broader issue
- Soft leads are also called alternative leads

TYPES OF SOFT/ALTERNATIVE LEADS

- Anecdote
 - Description
 - Quotation
 - Question
 - Suspenseful
 - Ironic
 - Direct-address
 - Words used in unusual ways
 - Multiparagraph
 - Shockers- lead with a twist
- “Buried” or “Delayed” leads—these typically begin with an interesting example or anecdote that sets a story’s theme, then a “nut graph”—perhaps the third or fourth graf—summarizes the story and provides a transition to the body

ELEMENTS OF GOOD LEADS



- Are specific—good leads contain interesting details and can help readers or viewers/listeners visualize the events they describe
- Use strong, active verbs—a strong word or descriptive verb can transform a routine lead into a dramatic one.
- Emphasize the magnitude of the story—stress the impact stories have on people
- Stress the unusual—by definition, news involves deviations from the norm
- Strive for simplicity—every lead should be clear, simple and to the point
- Localize and update—leads should emphasize your community's involvement in stories (local angles and reactions to national, international stories)

ELEMENTS OF POOR LEADS



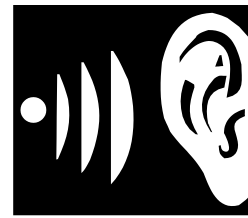
- ◉ Not beginning with the news—you should stress the news of the story
- ◉ Don't “bury” the lead—chronological order rarely works in a news story—the lead should stress the central point, what's most newsworthy, noteworthy or unique
- ◉ Too wordy- don't cram excessive information into leads
- ◉ Keep broadcast leads to 12-15 words
- ◉ Avoid “label” leads-- “Label” leads mention a topic but fail to reveal what was said or done about the topic. Leads must report the substance of a story, not just its topic.
- ◉ Avoid “agenda” leads—an opening paragraph that places too much emphasis on the time and place at which a story occurred is called an “agenda” lead
- ◉ Putting names in leads that aren't needed there
- ◉ Use the “delayed-identification tactic, regarding names
- ◉ In many stories, the names of the main subjects are not as important as what those people did or what happened to them.

TV NEWS STORY TYPES



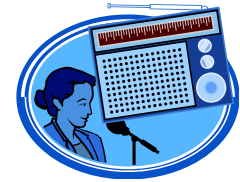
- ◉ Reader- 10-30 seconds
- ◉ Voice over (VO)- 20-40 seconds
- ◉ Voice over/sound on tape (VO/SOT)- 30-45 seconds
- ◉ Package- 1:15-2 minutes
- ◉ Live shots (with any of the above)
- ◉ Importance of soundbites:
 - Credibility
 - Emotion
 - Opinion
 - Variety
- ◉ Scripting
 - See scripts for broadcast story types p. 158-161
- ◉ Converged website content (p. 171)

SELECTING AND WRITING INTO SOUNDBITES



- ◉ As you decide how to put together a news or feature package, soundbites should be your first consideration- which ones do I use and where do I use them in the story?
- ◉ Choose soundbites that really say something, that convey opinion, emotion and/or are especially eloquent, pithy, colorful
- ◉ Don't use soundbites that say what you as the reporter can say
- ◉ Avoid the “had this to say” cliché leading into a soundbite
- ◉ Avoid weak “echo” lead-ins to soundbites- these repeat what the interviewee says

STORY MIDDLE AND ENDINGS



- ◉ Especially in hard news stories, “inverted pyramid” construction works well
- ◉ After a central point lead, follow with information in descending order of importance
- ◉ This requires ranking facts and details from most-to-least important
- ◉ Remember, in broadcast stories, you are writing to a story length of time, so it’s essential to “write tight”
- ◉ End stories by looking ahead to what will or may happen next, based on what’s expected from the information reported in the body of the story
- ◉ Or, end by giving: the other side, another bit of information, a summary, or the punch line in a suspense-type story