Chapter 6

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.
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.
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
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?
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)
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
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.