

Basics of News Writing

Basics of News Writing – Quick Reference Notes

1. Core Principles

Principle	What It Means	Why It Matters
Accuracy	Verify every fact, name, date, and quote.	Builds credibility; prevents retractions.
Objectivity	Present information without personal bias.	Allows readers to form their own opinions.
Clarity	Use simple, direct language; avoid jargon.	Ensures the story is understood by the widest audience.
Timeliness	Report events as soon as possible after they happen.	News loses value when it's stale.
Relevance	Focus on what impacts the audience (who, what, where, when, why, how).	Keeps readers engaged and informed.
Balance	Include multiple viewpoints when appropriate.	Provides a fair picture of the issue.
Fairness	Give subjects a chance to respond to allegations.	Upholds ethical standards and legal safety.

2. The Inverted Pyramid Structure

1. **Lead (Lede)** – 1-2 sentences answering the 5 Ws + H.
 - *Example:* “A 7-year-old boy was rescued from the river yesterday after a sudden flood forced his family to evacuate.”
2. **Nut Graf** (optional but common in feature or explanatory pieces) – Brief paragraph that explains why the story matters.
3. **Body** – Details presented in descending order of importance:
 - Key facts, quotes, statistics, background, and context.

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- Each paragraph should stand alone if the article is cut off.

4. **Tail** – Lesser?important information, related anecdotes, or future outlook.

Visual cue:

Lead ? Most critical info

?

Supporting facts & quotes

?

Background & context

?

Less critical details

3. Writing the Lead

Type of Lead	When to Use	Typical Length	Example
Hard news	Breaking events, straight facts	1?2 sentences	“City council approved a \$5?million budget for the new library on Tuesday.”
Feature	Human?interest, profiles, deep?dive	1?3 sentences, may be anecdotal	“When Maria opened her bakery at dawn, she never imagined it would become the town’s gathering place.”
Analytical	Complex issues needing context	2?3 sentences, includes why it matters	“The new tax law, slated for implementation next month, could cut small?business profits by up to 12?%.”

Tips for a strong lead

- Start with the most newsworthy element.
 - Use active voice.
 - Include a verb that conveys action (e.g., *announced*, *rescued*, *voted*).
 - Avoid “fluff” adjectives; keep it factual.
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4. Gathering Information

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1. Research

- Check primary sources (official statements, public records).
- Use reputable secondary sources (previous reports, expert analysis).

2. Interviews

- Prepare a list of open-ended questions.
- Record (with permission) and take accurate notes.

3. Verification

- Cross-check facts with at least two independent sources.
- Use fact-checking tools (e.g., Snopes, FactCheck.org) for controversial claims.

4. Legal Check

- Be aware of libel, defamation, and privacy laws.