

Writing News Stories

No. 47 in the Writing Center Handout Series

A news story presents the facts about an event in a simple, clear, and subjective manner.

Consider the following points:

- Write about facts only— what you observed or can ascertain from talking to participants. You should NOT be the subject or a part of this story. Do not use *I*.
- Some research is usually necessary to complete the story. Have there been accidents at this corner before? Does the driver of the car who ran the light have a record of traffic violations? What was the mayor's position on the issue last month? What political action groups have been taking sides in the controversy?
- The people you quote should be as credible as possible—don't quote the five-year-old standing on the street corner who happened to see the accident.
- Represent fairly the words and intentions of the people you interview. You may clean up gross errors in language to spare your speakers ridicule, but you must maintain the exact meaning of the quotation. Use "she said," never "she averred" or other synonyms for "said."
- Determine what is the news story and what is the background story, which comes later in the piece. For example, three days after the car crash in which Princess Diana was killed, the news story is the revelation that the chauffeur had a high blood alcohol level, the background story (*back-story*) is that the princess died in the crash.
- Avoid loaded words that carry emotional emphasis or show opinion.
- Use clear, simple language and short paragraphs—one point per paragraph.
- A news story does not express opinion unless it is expressed in a quotation from someone who was there or is an expert.
- Don't guess; find out what you can and don't mention things about which you have only vague information.
- Follow the standard structure:
 1. a *lead* sentence that encapsulates the most important information;
 2. a *funnel structure* that lists the information in descending order of importance (the story will be cut from the bottom);
 3. include the *back-story* several paragraphs down from the lead—whatever happened before that will help us understand the latest news;
 4. *no conclusion* necessary, though you may end with a twist or with a piece of information that suggests other directions for the story (keep in mind that it will probably be cut!).

For more information on writing News Stories, see

<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/units/paperprod/language.html>
<http://www.journalism.bsu.edu/Journalism/Tutorials/hottips.html>

