

Structure & Context

Fundamentals of Journalism - JR 102

Emerson College - Fall 2012

Structure

Structure

- Stories should be organized to make it as easy as possible for the reader to follow the story.
- It should also be structured in a way that's easy for the writer to make all the elements fit together.
- Experience journalists don't usually write out outlines, but they do plan their stories out before writing.

Grafs

- Grafs should be between 1-4 sentences.
- You don't want large chunks of text.
 - Easier readability.
- Vary length of grafs.
 - Just like you vary sentence structure.
- One idea per graf.

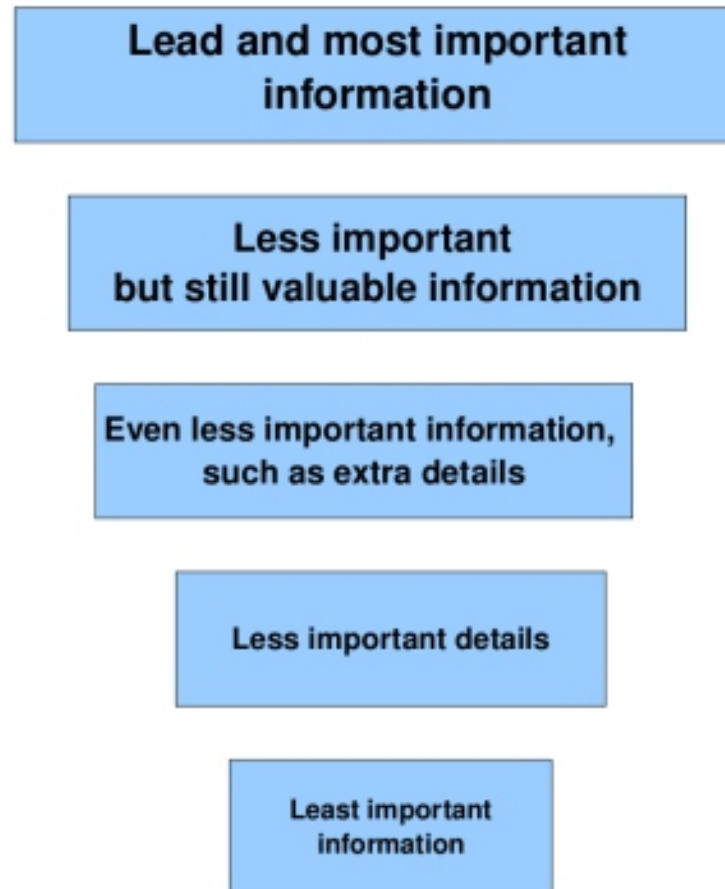
Inverted Pyramid

- Traditional/most basic news story format.
 - This is for hard news stories.
 - Features follow different structure (see later slide)
- Most important/newsworthy information first. Information becomes less essential as the story goes on.
 - Big news at top, facts in decreasing order of importance.

Inverted Pyramid



Inverted Pyramid



Inverted Pyramid

- Use news judgment to decide what is most important.
- Purpose of inverted pyramid is two-fold.
 - Get most important information to your readers as quickly as possible.
 - You don't want them searching for info.
 - So editors can easily cut on deadline if necessary without having to rewrite/figure out what can be cut.

Supporting the Lede

- The grafs immediately following the lede have to support the lede.
- Support grafs will out the information provided in the lede.
- Stories that don't support the lede frustrate/confuse readers.
 - They don't deliver on what you promised in the lede.

Elaborating

- Once the lede has been supported, you can expand the scope of the story.
 - Additional information.
 - Less significant details.
 - Answers to less pressing questions.
- Lede support is necessary. Elaboration is optional.
 - Depending on space, it might not even be optional.

Like Ideas

- Group/keep like idea together.
- Jumbled ideas hurt flow of your story.
- Learn to recognize natural connections when organizing a story.
 - This will make transitions (later slide) easier.

Multiple Themes

- A story has two or more key (lede-worthy) points.
 - This isn't that common.
 - Generally, two points. Never more than three.
 - If there are multiple things, think about if it should be multiple stories.
- Multiple themes must be set up in the lede.

Multiple Themes

- If story has multiple elements, these elements should be in some way be connected/related.
- When story has multiple elements, each element must be supported.
 - Support each element individually. (Its own graf.)

Multiple Themes

- Structure for stories with multiple themes (pg. 138):
 - Lede/nut graf (all elements must be set up by the end of nut graf)
 - Element A
 - Support
 - Elaborate
 - Element B
 - Support
 - Elaborate
 - Element C (Again if you've got an Element C, assess if you've got too much in your story.)
 - Support
 - Elaborate
 - Secondary Themes

Chronological

- Follows the exact order of events.
 - First X happened. Then Y. Then Z.
- Not common in hard news.
 - What's most news worthy doesn't usually happen in order.
- Chronological accounts may be mixed with non-chronological sections.
 - Chronology is good for recounting an event.

Chronological

- Disaster, police, fire and sports stories often contain at least some chronological elements.
- Effective in organizing a complex series of events.
- This structure is more common in features.

Hourglass

- Summarizes the news like inverted pyramid.
- Writer does not end story at the bottom of the pyramid, but starts again in chronological order to and fleshes the story out.

Hourglass

- Starts off summarizing the news following the inverted pyramid structure.
- Writer does not end story at the bottom of the pyramid, but starts again in chronological order to and fleshes the story out.

Transitions

- Each graf is its own idea. You need to transition from idea to idea for your story to flow.
- Sometimes a single word can work as a transition.
- Other transitions need to be a sentence or even a graf.

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Types of Transitions

- Logical Connections
- Time Connections
- Place Connections
- Contrasts
- Additions
- Natural Connections

Logical Connections

- Emphasizing a relationship between thoughts.
- Direct/evident connections.
- Transition words:
 - therefore, as a result, so, because

Time Connections

- Transitions relating to time.
- Transition words:
 - meanwhile, while, at the same time, before, after, following

Place Connections

- Relationship pertaining to location.
- Transition words:
 - across the street, next to
- May also indicate a change of location

Contrasts

- Transitions indicating the difference between things.
- Transition words:
 - however, but, despite

Additions

- Transitions indicating a reader is about to get more information.
- Transition words:
 - also, in addition, and

Natural Connections

- Wording referring to something mentioned in the previous graf.
- Transition words:
 - this, that
 - When using this or that, you need to specify this/that WHAT?
 - i.e. this meeting, that class
- Often natural connectors will not need transitional words.
 - Simply referring to “the (previously mentioned subject)”

More on Transitions

- Familiarize yourself with all the transition words from the textbook.
 - Writing and Reporting the News, pg. 139-141
- Be mindful of not overusing transitions.
 - Beginning reporters usually don't use enough.

Bullets

- Often used in newspapers and on the Web to make lists clear.
- Should be used selectively.
 - Will be used more in some kinds of stories than others.
 - Example: more common in service features.
 - Exception far more than the norm
 - Often used in newspapers and on the Web to make lists clear.

Bullets

- Only use bullets when there are three or more items.
- Bullets should only be 1-2 sentences. (Short)
- All bulleted items must follow parallel structure.

Features

- Same rules of structure apply.
 - Story must still support a soft lede
- Features rarely follow inverted pyramid.
- Features more likely to build to a climax.

Features

- Common structure for features includes:
 - Chronological
 - Spatial
 - Problem, then solution
- Features often return to the lede at the end.
 - Snapper/kicker
- Features need a conclusion.
 - Hard news story tapers off

Context/Background

Context/Background

- Just what happened isn't usually enough.
- Stories need to be put in context.
- Non-essential explanatory information = background
 - Information not required to follow the story.
 - Gives a story more depth
 - Usually low in a story
- Essential explanatory information = context
 - Information required to follow the story.
 - Needed high in the story

History

- Each time a subject is revisited, you need to give readers the basic facts.
- Enough information so that a reader who has no knowledge of previous events can at least understand.
- Not so much that you bore people who have been following the story.
- Also, illustrates changes over time.

Relationships

- Comparison: Puts an event into perspective based off other news and/or events.
- Patterns: If this is a pattern, illustrate how. What are the other parts of this pattern?
- Future: What are the next steps?