ADVANCED REPORTING

A CLASS DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU A BETTER REPORTER

BE PREPARED TO WORK VERY HARD

PREPARED BY

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
ADVANCED REPORTING

Prof. Jan Shaw

San Jose State University

AJEEP
You are not a scribe, unthinkingly recording what others assert and presenting that as fact. As a reporter, you verify. As a reporter, you bring your critical thinking and your skills in interviewing, observing and research to bear as you probe more deeply into issues and events. You ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. You dig for information not readily available. You THINK.

You ask yourself, ‘What is going on here? Where can I look for answers? Where is the information I need? Who can I talk to? Who do I need to talk to? How can I arrange to talk to them’?

Your readers depend on you for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s unverified assertions, not just an easy story.

The reporter is often the only thing standing between readers and the half-truths, lies, and exaggerations of others.

Course Description

In journalism, reporters bring truth to readers. This is known as “Getting the Story RIGHT.” It’s what you do.

In advanced reporting, student reporters learn more about how to do that.

Reporters Interview, observe, research and think. This reporting process holds true whether a reporter is covering a meeting or a war, a party or a fire, an art exhibit or a crime scene, a concert or an election, an issue of local importance or an issue of national importance.

In this class, students add fact-based depth and breadth to their stories, to take stories one or two steps beyond a quick summary of Who, What, When and Where plus Why and How, beyond the simple “What happened and what is happening now??”
In the advanced class, the reporting on the “What” is more rigorous, more in-depth and more thorough. Often, a greater emphasis is placed on the “Why” and “How” than in a simple event story.

In this hands-on class, students will:

• Practice how to report stories using the three basic tools of reporting: Direct observation, research and interviews.

• Practice the journalistic standard of fact-based truth.

• Practice the need for precise facts and details in your stories. (They make for rich, informative and interesting pieces.)

• Show by their reporting that they know that facts must be verifiable.

• Understand they are not scribes who simply take notes and include all assertions of facts in stories without verifying the truthfulness of the assertions. As reporters, students will bring their critical thinking to bear as they ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. If reporters can’t verify someone else’s assertion of fact, it needs to be left out of the story. Readers depend on reporters for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s misrepresentations.

• Show in their stories that all facts must be sourced immediately. The attributions are folded into each sentence.

• Show in their writing and reporting that they can keep their opinions to themselves and out of the story.

• IMPORTANT NOTE: You can rewrite assignments in an attempt to get more points. More points are not guaranteed unless there is substantial improvement. There is an exception to this: If you used the first person or made a factual error, it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points.

CHECK YOUR WORK BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN.


This advanced reporting class is taught as reporting is practiced professionally in the United States, and, as stated before, it is a hands-on class.
The advanced reporting students begin their final project on the first day of class by making observations and interviewing students on campus about their attitudes toward campus crime. These interviews include questions designed to elicit first- or second-hand experience with campus crime. All of your interviews, observations, research – plus a draft story – will be the final project. The final project replaces the final examination. Again, the finished campus crime reporting and draft story are the final story project.

Students will work on this final project story throughout the six sessions. Sessions will include interviewing, observation, research for statistics and facts and, if possible, a presentation – or mini-press conference – by a person knowledgeable about crime on campus so that reporters become accustomed to using expert commentary when appropriate. At least one session and parts of others will focus on in-class rewriting with the instructor’s help and tips for better writing.

Grammar and spelling issues will be addressed daily and in the edits of student assignments. It’s assumed you have a solid grasp of English going into the class.

Each day, the instructor will listen to the students’ experiences reporting the crime story and make suggestions. The instructor will explain the best practices for reporting before and after each day’s assignments. Comments are based on the papers and assignments that will be handed back that day, in response to students’ questions and experiences, and in preparation for the next assignment.

Students will be spending a lot of time outside of class interviewing, reading the handouts, researching, reporting, verifying facts, writing up summaries of interviews and research, doing more interviewing, writing a story and thinking.

Again, the class centers on reporting – interviews, research and direct observation – using a more in-depth story on campus crime and students attitudes toward it.

In the process of doing this, students learn
- To get the story right and to probe beyond the surface
- To verify facts
- To give their readers correct, factual information about events or issues that impact or interest them,
- To cite the sources of the information – in other words, to attribute the information
- To keep their opinions, conclusions and comments out of the story.

As with all reporting, we do this through
- Research
- Direct observation
- Interviews with knowledgeable people
- Interviews with people who witnessed or attended an event
• Interviews with people who are impacted by a policy, an event, an issue or a problem
• And asking yourself if there is more to the story than what is readily apparent

TECHNICAL NOTE: In this class, there is no first or second person (I, me, my, we, our, you, your, etc.) in any of your assignments, unless it is specified to be an essay. The first person is not used in stories because the job of a reporter is to find fact-based truth, not give opinions on it or lecture readers. There is plenty of room in the media for opinions, but not in professional, fact-based news reporting where there are standards.

The reporter and the reporter’s editor do, however, decide what stories to report, investigate or dig into more deeply. After that, the content of the story is based NOT on what the reporter or editor thinks but on verifiable facts and research, interviews with those impacted, interviews with witnesses, interviews with knowledgeable people and direct observation of events. In direct observation, you describe what you saw/heard/smelled so that, essentially, you put the reader at the scene. The reader can see it all though your words. You leave out the “I” and concentrate on fact-based content in direct observation and descriptive writing.

If you use the first person or the second person, it will be considered a factual error and you receive no credit for the assignment.

Students must follow and meet journalistic standards.

Once more: Sometimes rumors, lies and exaggerations rule the day. As a reporter, you must uncover the truth for your readers.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives
1. To gather facts and material through direct observation, interviews and research in order to give your readers correct, factual information about events or issues that impact or interest them.
2. Understand and practice what in-depth means when it comes to reporting. Understand the three main elements of reporting: Observation, interviews, research.
3. Understand the fundamentals of how to report in a non-biased way.
4. Students will understand the role of in-depth reporting.
5. Students will understand the need of talking to observers and witnesses and experts.
6. Students will understand the process by which reporters attempt to be as objective as possible. It is a process made up rules to follow for published stories.
7. Know the necessity of verifying facts and assertions of fact before they ever become part of your story. No verification – keep it out of the story.
In class, the instructor will also discuss feature leads that are often used on issue stories such as campus crime. In many respects, that’s why you always ask interviewees for anecdotes and stories and get them talking about campus crime beyond two-syllable responses. All of sudden, the statistics take on meaning when you discover that a friend of an interviewee was mugged and what happened to that person.

**Course Content Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. By the end of the course, it is expected that students will understand and practice how to add breadth and depth in reporting by intensive interviewing, detailed research and expert opinions.
2. Understand the three main elements of reporting – observation, interviews and research – after having reported and written a more in-depth story on student attitudes toward crime on the San Jose State University campus using observation, interviews and research.
3. Understand the fundamentals of how to report in a non-biased way after having attributed every fact in the story to its source, attributed all opinions to specific interviewees and after having checked the final story to remove any unattributed material unless it’s factual observation.
4. Learn to verify assertions made by others and not take them as automatically true after researching the facts to ascertain their truthfulness and not using them if they are false. (You are not a scribe who simply takes notes. As a reporter, you bring your critical thinking to bear as you ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. Your readers depend on you for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s thoughts.)
5. Begin to understand the structure of a more in-depth story after they have studied and used a feature lead and a feature story structure in their final story projects.
6. Understand that interviews add depth and human face to a story and that research gives readers the context and perspective surrounding those interviews after having completed a final story project using research and interviews.
7. Understand that they are to stay out of their stories. In this class, students are professional journalists, not essayists or opinion mongers. If you use the first or second person in any assignment, it is considered a factual error and you receive no credit for the assignment. Check your work.

**Required readings (handouts):**

1. On-the-street interviewing tips
2. Observation tips
3. Reporting excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer
4. Interviewing excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer
5. Writing tips and instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid (plus some more writing tips)
6. Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer (two partial sections)
7. Story template
8. Quotations
9. Partial checklist for stories
10. Proofreading marks used by instructor
11. Major project instructions
12. Format for interviewing summaries
13. Format for research summaries
14. Illustration of an inverted pyramid

Readings that are recommended but not required:

For the basics: An online reminder of what you need to do when you are writing everyday stories. [http://pocketjourno.com](http://pocketjourno.com).

For superb reporting and writing:
San Francisco has one of the nation's worst problems with hard-core homelessness. Thousands are without shelter, and as many as 5,000 spend virtually all their time on the street. Chronicle reporter Kevin Fagan and photographer Brant Ward spent four months among the homeless and those who deal with them. In this series, they explore how one of the nation's wealthiest cities came to have so many people living on its streets.

**SHAME OF THE CITY series, San Francisco Chronicle:**

**Part 1: Homeless Island**

Infographic: Goes with First in the series – Data:

**Part 2: Family in van:**

**Part 3: A Rugged Refuge** / Many homeless men would rather sleep on the street than in San Francisco's most notorious shelter, calling it a dangerous drug haven:


Books: The Word, an Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing by Rene J. Cappon. You'll have to hunt for this book. It will help you with your writing and reporting for most of your careers. There's a 1980s first edition and an early 1990s second edition. You can find used copies on Amazon.com and probably bookfinder.com – maybe e-Bay, half.com or other sites. It takes your writing beyond the basics into new levels of sophistication, and the book makes it fairly easy to understand how to do that.

The Elements of Journalism by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. This book addresses the principles and fundamentals that define journalism as a profession and a calling. It captures, as one critic said, "the shortcomings, subtleties and possibilities of modern journalism." Some chapters are better than others.

Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. The title explains it. Again, some chapters are more relevant than others.

Stories from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR):

Report Spurs Action on Afghan Bird Poaching
IWPR story said to have contributed to introduction of ban on poaching of species that prey on agricultural pests.
By Sadeq Behnam

Trade Through West Afghan Province on the Up
Traders say exports rising thanks to better business climate and security.
By Mohammadali Jawed, Harun Hakimi - Afghanistan
http://iwpr.net/report-news/trade-through-west-afghan-province

Silk Industry Struggles in Herat
Artisans and traders warn that historic craft faces collapse in the face of cheaper imports.
By Sharif Sayidi - Afghanistan
http://iwpr.net/report-news/silk-industry-struggles-herat

Keeping Up Appearances in Azerbaijan
Soviet tradition of organized “volunteering” persists in Nakhichevan exclave.
By Elman Abbasov - Caucasus
http://iwpr.net/report-news/keeping-appearances-azerbaijan

Other Equipment/Material Requirements: A notebook, paper and pencils. It would help students to have access to a voice recorder and a computer outside of class but that is not required. People have taken notes and written stories by hand for decades and it works although the ability to do direct quotes diminishes.
Assignments and grading policy

**Grading:** Grades in this course will be figured on a straight percentage basis. That means your final grade is based on the percentage of the total points you earn. The grading will follow this scale:

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<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>100 - 93%</td>
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<td>92 - 90%</td>
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<td>62 - 60%</td>
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**Points:**

- Attendance: 2 points each day, 1 point if late, 0 if absent
- Summaries of readings: 0 to 2 points each and graded on whether it appears the student read the material thoroughly.
- Summaries of 14 interviews: 0 to 15 points. Students can keep adding interviews through the fifth and, if the quality is good, can add to their points up to the 15 points possible. Graded on the quality of the interviews, professional journalistic standards, adherence to the assignment and completing 14 interviews
- Observation related to story: 0 to 5 points and graded on the accuracy and pertinence of the observations to help readers understand the story by putting readers at the scene through your words. No first or second person.
- An exercise in observation: 0 to 5 points and graded on adherence to the instructions and if the observations put readers at the scene so they can see it through your words. No first or second person. This assignment may be canceled if the there is not enough time.
- Story: 0 to 10 points and graded on clarity, accuracy, depth and breadth of reporting, adherence to the assignment instructions, and adherence to professional standards of journalism. Can be rewritten until more points are earned if the rewriting is good enough.
- Research: 0 to 10 points and graded on clarity, accuracy, depth and breadth of reporting, legitimacy of sources and adherence to professional standards of journalism. Are these sources of a quality and legitimacy that they could be cited in a professional story? Could the information you found be used in a professional-level story about student attitudes toward crime at SJSU? That is the standard.
- Expanded, corrected and rewritten research: As with the other assignments, you can rewrite and expand your research and, if it is good enough, gain more points
up the 10 allotted for this assignment. Graded on clarity, accuracy, depth and breadth of reporting, legitimacy of sources and adherence to professional standards of journalism. Are these sources of a quality and legitimacy that they could be cited in a professional story? Could the information you found be used in a professional-level story about student attitudes toward crime at SJSU?? That is the standard.

- Final project: 0 to 10 points and graded on whether, at the end of the course your information and sources are of a professional level and could be used in a professional story on student attitudes toward crime at SJSU. All of your work, original and rewritten, will be in this folder and you will turn it in at the beginning of the last day of class.
- Any other assignments will have points that fit within these parameters.
- Assignments and points are subject to change. You will be notified in class and by email, if you have email.
- If you use the first person or the second person in any assignment except an essay, it is considered a factual error and you receive no credit for the assignment and it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points.

CHECK YOUR WORK BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN.

Advanced Reporting
Schedule to be announced

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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</th>
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| 1     | To Be Announced (TBA) | **Topics:** Interviewing, observing and the final project.  
**Readings:**  
- A story template  
- Tips on street interviewing  
- Observation tips  
- A format for the interviewing summaries assignment  
- An illustration of an inverted pyramid  
- Handout on quotations  
- Reporting excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer.  
  
Day’s content: Instructor takes roll and distributes handouts. Instructor briefly discusses the individual class project, which is focused on the reporting and writing required to do a story about student attitudes toward crime at SJSU.
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<td>crime on campus.</td>
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<td>Instructor briefly reviews on-the-street interviewing techniques and instructs them to ask for detail and stories/anecdotes/memories from their interviewees. Interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent. (The latter when someone declines to talk to you.)</td>
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<td>For this, the final project, the reporter must always get the correct spelling of the person’s full name (first and last), year in school and major. Need first and last name to get credit for the assignment.</td>
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<td>The time actually in the class on the first day will be short because the instructor and the students will be heading out onto the campus for the students to begin interviewing for their stories on student attitudes toward crime on campus.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments and deadlines:</strong> Students will begin reporting the final project today and are assigned to go onto the campus to begin interviewing students about their attitudes toward crime on campus. By the fifth class, students must have 14 good interviews. Most of those will be done after class on your own time.</td>
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<td>Don’t forget: Ask if they feel safe on campus. Ask why or why not. Ask for details. How about the blocks just off campus? Ask for stories and anecdotes of their own or friends’ – “Do you take any precautions walking on campus? At night? The area surrounding the campus? Do friends? Have you ever become nervous? Friends? Have you ever seen a crime on campus or near campus? Have any of your friends? Ever been a victim of a crime or know someone who has?” Along that line.</td>
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<td>Then write up:</td>
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<td>• Summaries of interviews following the format that was handed out. Due next class.</td>
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<td>• A short, third-person essay on your observations – half of a page or so. Due next class. Also to be written in the third person. Must be specific about details. It may be there wasn’t much to observe. If so, do the best you can. Due next class.</td>
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|       |      | • A 500- to 600-word preliminary draft of what will be a 700- to 800-word story. For the first draft, use a summary Who, What, When, Where, Why, How lead. Follow the inverted pyramid story template that was handed out. This draft will be based on your interviews and observations. The idea is that you weave
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<td>them together. Research and additional interviews will be added in later drafts. Due next class. BRING TWO COPIES, one for the instructor and one for yourself. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person. All third person. Include the word count under your name. Due next class.</td>
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<td>• For the class after this one, write up a summary encompassing all the readings handed out today – not to exceed one page total. (Will be graded on whether it appears you have read everything carefully and absorbed the information.)</td>
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<td>• The following assignment is NOT due next class but at the one following. Students will read today’s handouts and write a one-page summary to be graded on whether it’s clear that you read and absorbed the information. Third person.</td>
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<td>• If something in the reading or writing is unclear or raises questions, bring those questions and any interviewing and/or observation questions to the next class for the instructor to address.</td>
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<td>• Note: Your first draft may not be very good, but by making mistakes and then correcting them as per the professor’s instructions, you will learn and your story will improve. Concentrate on accuracy and clarity. The story template should help. This does not extend to using the first person or including a factual error. If you used the first person or made a factual error, it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points.</td>
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<td>CHECK YOUR WORK BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Topics: Interviewing problems, observation problems, third person problems, research.</td>
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<td>Discussion: In-depth reporting depends a lot on the critical thinking of the reporter. The reporter has to figure out what the story is and what the story needs so that readers have a broader understanding of the issue – not just, in this case, that opinions vary.</td>
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<td>And if you find something verifiable and interesting, go with it. You can break out of the formatted leads if you have an interesting angle.</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
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<td>1. Writing tips and instructions for inverted pyramid leads (plus some more</td>
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<td>writing tips)</td>
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<td>Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer. Read the following:</td>
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<td>• Summary leads</td>
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<td>• Multi-element leads and</td>
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<td>• Then pick three other leads to study</td>
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<td>• Proofreading marks used by instructor</td>
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<td>• Format for research summaries</td>
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<td>Day’s content: On the second day, students break into small groups to read each other’s interviewing summaries and the draft stories as the instructor goes from group to group. Students make any quick corrections on their stories and hand them in along with the rest of the assignments due.</td>
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<td>Class discussion and roll.</td>
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<td>Then students use the classroom computers to research crime at SJSU by going to the university’s police website and, perhaps, the City of San Jose police website. Might also check the university’s Office of Institutional Research and see if they have anything. Might also check some of the general college websites. For those, try an online search at Bing.com or Google.com search – try searching “Crime at San Jose State University” or a similar search phrase and see what pops up.</td>
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<td>If the university where you are located doesn’t have these statistics, talk to the campus police or security people or someone in authority and see what they can give you in terms of overview and incidents.</td>
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<td>During class, summarize the facts and statistics that could be used in your story and put onto a Word document of not more than two pages. Print it out and email it to yourself, if you have email. If you have a flash drive or a computer at your residence, you can copy and paste the larger amounts of data and put on a flash drive or email it to yourself for further study.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments for the next class:</strong> Seven of them, including writing a feature lead for your story. Read the instructions.</td>
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<td>1. Write up very short summaries of your research following the format for research summaries. Keep your more extensive notes. Those you’ll use for writing the story.</td>
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<td>2. Continue researching for facts, statistics and/or studies for your story.</td>
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<td>3. Continue interviewing students until you reach the required 14 interviews and hand in the summaries as you progress.</td>
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<td>4. Look at your facts and statistics and decide which ones are pertinent to your story and highlight them for the next rewrite.</td>
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<td>5. Study your story to figure out what would make it stronger: Certain types of facts? Different interviews? Different questions? Then figure out where that information could be found.</td>
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<td>• AGAIN, in-depth reporting depends a lot on the critical thinking of the reporter. The reporter has to figure out what the story IS, what the story needs so that readers have a broader understanding of the issue – not just, in this case, that opinions vary. And is there something going on that no one knows about? Report on it.</td>
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<td>• And if you find something verifiable and interesting, go with it and feel free to break out of the formatted leads if you have an interesting angle.</td>
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<td>6. Read the handouts for session 2 but no summary is assigned. For the leads handout, study the summary lead, the multi-element lead and three other leads of your choosing that might work for your story. Only the summary of your readings from the first class is due at the next session.</td>
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<td>7. Write a feature lead for your story in one of the following two styles:</td>
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<td>A. An anecdotal lead where you relate an anecdote from one of your interviewees as the opening for the story. An anecdote must be a real incident – no made-up scenarios.</td>
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<td>Susan Johns had just finished her night class last spring and was setting off across the campus when she noticed someone following her.</td>
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<td>“I ran to the blue light phone and a campus officer came over to walk me to the parking garage,” Johns said. “As soon as I picked up the phone, the guy took off.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Then another student’s views.</strong></td>
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<td><em>John O’Hara, on the other hand,</em></td>
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<td><em>said he has never had any incidents</em></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><em>and feels the campus is quite safe.</em></td>
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<td><strong>Then a statement/nut graph on what the story is all about.</strong></td>
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<td><em>Students’ attitudes toward crime</em></td>
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<td><em>on campus and their own sense of</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>safety may vary, but crime rates,</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>including reported incidents of</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>violence, remain steady, according to</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>the University Police Department.</em></td>
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<td><strong>Whatever you write must be true. Stick to specifics.</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>B. Or a lead using a person. This tends to focus not on an incident</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>but on the person’s opinions:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Shaminder Jones says he doesn’t</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>worry much about crime on campus,</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>but he still makes sure to walk with his</em></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><em>female classmates when it gets dark.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>(Followed by a supporting quote that</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>relates to the story and then a nut</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>graph stating what the story is about.)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Or the nut graph might reflect that</em></td>
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<td><em>crime is rising on campus or</em></td>
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<td><em>decreasing on campus. Let your</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>readers know.</em></td>
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<td><em>If you’ve discovered something</em></td>
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<td><em>important, you wouldn’t use a feature</em></td>
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<td><em>lead – you would emphasize the</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>‘something important’ in the lead.</em></td>
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<td><strong>DO NOT spend hours on this. Give it half an hour or so and do the best you can. If you are having trouble, do not worry. Bring in what you’ve managed to write even if you don’t like it.</strong></td>
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### Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines

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<td>3</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>The point: There are many ways to open a story and you need to find the one that works best with your information and story angle.</td>
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#### Topics: Edited stories returned. Common mistakes in reporting and writing will be discussed including grammar and punctuation. Today in class: More research online for statistics, facts and/or studies on crime at SJSU to be folded into story after class. The corrected and rewritten story is due tomorrow. Use a feature lead if you have developed one you think works well. It still needs to be one sentence long and 30 words or less.

#### Readings: None required.

#### Day’s content: Instructor hands back edited stories and other graded assignments. Students break into small groups of two or three and begin reading each others’ stories. Instructor goes from group to group making suggestions. As issues and common mistakes become apparent, the instructor lectures the class on these and on how to improve the stories to better meet professional standards. This should take about half the class but can go longer.

Then students go to the classroom computers for online research. Look for statistics and safety guidelines at the online SJSU police website. (You are looking for a few really pertinent facts/statistics that work well with your story and will better inform your readers. This is not a report about crime stats or advice on being safe.)

Next, go to the City of San Jose police website and see if they have any stats on crime in those blocks immediately surrounding the campus. There may not be any current statistics for that area but look carefully. Citywide statistics are useless for this story.

Next do a Bing.com or Google.com search, typing in something like “Crime statistics at San Jose State University” and see if that gets you any information, maybe from some college services. You’ll write up summaries of what you found following the research summary template handout. These are brief summaries – do not cut and paste information into the report you will be giving me.

#### Assignments and deadlines: Seven assignments

1. Rewrite your story following the edits, class suggestions and adding in your research and any new quotes. Staple it to the top of the edited first draft and turn both in at the next class. (Your edited stories will be returned to you today.) Again, you will
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<td>make corrections, add research and add any good, new interviews to your story while removing weaker ones – if there are any weaker ones. This will be the first rewrite. If one of your feature leads works, you can use it in place of the summary lead but it’s not required.</td>
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Again, the idea is that you weave together your reporting elements: Interviews, observations, research. (We may get an expert to talk to the class at the next session and, if so, that, too, will be added.)

Make two copies – one for yourself and one to hand in to the instructor. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person. (Quotes can be two sentences long – no more.)

*Remember, as a reporter, you bring critical thinking and research skills to bear as you ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. Readers depend on you for truth.*

2. Write up a summary report of your research following the format in the handouts.
3. Be prepared to bring in questions for the instructor at the next class period if something needs to be clarified.
4. If more interviews are needed, do them and get me a summary if you have not yet reached 14. If you have reached 14, no need to do a summary.
5. If more research is needed, get it done and get me the summaries.
6. Don’t forget that you can rewrite assignments in an attempt to get more points. More points are not guaranteed unless there is substantial improvement. There is an exception to this. If you used the first person or made a factual error, it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points. Check your work before you turn it in.
7. Prepare questions for a pretend mini-press conference at the next class with a person knowledgeable about SJSU crime. Think to yourself:
   - What do I need or want to know to better understand the situation or event?
   - What do my readers need or want to know?
   - How can I succinctly phrase the question?
   - Essentially, you are looking for comments and overviews because experts know a lot and can add perspective. Don’t use them for facts. Using an expert to fill out your
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<td>statistics is usually a waste of their time, a mistake on your part, and a disservice to your readers. Instead, you want to tap into their experiences and viewpoints.</td>
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<td>- If you attend class but have no questions prepared, you will not be allowed to stay.</td>
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<td>The questions must be succinct – no rambling thoughts as you gropes your way toward a distant, unformed question.</td>
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<td>And this is subject to the expert making it to class.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Topic: The use of experts in advanced reporting. Stories handed back ready for final rewrite due at the last class as part of the final project.</td>
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<td><strong>Handout: Observations and Descriptive Writing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Day’s content:</strong> Instructor collects stories and summaries and speaks briefly about how experts fit into a story. Essentially, you are looking for comments and overviews because experts know a lot and can add perspective. Don’t use them for facts unless you’re desperate. Generally, using an expert to fill out your basic facts because you didn’t do your homework is a mistake, a disservice to your readers and a bit of an insult to your source. Confirm the facts? That would be OK. But you need to tap into their experiences and viewpoints – their overview of the situation. What is really happening? Why? What led up to it? You’re looking for in-depth comment from thoughtful people.</td>
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<td>A person knowledgeable about campus crime is scheduled to talk to the students during the first half of the class. Have your questions prepared – this will be similar to a mini-press conference. If you don’t ask, you won’t have anything to add to your story. (Actually, the instructor will call on you if no one speaks up, so be prepared.</td>
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<td>At the conclusion, if there is time, students will go to the computers and write up their notes from the expert commentary, print them out and email them to themselves. These notes will be used in writing the final story that is due at the last class, Session 6.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments and deadlines:</strong></td>
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<td>1. Finish typing up or writing out all of your expert interview notes, Fold the pertinent ones into your story. Save them – they will be part of the final project you turn in.</td>
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<td>2. Get our your story and read it aloud. Many errors you may have missed can be found using this technique. The story is far enough long</td>
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<td>that this process should be quite helpful. Make corrections. Email it to yourself or put it onto a flash drive in case your computer crashes. The final story is due at the last class. 3. A half-page summary of handout readings: Observations and Descriptive Writing – read very carefully.</td>
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| 5    | TBA   | **Topic:** Observations and descriptive writing.  
**Readings:** Major project instructions.  
**Day’s content:** The third leg of good reporting is direct observation and the ability to show your readers what you are seeing. Today, if all goes well, you will be observing, taking notes and writing up what you see in the third person either at an event or at the cafeteria. It’s due tomorrow as part of your final project. The ability to really see and describe what you see to your readers is a skill you must hone as your professional career progresses. It’s harder than it seems. All fact-based, third person writing. No opinions. No conclusions. No comments. Don’t say “I” or “us” or “you.” The readers want to know what you saw – not what you thought about it.  
**Instructor’s comments:**  
**FIRST YOU HAVE TO SEE**  
The third leg of good reporting is direct observation. You must really look at a scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough.  
Start writing down the details: Third person descriptions of what you see, smell and hear. Don’t use the first or second person – no ‘I, me, my, our, we, us, you, your.’  
In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.  
The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. No comments.  
Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see. |
For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reactions so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions, not yours.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations.

So back yourself up. What did you see that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see. At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

- Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
- Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high, the flames adding another story or two
- Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
- Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
- 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
- Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
- Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing counterpoint lights on the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
- Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators

Be aware that almost any physical description can contain elements that are accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students …” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’

Specifics – precise specifics – are more informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.
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<td>The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.</td>
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<td><strong>AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.</strong></td>
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<td>Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.</td>
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<td>Again. Pay attention in your mind to what you might be concluding. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down.</td>
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<td>So today’s descriptions have to be of real details and real actions all factually based, all in the third person.</td>
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<td>Take home, finish the story, email it to yourself and bring a hard copy to the next class. This is your final project and much of your grade rests on it. It will be graded on accuracy, thoroughness, organization, depth, breadth and clarity. A factual error means a zero for the assignment. Double-spaced, one to two sentences per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. All third person – no first or second person as has been stated previously.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments and deadlines:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Complete descriptive writing and turn in at next class as part of the major project.</td>
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<td>• Finish the final story and turn in as part of the major project.</td>
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<td>• Assemble the final major project and bring it all to next class.</td>
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<td>• Be on time.</td>
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<td>a. The final project consists of everything you have written and rewritten in this class.</td>
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<td>b. Staple the most current rewrite on top of the earlier, edited version or versions. Then assemble the stapled and other documents.</td>
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<td>c. Put it all in a file with your final story first.</td>
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<td>d. Then put an index on top of the story so that I know the order of the assignments as you’ve arranged them.</td>
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|       |      | e. Then put a cover sheet on top of the index with your name,
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<td>the name of the class and the date. If you want your project returned, add your mailing address.</td>
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<td>f. The quality of the final assignments will be graded on adherence to professional journalism standards. See ‘grades and assignments’ for specifics.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong> Instructor reviews basics of advanced reporting. Students discuss the class with an eye to improvements.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong> None</td>
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<td><strong>Day’s content:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Be on time.</td>
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<td>• Briefly meet in small groups to review final stories/projects. Students can make last minute, handwritten corrections.</td>
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<td>• Hand in final stories/projects.</td>
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<td>• Instructor reviews main points of advanced reporting: Adding depth and breadth through thorough interviewing, talking to experts, digging deeply into facts, statistics and history, and finding the human element in it all.</td>
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<td>• Instructor goes over the class point by point, assignment by assignment, asking what worked and what didn’t.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Get the Instructor a mailing address today if you want your final project to be returned. Can include it in your final project.</td>
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**Note from the professor**

*As reporters, you can bring depth and breadth to your stories by finding and interviewing the right people, by digging deeply into facts, statistics and history, and by finding and highlighting the human element in it all.*

*One key is verification of all details so that you GET THE STORY RIGHT.*

*You don’t pass on half-truths, exaggerations and outright lies as the whole truth. You owe your readers the truth and nothing but the truth.*
You need to realize that ethics are bound up in practically every decision a journalist makes. The stories you cover. The way you cover them. The way you handle sources. The honest or dishonest ways that you approach people.

For instance, when you are dealing with experienced officialdom, they usually know the ropes of off-the-record and on-the-record and deep background.

When you are dealing with the general public, too often they don’t. You ask them questions and unless a camera is trained on them, they don’t realize that you will put their names and thoughts into a story for everyone to see.

SO YOU MUST MAKE IT CLEAR. YOU MUST NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR NAIVETE. You need to protect them, especially if there is danger associated with the story or a chance they could get in trouble or a chance they could lose their jobs.

On a more prosaic note, if word gets around that you don’t protect your sources, no one will talk to you and other journalists will think you’re pond scum. And word always gets around.

And then there is the question of confidentiality of sources. Do you go off the record in the first place? It depends. Is someone in danger? Are you just trying to get a sense of the story and don’t need them on the record? And how do you protect your sources?

Meanwhile, when you are first getting started, be aware that people may use the off-the-record or background interview to get at others or promote their own interests through you and your story. You get better at spotting this as you become more experienced.

And ask yourself—always—did I get the story right? Should I make more calls, do more digging so that readers have a better picture and I am a better journalist?
Advanced Reporting

SESSIONS

DAY-BY-DAY INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Advanced Reporting

SESSION 1

BRIEF INTRODUCTION BEFORE TAKING THE CLASS ONTO THE CAMPUS FOR INTERVIEWING

THE START OF THE FINAL PROJECT

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
The reporter is often the only thing standing between readers and half-truths, lies and exaggerations.

Before class suggestions:

- You need to arrange for an expert on crime at your university (or on whatever your topic is) to come to the fourth class for a fake, mini-press conference for the students. If the story is crime, very often, university police departments have someone who works with students or the student press. See if that person will visit or ask whomever is in charge who might be available.

- Before class every day, write on the board: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? The 5W’s and H – as a reminder of the questions that need to be answered in leads. Write out anything else you think is pertinent for that day’s class.

- Allow time for individuals to approach you: Be there a bit early in case someone wants to ask you questions before class starts. Stay after for a bit for the same reason.

- Computer check: On those days when students will be using the computers, arrive extra early. Turn on all the computers and make certain they are working. If a computer isn’t doing what it should be doing, shut it down. That way, if the students need the computers, they don’t spend 10 minutes trying to make it work. Then print from each computer to check that that is working. If it’s not, reserve it for those with a flash drive and a printer at home. Otherwise, shut it down.
Session 1

SESSION 1 SUMMARY: Welcome, brief explanation of that day’s activities, hand out reading assignments and take the class out onto the campus to begin reporting a story about student attitudes toward campus crime at SJSU. Skip introductions and any in-depth explanations until Session 2.

Note: As the instructor, you can chose any story to be carried on through the sessions as a way to teach advanced reporting, not just student attitudes toward crime. But it’s a good idea to look for a story where the students can:

- Interview regular people throughout the course
- Interview an expert or experts
- Make observations to fold into the story so readers can see what is happening through the words of the reporter
- Easily find statistics, facts and/or studies.

The problem with many news event stories is that after that day – that initial event – there’s no one to interview and no way to follow up on the reporting. That’s why an issue story is suggested, in this case, student attitudes toward campus crime.

Class begins:

1. Take roll.
2. Briefly welcome students to the class.
3. Tell them today’s in-class and out-of-class assignments will be interviewing students and making observations for a story that is going to be the major project in the class, writing the first draft of the story and reading and summarizing the handouts.
4. Distribute the following handouts:
   - Tips on street interviewing
   - Starter questions for the story
   - Observation tips
   - An interviewing report summary format
   - An illustration of an inverted pyramid
   - A story template
   - Handout on quotations
   - Reporting excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer.
   - The assignments are in the syllabus so refer them to that document.
5. Brief introduction example: “Hello, I’m Professor Jan Shaw and I will be your instructor for the six sessions of advanced reporting. It is going to be a fast-
paced class with a lot of outside work, but I will be here before and after class to answer your questions and help you if needed.

6. **Quick lecture** example before taking them in teams onto the campus:

“Starting today, you will begin your final project for this class. We’ll be going onto the campus and you will be (1) interviewing student – 14 interviews are ultimately required, and (2) noting what you see. The second part – observing – allows readers who weren’t there to see it through your eyes.

“After class, you will continue interviewing and observing. Then you will start writing the first draft of the story – along with readings.

“At the next class you will give me the first draft of the story and a summary of your interviews. Interviewing and observing are important. They are two elements every reporter must learn. The third leg of reporting is research, which we will do in the next class.

“Working on an actual story helps you to understand the lessons taught in this class.”

**INTERVIEWING TIPS:** (Note: Read the dialogue aloud and have students look at the handout as you do.)

“When you approach a student or an official, smile and politely introduce yourself along these lines:

‘Hello, I’m ___________ and I’m doing a story for my reporting class on student opinions and attitudes toward campus crime. Would you have a minute to tell me why you are here and what you think of it?’

‘Would you give me your name and the correct spelling? The story isn’t going to be published but the professor wants us to source everything.’

“Get their first and last names, majors and their year in school. **Double check the spelling of the their names.** You must have these or the interview won’t count.

“If an interviewee does not want to give you his or her name, thank them for their time and move on. No full name, no credit for the interview.

“If the person agrees, ask them questions, listen to the answers and write them down. Use the answers to help formulate the next questions.

“If you are using a voice recorder, ask permission to do so.”
“If you are not, jot down the notes the best you can. As soon as the interview is finished, step aside and immediately fill in your notes from memory while they are fresh.

“Also, if something is especially interesting, you can stop the interviewee, read back what you wrote down, and see if you can get them to expand on their thoughts. You keep writing it down until you have it correct and exact in your notes. It does, however, interrupt the flow of the interview.

“Your interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent – the latter when someone declines to talk to you.

“And don’t forget, you must always get the correct spelling of the person’s full name along with their year in school and major.

“Now, take a look at the note on biased questioning. Read this and do not introduce bias into your questions.”

(Hold up the On-the-Street Interviewing Tips handout that includes ‘Biased Questioning.’ In summary it says: ‘For instance, the question, ‘What are the speaker’s strengths?’ is biased. It assumes the speaker has strengths. So the interviewees try to answer your question and your bias gets into their answers. Instead, phrase it like this: ‘Does the speaker have any strengths?’ If the answer is ‘yes,’ then ask what they are.)

“You will do these interviews during and after class and write up summaries to hand in at the next class.

(Hold up the format for interviewing summaries.)

“Summarize your interviews this way but hold on to your original notes. Those are what you will use to write your story. See the assignment section in your syllabus for details.

Observations – Sample instructions:

“You will be writing a half a page of your observations in the third person. It’s due next class. There may not be much to observe because of the nature of this story, but do the best you can.

“There will be no first- or second-person in your observations and no conclusions. No ‘I saw’ or ‘you will see.’

“And NO conclusions. Let me demonstrate what I mean by a conclusion.

“See this table?”

(Instructor points to a table or desk or chair or whatever is in the room.)
“Is it dull? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘dull’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you are talking about. There is no information for the reader.

“So, describe it. A metal table, dark gray on the top and light gray on the sides and legs. About 4 feet by 8 feet. Some stains and scratching.

“Now the reader has an idea of what you are seeing, and you let them come to their own conclusions.

“And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment today – describe.”

ASSIGNMENTS:

“Look over today’s assignment section in the syllabus – do you see everything that needs to be done before the next class? Are there any questions? You can also email me with any questions that arise.”

(Hold up the assignment section in the syllabus so they know to which handout you are referring. You are trying to make the first day’s lectures as brief as possible. That means you can defer answering some questions until the next session. Just tell them why.)

“In addition to these assignments, bring in any questions that may arise regarding interviewing and observing. I’ll answer them the best I can.

“Take your notebooks or paper and pen or pencil. Anyone not have paper and pencil?”

(Give them paper from the printer if they haven’t any. Have some pencils to loan them if they didn’t bring their own.)

(Then form teams of two to three, tell them to take everything with them because they won’t be returning to the classroom today. You will go with them but stay in the background because you are there to answer questions, not participate in the interviewing.)

“Let’s go. Remember, both observations AND interviews – during and after class. I can answer more questions once we are out there.”

These are today’s assignments that they will see in the syllabus:

• A 500- to 600-word preliminary draft of what will be a 700- to 800-word story. For the first draft, use a summary Who, What, When, Where, Why, How lead. Follow the inverted pyramid story template that was handed out. This draft will be based on your interviews and observations. The idea is that you weave them together. Research and additional interviews will be added in later drafts. Due next class. BRING TWO COPIES, one for the instructor and one for yourself.
Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person. All third person. Include the word count under your name. Due next class.

- Summaries of interviews following the format that was handed out. Due next class.

- A short third-person essay on your observations – half of a page or so. Due next class. Must be specific about details. It may be that there wasn’t much to observe. If so, do the best you can. Due next class.

- For the class after this one, write up a summary encompassing all the readings handed out today – not to exceed one page total. (Will be graded on whether it appears you have read everything carefully and absorbed the information.)

- If something in the reading or writing is unclear or raises questions, bring those questions and any interviewing and/or observation questions to the next class for the instructor to address.

- Note: Your first draft may not be very good, but by making mistakes and then correcting them as per the professor’s instructions, you will learn and your story will improve. Concentrate on accuracy and clarity. The story template should help. This does not extend to using the first person or including a factual error.

  If you used the first person or made a factual error, it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points.

The instructor then edits all the assignments for content, structure, adherence to the assignment instructions, grammar, punctuation and whatever else is relevant to each assignment. YOU MUST RETURN THEM AT THE NEXT CLASS, ESPECIALLY THE STORY.

(Handouts for Session 1, next page)

- A story template,
- Tips on street interviewing,
- Observation tips,
- An interviewing report summary format,
- An illustration of an inverted pyramid,
- Handout on quotations,
- Reporting excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer.
HANDOUTS FOR SESSION 1

(Note: the instructor will have to print out the illustration for the inverted template and the reporting excerpts from Writing Across the Media” from the PDFs. They are also printed out in the binder.)

On-the-street Interviewing

BY JAN SHAW

(Note: If you are using a voice recorder, ask if they mind being recorded and tell them you use the recorder to make certain the quotes are accurate. If they object, politely turn it off or put it away and take notes. By law in the United States, you must have permission. Check your batteries.)

In preparation: Ask yourself, what do you and your readers need to know? What might your readers like to know? What about this story might pique their interest and what is it that is important for them to know? As a reporter, you are often making these kinds of decisions.

Jot down pertinent questions so you don’t go blank in the middle of an interview. Keep these by you. But be careful – some of the most interesting anecdotes and quotes come from questions that developed talking to someone – not from your list.

Ask interviewees for detail and for stories, anecdotes and memories. Interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent. (The latter when someone declines to talk to you.)

On-the-street interviews differ from sit-down-and-talk interviews. When you are on the street, notebook and recorder in hand, the questions and answers tend to be shorter, quicker and less in-depth and that’s if you can get anyone to talk to you.

They are off-the-cuff: No appointment was set up, no background work completed, no biographies read.

So, for you first time out, follow these suggestions. As you get more comfortable doing this, you will develop your own way of street interviewing.

For this story you are looking for:
1. Opinions and thoughts
2. Anecdotes and stories
3. Attitude
4. Background information
5. The critical ‘why’ questions -- what led them to having these opinions of SJSU
6. Don’t forget: Full name correctly spelled, year in school and major
7. And at the end always ask something along the line of "And do you have any
other thoughts?? Anything I haven't asked you about?"
8. Then thank them

14 interviews required but not all today

When you approach a potential interviewee, smile and politely introduce yourself along
these lines:

‘Hello, I’m ___________ and I’m doing a story for my
reporting class on student attitudes toward San Jose State.

“Would you have a minute to talk to me? Maybe tell me why
you are here and what you think of it?’

“And could you give me your name? Correct spelling? The
story isn’t going to be published but the professor wants us to
source everything.”

Get their first and last names, majors and their year in school. You must have these or
the interview won’t count.

If they don’t want to tell you, politely thank them and move on to the next subject. For
this assignment, no one gets to be unidentified. You can’t use them in your stories.

1. And begin your interviews.

• “So, what brings you here to SJSU?
• “Has it been worthwhile?
• “Anything you don’t like especially?
• “Or do like?
• “Have you gotten to know people?
• “Do you live on campus or nearby or commute?
• “When you first came onto the campus, what was your reaction?”
• And so on until you think you have enough to work with. Don’t inadvertently
spend all your time with just a few interviewees.

2. And so on. DO NOT ASK THESE QUESTIONS LIKE IT’S A SURVEY. Try
to turn it all into a conversation. In your stories, you can use individual answers
but you can’t draw conclusions. For example, you can’t say, “Students like SJSU.”
That’s a conclusion and can’t be verified because you spoke with maybe 10
students and there are 26,000 or so with whom you haven’t spoken.
3. You need to move beyond questions that can be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or one-word response to questions that require a fuller response. You are not conducting a survey, you are conducting an interview with live, real people and you are trying to elicit from them experiences, thoughts and opinions. That way, you have human material for your story. The backbone of a story can be it’s facts and statistics but interviews turn it from a report into a story with a human face. So dig into the “why’s” and “how’s” … not just the “what.”

4. As soon as you are done, start filling in your notes while your memory is still fresh, even if you are using a voice recorder. Your own memory will supply you with what you sense is most important. If you rely only on the recording, suddenly everything seems of equal importance. So, don’t skip the “filling in the notes” step if at all possible.

5. Also, if during an on-the-street interview something is especially interesting, you can stop the interviewee, read back what you wrote down, and see if you can get them to expand on their thoughts. You keep writing it down and reading it back to them until you have it correct and exact in your notes. It does, however, interrupt the flow of the interview.

6. KEEP YOUR OPINIONS TO YOURSELF, for the most part. The dangers are that you (a) bias the interview, or (b) end up boring everyone to death by rattling on and ruining what is supposed to be interviews of other people’s opinions.

7. Biased Questioning: A big no-no. Example: “What do you like about San Jose State?” is biased. It assumes the student likes something about the place. So the interviewees try to answer your question and your bias gets into their answers. Instead, phrase it like this: “Is there anything you like about San Jose State?” If the answer is ‘yes,’ THEN you can say something like “Oh, tell me about that.”

8. NOTE ON VOICE RECORDERS: There used to be some debate on their use – now there isn’t. If you can, use them. Just check the batteries and get permission.
Observation and Descriptive Writing instructions

BY JAN SHAW

First You Have to See

The idea is to put the reader at the scene through your eyes and your words. To do this, you must really look at the scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough. Write out what you see. Smells can also be described as well as sounds, if they are pertinent to the story.

In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. Don’t.

Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reaction so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations. Again, the reader can’t see anything.

So back yourself up. What did you see or are you seeing that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

Example, continued. At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

• Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
• Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
• Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
• Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
• 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
• Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
• Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing a counterpoint light to the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
• Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators

Be aware that almost any physical description can contain elements that may be accurate but unhelpful to the reader.
For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students ….” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’ ‘There were 25,000 people in the stadium stands but there were 60,000 seats.’

Specifics – precise specifics – are informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.

Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

So description and observation assignments in this class must comprise real details and actions and ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON. No ‘I saw’ or ‘you will see.’

NO conclusions. By that I mean, again, no shorthand descriptions that you understand but your readers don’t.

Another example of a conclusion: Look at the floor.

Is it boring? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘boring’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you’re referring to. There is no information for the reader.

So, describe it. Is it wood (or metal or linoleum or vinyl or tile)? What color? Is it polished? Not polished? Scuffs? Spotless? Dirt streaks? Tire marks? Shoe marks?

Then there are Smells. Smells are tough to describe. But do the best you can. Usually the specifics will have to carry you. Pineapple has a smell. Frying hamburgers have a smell. Air fresheners have a smell. Just be as specific as you can and you do that by paying attention, by concentrating on what you are seeing or smelling or hearing.
Air is another tough one. You can say it’s stuffy or hot or icy or whatever it is. If it isn’t anything, leave it out.


Visuals: What are you seeing? Be specific. Draw the readers a word picture. Don’t say “colorful.” Again, you know what that means but the reader doesn’t. What did you see that led you to that conclusion? THAT’s what you show the reader.

You’ll hear the word “SHOW” in most writing classes: “Show, don’t tell.” You “show” with specifics. “Telling” is when you start using conclusions that have no information in them for the readers. You and you alone will know whereof you speak.

With the right writing, readers have an idea of what you are seeing, and you are letting them come to their own conclusions. You can immerse them in a scene. Your words bring it alive and make it real for your readers.

And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment – describe.
The Inverted Pyramid Structure
Summary Lead and Information in Descending Order of Importance

Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

Next most important information

Next most important information

Next most…

Next most…

Stop
Writing
Basic Inverted Pyramid Story Template

By Jan Shaw

Descending Order of Importance:

   Lead length: 30 words or less. Double spaced and indented. Use past tense.

2. Second paragraph: quote from someone that relates to and supports the lead. Double spaced and indented. Must have full name or can’t use. Include major and year in school.


4. Fourth paragraph: A description maybe of security, if applicable. One sentence, double-spaced, indented. The description may take two paragraphs. If no description is applicable, add more sourced information or a quote here.

5. Fifth paragraph: More information, one sentence. Put your source at the end of the sentence. (, according to ______.) Double spaced and indented.


7. Seventh paragraph: A quote from a different person. Double spaced and indented.

8. Eighth paragraph: More information, one sentence, sourced at end of sentence and indented.

9. Another quote.

10. Continue to weave together facts, interviews and observations following this basic order and format. Feel free to add more facts or more quotes than is called for here – just stick to the rules.

Follow this format for up to 600 words or until you run out of information. When you run out of information, stop writing. If that bothers you too much, end with a quote if, and only if, it fits smoothly into the story.

If you don’t have enough information, go back and do more interviewing and/or reporting.

PUT WORD COUNT UNDER YOUR NAME.

Remember – descending order of importance.
**Quotation Instructions**

**BY JAN SHAW**

Indirect quotations are usually used throughout a story to let readers know who is saying way and to let people speak and make their own points or to impart information – but when direct quotations are used, use only the lively or interesting ones. Don’t use direct quotations to impart basic information.

I. Using Quotes:

It boils down to this: To use direct quotation marks, the quote must be EXACTLY what the person said.

Close or almost?? No. Use a partial quote or paraphrase the quote if it’s not exact.

Exact: “We have a real problem with the financing of the new arena,” said Patricia Nguyen, who is heading up fundraising.

Partial quote: Head fundraiser Patricia Nguyen said there’s a “real problem” with the new arena’s financing.

Paraphrase: Financing troubles have surfaced at the new arena, said Patricia Nguyen, the chief fundraiser.

**DON’T EVER CHANGE THE MEANING OF A QUOTE.**

**DON’T EVER LET YOUR EDITORS CHANGE THE MEANING OF A QUOTE IN YOUR STORY.**

**BE PREPARED TO FIGHT FOR THIS – YOUR INTEGRITY AND REPUTATION ARE AT STAKE.**

II. Punctuating quotes:

- Use ‘said’
- Commas and periods at the ends of quotes go inside, to the left, of the closing quote marks. “It’s hot,” said Darlene Lee, a sophomore pre-nursing major.
- Place the ‘said’ after the name in attributions that are three words or less. (Freitas said)
- Place the ‘said’ in front of the name when it’s more than three words. (said Donald Perez, a computer major.)
- When the speaker is still talking but the writer is using a new paragraph with no other words to break up the quote, the closing direct quote mark is left out.

The following are correctly punctuated:
“It looks as if it’s going to rain today,” said Danny Freitas, a computer major. “The drought is over.”

Freitas, who is in his first year at SJSU, said the area “badly needed” rain.

“The only problem,” Freitas continued, “is that it’s a very light rain. It’s almost nothing.

“I think what we really need is about two weeks of steady rain – not this drizzle.”

Some punctuation rules:
1. Use “said.” Don’t use anything else in this class – don’t say mentioned or exclaimed.
2. In this class, tuck that “said” at the end or the middle of the sentence unless the veracity of the statement is at stake or if there could be some confusion about who is speaking.
   • For instance, if someone says the city is going bankrupt, it makes a difference who is saying that. If it’s the mayor, attribute the statement to the mayor at the beginning of the sentence.
   • To avoid confusion – sometimes someone else was talking in the preceding sentence and you don’t want readers to think the same person is still speaking.
   • Or you left out the name in the first reference to the person. In news leads, we usually don’t use unknown names so a lead might read “The head of the Jefferson School district will leave that post in two weeks…..” And the next paragraph will start, “Superintendent Amelia Hart, who has ……”
   • The only other general exception to putting attributions in the middle or the end of sentences is if the person is so prominent, he or she needs to be introduced to readers immediately.
3. Next, if the actual attribution is three words or less, put the “said” AFTER the person’s name. “The election is nearing,” Ray Jones said.
4. If the attribution is longer than three words, put the “said” IN FRONT OF the person’s name. “The election is nearing,” said Ray Jones, who is in charge of the ballots in Santa Clara County.
5. Commas and periods go INSIDE the closing quote mark. “The election is nearing,” Jones said.
6. If a quote is a complete sentence, you capitalize the first letter even if it’s not the actual beginning of the sentence: Freitas said, “If we do have storms, though, I hope it’s not during the football game.”
7. Give direct quotes their own paragraphs.
8. Partial quotes:
   The football game was “just awful,” the coach said.
   The team is going to need some “tough” practices, he said.
Starter questions for story on student attitudes toward crime at SJSU

- Ask if they feel safe on campus.
- Ask why or why not.
- Ask for details.
- How about the blocks just off campus? Comfortable? Not?
- Ask for stories and anecdotes of their own or friends’
- Do you or anyone you know take precautions walking on campus? At night? Off campus?
- Have you ever seen or encountered any situations of crime? (Really? Where and what happened? Could you tell me about it?) (Has anyone you know? Yes? Can you tell me about it?) (And those would need to be verified before you could use them – no second-party sources in your story – all reporting must be original.)
- So things are good for you? You don’t worry? Are the people you know also pretty comfortable?
- And let the conversation go along … at some point if you are talking to a group, you can ask them all, “Has anyone here ever run into a dangerous situation on campus? Or near campus?”
Format for Interviewing Summaries

Interviewing template for the report that summarizes your interviews – use your original notes to write the story:

1. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.

2. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.

3. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.

Follow this format for each of your interviewees.

Number of interviews required: 14 but you can have more.
RESEARCH!
THE HUNT FOR FACTS, STATS AND STUDIES

SOURCES
FROM "WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA"

BY KRISTIE BUNTON, THOMAS B. CONNERY,
STACEY FRANK KANIHAN,
MARK NEUZIL, AND DAVID NIMMER
TAILORING THE INFORMATION SEARCH

Before conducting an interview or surfing the Internet for sources, media writers should ask themselves four questions to help focus their search for information. Shirley Biagi offers the following advice in her book “Interviews That Work.”

First, the writer asks a practical question: *How much time do I have to track down information?* A TV reporter whose news director has just bellowed out an order to get over to the city’s airport and interview an arriving diplomat will not have time to conduct an extended information search. If the reporter is a well-read follower of current events, he or she will be able to think of questions on the spur of the moment. However, a public relations writer assigned to work on his or her company’s annual report has several weeks to track down information that will help him or her understand the ins and outs of the company’s financial position. To write an annual report, he or she must conduct an extended search for information.
Second, the writer asks: *What do I need to know?* An advertising copywriter who needs the phone number of a discount store to insert in a newspaper advertisement has no reason to waste time on a documentary search: He should get a telephone book. But a university public relations writer preparing a fact sheet for AIDS Awareness Week on campus may need to know how many Americans are living with HIV; she should seek documentary sources, such as the Statistical Abstract of the United States and the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control.

Third, the writer asks: *How will I use this information?* If the information is critical to the news release, the writer can launch an extensive search for the statistics on HIV patients. But if the focus is on campus plans for making students aware of AIDS, the writer can make a quick sweep of sources and waste little time trolling for tangential information.

Finally, the writer asks: *Who is the audience for this information?* If the information is to be used to form questions for an interview with a scientific researcher whose work is developing new HIV-fighting drugs, the writer should spend several hours learning about the properties of the drugs and becoming familiar with the relevant scientific terms. But if the information is to be used to provide a supporting paragraph in a fact sheet, the writer should spend time looking for translations of scientific jargon into everyday language for the journalists who will receive the AIDS Awareness Week media kit.

**Using a Variety of Information Sources**

Decisions as to how best to gather information will depend on the writer, the subject and the time available. But all media writers need solid information before they can begin writing. Advertising legend Leo Burnett “has said that in addition to a facility for putting words together, ‘organizing facts and finding things that were interesting to people’ contributed to his success.”

Knowledgeable media writers find facts and information in a variety of documentary sources. A common source of public documents and other information is the government. But numerous other places to look include the local library, the Internet, businesses, nonprofit and other media publications and broadcasts. When a media writer wants
to know about a person, the list of possible sources is lengthy and always changing. Think about yourself as a student and a citizen, and the number of cards you carry around in your wallet or purse: your driver’s license, college ID card, voter registration card, Social Security card, club membership card and perhaps, a visa or passport. Many of these cards are connected to public documents that are available to anyone wanting to look. Depending on your state of residence, for example, driver’s license records are fairly easily obtained, complete with name, age, address, physical description and driving record. A reporter investigating a traffic accident might find this information useful.

In their book “Search Strategies in Mass Communication,” authors Jean Ward and Kathleen Hansen identify what they call “potential contributors” to a mass media message. Ward and Hansen divide these contributors or sources of information into three categories. Informal sources include observation, casual reading, and networks of friends and co-workers. Institutional sources are the traditional tools of the journalist’s trade: government documents, colleges, interest groups and businesses. Information and data tools are the various libraries, commercial databases, Internet resources and data files available through a computer-generated search.

A listing of all the possible places to locate information would be endless, but we can identify the types of sources that tend to be most useful to media writers. These sources include commercial databases, Internet sources, government documents, interviews and observation.

Commercial Database Services

Most writers begin researching a subject by finding out what others have written about the topic. The quickest and easiest way to locate such information is through a commercial database service. Databases have been around in computer form since the late 1970s, and in printed versions for much longer. “The Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature,” for example, is a well-known source of information published on general topics.

Nora Paul, library director at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., describes commercial database services as “information malls.” Each service offers a specific kind of information, such as bibliographies, articles, books, government documents, photographs or telephone numbers. An advertising copywriter about
to embark on a campaign for a new cancer drug could look for information in the Cancerlit database, which contains citations to cancer studies, articles and treatment reports dating back to 1963. A public relations writer organizing a campaign to promote a new model of personal watercraft, such as a Jet-Ski, would need to know about the competition. One place to look would be the Thomas Register, which contains information on who makes personal watercraft (and thousands of other products), where they are manufactured and how they are designed. A magazine writer traveling to Slovakia would be wise to search a news database such as VuText or DataTimes for the latest news stories on the country.

Internet Sources

The World Wide Web. The Internet has been described as the world's largest library, except that all the books and periodicals are piled in the middle of a room in cyberspace in no particular order. The primary way government agencies, many businesses, nonprofit groups and news organizations publish information electronically is on the part of the Internet known as the World Wide Web. The Web has become the vehicle of choice because of its multimedia characteristics: Sound, text and video can be integrated into one package. Web
Any information acquired from the Internet, whether from a Web site, newsgroup, bulletin board or listserv, must be verified for accuracy and reliability.

Government Documents

Government documents are another useful source of information, and accessing them has become easier since the advent of the World Wide Web. There are nearly as many government document databases as there are government agencies, covering everything from patents to pollutants. Finding the right agency takes time and talent, but you should keep this guideline in mind: The information you seek exists somewhere. Keep digging until you find it.

Freelance writer and activist Bonnie Hayskar, for example, dug through a number of government Web sites to find documents on the dangers of glue-sniffing. Among the sites she visited online were the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration. She used the documents she found to show the toxic properties of toluene, an active ingredient in glue manufactured by H.B. Fuller Co. and sold in Latin America, where street children sniff it as a narcotic.7

Interviews

In addition to gathering information from commercial databases and Internet sources, media writers depend on interviewing as a primary way of finding information on a topic. They must be able to ask the right questions, at the right time, in the right way — with a touch of self-assurance tempered by a hint of self-consciousness. The art of interviewing is not easily mastered. It is a skill that is developed through diligence and practice. Some media writers approach the interview like Doberman pinschers, snapping out questions and demanding answers from subjects. Others are more like cocker spaniels, nudging, coaxing and cajoling.

Whatever the style or manner, interviewing depends on having the guts to ask questions — even seemingly dumb ones. For instance, while Carole Rich was a cub reporter for the former Philadelphia Bulletin, she was assigned to cover a meeting of the Philadelphia School Board. She knew nothing about the board or its business, but she
noticed this little item on the agenda: "Approves token losses of $30,000." After the meeting, she got up the courage to ask a school auditor the obvious question: How can $30,000 be a token loss? He told her it was $30,000 worth of lost bus tokens that the school district sold to students to use on the city’s public transit system. Rich, in turn, asked more questions of other officials, eventually learning that a major theft of tokens had occurred at one of the schools and that the procedure for selling tokens varied from one school to another. The auditor, who did not want to be quoted, supplied Rich with facts and figures about previous years' losses. Rich explains what happened next:

I returned to the newspaper and told my editor about the tokens, the only item that really interested me in what seemed like an otherwise boring meeting.

"Write it," he said. And he told me to put the rest of the board's news in a separate story.

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What Carole Rich got by asking the right questions, at the right time, in the right way, was a good story and a promotion. Not all media writers can expect such dramatic results, but they can expect the answers to good questions to make good stories easier to write.

Locating Interview Sources. The key to getting good answers to good questions is finding the right person to ask: one who has the knowledge, time and inclination to talk about your topic. Sometimes, the media writer needs only facts, perhaps about an influenza virus attacking grade-schoolers; here, the task is finding the appropriate agency, such as a city or state public health department, and a specialist in the communicable diseases division. Other times, the media writer searches for the answer to a policy question, such as why clinics did not have adequate flu vaccine supplies for everyone in the community; here, the writer needs to find someone higher up the administrative ladder who can speak for the agency or department. The secret is in
TAILORING THE INFORMATION SEARCH

Before conducting an interview or surfing the Internet for sources, media writers should ask themselves four questions to help focus their search for information. Shirley Biagi offers the following advice in her book "Interviews That Work."

First, the writer asks a practical question: *How much time do I have to track down information?* A TV reporter whose news director has just bellowed out an order to get over to the city's airport and interview an arriving diplomat will not have time to conduct an extended information search. If the reporter is a well-read follower of current events, he or she will be able to think of questions on the spur of the moment. However, a public relations writer assigned to work on his or her company's annual report has several weeks to track down information that will help him or her understand the ins and outs of the company's financial position. To write an annual report, he or she must conduct an extended search for information.
Second, the writer asks: *What do I need to know?* An advertising copywriter who needs the phone number of a discount store to insert in a newspaper advertisement has no reason to waste time on a documentary search: He should get a telephone book. But a university public relations writer preparing a fact sheet for AIDS Awareness Week on campus may need to know how many Americans are living with HIV; she should seek documentary sources, such as the Statistical Abstract of the United States and the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control.

Third, the writer asks: *How will I use this information?* If the information is critical to the news release, the writer can launch an extensive search for the statistics on HIV patients. But if the focus is on campus plans for making students aware of AIDS, the writer can make a quick sweep of sources and waste little time trolling for tangential information.

Finally, the writer asks: *Who is the audience for this information?* If the information is to be used to form questions for an interview with a scientific researcher whose work is developing new HIV-fighting drugs, the writer should spend several hours learning about the properties of the drugs and becoming familiar with the relevant scientific terms. But if the information is to be used to provide a supporting paragraph in a fact sheet, the writer should spend time looking for translations of scientific jargon into everyday language for the journalists who will receive the AIDS Awareness Week media kit.

**Using a Variety of Information Sources**

Decisions as to how best to gather information will depend on the writer, the subject and the time available. But all media writers need solid information before they can begin writing. Advertising legend Leo Burnett "has said that in addition to a facility for putting words together, 'organizing facts and finding things that were interesting to people' contributed to his success."14

Knowledgeable media writers find facts and information in a variety of documentary sources. A common source of public documents and other information is the government. But numerous other places to look include the local library, the Internet, businesses, nonprofit and other media publications and broadcasts. When a media writer wants
to know about a person, the list of possible sources is lengthy and always changing. Think about yourself as a student and a citizen, and the number of cards you carry around in your wallet or purse: your driver’s license, college ID card, voter registration card, Social Security card, club membership card and perhaps, a visa or passport. Many of these cards are connected to public documents that are available to anyone wanting to look. Depending on your state of residence, for example, driver’s license records are fairly easily obtained, complete with name, age, address, physical description and driving record. A reporter investigating a traffic accident might find this information useful.

In their book “Search Strategies in Mass Communication,” authors Jean Ward and Kathleen Hansen identify what they call “potential contributors” to a mass media message. Ward and Hansen divide these contributors or sources of information into three categories. Informal sources include observation, casual reading, and networks of friends and co-workers. Institutional sources are the traditional tools of the journalist’s trade: government documents, colleges, interest groups and businesses. Information and data tools are the various libraries, commercial databases, Internet resources and data files available through a computer-generated search.

A listing of all the possible places to locate information would be endless, but we can identify the types of sources that tend to be most useful to media writers. These sources include commercial databases, Internet sources, government documents, interviews and observation.

Commercial Database Services

Most writers begin researching a subject by finding out what others have written about the topic. The quickest and easiest way to locate such information is through a commercial database service. Databases have been around in computer form since the late 1970s, and in printed versions for much longer. “The Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature,” for example, is a well-known source of information published on general topics.

Nora Paul, library director at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., describes commercial database services as “information malls.” Each service offers a specific kind of information, such as bibliographies, articles, books, government documents, photographs or telephone numbers. An advertising copywriter about
to embark on a campaign for a new cancer drug could look for information in the Cancerlit database, which contains citations to cancer studies, articles and treatment reports dating back to 1963. A public relations writer organizing a campaign to promote a new model of personal watercraft, such as a Jet-Ski, would need to know about the competition. One place to look would be the Thomas Register, which contains information on who makes personal watercraft (and thousands of other products), where they are manufactured and how they are designed. A magazine writer traveling to Slovakia would be wise to search a news database such as VuText or DataTimes for the latest news stories on the country.

Internet Sources

The World Wide Web. The Internet has been described as the world’s largest library, except that all the books and periodicals are piled in the middle of a room in cyberspace in no particular order. The primary way government agencies, many businesses, nonprofit groups and news organizations publish information electronically is on the part of the Internet known as the World Wide Web. The Web has become the vehicle of choice because of its multimedia characteristics: Sound, text and video can be integrated into one package. Web
Any information acquired from the Internet, whether from a Web site, newsgroup, bulletin board or listserv, must be verified for accuracy and reliability.

**Government Documents**

Government documents are another useful source of information, and accessing them has become easier since the advent of the World Wide Web. There are nearly as many government document databases as there are government agencies, covering everything from patents to pollutants. Finding the right agency takes time and talent, but you should keep this guideline in mind: The information you seek exists somewhere. Keep digging until you find it.

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Advanced Reporting

SESSION 2

EXPANDED INTRODUCTION, DISCUSSIONS OF FIRST DAY ASSIGNMENTS, ONLINE RESEARCH

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Session 2

SESSION 2 SUMMARY: Fuller introduction of yourself and the purpose of the class. Discussion of problems students encountered on the first assignments: Writing, Interviewing, Observations. Briefly break into small groups so students can see what others did. Students go to the class computers for online research for facts, statistics and/or studies relating to their stories.

1. On the board, write out these two links: http://www.bing.com and http://www.google.com for use in their online research. Under that write:

   1. Online search phrases: SJSU crime statistics, student attitudes toward crime at SJSU (and see what pops up). Then try out your own search phrases.


   3. If you find an interesting new angle to a story on crime on campus, feel free to break out of the formatted leads.

   *The last one is because these are advanced reporting students and may already be competent or nearly competent in story structure. However, I suggest you limit it to the lead until you have a sense of just how competent each student is or is not in reporting and writing.*

Class begins:

1. Take roll
2. Distribute handouts.
   - Writing tips and instructions for inverted pyramid leads (plus some more writing tips)
   - Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer (two partial sections)
   - Proofreading marks used by instructor
   - Format for research summaries
   - Online search sites

3. Give them a broader introduction of yourself, telling them about your background and/or interest in journalism. For example:

   “I was a reporter for 20 years and now I’ve been an instructor for 20 more. I’m passionate about journalism, about teaching and about meeting professional standards in the practice of journalism. That will reflect in everything we do in this class.”
“Our focus is on informing our readers of the truth – fact-based truth. That is your obligation as journalists. Journalists play an important role in society. We get information to our readers they usually can’t get on their own. What’s more, we find out the truth of an event or issue to help your readers sort through the misinformation, exaggerations, lies and half-truths that tend to swirl around issues. It is a big responsibility, and this class will begin to give you the tools to achieve that.

“But much of what you do will relate to your own ability to think and analyze and question. A reporter has to figure out what the story IS and what the story needs so that readers have a broader understanding of the issue.

“And is there something going on that no one knows about? Report on it.

“If you find something verifiable and interesting, go with it. And feel free to break out of the formatted leads if you have an interesting, solid angle.

“So … today’s assignments.”

5. Have them look at the assignments as listed in the syllabus and ask if there are any questions.

“Study your story to figure out what would make it stronger: Certain types of facts? Different interviews? Different questions? Different angle? Then figure out where that information could be found.” (Pause)

“I’m just going to take roll ….”

1. Take roll.
2. Distribute handouts.
   - Writing tips and instructions for inverted pyramid leads (plus some more writing tips)
   - Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer. Read the following:
     o Summary leads,
     o Multi-element leads and
     o Then pick three other leads to study
   - Proofreading marks used by instructor
   - Format for research summaries

3. Briefly describe the major project.
   “The major project is a compilation of all your written, edited and rewritten assignments for this class so keep them all.”

4. Then open the class to questions and answers on the assignments from the last class. (Allot about 10 minutes.)
You could say something along this line:

“Tell me how it went with your interviewing and story writing? Was there anything to observe? And what went well and what didn’t?”

If no one raises a hand, call on students. Address the questions raised. Be prepared to offer suggestions to improve their reporting. Some questions will likely be framed along the line of “What do I do when ….?”

Allow about 10 minutes for the question-and-answer session.

Next:
5. Break class into groups of two or three so they can read each others’ assignments. Go from group to group scanning the material and making suggestions both to individuals and to the class as a whole as common problems arise.
6. Let them make handwritten corrections on the papers.
7. Collect assignments.

Then students use the classroom computers to research crime at SJSU by going to the university’s police website and, perhaps, the City of San Jose police website. Might also check the university’s Office of Institutional Research and see if they have anything. Might also check some of the general college websites. For those, try an online search at Bing.com or Google.com search – try searching “Crime at San Jose State University” or a similar search phrase and see what pops up.

(If the university where you are located doesn’t have these kinds of statistics, talk to the campus police or security people or someone in authority and see what they can give you in terms of overview and incidents, if any.)

Suggested comments:

“Facts, history, statistics and recent studies can contribute context and perspective to a story.

“For example, students might say the campus is safe or unsafe or somewhere in between. That’s not enough information for your readers. You must find the crime statistics on campus and give them to the reader. Get the comments of an expert or two to help with perspective.

“OK now …

“The rest of the class time will be spent at the computers. You’ll be doing online research for facts, history, information and statistics relating to the story.

“If you have email, you can send the research to yourself. But for printing out in this class, no more than two pages of information.

“Everybody – look at me and listen. You must use legitimate sources for facts and statistics. San Jose State’s statistics are considered legitimate, as are the other suggestions for sites. Watch out for bogus sites.

“You have a handout to get you started. (Hold up ‘Online sites…’ handout.

“And once you’ve found some information pertinent to your story, you’ll be giving me a summary of what you found. For that, follow the handout that says: Format for Research Summaries. The instructions are there.

“I’ll come around to help if you get stuck or need some advice or have a question. Everybody, to the computers.”

Students spend almost the rest of the class researching, taking notes, pasting pertinent information into a Word document and listening to the instructor’s suggestions as the instructor goes from student to student and addresses the whole class on common problems. If they have the time, they can begin organizing the format for summaries.

Have everyone print their documents about 10 minutes before the class ends. At home, they will use this research to add to their first story. Eventually it will be a roughly 700-to 800-word story they will turn in as part of the major project.

While the students wait for the printouts, talk to them about the assignments for the next class, including the directions for the next step in the story. Or answer questions. Or whatever you think needs some explaining or discussion.

Send the students on their way. Hang around for a while in case students want to talk to you. Use the classroom, if available, or your office or someplace where you can all sit, if you wish.

In-depth reporting depends a lot on the critical thinking of the reporter. The reporter has to figure out what the story is and what the story needs so that readers have a broader understanding of the issue or event.

Readings:
- Writing tips and instructions for inverted pyramid leads (plus some more writing tips)
- Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer.
Assignments due next class:

1. Write up very short summaries of your research following the format for research summaries.
2. Keep researching for facts, statistics and/or studies for your story. Using the research format, write up a summary of your research. Keep your more extensive notes. Those you’ll use for writing the story.
3. Study your research and decide what you are going to add to your story when you get it back tomorrow.
4. Study your story to figure out what would make it stronger: Certain types of facts? Different interviews? Different questions? Then figure out where that information could be found.
5. Begin to figure out how you are going to fold your research into your story.
6. Keep interviewing students until you reach the required 14 interviews and hand in the summaries as you progress.
7. Read the handouts but no summary is assigned. However, turn in the summary from the first day’s readings at the next class.
8. Write a feature lead for your story in one of the following two styles – see syllabus for specifics.

The instructor then edits all the assignments for content, structure, adherence to the assignment instructions, grammar, punctuation and whatever else is relevant to each assignment. The students and the assignments are dependent on the instructor returning all edited material back to the students at the next class period.

Handouts for this class period are below:

- Writing tips and instructions for inverted pyramid leads (plus some more writing tips)
- Leads, summary, multiple element and others – excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer. Students will study the summary lead, the multi-element lead and three leads of their choosing.
- Proofreading marks used by instructor
- Format for research summaries
- Online search sites

Note: The handouts for proofreading marks and the Leads from Writing Across the Media are on PDFs and need to be printed from them. There are prints in the binder. The rest are below.
## Proofreading Marks Used by the Instructor

**By Jan Shaw**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≡≡</td>
<td>Capitalize</td>
<td>As it says in writing across the media. “It is important for media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>Close up – no space</td>
<td>writers to understand the concept of involvement when considering an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Delete, close up</td>
<td>audience. The word <em>involvement</em> comes from the Latin verb <em>volvere,</em> which means ‘to turn, roll, or wrap.’ Metaphorically, then, media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Mark to insert punctuation</td>
<td>writers try to determine what the audience is ‘wrapped up in.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Transpose</td>
<td>They also try to assess the extent to which the audience is involved in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Paragraph and indent</td>
<td>a particular subject, as this will affect both the content and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Replace</td>
<td>the level of detail included in the writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Remove</td>
<td>From <em>Writing Across the Media</em>” 2 cc truth is the philosophical core of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Insert space</td>
<td>journalism, and good news writers strive to tell the truth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Another symbol for paragraph</td>
<td>“Truth is also important to news writers on a practical level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Stet</td>
<td>in that it ensures their credibility. News writers who are less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>Lower case</td>
<td>than truthful, whether deliberately or negligently, lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>Delete</td>
<td>credibility with their audiences and colleagues.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅</td>
<td>Insert hyphen</td>
<td>These are some of the authors’ not to be ignored thoughts on journalism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1From “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil and David Nimmer. Pages 51-52; 2Page 38; 3Page 39.
1. Use the Subject-Verb sentence structure. It’s bright, lively, uses the active voice and helps with clarity. Begin the sentence with the subject followed by the verb, e.g., “Students gathered ….” The word ‘students’ is the subject and ‘gathered’ is the verb. Getting the verb into the beginning of the sentence can also help long sentences to be clear.

2. Place the most important information of the sentence at the beginning of the sentence. The inverted pyramid style places the most important information first and you do the same thing, when possible, in your sentences.

3. Attributions often go at the end of a sentence. They are required but not always interesting so put them last. Again, this follows the “most important or interesting information first” guideline. In most sentences, information tends to be more interesting than sources. Sometimes, the source is more interesting. If President Obama told you something, you might put the attribution first.

4. With difficult-to-understand information, use simple, short sentences and paragraphs as a way to help the reader absorb it all.

5. Use specific, precise words and stay away from generalizations. This is a key to great news writing.

Don’t say, “Students feel safe on campus.” For starters, you’ve talked to maybe 12 students and there are 26,000 of them on campus. If you do the sweeping generalization, it will be considered a factual error because you have not done the research to back it up. You concluded on almost no information that students feel safe. Don’t do that. Give your readers the same information you uncovered and stay away from conclusions.

Instead of saying, ‘Student say they feel safe,’ you say, something like:

Sophomore James Lee says he feels the campus is quite safe.

The computer science major says he does, however, worry about the area surrounding the campus.

“When it gets dark, I really don’t like walking off campus,” he said. “It feels dangerous.”

That’s specific and has the added benefit of being true as opposed to ‘students feel safe.’

6. Use words that are information heavy. Inexperienced writers use words such as “happy” or “proud” or “dull” or “stylish.” Those words are the conclusion of the writer, not a description. YOU know what those words mean to you but your readers don’t.
Again, be specific and don’t be judgmental. What did you see that led you to the conclusion that the person was happy? Describe THAT to the reader. “… he said, laughing.”

Same with physical descriptions. Don’t hand the readers your conclusions, such as “pretty or handsome.” There is no information in the word “handsome” to help the reader understand what you mean. So be specific instead. No one cares if you think someone is happy or pretty or handsome. Describe what you saw that led you to that conclusion. That helps the reader see what you saw. Your conclusions are useless to them.

7. Consider varying your sentence lengths as you begin to develop rhythm in your writing. Writers vary length for rhythm, impact and to interest their readers. Shorter sentences are often clear sentences. Long sentences that are correctly constructed can also add to a story but they must be CLEAR. The key is to keep the sentences clean and uncluttered and to rid all sentences of unnecessary words.

8. Be sparing with the use of adjectives and adverbs. When you do use them, they must really add to the information. For instance, ‘collapsed’ is a good, specific verb. If you add ‘slowly collapsed’ you’ve added information that is helpful to the reader. Adverbs and adjectives can add so much to your writing but they must be specific and precise.

9. Rid your sentences of unnecessary words.

10. NEVER use exclamation points.

11. Think of your readers.

Again, in this class, there is no first person (I, me, my, we, our, etc.) in the finished story. The first person is not used in stories because the job of a reporter is to find fact-based truth, not give opinions on it. There is plenty of room in the media for opinions, but generally not in professional, fact-based journalism where there are standards.

The reporter and the reporter’s editor do, however, decide what stories to report, investigate or dig into more deeply. After that, the content of the story is based NOT on what the reporter or editor thinks but on verifiable facts and research, interviews with people impacted by an event, knowledgeable people or experts and direct observation of events.

Again, in direct observation, you describe what you saw/heard/smelled so that, essentially, you put the reader at the scene. The reader can see it all through your words. You leave out the “I” and concentrate on content in direct observation. Reporters must keep themselves and their opinions out of any stories they do for this class and for news outlets that follow journalistic standards. The third-person form is easily learnable.
Once more: Sometimes rumors, lies and exaggerations rule the day. As a reporter, you must bring truth to the matter.
Instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid
(plus some MORE writing tips)

BY JAN SHAW

Beginning News Writing: Some rules about summary leads for the inverted pyramid and some suggestions on writing your stories.

In the inverted pyramid style, the lead (or lede) is the first paragraph of the story and summarizes what happened.

The writer aims to answer the overriding question of “What Happened?” and is designed to both summarize and interest the reader in the story.

Ask yourself what about the story is most interesting and fold that into your summary lead.

The lead needs to answer the following questions in 30 words or less: Who? What? When? Where? and sometimes “How?” and “Why.”

There is no introduction in this non-academic style of writing. You IMMEDIATELY get to the point. If your readers had no more information than your lead, they would still know what happened from your summary of the story’s most important elements.

A good lead is usually in the active voice.

For the purposes of this class, do not start the story with a direct quote or a question. (And do not use questions as set-ups anywhere in a story.) Those types of leads can be used occasionally. The problem: It’s often not the best lead. Instead, it’s the only lead a novice reporter can think of. Once you develop your abilities to write leads, then the question or quote lead is simply one more way to to best start that particular the story – not a desperate move because the writer is drawing a blank.

Don’t use the first or second person. Use the third person.

In the inverted pyramid style, don’t use names that are unfamiliar to your readers – replace with a descriptor.

For example:
Correct: A bystander leapt to the aid of an injured woman today when ….
Not Correct: David Freitas leapt to the aid of an injured woman today when….

The reason: What happened is most interesting. The name is distracting. So you name him in the second paragraph: David Freitas had just left work when he spotted a car aimed … , he said.
Sum up the facts: Think to yourself, what would the reader find most interesting and/or important?

If you don’t like your lead, try rearranging the order of the facts or perhaps bring up some other element that you were going to use in the second or third paragraph and see if you like that.

Experiment.

If worse comes to worse, live with the lead you don’t like, write your story and then go back to the lead. When inspiration completely fails, just make the lead clear and accurate and hope the topic is enough to interest readers. Maybe you’ll think of lively verbs and perfect nouns later. Or not. It happens. A lot.

There are many other styles of leads and structures for stories, but the summary lead is the basic one for news stories.

Once your lead is written, try to find a good quote that supports and relates to the lead.

Then the writer adds essential details that didn’t fit in the lead. This sometimes occurs in the second paragraph with the quote following in the third.

Then more quotes, anecdotes, details and facts all related to the story. Don’t let yourself get sidetracked by something that interests you but is beside the point of the article. Write a different story or a sidebar to go with your main story if it’s interesting enough.

In the inverted pyramid style, the writer structures the quotes, anecdotes, observations, facts and statistics in diminishing order of importance until the end, where the writer throws in the remaining information that isn’t all that important or wouldn’t fit anywhere else.

Then you stop writing.

In the inverted pyramid style, there is no need for a close. If you feel you absolutely have to have a close, use a quote.

The story we are doing is not a pure hard news event such as a fire, a vote, a fight, a train derailment. That’s where the inverted pyramid style can really shine with its tight rhythms and pell-mell pace.

Instead, our story is more of an issue story but written in the event style. This is so that if you need more interviews, you can get them.

In your writing, try to practice some basics: Use good strong verbs, the active voice, vivid details and interesting quotes. These add spark to your stories. If your first stories
seem lackluster or dull, don’t worry. Writing is a craft that can be learned. The more you write and think about it and read, the better you become. Be patient with yourself.

Remember: Specifics and precision are powerful. Generalities are not. So try not to backslide into boring generalities that aren’t informative and risk being too broad to be true. Overreaching for a reporter can be enormously embarrassing as well as get you fired.

Remember: You must always be clear. You don’t want to confuse your readers with muddled writing.

In trying to keep readers interested, reporters can also vary sentence lengths – short and punchy, long and interesting, medium and informative. When done correctly, that is another tool to create rhythm in your writing, along with subject-verb sentences and parallel construction, which we are not going to address in this class.
Advanced Reporting

Format for Research Summaries

Format for the report summarizing your online and/or print research that is pertinent enough to be used in your story. This is simply a summary for the instructor. When writing your stories, use your original notes. This does help you organize those notes into usable form.

- Generally, use bullets for the various pieces of information you found.
- Don’t include everything, just the facts that could actually be used in your story.
- For the purposes of this summary, don’t use more than eight sources even though you might use more than that in an actual story. If you don’t have eight, list what you do have. You need a minimum of three.

1. First source: Name of organization that published the information, in detail, if possible, underlined

   A. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   B. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   C. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:

2. Second source: Name of organization that published the information, in detail, if possible, underlined

   A. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   B. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   C. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      a. Fact, statistics or history:
      b. Fact, statistics or history:
      c. Fact, statistics or history:

And repeat this format for all your sources

General instructions: You must use legitimate sources for facts and statistics. San Jose State’s statistics are considered legitimate, as are the other suggestions for sites.

You must also write out who or what this source is – exactly – because you must inform your readers. Do not use the website address – use the name of the organization and explain what the organization does. If it’s an individual, use the person’s title and the organization he or she is with. If it was published research, cite the year, the name of the publication and explain what that publication does.
Advanced Reporting

Online search sites for story

Original research only: No magazines or newspapers can be used as sources

I. Sites to try to locate facts and figures on crime at SJSU:

1. The SJSU University Police Department site (known as the UPD)
2. Try the City of San Jose police website looking just for the blocks around SJSU. Citywide statistics are useless for this story.
3. You might also check the university’s Office of Institutional Research and see if they have anything.

II. You might also check some general college websites. To find those, use a search engine. Two often-used search engines are:


(If you haven’t done this before, type the address into the white line near the top of the page. When they pop up, try using this search phrase, typed into the white search box:

1. ‘Crime at San Jose State University’ and see if anything useful is suggested.
2. You might also try ‘Crime statistics for San Jose State University.’

(If you haven’t used a search before, be aware that the most relevant possibilities are usually on the top of the first page.)

III. After that, try your own search phrases.

Basically: THINK

The reporter needs to figure out what the story IS, what the story needs so that readers have a broader understanding of the issue or event.

Let that be your guide to searching the Internet for information that is relevant to your story and the angle you are taking.

Ask yourself, what do they need and what do I need to do to find it?

– Jan Shaw
Advanced Reporting

SESSION 3

EDITED STORIES DISCUSSED, COMMON MISTAKES AND PROBLEMS, MORE RESEARCH

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Session 3

SESSION 2 SUMMARY: Edited stories returned. Common mistakes in reporting and writing discussed including grammar and punctuation. Today in class: More research online for statistics, facts and information on crime at SJSU, which is to be folded into story after class. The corrected and rewritten story is due tomorrow. Students can use a feature lead if it works with their story. It still needs to be one sentence long and 30 words or less.

Readings: None required.

Class begins:
1. Take roll
2. Instructor hands back edited stories and other graded assignments.
3. Instructor reminds students of the basic story format, which is also listed in the syllabus. You can read this list aloud and then continue with suggested comments:

“Stories are to be
• “Double-spaced (pause)
• “One sentence per paragraph (pause)
• “Every sentence must be attributed, often at the end. Only observations are not attributed. (pause)
• No first or second person – no ‘I, me, my, mine, us, our, we, you, your.’ (pause)
• “Remember to follow the template and put your information in descending order of importance with a lead that is 30 or fewer words.
• “And read your stories aloud to check for errors. It’s very effective.”

“Ok, break into small groups. Take a look at each others’ edited stories and quick glance at the research.” (And the instructor puts them into groups of two or three – this is so new people will be seeing each others’ assignments and cliques don’t form.)

Instructor goes from group to group making suggestions. As issues and common mistakes become apparent, the instructor lectures the class on these and on how to improve the stories and/or research to better meet professional standards. This should take about half the class but can go longer.

Then students go to the classroom computers for more online research or to begin filling in the gaps the instructor might have noted in their stories.

“Ok, everyone – to the computers. Today you are going to fill in the gaps in your stories – ones you’ve found and ones the instructor has noted. Also, keep looking for pertinent information for your story.”

Assignments and deadlines:
1. Rewrite your story, staple it to the top of the edited first draft and turn both in at the next class. (Your edited stories will be returned to you today.) You will make corrections, add research from today’s class and add any good, new interviews to your story while removing weaker ones – if there are any weaker ones. This will be the first rewrite. If one of your feature leads works, you can use it in place of the summary lead but it’s not required.

Again, the idea is that you weave together your reporting elements: Interviews, observations, research. (We may get an expert to talk to the class at the next session and, if so, that, too, will be added.) Finish your rewrites in class at home. Make two copies – one for yourself and one to hand in to the instructor. Then, once again, students will email the material to themselves and bring two hard copies to the next class. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person. (Quotes can be two sentences long – no more.)

Remember, as a reporter, you bring critical thinking and research skills to bear as you ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. Readers depend on you for truth.

2. Write up a summary report of your research following the format in the handouts.
3. If more interviews are needed, do them and get me a summary if you have not yet reached 14. If you have reached 14, no need to do a summary.
4. If more research is needed, get it done and get me the summaries.
5. Don’t forget that you can rewrite assignments in an attempt to get more points. More points are not guaranteed unless there is substantial improvement. There is an exception to this. If you used the first person or made a factual error, it can’t be fixed for more points – or any points. Check your work before you turn it in.
6. Prepare questions for a pretend mini-press conference at the next class with a person knowledgeable about SJSU crime. Think to yourself:
   a. What do I need or want to know to better understand the situation or event?
   b. What do my readers need or want to know?
   c. How can I succinctly phrase the question?
   d. Essentially, you are looking for comments and overviews because experts know a lot and can add perspective. Don’t use them for facts unless you’re desperate. Using an expert to fill out your statistics is a mistake and a disservice to your readers. Instead, you want to tap into their experiences and viewpoints.

   The questions must be succinct – no rambling thoughts as you grope your way toward the question. (And this is subject to the expert making it to class.)

The instructor then edits all the assignments for content, structure, adherence to the assignment instructions, grammar, punctuation and whatever else is relevant to each assignment. YOU MUST RETURN THEM AT THE NEXT CLASS, ESPECIALLY THE STORY.

No handouts.
Advanced Reporting

SESSION 4

EXPERTS - FIND THEM
THE USE OF EXPERTS IN REPORTING AND WRITING

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Session 4

SESSION 4 SUMMARY: The use of experts in advanced reporting.

1. Take roll.
2. Hand back edited and graded assignments.
3. Collect story and any other assignments that have been rewritten or are to be turned in.
4. Brief introduction of guest.

“Students, today we have ____________ who will answer your questions on crime, students and SJSU. I want you to use his/her expertise to add an overview, to add perspective for your readers – to give them context.

Instructor collects stories and summaries and speaks briefly about how experts fit into a story:

“Get our your prepared questions but be prepared to use our guest’s answers as a pointer to a new question.

“He/she will call on you after you raise your hand. If no one raises a hand, the instructor will call on you. Those without prepared questions must leave the class for the day. Everyone have their questions? Hold them up? Good.

Ask the guest if he or she has a prepared statement – you will have asked him/her in advance to prepare a very brief one – just a few minutes, maybe about his or background and a little something about the topic.

Then the questioning commences. If no one raises a hand, call on individuals. If the questions are rambling, simply cut in and say, “And the question is?” to prod the student into asking the question. If there doesn’t seem to be a question, move on to the next student.

If it’s turning into a disaster, quietly start inserting your own questions. Inexperienced student reporters often go mute at their first press conference, even a fake one.

Then, when the questions and the speaker are finished, thank the speaker and walk him or her out to the hallway.

Come back in and instruct the students to immediately review their notes and fill them in a bit while their memories are fresh. Then, if there is time, students will go to the computers and write up their notes, print them out and/or email them to themselves. These notes will be used in writing the final story that is due at the last class, Session 6.
Assignments and deadlines as listed in the syllabus:

1. Finish typing up or writing out all of your expert interview notes, Fold the pertinent ones into your story. Save them – they will be part of the final project you turn in.

2. Get out a copy of your story and read it aloud. Many errors you may have missed can be found using this technique. The story is far enough long that this process should be quite helpful. Make corrections. Email it to yourself or put it onto a flash drive in case your computer crashes. The final story is due at the last class.

3. A half-page summary of handout readings: Observations and Descriptive Writing – read very carefully.

   Instructor edits the stories and any other assignments and returns them at the next class.

HANDBOUT:

Observations and Descriptive Writing – located on next page
Advanced Reporting

Observation and Descriptive Writing instructions

BY JAN SHAW

First You Have to See

The idea is to put the reader at the scene through your eyes and your words. To do this, you must really look at the scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough. Write out what you see. Smells can also be described as well as sounds, if they are pertinent to the story.

In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. Don’t.

Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reaction so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations. Again, the reader can’t see anything.

So back yourself up. What did you see or are you seeing that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

Example, continued. At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

- Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
- Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
- Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
- Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
- 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
- Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
- Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing a counterpoint light to the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
- Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators
Be aware that almost any physical description can contain elements that may be accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students ....” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’ ‘There were 25,000 people in the stadium stands but there were 60,000 seats.’

Specifics – precise specifics – are informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.

Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

So description and observation assignments in this class must comprise real details and actions and ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON. No ‘I saw’ or ‘you will see.’

NO conclusions. By that I mean, again, no shorthand descriptions that you understand but your readers don’t.

Another example of a conclusion: Look at the floor.

Is it boring? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘boring’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you’re referring to. There is no information for the reader.

So, describe it. Is it wood (or metal or linoleum or vinyl or tile)? What color? Is it polished? Not polished? Scuffs? Spotless? Dirt streaks? Tire marks? Shoe marks?

Then there are Smells. Smells are tough to describe. But do the best you can. Usually the specifics will have to carry you. Pineapple has a smell. Frying hamburgers have a
smell. Air fresheners have a smell. Just be as specific as you can and you do that by paying attention, by concentrating on what you are seeing or smelling or hearing.

Air is another tough one. You can say it’s stuffy or hot or icy or whatever it is. If it isn’t anything, leave it out.


Visuals: What are you seeing? Be specific. Draw the readers a word picture. Don’t say “colorful.” Again, you know what that means but the reader doesn’t. What did you see that led you to that conclusion? THAT’s what you show the reader.

You’ll hear the word “SHOW” in most writing classes: “Show, don’t tell.” You “show” with specifics. “Telling” is when you start using conclusions that have no information in them for the readers. You and you alone will know whereof you speak.

With the right writing, readers have an idea of what you are seeing, and you are letting them come to their own conclusions. You can immerse them in a scene. Your words bring it alive and make it real for your readers.

And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment – describe.
Advanced Reporting

SESSION 5

READERS CAN SEE A SCENE THROUGH YOUR EYES IF YOU FIND THE RIGHT WORDS

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVATIONS AND DESRIPTIVE WRITING

AN EXERCISE

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Session 5

SESSION 5 SUMMARY: Observations and descriptive writing exercise. You will take the students to an event where they can sit down or over to the cafeteria.

Handouts: Major project instructions and story checklist.

Class begins:

1. Take roll.
2. Hand back assignments and the edited stories for their final rewrites.
3. Collect the half-page summary of the Observation and Descriptive Writing handout. Any other rewritten assignments won’t be collected today but will be handed in as part of the final project due at the next class.
4. Discuss the major project instructions, basically going over the handout.
5. Introduce today’s out-of-class assignment and tell them they won’t be coming back to the classroom so they are to take everything with them.

Suggested comment:

Suggested introduction: First You Have to See
“The third leg of good reporting is direct observation.
“You must really look at a scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough.

“Start writing down the details: Third person descriptions of what you see, smell and hear. Don’t use the first or second person – no ‘I, me, my, our, we, us, you, your.’

“In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

“The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. No comments.

“Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

“For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reactions so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions, not yours.

“Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations.
“So back yourself up. What did you see that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

“At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:
• Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
• Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
• Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
• Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners

*If this is taking too long, stop here and take them out to the event or to cafeteria. If time is OK, continue.*

• 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
• Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
• Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing counterpoint lights on the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
• Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators

“Almost any physical description can contain elements that are accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

“For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students …..” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

“Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’

“Specifics – precise specifics – are more informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

“The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

“AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.
If this is taking too long, stop here and take them out to the event or to cafeteria. If time is OK, continue.

“Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

“Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

“So today’s descriptions have to be of real details and actions.

“I’ve put these comments into your syllabus. Take a look at them to refresh your memory as you are undertaking today’s assignment.”

Have them gather up all their things. They will not be returning to class that day.

“Today we will go to the cafeteria (or some event) as an exercise in observation and descriptive writing. It’s due tomorrow as part of your final report.

“Read the instructions in your syllabus.

**Assignments and deadline:**

- Finish major project and bring to next class. Be on time.
- Complete descriptive writing and turn in at next class as part of the major project.
- Finish the final story and turn in as part of the major project.
- Assemble the final major project and bring it all to next class.
- Be on time.

  a. The final project consists of everything you have written and rewritten in this class.

  b. Staple the most current rewrite on top of the earlier, edited versions. Then assemble the stapled and other documents.

  c. Put it all in a file with your final story first. If you want your final project mailed back to you, write your address on the cover page and on the file.

  d. Then put an index on top of the story so that I know the order of the assignments as you’ve arranged them.
e. Then put a cover page on top of that with your name, the name of the class, the date and, if you want it returned to you, a mailing address.

f. The quality of the final assignments will be graded on adherence to professional journalism standards. See ‘grades and assignments’ for specifics.

HANDOUTS: Major Project Instructions and A Partial Checklist for News Stories

Advanced Reporting
Major Project Instructions

Editing and rewriting:

1. See if any pertinent information is missing in your summaries and reports, find said information if possible and add it in for final corrections or rewrites. If the corrections or additions are small, just handwrite them. If they are not small, rewrite and, if you have a computer, reprint.

2. Go through your writing and see if you can edit for clarity or wordiness or just a better sentence structure.

3. See if there are any edits you overlooked. If so, fix as per the edit.

4. If there is anything in your story or assignments that you don’t understand or don’t like, mention it to the instructor during this class.

5. If you have time, work on improving your stories but remember that this is a reporting class and the grade is weighted toward the reporting assignments.

6. Once you’ve finished and repaired the assignments, you need to assemble it all in a folder.

Assembly:

The final project should be neat, tidy, legible, well organized and reflect professional journalism standards. In a folder, you will compile all your graded, edited and rewritten assignments:

- For beginning reporting, that includes all summaries, research reports original and rewritten, observation, and a story.
- If you have updated, improved, or rewritten assignments, staple them on top of the original, edited pieces and put them in the file.
- Put the stapled (or not stapled) reports and summaries in chronological order and put the story last.
- INCLUDE AN INDEX
• Include your name and address so instructor can mail your final projects to you.

1. The folders are due at the last class session.

2. Be on time.

A Partial Checklist for News Stories

STORY:
• Is accurate, clear and complete with all facts checked and verified
• Includes interviews with people likely to be affected by the topic of the story
• Uses specific examples and anecdotes
• Uses active voice

LEADS:
• 30 words or less
• One sentence that emphasizes the most important of the 5 Ws and the H
• Interesting information
• Avoids unfamiliar names
• Contains a strong, precise verb

BODY:
• In this class, the lead is followed by a direct quote in the second paragraph that directly relates to and supports the lead – a continuation of the lead in many respects
• Sentences generally begin with the subject followed by good specific verbs
• Interesting direct and indirect quotations are sprinkled through the story
• Includes students, observations and research
• All facts and statements are sourced/attributed except direct observations
• Descriptions are clear and relate to the story
Advanced Reporting

SESSION 6

THE FINAL MAJOR PROJECT DUE

(AND REVIEW)

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP
Session 6

**SESSION 6 SUMMARY:** Instructor reviews basics of advanced reporting. Students discuss the class with an eye to improvements.

Have students go to [http://pocketjourno.com](http://pocketjourno.com). It’s a website that is very handy when a reporter is starting an event story and needs some reminders about what to do. You can also access it via a tablet or phone.

**HANDOUTS:** None

Class begins.

- Take roll
- Briefly meet in small groups to review final stories/projects. Students can make last minute, handwritten corrections.
- Hand in final stories/projects.
- Write [http://pocketjourno.com](http://pocketjourno.com) on the board. Have students go to the computers and VERY BRIEFLY pull up the website so that they are familiar with it.
- Instructor reviews main points of advanced reporting: Truth, ethics and getting the story right.

Suggested comment:

“As reporters, you can bring depth and breadth to your stories by using thorough interviewing, talking to experts, digging deeply into facts, statistics and history, and finding the human element in it all.

“The key is verification of all details so that you GET THE STORY RIGHT.

“You don’t pass on half-truths, exaggerations and outright lies as the whole truth. You owe your readers the truth and nothing but the truth.

“You need to realize that ethics are bound up in practically every decision a journalist makes. The stories you cover. The way you cover them. The way you handle sources. The honest or dishonest way in which you approach people.

“For instance, when you are dealing with experienced officialdom, they know the ropes of off-the-record and on-the-record and deep background.

“When you are dealing with the general public, they don’t. You ask them questions and unless a camera is trained on them, they often don’t realize that you are actually going to put their names and thoughts into a story for everyone to see.
“SO YOU MUST MAKE IT CLEAR. YOU MUST NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR NAIVETE. You need to protect them, especially if there is danger associated with the story or a chance they could get in trouble or lose their jobs.

“On a less high plane, if word gets around that you don’t protect your sources, no one will talk to you and other journalists will think you’re pond scum.

“Do you go off the record? It depends. Is someone in danger? Are you just trying to get a sense of the story and don’t need them on the record? And how do you protect your source?

”And ask yourself – always – did I get the story right? Should I make more calls, do more digging so that readers have a better picture and I am a better journalist?”

NEXT:

Then the instructor goes over the class point by point, assignment by assignment, asking what worked and what didn’t. What was useful and what was not?

Go through each assignments and ask for individual comments and a general class sense of that assignments usefulness. If no one comments, call on people.

Ask if there is a way it could be improved. Explain that the assignments can change based on their feedback and, for the next round of students, do they have any suggestions? Use that feedback to improve the class.

Then talk to them about your sense of the class – your thoughts and impressions, giving them feedback and suggestions.

And make sure they give you a mailing address if they want their final projects mailed back.

Then it’s time to say goodbye.
Journalism Jargon

Attribution – Citing the source of information.

Background – This is used when a source does not want to be identified but wants the reporter to more details about a story. The reporter can use the information but not the source’s name.

Off the record - Information that must not be disclosed.

Byline – the writer’s name at the top of the story under the headline.

Quote, direct – A person’s or a document’s exact words with quotation marks around them.

Quote, indirect – No quote marks because it’s not exactly what was said. The reporter paraphrases.

Lead (or lede) – In a news story, it’s the first sentence with a summary of the most important facts, usually 30 words or less. In a feature, the lead is also at the top of the story but it’s not a summary. Instead it is an anecdote or a description or something that hints at or draws the reader into the story.

Graph – Short for paragraph. Can also be a chart.

Breaking news - Surprise events requiring immediate attention and the reordering of the what was going to go on the front page. What is known also is immediately posted on the publication’s website.

Nut graf or graph - Paragraph fairly high up in the story that indicates the impact of the story or clearly states the point of the story. Often journalists often say this is the paragraph that tells readers why they should care about the story.

Draft – A reporter’s first version of a story before it’s been edited or rewritten.

Caption/cutline – This is the information printed underneath a photograph or other visual element that identifies what is happening and identifies the people in the photo. The photographer’s or designer’s name is included.

Header - a special indicator that the story is part of a larger series

FYI – Stands ‘for your information.’

Infographic - a designed illustration that accompanies the story and gives information in a visual way. This can include charts, graphs and other similar things.
WRITING LEADS

FROM “WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA”

By Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery,
Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer
IDENTIFYING COMMON TYPES OF LEADS

Ring Lardner, the famous writer, penned what many journalists consider to be the best newspaper lead ever written. About the death of a promising young boxer, Lardner’s lead included this sentence: “Stanley was 24 years old when he was fatally shot in the back by the common law husband of the lady who was cooking his breakfast.”\textsuperscript{4} The information conveyed in that lead goes beyond 26 words on the printed page.

Lardner’s opening is an example of a summary lead, the most common type of lead used by media writers. Several other types of leads are also used in media writing, including the multiple-element, suspense, character, scene-setting and narrative leads.

The Summary Lead

The main function of a \textit{summary lead} is to provide information. As the term implies, this type of lead summarizes the important details of
WRITING TIPS

OBSERVING TRADITIONAL NEWS VALUES

Traditional news emphasizes six values.1 Journalists consider these values in choosing events to cover, and public relations writers stress the values in pitching stories with their clients’ messages to journalists.

1. **Impact**: An event’s consequence for the audience affects its news value. A 16-car pileup stalling 500 expressway commuters is bigger news than a fender-bender on a rural road.

2. **Proximity**: Where the event occurs is important, and events closer to home are bigger news. Therefore, a 16-car pileup in Denver is important for Colorado TV stations but not for Atlanta stations.

3. **Timeliness**: Newer news is bigger news. If that 16-car pileup occurs today, it is a bigger story on tonight’s newscast than a car crash of three days ago.

4. **Prominence**: Simply put, names make news. That means a car crash that kills the governor is bigger news than a crash that kills a garbage collector or a college professor.

5. **Novelty or deviance**: Unusual things make news. A car crash caused when a driver swerves to avoid an elephant that escaped from the zoo is bigger news than a crash caused when a driver falls asleep.

6. **Conflict**: Contention between people or organizations makes news. If the police investigating the 16-car pileup draw different conclusions about its cause than the driver of the first car, the story will continue to make news.

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a news event. Typically, summary leads are one sentence long, although there is no rule against two short sentences or more. Summary leads are used in “hard” news stories written on deadline, shorter stories, routine news and news releases. Sports stories, business news, weather stories and news releases often use summary leads. Media
consumers in a hurry or those who skim or channel hop can get the
gist of the event from a summary lead. Entire ad campaigns can be
based on what is essentially a summary lead: “Drink Coca-Cola” or
“Timex: Takes a Licking and Keeps on Ticking.” As news and other
information becomes more compressed for various audiences, sum-
mary leads will only become more ubiquitous.

Six elements are common to summary leads: who, what, where, when, why and how. They can be stated as questions:

What happened?  
Who was involved?  
Where did it happen?  
When did it happen?  
Why did it happen?  
How did it happen?

Most summary leads contain at least four of the five W questions and
the H. In such a lead, the Ws and H are usually mentioned in order of
importance, which depends on the subject matter and the medium.
For example, a newspaper story would rarely begin with a when, or
time element; a broadcast story, on the other hand, might start out,
“This morning at the White House, President Clinton. . . .” The im-
mediacy needs of a broadcast audience help dictate beginning a lead
with when.

For most news stories, the what or who elements are most impor-
tant. The what element represents the news value in the event — the
action. That is why the what element often is stated as a verb. For sto-
ries involving famous people, the who element becomes the most sig-
nificant. Almost any action taken by the U.S. president, for example, is
considered newsworthy. Where and when — which are not space-
consuming in the crowded world of lead construction — are usually
subservient to what and who. The why and how elements are sometimes
left out.

Here is an example from a team of reporters at the Chicago Trib-
une, covering an airplane accident under a tight deadline in November
1996:

QUINCY, Ill. — A United Express plane from Chicago and a private
plane collided on a runway in a fiery accident Tuesday night that killed
13 people.10
The elements of the lead can be dissected as follows:

WHO: A United Express plane and a private plane
WHAT: collided, killing 13
WHERE: on a runway in Quincy, Ill.
WHEN: Tuesday night

The *how* element was left for the second and third paragraphs in the story, and why the planes crashed was not known at press time and was not included.

Obituaries often open with summary leads. When the retired commissioner of the National Football League died in December 1996, reporter Bill Brubaker of The Washington Post used a standard, albeit fact-filled, summary lead:

> Alvin “Pete” Rozelle, a masterful promoter, innovator and deal-maker who was commissioner of the National Football League for almost 30 years until his retirement in 1989, died last night at his home in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. He was 70.\(^{11}\)

A reader skimming the newspaper on that December morning could read the first paragraph of Brubaker's obituary and get the principal facts:

WHO: Pete Rozelle
WHAT: died
WHEN: last night
WHERE: at his home

Rozelle was a familiar name to many, but not all, Americans. To jog the memory of some readers and introduce the subject to the rest, the writer uses a description of Rozelle's style and job. The cause of death — *how* — in Rozelle's case, brain cancer, is mentioned in the second paragraph. The *why* of someone's death is a question left for
philosophers, theologians and scientists and generally is not included in newspaper obituaries. Summary leads are not limited to newspaper stories. Public relations writers are well advised to present facts and figures in clear, concise, no-nonsense terms in a news release. That way, their audience — journalists — can withdraw the news from a news release in a hurry. Here is how Teresa McFarland, public relations director for Mall of America, announced the Mall's new parental escort policy:

Bloomington, Minn. — Mall of America will implement a Parental Escort Policy effective Oct. 4, 1996, to reduce the growing number of unsupervised youth at the Mall on weekend nights.

Under the new policy, youth under 16 will need to be accompanied to the Mall by a parent or guardian 21 years or older, from 6 p.m. until closing time on Friday and Saturday nights. Youth under 16 who do not have a parent or guardian with them will not be allowed to enter or remain in the Mall after 6 p.m.\textsuperscript{12}

McFarland uses simple and direct language to state the message. A newspaper or broadcast outlet could use her first sentence with only minimal changes. One pitfall for public relations professionals — avoided by McFarland — is a tendency to bury or sugarcoat the news; such an effort damages the credibility of the PR person in the eyes of the audience.

Writers for the World Wide Web are presented with a unique set of circumstances when composing the opening for a Web page. The World Wide Web is useful to public relations writers in distributing news releases quickly, and a summary opening, complete with electronic-mail connections and other links to supporting materials, is a typical strategy. Here is a University at Buffalo release about a scientific study conducted by its faculty:

Buffalo, N.Y. — Eating contaminated sport fish from Lake Ontario is associated with shortened menstrual cycles, epidemiologists from the University at Buffalo have found.\textsuperscript{13}

Then, next to the story are eight links to other resources, including experts in the field.
Let us look at a more complex example of a summary lead. In January 1997, Newt Gingrich, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, was involved in a controversy surrounding an ethics investigation at the same time that he sought re-election as speaker. Here is how USA Today reporter Jessica Lee, using a summary lead, begins her story on the results of the voting for speaker:

WASHINGTON — Newt Gingrich triumphed Tuesday over Democratic opposition and Republican dissent to become the first Republican in 68 years to win successive terms as House speaker.

Gingrich, his re-election clouded until the last minute by ethics charges, won 216 votes — three more than he needed.¹⁴

There are only 25 words in the first paragraph (which, in its pure form, could be considered the lead) and 20 words in the second. Breaking down the elements, here is how it looks:

WHO: Newt Gingrich
WHAT: wins re-election as speaker
WHERE: U.S. House, Washington
WHEN: Tuesday
WHY: by triumphing over opposition and dissent
HOW: won 216 votes

Note that Lee fits the who, what, where, when and why in the first paragraph, and adds the how in paragraph two, along with more explanatory material about the ethics charges. Her first words are Newt Gingrich, because as speaker of the house (and a well-known national figure), Gingrich is the central focus of the story. Also notice that the time element, Tuesday, is mentioned immediately after the strong main verb, triumphed. A good rule of thumb is to get the time element after the main verb unless the day of the week can be mistaken as the object of the verb. "George Foreman fought Tuesday..." isn't going to work, unless a fighter out there is named after a day of the week. One more note: A time element tacked on to the end of a sentence too often looks like an afterthought.

Immediate Versus Delayed Identification Summary Leads. Some summary leads are divided into two categories: immediate identifica-
tion and delayed identification. *Immediate identification leads* always mention a person by name — the emphasis is on the *who* of the story. This type of summary lead is used when the person making the news is the most important aspect of the news.

In a *delayed identification lead*, the emphasis is on the *what* of the story. This kind of lead is used when what happened is more important than the person to whom it happened, such as when the person or persons involved in the news have little name recognition beyond their immediate circle. In a story on a traffic accident involving a person not in the public eye, the reporter would use a delayed identification lead, substituting a brief descriptive phrase in place of the person’s name. It then becomes important to mention the name as soon as possible.

**Des Moines, Iowa — A Blooming-**
<ref>John Doe, 70, was killed instantly when the animal smashed through the windshield, the Polk County medical examiner said.</ref>
<ref>ton, Iowa, man died Sunday night when his car collided with a deer on Interstate 80 near Ankeny.</ref>

The phrase *Bloomington, Iowa, man* is used to describe the victim, who is then introduced by name in the second paragraph. If the accident involved a well-known person, the immediate identification lead might read:

**Des Moines, Iowa — Former Iowa**
<ref>Doe, 70, was killed instantly when the animal smashed through the windshield, the Polk County medical examiner said.</ref>
<ref>governor John Doe died Sunday night when his car collided with a deer on Interstate 80 near Ankeny.</ref>

News releases from big corporations will almost always use immediate identification leads, assuming the company is well known. For example, a “pitch letter” to newspaper and magazine editors from a PR agency hoping to get a story on its client begins this way:

In an industry where many companies are folding or cutting back, IDS Financial Services is growing and prospering.  

There are no set rules on when to use summary leads or any other type of lead. And summary leads will differ from medium to medium. In broadcast writing, where one rule of thumb in lead writing is to
WRITING TIPS

USING ACTIVE VERBS

Use active verbs. That is probably the single most important rule of strong writing. All sentences have either active- or passive-voice verbs. Active voice emphasizes the performer of the action by making the performer the subject of the sentence. Martha kissed John expresses action. So does A masked man with a shotgun robbed the Main Street Liquor Store. Active verbs do something to someone or something. They are strong and direct, moving a sentence forward and making it easier and more interesting to read.

In contrast, passive-voice verbs put the focus on the receiver of the action, as in John was kissed by Marta and The Main Street Liquor Store was robbed by a masked man with a shotgun. Sentences cast in the passive voice are indirect and usually more wordy and less interesting than active-voice sentences. A string of sentences cast in the passive voice can bog down a reader.

Although in most cases sentences should be cast in the active voice, the passive voice sometimes is the better choice, such as when the emphasis should be on the receiver of the action. In these sentence types, the receiver of the action is more important or newsworthy than the agent of the action, as in the following example:

Princess Diana’s casket, wrapped in the maroon-and-gold Royal Standard, was carried out of Westminster Abbey by eight Welsh guards.¹


move from the general to the specific, the same story may sound very different from its print sibling. A reporter for the Associated Press wrote the following for the print wire in 1996:

The United States may be grossly underestimating the number of women who die due to pregnancy, the government reported today.¹⁶
The same story appeared on the AP broadcast wire from writer Russ Clarkson in this way:

Pregnancy may be killing twice as many American women as anyone thought.¹⁷

As noted in Chapter 3, broadcast audiences have different needs than print audiences. Each can be served by summary leads, but usually the wording differs. In television writing, a summary lead is often spoken by the anchor, who introduces both the story and the reporter. For example, KARE, the NBC affiliate in the Twin Cities, uses this technique in its Mall of America parental escort story. Anchor Diana Pierce introduces the segment with a summary lead:

Tonight’s other big story takes us to the Mall of America. That’s where a controversial new escort policy went into effect tonight. It forbids kids under age 16 from going to the Mall without an adult escort. But as Mall officials found out tonight, some rules are meant to be broken. KARE 11’s Dennis Stauffer reports.¹⁸

The station then cuts to Stauffer at the mall, who continues the story by interviewing mall officials, security officers and kids, some of whom successfully sneaked in. The anchor provides the hard news of the curfew in the lead, and the reporter fills in the details. (For more details on the story, see pp. 142 and 144 in Chapter 6.)

The Multiple-Element Lead

A multiple-element lead, which can be a summary lead or another type of lead, works when a single theme would be too restrictive. In a multiple-element lead, the writer can use parallel structure to work more than one theme into the lead. Such leads are common in stories dealing with several actions taken by government bodies at one meeting. Here is an example:

The Mayberry City Council Tuesday fired two department heads, established an administrative review board and authorized the mayor to begin searching for a new fire chief.
The reporter has concluded that all three of the actions taken by the city council are important enough to be in the lead. The reporter lists them in order of importance. Such a lead also serves to set up the rest of the story as details about each action are added. It is a multiple-element summary lead. The danger in such an approach, of course, is to try and do too much, cluttering the lead and confusing the reader.

In covering the Mall of America parental escort story, reporter Sally Apgar of the Star Tribune, the daily newspaper in Minneapolis, uses a multiple-element lead in a follow-up story on reaction to the proposed curfew:

The Mall of America’s consideration of a policy that would require youths under age 16 to be escorted by a parent or guardian after 6 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays is drawing sharp criticism from community groups and teens but high praise from some storekeepers.\(^\text{19}\)

The story then details the reaction from three groups — community organizations such as the Urban League, teen-agers and mall store owners — in the order in which they are presented in the lead.

Similarly, many leads in the stories about Target Stores’ decision to stop selling cigarettes are of the multiple-element variety. This is so because of the company’s justification of the move as an economic decision rather than an anti-smoking one. The Chicago Tribune’s lead uses the multiple-element approach, and it adds another element:

Claiming bottom-line economics rather than moral superiority, the Target Stores division of Dayton-Hudson Corp. broke ranks with other discount stores by declaring a smoke-free zone.\(^\text{20}\)

The three-element lead promises to begin a story about economics and the morality of smoking, and includes a comparison to similar businesses.
Openings for Web pages tend to use multiple-element leads because of the desire to keep the Web reader moving from link to link. For example, among the most frequently visited Web sites is ESPN SportsZone, a product of the all-sports television and radio network. On the SportsZone Web page, the opening item is always one paragraph long and contains at least two links to stories, followed by a list of five or six links to related subjects. Here is how SportsZone handled its 1998 National Football League Super Bowl preview:

Three current Broncos played in Denver's last Super Bowl loss in 1990, but don't expect them to freely share those memories. John Elway, Steve Atwater and Tyrone Braxton say they've <block out their previous failure> in the big game. Is Denver headed for another forgettable experience? The Zone seeks the answer in today's <Stats Class>.

The opening provides links to the main story — “<block out their previous failure>” — and a statistical analysis of the game — “<Stats Class>.” Five links to related stories follow the opening links. Note also the use of the present tense and the time element today. One advantage to writing for the Web is its immediacy, and sentence structure and word choice should reflect that.

The Suspense Lead

A suspense lead is the opposite of a summary lead. The writer manipulates facts and bits of information to leave the reader guessing about the main point of the story. The first couple of paragraphs set up the premise by providing clues; then a paragraph to follow gives the answer.

The suspense is often about why this person or that event is newsworthy. A suspense lead is problematic if the event is well known, and there is always a danger that the headline writer will give away the answer. But if the person or event is not famous, a suspense lead can draw readers into a story that they may not otherwise read. For example, here is a suspense lead:
SAVAGE, Minn. — Before Bo knew anything, before Air Jordan took flight, before George Herman Ruth became The Babe, there was Dan Patch.

At the turn of the century, Dan Patch became one of the most prominent sports figures of a generation by covering a mile in less than two minutes.

At this point, the reader knows Dan Patch is a successful sports figure and marketer from the early 1900s. The alert reader will figure out that Dan Patch is not human, because humans cannot run two-minute miles. The suspense is ended in the next three paragraphs:

It helped that he had four legs.

The mahogany-colored horse became the first commercial superstar of American sports. The pacer’s name and likeness were lent to hundreds of products, including cars, beer, sheet music, kitchen knives and billiard cue chalk.

On June 20, 75 years after his death, the country’s largest collection of Dan Patch memorabilia will be sold at the Meadowlands racetrack in East Rutherford, N.J. Experts value the 500-plus items at more than $100,000. The collection includes a workout sulky, a stove, a thermometer, postcards, posters and pails.22

Mystery solved. One flaw in a suspense lead is when the clues do not lead up to the answer, or, worse, when the writer forgets and leaves out the answer altogether.

It is a good idea not to hold the answer to a suspense opening too long, particularly if you are writing for the World Wide Web, where readers tend to have a short attention span. Here is how ScienceNewsOnline uses one suspense opening:

The grandchildren who revamp Old MacDonald’s Farm years from now may end up harvesting a product their forbears ignored. If so, they can thank the first researchers to genetically engineer animals that concentrate a pharmaceutical product in urine.23

Here, the suspense and the answer to the “product” mystery are provided in the same paragraph — before the reader clicks on to another site.
Advertisements often attempt to add an element of suspense to capture the audience member’s attention. But the suspense usually does not last long because of the space and time limitations in most ads, as well as the danger of losing an impatient customer. The Columbia Sportswear Company, makers of rugged outdoor clothing, featured a full-page color photograph of a camouflaged jacket, the type a waterfowl hunter would wear. The headline to the ad reads: “One possible explanation for Elvis’ disappearance.” The ad was in Ducks Unlimited magazine, whose readers would be assumed to need camouflaged clothing and know who Elvis was (see Fig. 5-2).

**The Character Lead**

Many ad campaigns develop characters to get customers to identify with the products, from the Energizer bunny to the Maytag repairman. Print and broadcast stories use character leads to focus on individuals. They are usually found in feature stories, and they often contain rich, descriptive phrases about the person in the story. Character leads may contain information about a person’s demeanor or appearance, or a description about some aspect of his or her life.

Newspaper reporter Terrie Claflin uses the following lead to begin one of a series of stories on Rachel, a baby girl born to a mother addicted to drugs:

> She is, in many ways, a china doll. Skin like snow, eyes like sky, a tiny body rigid and cool to the touch. Her cheeks are rosy, her face expressionless, unchanging. The world swirls in color and motion around her, yet she does not perceive it. For like a china doll, within her tiny head, behind those ice-blue eyes, Rachel has no brain.²⁵

Character leads need not spend much time on descriptive phrases. Sometimes, briefly focusing on a real person can be used as an inlet into a larger issue. Articles that use examples of real people in the lead to explain complex stories are sometimes called “Dow-Jonesers” or Wall Street Journal-style stories, named after the newspaper company and newspaper that made them famous.

In the Target Stores example noted earlier, reporter Rekha Balu of Crain’s Chicago Business uses a local woman to begin her story about pressure felt by other retail chains, including Illinois-based Walgreen’s, to join Target in a cigarette sales ban.
When Katherine Redd craves a nicotine fix, she goes to her corner Walgreen's and buys cigarettes.

When the 38-year-old data entry clerk wants to quit smoking, she scours the same store for nicotine patches and gums.

Several stories on the Mall of America curfew also lead with an example of a person under age 16 not getting into the mall because of the new escort policy. Reporter Georgann Koelln of the St. Paul Pioneer Press adds a slight twist to that idea when she describes a mall employee who is nearly banned from work during the curfew:

"Are you kidding? I'm 18. I work here." It's 6:27 p.m. on Friday night. Petite, mini-skirted Galena Gregg, backpack slung behind her, is late for work at the Pacific Sunwear of California shop in the Mall of America, and she's being carded. She has no license, no state I.D. card.

To make matters worse, the whole country seems to be here witnessing the spectacle of this fresh fish caught in the net of the mall's new escort policy...  

While some writers may disagree with the use of a direct quote to begin a story, the dilemma of the teen-ager is clearly and accurately portrayed by the writer. The story goes on to describe the incidents and experiences of the first night of the mall's curfew, including the crush of media people following teens around the mall.

The Scene-Setting Lead

Scene-setting leads are similar to character leads, except that instead of focusing on a person, the writer examines a place. This kind of lead is also rich in details, but the details are of the scenery — a park, a crash site, a place of business. People are not the main point of a scene-setting lead, but they may be included as part of the scenery.

Television stories, with their focus on visual images, commonly use scene-setting leads. The key is to let the pictures do the work. CNN reporter Larry Woods is an expert at matching words with visual images. In a series of stories called "Across America with Larry Woods,"

The retail paradox — a drugstore peddling a deadly and addictive product in one area and selling a potential cure in another — is not lost on Ms. Redd.
he crafts descriptive, informative text to match majestic pictures of the mountains, the sea and the desert. In a story on fabled U.S. Highway 66, under a backdrop of Arizona scenery and a ribbon of highway, Woods intones in his distinctive voice:

In the high desert country of western Arizona, they are trying to bring back the past . . . trying desperately to bring back to life what John Steinbeck called in 1939 'the mother road of America . . .' Historic Route 66.89

A scene-setting lead may also include elements outside the physical environment of the place itself, helping to establish a mood. Such is the case with Bill Barich's story about a boxing club for Sports Illustrated. He begins like this:

Professional boxing has always thrived in an atmosphere of greed, larceny, poverty and casual violence, so it has always been at home in Philadelphia, a tough town with an attitude, where the mob still dumps a few bodies into the Delaware River every year. Open the Yellow Pages in Philly, and the first thing you notice are ads for a pair of ambulance chasers, who offer a seductive menu of potentially actionable mishaps — bus accident, dog bite, slip-and-fall. Unemployment is high, scams mutate and multiply, bookies proliferate, and hard drugs are easy to find. Crack cocaine has turned certain blocks into piles of rubble as bombed out as any in Belfast or Beirut, and the young men who live there are sometimes desperate enough to put on the gloves and aim themselves toward the Legendary Blue Horizon in hopes of escaping.

There isn't another sports arena in the country remotely like the Blue Horizon. It's the sort of raw and smoky cavern that George Bellows painted early this century, a throwback to the era of straw hats, stogies and dime beers. Only 1,500 fans can be crammed inside for an event, but the crowd compensates for its lack of size with its animal howling . . . 59

Outside of the reference to the painter, the first few hundred words of the story go by without any mention of an actual person, much less a quotation. The story is about the building, and the people inside are a part of that story — as are the city, the bombed-out piles of rubble, the river and the drugs.
The Narrative Lead

Character and scene-setting leads are part of a larger style of writing called narrative. The narrative lead may set the scene or describe a character, or it may use an anecdote to illustrate a larger point. The key to this type of lead is the inclusion of a who, what, when, where section that tells the reader why the story is important. The nut paragraph should reply to the statement "Here's why you should care about this story."

Sometimes a narrative lead is chronological, in a story-telling sense. Mitch Albom of the Detroit Free Press describes the scene at a press conference at the high school of a prep basketball star in chronological order as a way of beginning his comparison of the emphasis placed on sports versus academics in America:

The little chocolate doughnuts were in a box, next to the coffee urn. Normally, high schools don't provide food for their assemblies, but today was special, all these TV crews, radio people, sports writers. A table was arranged near the front of the room, and a reporter set down a microphone, alongside a dozen others. "Testing 1-2 ... testing 1-2," he said.

Suddenly, the whole room seemed to shift. The guest of honor had arrived. He didn't enter first. He was preceded by an entourage of friends, coaches, his grandmother, his aunt, his baby brother, more friends, more coaches and his girlfriend, whom he identified later as "my girlfriend." She wore a black dress and jewelry and had her hair pinned up, as if going to the prom, even though it was mid-afternoon and math classes were in progress upstairs.¹⁰

After some more description of the scene, Albom then goes upstairs to the math class and finds another kid with a scholarship — an academic scholarship — and compares the two youngsters. Narrative writing uses elements of fictional writing, including setting the scene, telling a story, adding suspense and exploring characters (see Chapter 8).

Avoiding Overused Leads

University of New Hampshire journalism professor Jane Harrigan offers a list of overused leads that beginning and experienced writers alike sometimes fall back on.¹¹ In addition to her suggestions, several other ineffective leads should be avoided.
WRITING LEADS

FROM “WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA”

By Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer
WRITING TIPS

USING ACTIVE VERBS

Use active verbs. That is probably the single most important rule of strong writing. All sentences have either active- or passive-voice verbs. Active voice emphasizes the performer of the action by making the performer the subject of the sentence. Martha kissed John expresses action. So does A masked man with a shotgun robbed the Main Street Liquor Store. Active verbs do something to someone or something. They are strong and direct, moving a sentence forward and making it easier and more interesting to read.

In contrast, passive-voice verbs put the focus on the receiver of the action, as in John was kissed by Martha and The Main Street Liquor Store was robbed by a masked man with a shotgun. Sentences cast in the passive voice are indirect and usually more wordy and less interesting than active-voice sentences. A string of sentences cast in the passive voice can bog down a reader.

Although in most cases sentences should be cast in the active voice, the passive voice sometimes is the better choice, such as when the emphasis should be on the receiver of the action. In these sentence types, the receiver of the action is more important or newsworthy than the agent of the action, as in the following example:

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move from the general to the specific, the same story may sound very different from its print sibling. A reporter for the Associated Press wrote the following for the print wire in 1996:

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WRITING TIPS

USING THE TOOLS OF WRITING

Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies is one of the most respected writing coaches in the country. At his workshops, Clark says it helps him to think of writing as similar to carpentry, complete with a plan and some 20 “writing tools” stored on a workbench. Here are several of Clark’s tips for writing:

1. Begin sentences with subjects and verbs, letting subordinate elements branch off to the right. Even a very long sentence can be powerful when subject and verb make the sentence’s meaning clear right from the start.

2. Place strong words at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs, and at the end. The period acts as a stop sign. Any word next to it gets noticed.

3. Avoid repeating a key word in a given sentence or paragraph, unless you intend a specific effect.

4. Prefer the simple over the technical: shorter words and paragraphs at the points of greatest complexity.

5. Slow the pace of information, for the sake of clarity. Short sentences make the reader move slowly. They give her time to think. They give him time to learn.

6. Reveal telling character traits. Don’t say “enthusiastic” or “talkative,” but create a scene in which the person reveals those characteristics to the reader.¹


story we might regularly see on television. Now look at a different theater listing for the same play:

Lanford Wilson’s play can be considered an occasion for an astonishing performance by John Malkovich as a foulmouthed restaurant manager who woos and wins his dead brother’s dancing partner.¹⁰
WRITING TIPS

USING THE INVERTED PYRAMID STRUCTURE

The inverted pyramid structure is most useful to print media writers without a lot of time or space. The topsy-turvy triangle demands that such writers get to the main point of the story quickly, answering as many of the who, what, where, when and why questions as possible in the lead. From there, writers add less important facts or anecdotes, material that can be trimmed by a copy editor seeking to eliminate column inches. What the style lacks in subtlety, it makes up for in efficiency. Consider the following example:

SANTA ANA, Calif. (AP) — John J. Famalaro should be executed for the brutal sex killing of a waitress whose body was stashed three years in an Arizona freezer after the slaying, a jury decided Wednesday.¹

In just 30 words, the writer tells who (John Famalaro), what (should be executed), why (for a brutal sex killing, the jury decided) and when (the verdict came on Wednesday).

The next paragraph lets readers know how old the man is, who he killed, how old the victim was and when he killed her.

It was the same jury that convicted the 40-year-old former handyman last month of murder and special circumstances of sodomy and kidnapping in the 1991 death of Denise Huber, 23, of Newport Beach.²

By the time readers reach the last two of the story’s six paragraphs, they have been given supporting details: The victim was struck 31 times, with a nail puller, in a Laguna Beach warehouse.

². Ibid.
WRITING TIPS

WRITING EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS

The reader’s journey through a complex story should be as smooth as possible. Transitions between ideas, between sentences and between paragraphs should flow easily in order for the overall piece of writing to have clarity and coherence. Smooth transitions are especially important in guiding readers through a complex piece of writing.

You can tie ideas, sentences and paragraphs together in your writing by using the following strategies:

1. Repeat key words, phrases or names that connect readers to a preceding paragraph or sentence.
2. Use transitional words, such as but, and, nevertheless, also, however, consequently and similarly.
3. Incorporate transitional phrases, such as for example and as a result.
4. Use words that refer to time, such as since, then, next, after, before, now, later and earlier.

Be sure to choose transitional words and phrases carefully and precisely, and to use them in legitimate connections. For instance, use but or however to alert readers to something that is contrary or contradictory, and use similarly or also for things that are alike.

In the following sample transitional passage, the bus and Jones are repeated from a previous paragraph to connect ideas and move the new paragraphs along. In addition, transitional words and phrases (shown in italics) make the passage easy to read:

Police said the bus hit Jones when he broke free and tried to escape by running across the busy street. But two witnesses claim that police threw Jones into the street.

One witness, the owner of Mighty Clean Laundry, said she looked out . . .

Earlier in the day, a bartender at Main Street Chat-n-Chew had refused to serve Jones . . .
WRITING TIPS

USING THE NARRATIVE, CHRONOLOGICAL AND HOURGLASS STRUCTURES

As noted in the Writing Tips box on page 138, the inverted pyramid structure provides a fast and efficient way for organizing a story that is limited by time or space. But it is not necessarily the most interesting or subtle method. Experienced writers and storytellers may prefer a less structured, more imaginative method for piecing a story together, particularly when they are allowed the space and time to do so. They may use a narrative, chronological or hourglass structure.

Narrative form is used to describe scenes and people, often incorporating dialogue between the people in a story.

Chronological structure is often used to tell a story within a story. As the term implies, the story begins with an interesting moment and follows the action as it unfolds. A chronology is particularly effective in stories about a crime or an accident, for instance.

Hourglass structure combines the inverted pyramid, narrative and chronological forms. According to writing coach Roy Peter Clark:

The top of the hourglass looks like the old inverted pyramid, but is shorter in duration—perhaps four or five paragraphs. So we learn that a man shot a police officer in the leg, ran into a house, held a boy hostage for eight hours, surrendered without harming the boy, and was finally arrested. What follows is a transition, called the turn. “Police and witnesses gave the following account of the dramatic incident.” What follows is a retelling of events in chronological order, with many more details than a standard story would allow.

Readers now have a choice. They can read the top and quit, or if interested can linger down in the story.1
