

BEGINNING NEWS WRITING

Prof. Jan Shaw

San Jose State University

AJEEP

BEGINNING NEWS WRITING

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE NOVICE

BE PREPARED TO WORK VERY HARD

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

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BEGINNING NEWS WRITING

SYLLABUS

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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. What is known is immediately posted on the publication's website. In print, it requires the reordering of the what was going to go on the front page.

Nut graf or nut 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, maps, drawings and other similar things.

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Beginning News Writing

Syllabus

BY JAN SHAW

Course Description

This is the Beginning News Writing class. The most basic lesson you will learn is that accuracy is everything – facts, quotes, observations, spelling and grammar.

Accuracy is everything.

Sometimes rumors, lies and exaggerations dominate a society's information. In journalism, the reporter brings facts and truth to readers. More prosaically, this is known as "Getting the Story RIGHT," and there is no better goal for an aspiring journalist.

Remember, fact-based truth is the heart of journalism. You will practice that for the duration of this course as a foundation for your professional lives.

In the process of doing this, students learn

- To get the story right.
- To give their readers correct, factual information about events or issues that impact or interest them.
- To cite the sources of the information, which is called attribution.
- To keep their opinions, conclusions and comments out of the story.
- That interviewing people impacted by a policy, an event, an issue or a problem is critical.

As with all reporting, we do this through

- Research
- Direct observation
- Interviews

In Beginning News Writing you are going to learn and practice a style of story structure called the inverted pyramid. It is an organizational technique for writing stories. The inverted pyramid style means that you summarize the facts of the story – "What happened?" – in the first paragraph, essentially putting the most important information first. This is followed by the second-most important facts, then the third, and the fourth and so on to the end of the story. The last paragraph has the absolutely least important

information in it. Then you stop writing. No need for an ending in the inverted pyramid style. Quotes germane to the story are usually sprinkled throughout bringing a human face to the topic. Facts, statistics and history are folded in to give readers perspective.

The inverted pyramid structure for hard news stories centers on six elements: the 5Ws and H. Those initials stand for Who, What, When, Where, Why, How. The 5Ws and H are really the heart of event reporting.

In beginning news writing, student reporters start to think of their readers first. What does a reader need to know to understand this event or issue? What do I need to help them understand what is going on? How do I interest them?

- You will begin to be aware of the need to use simple, solid verbs and precise vocabulary, both for the clarity of your thinking and the understanding of your readers.
- You will learn to write in a non-academic style, beginning with short paragraphs that are only one sentence long.
- You will learn that in every sentence, you must tell the reader where you got your facts. This is known as attribution or sourcing and it is **CRITICALLY IMPORTANT**.
- You will learn that you cannot use quotation marks unless the quoted material is **EXACTLY** what the interviewee said.
- You will learn that when you paraphrase a quote – turn it into an indirect quote with no quote marks – you **MUST NOT** change the meaning of what was said. If you aren't certain, leave out or call back to verify.
- You will learn to leave yourself out of the story. The reader wants to know what you found out in your reporting, not what you personally think. Never will the words “I, me, my, we, our” appear in your stories. And for this class, neither will “you or your.”
- You will write an ‘inverted pyramid’ event story with a summary lead. The rest of the story’s information will be in descending order of importance.
- You will discover that once the main story is reported, there is a mass of details to be verified and that it is your responsibility to get **ALL** the facts correct – big and small.
- You will learn that you are doing all of this for your readers – to bring fact-based truth to events and issues in a style of writing designed to help readers comprehend events and issues.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

To successfully complete this course, students must be able to:

- Understand that news stories are accurate, complete, clear, concise and attributed
- Learn that good reporting is based on interviews, research and observations
- Learn the difference between fact and opinion and that reporters keep their opinions and conclusions out of the story.
- Learn to use the inverted pyramid style of writing

- Quote sources EXACTLY in direct quotes
- Attribute all information to legitimate sources if not observed firsthand
- Begin to develop the habit of using precise, active verbs and specific, solid nouns in the subject-verb sentence form

This 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, a local issue or a national issue.

Course Content Learning Outcomes

This is how students will learn and achieve the goals by the end of the course:

- Students will have written a simple 600-word story based on student attitudes to San Jose State University (or whatever university at which this class is being taught).
- Student will go out onto the campus to conduct interviews and note their observations. They will write up an initial story that will be rewritten and rewritten.
- They will briefly go online to get a sense of how to research the topic but they will rely on a fact sheet handed out by the instructor because this is a writing class rather than a reporting class.
- Students will use a very specific inverted pyramid template to write the story, folding in interviews, research and observations.
- Students may not use the first or second person in writing their stories. This way, they must use sources for everything but direct observation.
- Each paragraph is only one sentence long to help students write actively and directly and to force them to attribute every sentence unless it is a direct observation.
- This, in turn, forces opinions and thoughts out of the story.

Required Reading: Handouts (No textbook)

- Writing tips
- Interviewing
- Inverted pyramid template
- Handout on punctuation and rules of direct quotes
- Template of an inverted pyramid story structure for the final project
- Proofreading symbols to help students understand professor's edits, also found at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm>
- Reference: (Online) A Reporter's Field Guide Answering Journalism's Most Common Questions at <http://pocketjourn.com>

Suggested readings for the future:

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 print 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.

Another out-of-print but excellent book is *Writing Across the Media*, which covers print, broadcast, public relations and advertising writing. The lead author is Kristie Bunton. Ignore the online chapter in the book because it's outdated. The rest is excellent information on writing.

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.

An old San Francisco Chronicle series called "The Shame of the City." San Francisco has one of the nation's worst problems with hard-core homelessness. Thousands of people 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 explored how one of the nation's wealthiest and most cultured cities came to have so many people living on its streets. The first part, "Homeless Island," is particularly gripping. It's the best combination of reporting and writing that I've read.

Part one, introduction: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-HOMELESS-ISLAND-They-live-2510831.php>

Data that accompanies the first part: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-The-hard-core-stuck-on-street-2525831.php#photo-2685465>

Part two – Family in van: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-WE-RE-TOGETHER-It-has-2510481.php>

Part three: (Third in a five-day series) SHAME OF THE CITY / 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: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-A-Rugged-Refuge-Many-2525717.php>

Part four: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-THE-BEST-INTENTIONS-The-2547229.php>

Part five: <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/SHAME-OF-THE-CITY-A-WAY-OUT-Solving-San-2525635.php>

Other Equipment / Material Requirements

Paper or notebook and pencils or pens are required. If students can bring voice recorders to the first class, that would be worthwhile, but it is not required. Access to a computer outside of class is helpful but not required.

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:

100 - 93% A	86 - 83% B	76 - 73% C	66 - 63% D
92 - 90% A-	82 - 80% B-	72 - 70% C-	62 - 60% D-
89 - 87% B+	79 - 77% C+	69 - 67% D+	Below 60% F

Assignments and Points:

(Note: Grammar and punctuation must be correct)

- Attendance: 2 points each day, 1 point if late, 0 if absent
- Summaries of or responses to readings: 0 to 2 points each and graded on accuracy, clarity, grammar and punctuation.
- Short essay on your first day experiences: 0 to 2 points and graded on accuracy, clarity, grammar and punctuation.
- Exercise on observations: 0 to 10 points and the graded on the ability of the reader to see, smell and/or hear the scene through your words, adherence to instructions including the use of third person and not drawing conclusions or commenting. The idea is to put readers at the scene through your words and for them not to be aware of you.
- First draft story: 0 to 5 points and graded on clarity, accuracy in all things, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template, adherence to the assignment, inclusion of the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand the story.
- Second draft story: 0 to 10 points and graded on improvement, clarity, accuracy in all things, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template, adherence to the assignment, inclusion of the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand what happened.
- Final story: 0 to 15 points and graded solely on professional journalistic standards as they've been exercised and taught in this class.
- Final project: This is a folder containing all the writing and rewriting you have done in this class. Put your final story on top. 0 to 10 points. Graded on completeness, quality and meeting professional journalism standards.
- Any additional assignments will have points that fit within these parameters.

- Assignments and points are subject to change and will be announced in class and, if students have email, will be emailed.

You will be graded primarily on the quality of your reporting and your adherence to the assignments. Your story is not weighted as heavily in the final grade as your reporting. Students will put into practice the readings and lectures, and they will practice and experience interviewing, researching, observing and story writing.

To that end, here are the assignments that will be covered in this class.

These are subject to change. The instructor will inform you in class and, if you have email, by email.

Beginning News Writing / Course Schedule to be announced

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	To be announced (TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 1</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> Interviewing, observing, inverted pyramid story structure, summary leads and story template. (First draft of 600-word story due next class.)</p> <p><u>Day's content:</u> Campus interviews and observations. Brief lecture on interviewing, descriptive writing and story structure. The instructor reminds students to ask for detail and stories/anecdotes/memories from their interviewees. Interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent. Review story template so you know what kinds of information you need to gather. Class goes with instructor out onto the campus to conduct interviews and observe in preparation for writing a simple 600-word story on student attitudes toward SJSU. Instructor accompanies them but stays in the background.</p> <p><i>Note: If possible, tuck dull but necessary information unobtrusively into the story rather than using full paragraphs. I call it 'between commas.'</i></p> <p><u>NO:</u> John Smith is a computer engineering major. Full sentence. <u>BETTER:</u> John Smith, a computer engineer major, said he <i>Between commas.</i></p> <p><u>Assignments due next class:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft of 600-word story.

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional interviews • One page summary of their experiences interviewing, observing and writing the story, including problems that arose • One page summary of the readings – that’s one page only for all the readings • Do any additional interviewing you need after class <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story template • Interviewing suggestions • Observation and descriptive writing tips • Use of quotes • Punctuating quotes <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Summary leads: Who What When Where Why How</u></p> <p>Summary leads are used extensively when reporting that something has happened and usually the four of the six are used – the who, what, when and where.</p> <p>A summary lead informs readers of the basic facts of a story: <i>A freight train derailed near Salinas this morning, dumping several rail cars full of cotton onto Highway 101, injuring several people and bringing the morning commute to a halt.</i></p> <p>Readers read this and they know what happened. They don’t ‘why’ and the ‘how’ is a bit iffy.</p> <p>But readers know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO: A freight train (I know a train is technically not a ‘who’ but it’s treated as a ‘who’ for summary leads, depending on the story.) • WHAT happened: A train derailed causing people to be injured and halting the morning commute • WHEN: This morning • WHERE: Near Salinas

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<p>There it is – a summary lead with tightly packed information. Then the rest of the story fills in the details in descending order of importance.</p> <p><u>A multi-element summary lead</u> is often used for news elements that aren't related to one another – for instance, decisions made in meetings.</p> <p><i>The San Jose City Council last night voted to replace its aging parking meters, repave the airport parking lot and help sponsor the farmers' market downtown.</i></p> <p>Who: The San Jose City Council What: Replace parking meters, pave an airport parking lot, help the farmers' market (These are not causally related.) When: The decision happened last night Where: San Jose</p> <p>Why: Not stated in the lead How: Not stated in the lead</p> <p>It's a summary of facts.</p> <p>For many news stories, it's normal that the 'what' dominates.</p> <p><u>Sentences are often similar to inverted pyramids in that the most important information comes first and the least important comes last.</u></p> <p>Time elements and locations are required but they aren't very important so they are usually tucked into the sentence. DON'T start the sentence with the time element or the location.</p> <p>Instead, start the sentence with what's most interesting.</p>
2	(TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 2:</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> First draft due. Questions/discussion on interviewing, observing and writing the story. Lecture on common errors in writing a story. Students make corrections and hand in story and other assignments</p> <p><u>Day's content:</u> Break into small groups to read each others' stories. Instructor goes from group to group reading the papers and discusses common errors and problems. Students go to computers or to desks to fix those problems. Hand in story and other assignments.</p>

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<p><u>Assignments due next class:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise in lead writing: Bring in three new summary leads for your story by rearranging the order of the basic • information, moving up different information or changing the focus. • One page summary of readings <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bunton’s writing tips • Leads handout • Proofreading marks used by the instructor <p><u>Ongoing assignment:</u> Review instructions on all assignments and rewrite if necessary.</p> <p>An example for your exercise in lead rewriting – the train story:</p> <p><i>1. A freight train derailed near Salinas this morning, dumping several rail cars full of cotton onto Highway 101, injuring several people and bringing the morning commute to a halt.</i></p> <p><i>2. The morning commute came to halt this morning after a freight train derailed near Salinas, dumping several rail cars full of cotton onto Highway 101 and injuring several people.</i></p> <p><i>3. Several people were injured this morning after a freight train derailed near Salinas, dumping several rail cars full of cotton onto Highway 101 and snarling the morning commute.</i></p> <p><i>4. Tons of cotton landed on Highway 101 near Salinas this morning and caused a massive traffic tie-up after the rail cars carrying the cotton tipped over.</i></p>
3	(TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 3:</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> Research, rewriting and proofreading marks.</p> <p><u>Day’s content:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small groups to look at leads and then instructor collects

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<p>them. Read a few aloud.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edited stories handed back. • A fact sheet about SJSU distributed for use in your stories. Facts, statistics, history and other information give perspective to your readers and help them put interviews and observations into context. • Students go to computers or desks to begin rewriting and correcting their stories as per the instructor's edits and folding in the research. Students only add in that material the facts they think will help their readers. • Instructor makes suggestions and answers questions. • Instructor collects assignments <p><u>Assignments due next class:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewritten story. Continue rewriting and correcting your story following instructor's instructions, the story template, edits on your stories and folding in any research you think will help your readers and ONLY the research you think will help your readers. Staple it on top of the first draft. • Half-page summary of readings <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of good descriptive journalistic writing using detail and observation <p><u>General assignment:</u> Review instructions on all projects and rewrite if necessary.</p>
4	(TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 4:</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> Second draft due. Other assignments returned. Out-of-class exercise in descriptive writing.</p> <p><u>Day's content:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewritten story collected. • Be prepared to discuss your experience and any problems that might have arisen.

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief lecture on fact-based descriptive writing and examples. Instructor takes class to the cafeteria or to an event for an exercise in journalistic descriptive writing. <p><u>Assignments due next class:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive writing exercise: At least a page describing what you saw, heard and/or smelled • Bring all writing and rewriting to class to organize, correct and, if time, rewrite following journalistic standards. • What isn't corrected in class will be that day's take-home assignment. <p><u>General assignment: Review instructions on all projects and rewrite if necessary.</u></p>
5	(TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 5:</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> Discussion on descriptive writing, preparations for Final project</p> <p><u>Day's content:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final project discussed. • Discussion on writing the observations. Some opening paragraphs to read aloud. Small groups to read each others' descriptions. Collect. • Graded rewritten stories returned. Edits discussed. • Go to computers to begin the rewrite. <p><u>Assignments due next class:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final story stapled to the first and second edited drafts. • All written and rewritten assignments in a folder. • Together, they comprise your final project. <p><u>Readings: Review instructions as necessary.</u></p>
6	(TBA)	<p><u>SESSION 6</u></p> <p><u>Topics:</u> Final project, final story, beginning news writing review, class review</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> None</p> <p><u>Day's content:</u> Final story due and final project file of all written and</p>

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		rewritten assignments. Instructor conducts news writing review and class review. <u>Assignment:</u> Get the instructor your address so the final project can be mailed to you.

Links to stories that might be of interest

1. 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

<http://iwpr.net/report-news/report-spurs-action-afghan-bird-poaching>

2. 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>

3. 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>

4. Keeping Up Appearances in Azerbaijan

Soviet tradition of organised “volunteering” persists in Nakhichevan exclave.

By Elman Abbasov - Caucasus

<http://iwpr.net/report-news/keeping-appearances-azerbaijan>

Remember, as a reporter, you bring your critical thinking and skills in interviewing, observing and research to bear as you probe more deeply into issue 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? 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 thoughts, not just an easy story.

You are nearly alone in standing between your readers and the half-truths, exaggerations and lies of others.

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SESSION

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Beginning News Writing

Day-to-Day Instructions

By JAN SHAW

Before class every day, write on the board:

- Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How? These are called the 5W's and H. They are the questions that need to be answered in the leads. and stories of beginning news writing stories.
- You also might write out that day's assignments and/or activities and points you want the students to remember.

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 a simple story on student attitudes toward San Jose State University. Skip introductions and in-depth explanations until Session 2.

SESSION 1 SPECIFICS:

Assignments due next class:

- First draft of 600-word story.
- One page essay regarding their experiences interviewing, observing and writing the story, including problems that arose
- One page summary of the readings – that's one page only for all the readings

Readings:

- Story template
- Interviewing suggestions
- Observation and descriptive writing tips
- Use of quotes and punctuation of quotes

1. Take roll.
2. Briefly welcome students to the class.

3. Tell them that today's in-class and out-of-class assignments will include interviewing, observing and writing the first draft of a 600-word story, which is the first step in the class' final project.
4. Have them look at the assignment sheet for the rest of the assignments.
5. Distribute handouts on
 - Interviewing, including the use of voice recorders and a written-out introduction
 - Rules on punctuating direct quotes and indirect quotes and general guidelines for using direct quotes
 - Descriptive writing guidelines
 - That day's assignment sheet

4. Brief introduction example:

“Hello, I'm Professor Jan Shaw and I will be your instructor for the six sessions of beginning news writing. 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.

5. 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 students about their attitudes toward San Jose State University and (2) noting what you see. The second part – the observations – allows readers who weren't there to see it through your eyes.

“At the next class you will give me the first draft of a 600-word story on what you found out following the template that I've handed out to you. You'll also do a summary of experiences interviewing and observing and a summary of the readings.

“Interviewing and observing are two elements of reporting every journalist must learn. The third leg of reporting is research, but because this is a writing class, I'll will be giving you basic research in a fact sheet.

“This is, basically, immersion learning and these first assignments give you context for the rest of the sessions.

INTERVIEWING TIPS: They have a handout on this but read the opening aloud to give them a sense of a conversational tone.

“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 attitudes toward San Jose State University. Would you have a minute to talk to me? Yes?’

'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. You must have these or the interview won't count.

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

"Then ask them questions about what is happening, listen to the answers and write them down. Use the answers to help formulate the next questions. There are suggested questions in the handout on interviewing.

"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.

"And take a look at the note on biased questioning."

(Hold up the 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 you can ask what they are.)

"You will do these interviews and observations during and after class and write your first draft after class.

Observations: No first or second person stay away from conclusions. Demonstrate in class:

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

"NO conclusions. I will explain more later but, for now, I'll 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’re referring to. 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 – Hold up the assignment sheet 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 – tell them why.)

”Look over today’s assignment sheet – 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.”

“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.”

Assignments due next class:

1. Students conduct more interviews.
2. Students write the first draft of their 600-word-stories following the template to be graded on clarity, accuracy in all things, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template, adherence to the assignment, inclusion of the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand the story.
3. STORY FORMAT: Stories are to be
 - Double-spaced and the paragraphs obviously indented
 - One sentence per paragraph

- Unless it is an observation, every sentence must be attributed/sourced often at the end of the sentence
 - No first or second person – no “I, me, my, mine, us, our, we, you, your”
 - Remember to follow the template and put your information in descending order of importance with a summary lead that is 30 or fewer words
3. Write a one-page summary essay on how the day went including problems that may have arisen in interviewing, observing and writing. Zero to two points possible and graded on meeting the assignment.
 4. Write a one-page summary of the handouts. Zero to two points possible and graded on whether or not it appears you read and understood the salient points of the handouts.
 5. Continue interviewing after class.
 6. Bring the assignments to the next class. Be on time.

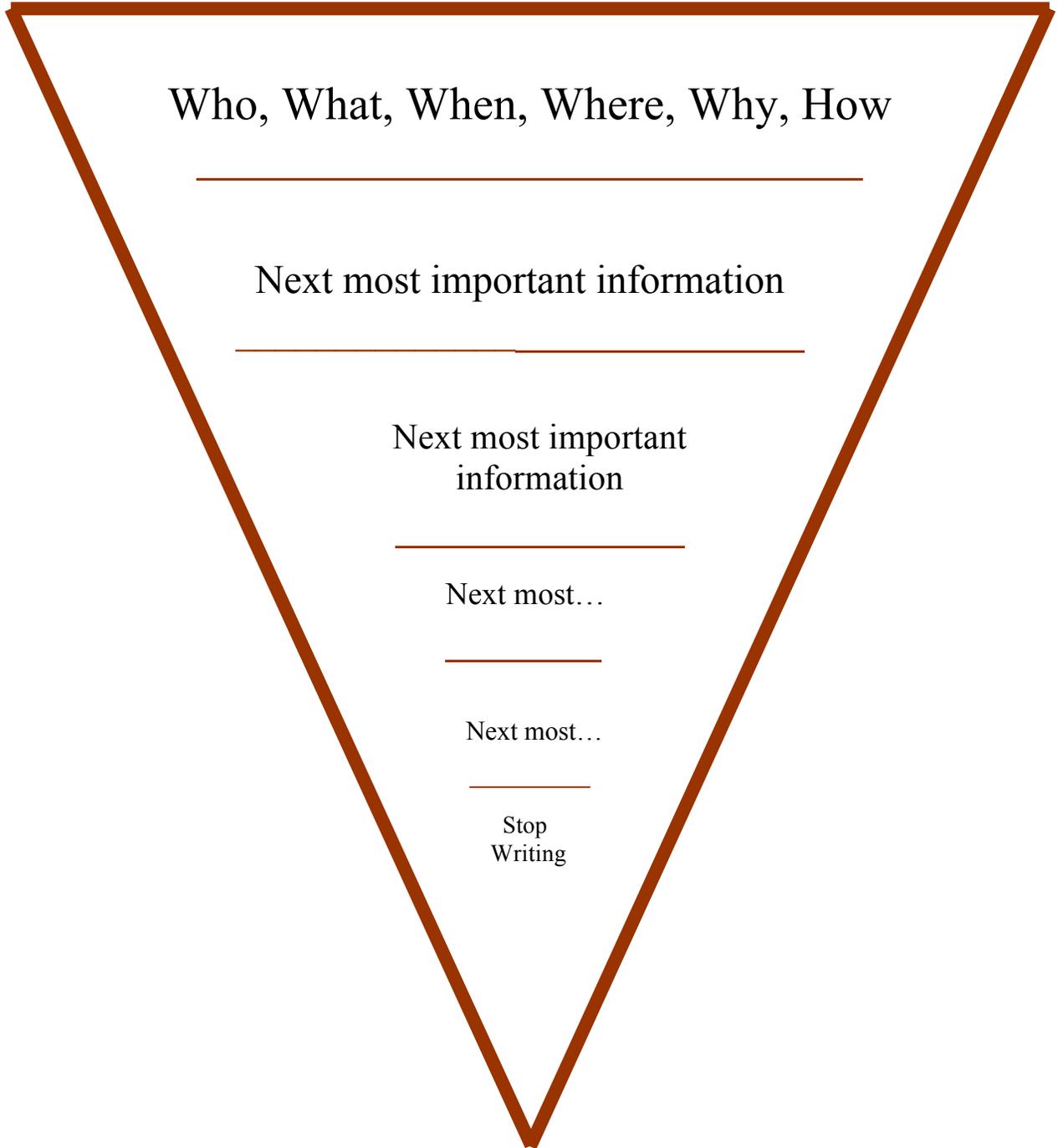
HANDOUTS FOR FIRST DAY – See next pages:

- Basic Inverted pyramid story template
- On-the-street interviewing suggestions
- Observation and descriptive writing tips
- Writing tips
- Instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid (plus more writing tips)
- Quotations: Use of quotes and punctuating quotes

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record the papers turned in that day and return them next class. This is an important step in learning, especially if you have them rewrite the assignments.

The Inverted Pyramid Structure

Summary Lead and Information in Descending Order of Importance



Basic Inverted Pyramid Story Template

BY JAN SHAW

DESCENDING ORDER OF IMPORTANCE:

1. Story lead: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How (How might not apply in this story.) 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.
3. Third paragraph: One sentence, expanding the lead. Double spaced and indented. Needs a source.
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.
6. Sixth paragraph. More information, sourced. 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.

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 your 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

TRY FOR AT LEAST 10 INTERVIEWS, PREFER 14.

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 – go for 10.
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. 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 Tips

BY JAN SHAW

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

NO conclusions.

By that I mean, no shorthand descriptions that you understand but your readers don't.

For example – 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. It's wood (or metal or linoleum or vinyl or tile)? What color? Is it polished? Not polished? Scuffs? Spotless? Dirt streaks? Tire marks? Shoe marks?

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, for instance. You can say it's stuffy or hot or icy or whatever it is. If it isn't anything, leave it out.

Same with sounds. But listen. Be specific. Saying it's "noisy" just isn't clear enough. What are you hearing? A conversation? Background noises of what? Dishes clanking? Really listen and then describe if for your readers.

Visuals: What are you seeing? Be specific. Draw the readers a word picture. Don't say "colorful." 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 this in most writing classes: "Show, don't tell." You "show" with specifics. "Telling" is when you start using conclusions that with 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.

And that's what you will do in the observation assignment today – describe.

WRITING TIPS

BY JAN SHAW

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: "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 just like the inverted pyramid style. It too 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 when not interesting in themselves 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 or complicated information, use simple, short sentences and paragraphs. This helps readers absorb the information. You build the information slowly so that it makes sense to readers unfamiliar with it.
5. Use precise words. Avoid generalizations. This is a key to great news writing.

Don't say, "Students feel safe on campus." For starters, you've talked to maybe 15 students and there are 26,000 of them on campus. If you use 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 immediately surrounding the campus.

"When it gets dark, I really don't like walking off campus," he said. "It feels dangerous."

It's specific. It 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 of people or scenes or action. Don't hand the readers your conclusions, such as "the scene was confusing." "The person looked unhappy." "The action was thrilling." There is no information in those words for people who weren't there. You need to figure out what you saw and then show the reader. Be specific. No one cares if you think someone is happy or the action is thrilling. 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. Short, long and in-between. They all work so long as the sentence structure is clear and the sentences uncluttered. 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.

Again, 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 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 elsewhere.

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.

Quotations

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.
YOUR JOB MAY BE AS WELL.**

II. Punctuating quotes:

"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' and don't say 'explained.'
2. In this class, tuck the "said" at the end of the sentence or in 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. Then place the “(Name) said” at the beginning of the sentence.

EXCEPTIONS:

- 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. If it’s some guy down the block, the name goes last or in the middle.
 - 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 summary 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.
 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.

Beginning News Writing

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, discuss writing, interviewing and observing experiences, students begin correcting their stories before handing them in along with their other assignments.

Break into small groups so students can read each others' stories. The instructor goes from group to group scanning the material and making suggestions. As common problems are noted, instructor lectures class and makes suggestions. Students go to computers, tables or desks to correct their stories. At end of class, instructor collects the story and other assignments.

SESSION 2 SPECIFICS:

I. GETTING THE CLASS STARTED

1. Take roll.
2. Take them back to yesterday's assignments on interviewing, observing and writing and ask them how it went. Be prepared to offer suggestions for improvement.
3. Tell them today's in-class assignment is rewriting or correcting the story.
4. Distribute handouts for second session:
 - Bunton's writing tips
 - Leads handout
5. Distribute assignments for next session:
 - Exercise in lead writing: At the next class session, bring in three new summary leads for the story. Try rearranging the order of the basic information, moving up different information from the body of the story or changing the focus.
 - One page summary of readings

II. EXPANDED INTRODUCTION: Tell students about your background and/or interest in journalism. For example:

"I was working in the media for nearly 20 years and now I've been an instructor for nearly 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.

"I was an editor, a newspaper reporter and a magazine writer over the span of the years I was working in journalism professionally. Part of the reason for my passion for teaching journalism stems from that experience. I want to help journalism students produce the best journalism possible and not to make the same mistakes I did when I was young and inexperienced – Also when I was older and very experienced.

“When I was on my very first assignment I couldn’t think of any questions to ask because I was so nervous and so young. I was standing in the street in front of a home that had burned, the fire was now out and my job was to interview the fire captain at the scene. I went through the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of the basic news event questions. My interviewee answered the questions along the line of one word per question and about two “I don’t know’s.” I had about three sentences worth of information and no story. I couldn’t think of anything else to ask because I was inexperienced and nervous.

“I was saved by a far more experienced reporter from another paper. She arrived at the scene and began asking a series of good solid questions. I stood behind her and took many, many, many notes and was able to write the story when I got back to the newsroom. After that, I began reading stories by others analyzing what questions they had asked to get their information. It never happened again – at least, not that particular mistake.

“I don’t want any of my students to have to go through that on their first stories. So my job is help you become more experienced and to be aware of what you don’t yet know.

“I am passionate about journalism and doing journalism right – getting the facts right – getting the details right – getting the context and background right – always delving for more information – always verifying the facts and verifying what people tell me because sometimes they lie or they are wrong – always keeping the readers in mind and my responsibility as a journalist to tell them the truth.

“When I left journalism, I didn’t think I would again find a profession I was passionate about. I wanted new challenges but I was unsure what those would be. And then I started to teach. So I feel very fortunate that that I can combine these two professions I love into one. For you, it means that you’re dealing with a pro and that I can help you learn.

(Replace this example with your own experiences.)

“Our focus is on informing our readers of the truth – fact-based truth. That is your obligation as journalists. It’s important. Journalists play a role in society of getting information to their readers that no one else will supply. You are the only thing standing between your readers and exaggerations, lies, half-truths and ignorance. It is a big responsibility, and in this class you begin to master the tools to achieve that. Let’s begin.”

III. SUGGESTED COMMENTS:

“Today we will briefly discuss your interviewing, observing and writing experiences. Next we will break into groups so you can see how others went about the assignment. I’ll collect your papers. And then we will go over the instructions for the lead-writing assignment due at the next class session.”

1. Then the instructor listens as students briefly relate their experiences. Call on students to respond. As issues arise, offer suggestions and tips. Ask if there are any questions. Some questions will likely be framed along the line of “What do I do when?” If so, answer them and then move on to today’s main work.

2. Students break into small groups to read each others’ stories. Instructor goes briefly from person to person, group to group, making suggestions to the person and to the class. Common mistakes include:

- Use of the first person
- Lack of attribution
- Paragraphs with more than one sentence in them
- Incorrectly punctuated quotes
- Incorrectly attributed facts and quotes
- Lack of a first and last name of an interviewee
- And others

3. Students then go to the computers, desks or tables and spend the rest of the class correcting their stories. The instructor goes from person to person scanning the stories and making suggestions.

4. Collect the assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS DUE NEXT CLASS:

- Exercise in lead writing: Bring in three new summary leads for the story by rearranging the order of the basic information, moving up different information or changing the focus.
- One page summary of readings

Readings:

- Bunton’s writing tips (Excerpts: Writing Across the Media: See the PDF file)
- Bunton’s leads handout (Excerpts: Writing Across the Media: See the PDF file)
- Proofreading marks used by the instructor

Ongoing assignment: Review instructions on all assignments and rewrite if necessary.

Note: Read the stories aloud to check for errors. Ask yourself, will your readers be thoroughly informed about this event after reading your story? Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.

STORY FORMAT, again:

- Double-spaced
- One sentence per paragraph
- Unless it is an observation, every sentence must be attributed/sourced often at the end of the sentence
- No first or second person – no “I, me, my, mine, us, our, we, you, your”

- Remember to follow the template and put the information in descending order of importance with a summary lead that is 30 or fewer words

Information on summary leads in the syllabus:
Some of this content could be used for a brief lecture.

Reprise:

Summary leads: Who What When Where Why How

Summary leads are used extensively when reporting that something has happened and usually the four of the six are used - the who, what, when and where.

After reading a summary lead, a readers knows the basic facts of a story:

A freight train derailed near Salinas this morning, dumping several rail cars full of cotton onto Highway 101, injuring several people and bringing the morning commute to a halt.

Readers read this and they know what happened. They don't 'why.' The 'how' is a bit iffy.

But readers know:

Who: A freight train (I know a train is technically not a 'who' but it's treated as a 'who' for summary leads, depending on the story.)

What happened: A train derailed causing people to be injured and halting the morning commute

When: This morning

Where: Near Salinas

There it is - a summary lead with tightly packed information. Then the rest of the story fills in the details in descending order of importance.

A multi-element summary lead is often used for news elements that aren't related to one another - for instance, decisions made in meetings.

The San Jose City Council last night voted to replace its aging parking meters, repave the airport parking lot and help sponsor the farmers' market downtown.

Who: The San Jose City Council

What: Replace parking meters, pave an airport parking lot, help the farmers' market (These are not causally related.)

When: The decision happened last night

Where: San Jose

Why: Not stated in the lead

How: Not stated in the lead

It's a summary of facts.

For many news stories, it's normal that the 'what' dominates.

Sentences are often similar to inverted pyramids in that the most important information comes first and the least important comes last.

Time elements and locations are required but they aren't very important so they are usually tucked into the sentence.

So DON'T start the sentence with the time element or the location.

Instead, start the sentence with what's most interesting.

PROOFREADING MARKS USED BY THE INSTRUCTOR

BY JAN SHAW

Mark	Meaning	Example
≡	Capitalize	As it says in <u>w</u> riting <u>a</u> cross the <u>m</u> edia. ¹ "It is important for media
⊂	Close up – no space	writers to under stand the concept of involvement when considering an
⊂#	Delete, close up	audience. The word <i>involvement</i> comes from om the Latin verb <i>volvere</i> ,
∨ ∨ ∨ ∧ ∨ ∨	Mark to insert punctuation	which means 'to turn roll, or wrap. [∨] metaphorically [∧] then, media
~	Transpose	writers to ^{try} determine what the audience is 'wrapped up in.'
L	Paragraph <u>and</u> indent	<u>They</u> also try to assess the extent to which the audience is involved in
↵	Replace	a particular subject, as this will ^a ffect both the content and
~	Remove	the the level of detail included in the writing.
#	Insert space	From Writing [#] Across the Media" ² [∨] Truth is the philosophical core of
	Insert space	journalism, and good news writers strive to tell the truth."
##	Another symbol for paragraph	^{##} "Truth is also important to news writers on a practical level. [~]
Stet	Restore to original	in that it ^{STET} ensures their credibility. News writers who are less
/	Lower case	than truthful, Whether Deliberately or Negligently , lose
~	Delete	credibility with with their audiences and colleagues." ³
≡ ∧	Insert hyphen	These are some of the authors' not [≡] to [≡] be ignored thoughts on journalism.

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.

WRITING TIPS

EXCERPTS FROM
“WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA”

1. Using the tools of writing
2. Writing effective transitions
3. Using active verbs
4. Using quotations effectively

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

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

1. Roy Peter Clark, “If I Were a Carpenter: The Tools of the Writer,” *Workbench* National Writers’ Workshop (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1994).

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

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 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:

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

1. "England's Rose at Rest," *The Star Tribune*, 7 Sept. 1997, A1.

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

WRITING TIPS

USING QUOTATIONS EFFECTIVELY

Interviews are a rich source of quotations. In a print or television news story, an advertisement or a press release, quotations can add zest and color to the writer's words and give readers or viewers a break from the usual pace and structure of the story. A good quotation functions like a verbal snapshot, explaining or expanding upon some element of the story.

The following guidelines will help you use quotations effectively in your writing:

1. Use quotations in complete sentences. Quotations that appear as full sentences are easier to read and understand. Taking good notes during interviews will help you develop an ear for good quotations and the skill of recording them in full-sentence format.
2. Choose quotes carefully. Cluttering a story with mediocre quotes will diminish the power of the effective quotations in a story.
3. Highlight an especially strong quotation by presenting it in a separate paragraph.
4. Avoid "stacking" quotes. These are quotations from two different speakers stacked in back-to-back paragraphs. Introduce the second speaker with a new paragraph by paraphrasing, for example, something he or she has to say.
5. Give the attribution at the end of a quotation for stories that will appear in print. For example:

"The information is often more important than the name of the person who relayed it," she said.

When the quotation is two or more sentences in length, place the attribution after the first sentence:

"I like ice cream better than frozen yogurt," John Smith said. "But I'd rather have frozen yogurt than no dessert at all."

WRITING THE SUMMARY LEAD

EXCERPTED 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."⁹ 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 *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 600 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.

1. The Missouri Group: Brian S. Brooks, George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen and Don Ranly, *News Reporting and Writing*, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3-4.

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, summary 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 *W*s 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 immediacy needs of a broadcast audience help dictate beginning a lead with *when*.

For most news stories, the *what* or *who* elements are most important. 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 stories involving famous people, the *who* element becomes the most significant. 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 Tribune, covering an airplane accident under a tight deadline in November 1996:

<p>QUINCY, Ill. — A United Express plane from Chicago and a private plane collided on a runway in a fiery</p>	<p>accident Tuesday night that killed 13 people.¹⁰</p>
---	---

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.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.¹³

Then, next to the story are eight links to other resources, including experts in the field.

Beginning News Writing

SESSION 3

REWRITES AND RESEARCH

(YES, THEY MAKE THE STORY BETTER.)

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP

SESSION 3

SESSION 3 summary: Leads, research, rewriting and proofreading marks.

Break into small groups to look at leads. Then students begin rewriting their stories and folding in research from the fact sheet they think will help their readers understand the story and ONLY the research that helps. Tell them that facts, statistics, history and other information give perspective to your readers and help put interviews and observations into context. Give them tips about tucking dull but informative information unobtrusively into a story. They study the lead and see if it can be improved or if one of the newer leads works better.

Instructor hands back edited assignments. Students break into small groups and begin reading each others' work. Instructor reads aloud a few leads. Instructor goes from group to group scanning the material and making suggestions. As issues and common mistakes again become apparent, the instructor lectures the class on these and on how to better meet professional journalistic standards. This should take about half the class.

SESSION 3 SPECIFICS

I. GETTING THE CLASS STARTED

1. Take roll
2. Address the whole class. Answer questions and ask how the lead writing went. Problems? Anything interesting?
3. Instructor collects the leads and summary.
4. Instructor hands out fact sheet on SJSU some of which will be added into their stories and any other handouts.

SUGGESTED COMMENTS REGARDING FACT SHEET

“You will read the facts on this handout (HOLD IT UP) and see which would help your readers understand the story and which ones are relevant to the topic. Fold those into your story. These kinds of facts don't necessarily need individual sentences. Fold them together in a sentence or tuck them here and there in the story.”

6. Instructor hands back the edited and graded assignments including the story rewrites. Have them look at the story corrections and then break into small groups and briefly read the edits. Instructor goes from group to group, scanning edits and making suggestions to the groups and to the class.

7. Students go to the computers or desks or tables and begin making corrections, rewriting their stories and folding in facts that will improve the story for the readers. This may be difficult for them. Tell them to do their best and that there will be one more rewrite where they can follow your edits. Remind the students that they should add

ONLY the research they think will help their readers – no more than that. Instructor goes from student to student, reading and making suggestions and answering questions. If the stories are going long because of the research, that's OK – just not too long.

8. Students print out their rewritten or partially rewritten story and email it to themselves, if possible. Or put it on a flash drive. (Everyone may not have email pr access to a computer outside of class.) They take them home and complete them.

Assignments due next class:

- A. Students finish rewriting, correcting and adding research to the story. Staple it to the original, edited story and turn it in next class. Also, email it to themselves, if possible. (Or flash drives.)
- B. Students work on correcting any other edited assignments returned to them unless it states that no rewrite is necessary. If you do rewrite and/or correct an assignment, staple it on top of the original before you turn it in. If the improvement is great enough, additional points are possible. All assignments are part of the final project.
- C. Handouts: Rewriting, no summary due

Remember, a factual error
means no credit for that assignment.

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments turned in that day and return them next class.

A Few Facts About SJSU

From SJSU Quick Facts –

Source: SJSU's Office of Institutional Research

<http://www.oir.sjsu.edu/Students/QuickFacts/20114QuickFacts.cfm>

Spring 2012:

Total Enrollment: 28,002 Students

(82% Undergraduate) and 93% California Residence

Fall 2011:

Total Enrollment: 30,236 Students

(82% Undergraduate) and 93% California Residence

Other information about SJSU

Source: SJSU Information

http://www.sjsu.edu/about_sjsu/facts_and_figures/

ACADEMICS: Source: SJSU Information

Through its seven colleges, the university offers 69 bachelor's degrees with 81 concentrations 65 master's degrees with 29 concentrations.

ACCREDITATION

SJSU is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Various college programs are accredited by specialized accrediting agencies. Additional information can be found on the university's WASC Accreditation site.

ATHLETICS

San Jose State University's Department of Athletics recruits and develops a diverse population of highly skilled student-athletes, coaches and staff to compete at the pinnacle of collegiate athletics.

FACILITIES

With additional campus locations, the SJSU main campus is home to more than 50 major buildings (23 academic buildings, seven residence halls) on 19 city blocks in downtown San Jose.

HISTORY

Founded in 1857, San José State is the oldest public institution of higher education on the West Coast. From its beginnings as a normal school to train teachers for the developing frontier, SJSU has matured into a metropolitan university offering more than 134 bachelor's and master's degrees with 110 concentrations.

REWRITING AND CHECKLIST

Check your story for redundant and needless words. Read it aloud. If you are stumbling through a sentence, the readers probably are too.

Have you used the subject-verb sentence-verb structure whenever possible? Look carefully at your sentence structure.

Are your words precise? Have you used five words trying to say something when one precise, specific word would be clearer? Those words don't always come to mind immediately, so think on it.

A PARTIAL CHECKLIST FOR NEWS STORIES

BY JAN SHAW

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

LEAD:

- 30 words or less
- Consists of one sentence that emphasizes the most important of the 5 Ws and the H (Who, What, When, Where, How)
- 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
- The the next most important or interesting information is presented. And that continues with a descending order of importance to the end. At the end are usually are bits of information you have that could help the readers but are not particularly significant. Then stop writing. For the inverted pyramid style, a close is not needed.
- 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

Assignments due next class, session 4:

1. Finish rewriting, correcting and adding research to the story. Staple it to the original, edited story and turn it in next class. Also, email it to yourself, if possible, or store on a flash drive.
2. Students continue to correct the edited assignments returned to them unless it states that no rewrite is necessary. If you do rewrite and/or correct an assignment, staple it on top of the original before turning it in. If the improvement is great enough, additional points are possible. All assignments are part of the final project.
3. Handouts: Rewriting (no summary due).

Remember, a factual error
means no credit for that assignment.

Beginning News Writing

SESSION 4

**OBSERVATIONS AND
DESCRIPTIVE WRITING**

(OR, HOW TO BRING THE READER TO THE SCENE.)

PREPARED BY

JAN SHAW

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

AJEEP

SESSION 4

SESSION 4 summary: Observation and descriptive writing. Take students out to the campus for an observation and descriptive writing exercise.

SESSION 4 SPECIFICS

I. GETTING THE CLASS STARTED

1. Take roll
2. Collect stories and any other rewrites. Ask if they are liking their stories any better.
3. Hand back edited and graded assignments
4. Hand out examples of good use of description and observation in a story
5. Lecture on firsthand observation and its role in informing the reader

Suggested introduction: First You Have to See

“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.

“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
- 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

“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.

“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.”

Have them gather up all their things and take them out onto the campus. They will not be returning to class that day.

II. TAKE THEM TO THE CAFETERIA OR TO AN EVENT FOR AN EXERCISE IN DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

The students will spend the rest of the hour sitting down at a scene and writing out a fact-based, specific description of what they see, hear and smell. It is to be turned in at the next class. They will not return to the classroom that day. **ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON.**

Assignments due next class:

1. A fact-based, specific, third-person descriptive writing assignment based on that day's class exercise. More than one page, less than three. Add a half page on problems, if any, you ran into trying to do the assignment. Zero to 5 points. Will be graded on meeting the goal of the of the assignment.
2. **Gather up everything you have written, rewritten and reported** for this class. Put it in a folder. Bring it all to the next class. (Students will spend the next session fine-tuning the writing in their stories.)
3. Re-read the descriptive writing handout. No summary but review it to help you with your descriptive writing/observation assignment.
4. Keep correcting your returned assignments unless it says that no rewrite is necessary.

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class.

These edits are very important for student learning.

Beginning News Writing

Observation and Descriptive Writing instructions

(From lecture and other notes)

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. DON’T say, “I saw...” “I observed...” Or “You will see....” Here are the first and second person pronouns you won’t use:

- First person singular: I, me, my.
- First person plural: We, us, our.
- Second person singular: You.
- Second person possessive: Your.

Next: 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.

Same with sounds. You listen. Be specific. Saying it's "noisy" just isn't clear enough. What are you hearing? A conversation? Background noises of what? Dishes clanking? Really listen and then describe if for your readers.

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.

Assignments due next class, session 5:

1. A fact-based, specific, third-person descriptive writing assignment based on that day's class exercise. More than one page, less than three. Add a half page on problems, if any, you ran into trying to do the assignment. Zero to 5 points. Will be graded on meeting the goal of the of the assignment.
2. **Gather up everything you have written, rewritten and reported** for this class. Put it in a folder. Bring it all to the next class. (Students will spend the next session fine-tuning the writing in their stories.)
3. Re-read the descriptive writing handout. No summary but review it to help you with your descriptive writing/observation assignment.
4. Keep correcting your returned assignments unless it says that no rewrite is necessary.

Remember, a factual error
means no credit for that assignment

Beginning News Writing

SESSION 5

THE MAJOR PROJECT

(TIME'S UP)

PREPARED BY

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AJEEP

SESSION 5

Session 5 summary: Students assemble, fine-tune and put all their assignments in a folder to be turned in at the next class period as the final project.

I. GETTING THE CLASS STARTED

1. Take roll.
2. Collect observations and ask how it went. Address any questions or problems that arose.
3. Pass back the edited, rewritten stories, any other assignments and ask if there are any questions. Address ones that pertain to the whole class. Hold on individual questions. Hand out final project instructions.

II. PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL ASSIGNMENT: Student instructions

Give the students the following instructions.

1. See if any pertinent information is missing in the stories, find said information if possible and add it in in a final correction or rewrite. If the corrections or additions are small, just handwrite them. Of 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. Students can handwrite the improvements or use the class computers.
6. The final project should be neat, tidy, legible, well organized and reflect the standards of professional journalism.
7. The folders are due at the last class, session 6.

Assignments:

1. Be on time to the next class.
2. Read the instructions on assembling the final project and its content.
3. In a folder, you will compile all your graded, edited and rewritten assignments:
 - Stories, summaries, essay and observations.
 - If you have updated, improved, or rewritten assignments, staple them on top of the original, edited pieces and put them in the file. ALL of your work needs to be in this folder.
 - Put the story first. After that will be the originals and the rewrites with the rewrites stapled on top of the original – newest rewrite first, then in descending order. Put the whole in chronological order. Again, the story and its rewrites are on the top of the stack.
 - INCLUDE AN INDEX.
 - Also include your name and address so the instructor can mail your final projects to you.

Instructions and Format for Major Project

Editing and rewriting:

8. 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.
9. Go through your writing and see if you can edit for clarity or wordiness or just a better sentence structure.
10. See if there are any edits you overlooked. If so, fix as per the edit.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.

Instructions for assignment
due next class, session 6:

1. Be on time with your completed final project in hand.
2. Stories, summaries, observations and other writings will be included in the final project folder.
3. If you have updated, improved or rewritten assignments, staple them on top of the original, edited pieces and put them in the folder. All of your work needs to be in this folder.
4. Put the story and its rewrites first with the most recent story rewrite stapled to the top.
5. After that, put the whole stack in chronological order.
6. INCLUDE AN INDEX.
7. Also include your name and address so the instructor can mail your final project to you.

**Remember, a factual error
means no credit for that assignment**

Beginning News Writing

SESSION 6

- **TURN IN MAJOR PROJECT**
- **REVIEW JOURNALISTIC FUNDAMENTALS**
 - **REVIEW CLASS**

(BEFORE WE SAY GOOD-BYE)

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AJEEP

Session 6: Last class

I. GETTING THE CLASS STARTED

- A. Take roll.
- B. Briefly break into groups so students can look at each other's final projects and make any last-minute hand-written corrections.
- C. Collect the final projects.
- D. Then review the basics of beginning reporting: Observations, interviews, and research. Explain how those three elements are the key to finding fact-based truth for their readers so that the stories you give to your readers are true in every detail. Again, journalists must get the story right – their readers depend on them.
- E. Review the obligations of journalists: You are not a scribe. You do not simply pass on assertions of fact without verifying them. If what someone said is true, isn't, leave it out – but you must find out.
- F. Talk about keeping readers foremost in mind.
- G. Then talk to the class about what elements of the class were most useful to them in beginning to understand basic reporting. Go through the elements of the class one by one looking for individual comments and a general class sense of that assignment's usefulness or and 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.
- H. Assignment: Students need to get the Instructor a mailing address so that the final project can be returned.

Suggested Comments from Professor Shaw:

“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 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 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 will actually 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?

II. Reminder of 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:

100 - 93% A
92 - 90% A-
89 - 87% B+
86 - 83% B
82 - 80% B-
79 - 77% C+
76 - 73% C
72 - 70% C-
69 - 67% D+
66 - 63% D
62 - 60% D-
Below 60% F

Reminder of Points:

- Attendance: 2 points each day, 1 point if late, 0 if absent
- Summaries of or responses to readings: 0 to 2 points each and graded on accuracy, clarity, grammar and punctuation.
- Short essay on your first day experiences: 0 to 2 points and graded on accuracy, clarity, grammar and punctuation.
- Exercise on observations: 0 to 10 points and the graded on the ability of the reader to see, smell and/or hear the scene through your words, adherence to instructions including the use of third person and not drawing conclusions or commenting. The idea is to put readers at the scene through your words and for them not to be aware of you.
- First draft story: 0 to 5 points and graded on clarity, accuracy in all things, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template, adherence to the assignment, inclusion of the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand the story.
- Second draft story: 0 to 10 points and graded on improvement, clarity, accuracy in all things, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template, adherence to the assignment, inclusion of the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand what happened.
- Final story: 0 to 15 points and graded solely on professional journalistic standards as they've been exercised and taught in this class.
- Final project: This is a folder containing all the writing and rewriting you have done in this class. Put your final story on top. 0 to 10 points. Graded on completeness, quality and meeting professional journalism standards.
- Any additional assignments will have points that fit within these parameters.
- Assignments and points are subject to change and will be announced in class and, if students have email, will be emailed.

ONE LAST TIME: As a reporter you bring your critical thinking and 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? 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 thoughts, not just an easy story.

You are nearly along in standing between your readers and the half-truths, exaggerations and lies of others. It is a heavy responsibility.