Structure & Context

Foundations of Journalism - JR 102

Emerson College - Spring 2013

Structure

Structure

- Stories should be organized to make it as easy as possible for the reader to follow the story.

- It should also be structured in a way that's easy for the writer to make all the elements fit together.

- Experienced journalists don't usually write out outlines, but they do plan their stories out before writing.

Grafs

- Grafs should be between 1-4 sentences.

- You don't want large chunks of text.
  - Easier readability.

- Vary length of grafs.
  - Just like you vary sentence structure.
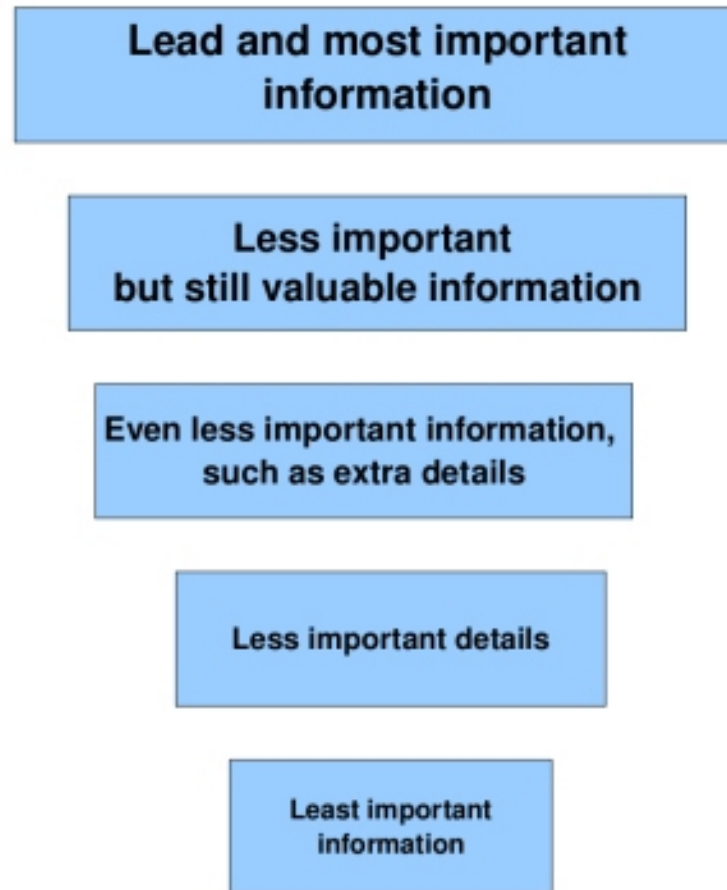
- One idea per graf.

Inverted Pyramid

- Traditional/most basic news story format.
  - This is for hard news stories.
  - Features follow different structure (see later slide)

- Most important/newsworthy information first. Information becomes less essential as the story goes on.
  - Big news at top, facts in decreasing order of importance.

Inverted Pyramid

Most Newsworthy Info

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Important Details

Other General Info
Background
Info

Inverted Pyramid

Inverted Pyramid

- Use news judgment to decide what is most important.

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

Supporting the Lede

- The grafs immediately following the lede have to support the lede.

- Support grafs will flesh out the information provided in the lede.

- Stories that don't support the lede frustrate/confuse readers.
  - They don't deliver on what you promised in the lede.

Elaborating

- Once the lede has been supported, you can expand the scope of the story.
  - Additional information.
  - Less significant details.
  - Answers to less pressing questions.

- Lede support is necessary. Elaboration is optional.
  - Depending on space, it might not even be optional.

Like Ideas

- Group/keep like idea together.

- Jumbled ideas hurt flow of your story.

- Learn to recognize natural connections when organizing a story.
  - This will make transitions (later slide) easier.

Multiple Themes

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

- Multiple themes must be set up in the lede.

Multiple Themes

- If story has multiple elements, these elements should be in some way be connected/related.

- When story has multiple elements, each element must be supported.
    - Support each element individually. (Its own graf.)

Multiple Themes

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

Chronological

- Follows the exact order of events.
    - First X happened. Then Y. Then Z.

- Not common in hard news.
    - What's most news worthy doesn't usually happen in order.

- Chronological accounts may be mixed with non-chronological sections.
    - Chronology is good for recounting an event.

Chronological

- Disaster, police, fire and sports stories often contain at least some chronological elements.

- Effective in organizing a complex series of events.

- This structure is more common in features.

Hourglass

- Summarizes the news like inverted pyramid.

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

Hourglass

- Starts off summarizing the news following the inverted pyramid structure.

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

Transitions

- Each graf is its own idea. You need to transition from idea to idea for your story to flow.

- Sometimes a single word can work as a transition.

- Other transitions need to be a sentence or even a graf.

Types of Transitions

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

Logical Connections

- Emphasizing a relationship between thoughts.

- Direct/evident connections.

- Transition words:
  - therefore, as a result, so, because

Time Connections

- Transitions relating to time.

- Transition words:
  - meanwhile, while, at the same time, before, after, following

Place Connections

- Relationship pertaining to location.

- Transition words:
  - across the street, next to

- May also indicate a change of location

Contrasts

- Transitions indicating the difference between things.

- Transition words:
  - however, but, despite

Additions

- Transitions indicating a reader is about to get more information.

- Transition words:
  - also, in addition, and

Natural Connections

- Wording referring to something mentioned in the previous graf.
- Transition words:
  - this, that
    - When using this or that, you need to specify this/that WHAT?
      - i.e. this meeting, that class

- Often natural connectors will not need transitional words.
  - Simply referring to "the (previously mentioned subject)"

More on Transitions

- Familiarize your all the transition words from the textbook.
  - Writing and Reporting the News, pg. 139-141

- Be mindful of not overusing transitions.
  - Beginning reporters usually don't use enough.

Bullets

- Often used in newspapers and on the Web to make lists clear.

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

Bullets

- Only use bullets when there are three or more items.

- Bullets should only be 1-2 sentences. (Short)

- All bulleted items most follow parallel structure.

Features

- Same rules of structure apply.
  - Story most still support a soft lede

- Features rarely follow inverted pyramid.

- Features more likely to build to a climax.

Features

- Common structure for features includes:
  - Chronological
  - Spatial
  - Problem, then solution

- Features often return to the lede at the end.
  - Snapper/kicker

- Features need a conclusion.
  - Hard news story tapers off

Context/Background

Context/Background

- Just what happened isn't usually enough.

- Stories need to be put in context.

- Non-essential explanatory information = background
  - Information not required to follow the story.
  - Gives a story more depth
  - Usually low in a story

- Essential explanatory information = context
  - Information required to follow the story.
  - Needed high in the story

History

- Each time a subject is revisited, you need to give readers the basic facts.

- Enough information so that a reader who has no knowledge of previous events can at least understand.

- Not so much that you bore people who have been following the story.

- Also, illustrates changes over time.

Relationships

- Comparison: Puts an event into perspective based off other news and/or events.

- Patterns: If this is a pattern, illustrate how. What are the other parts of this pattern?

- Future: What are the next steps?