

## Quotes:

What sets a professional journalist apart is knowing what you can say/write/report as well as how to say/write/report the story. A lot of people can pretend to be journalists, photographers and even filmmakers. Are they good? Some are and some really suck. The modern age of computers and software has just made it easier for people to pretend or at least try. Trying isn't bad either. American Idol is popular, in my humble opinion, because it removes/lowers barriers for the average Joe to become a superstar. YouTube can do the same thing as well as a good blog. Nothing wrong with that. The Internet also lets me do a lot of research on health issues. Still, it can't replace a GOOD doctor, nurse or care provider - or the training of a GOOD journalist.

*Brad Arendt, barendt@boisestate.edu*

With great power there must also come – great responsibility!

*Stan Lee, originally in Amazing Fantasy #15 (August 1962)*

With great power comes great responsibility.

*Stan Lee, from later Spider-Man stories and the 2002 movie*

Too often reporters seem to view their profession's ethos of objectivity as a shield from criticism rather than a demand for self-criticism. Journalists, being human, have opinions on the subjects they cover. Objectivity challenges them to be vigilant about distancing their reporting from their opinions.

*James Taranto, Best of the Web Today, Feb. 25, 2008*

I think we advisers do need to take some responsibility for long-term, recurring quality problems, because those may speak to how well we are training our students. True, the staff changes from year to year, but the adviser can establish a standard of training and expectations that live on from one staff to the next.

That doesn't eliminate every dumb mistake, but it does raise expectations and the level of journalism. We certainly don't have to meddle with content to accomplish that.

... If a football player fumbles once, it's pretty hard to blame the coach. If a team fumbles five times every game, then you legitimately start to wonder whether the coach is teaching players how to hang onto the ball.

*Jim Killam, Adviser Northern Star, Northern Illinois University*

## And other useful stuff

<http://www.newsroom101.com/> for AP and grammar exercises

<http://www.maconstate.edu> the college Web site, for names, titles, phone numbers and information about the college and the people you will be covering

<http://www.maconstate.edu/studentlife/studentmedia.aspx> for information about your student media and where some of the handouts will be

# AP Style

Below are some important AP style rules and journalistic conventions. See Student Media Coordinator to sign out or purchase a stylebook. For items not covered in the AP Stylebook, use a standard dictionary.

**addresses:** Abbreviate only Ave., Blvd. and St., and only when used with numbers: 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Spell out and capitalize when used with a street name but no number: He turned from that street onto Central Avenue.

**ages:** Use numerals: Firefighters rescued a 3-year-old boy and his sister, 6.

**commas:** Do not use a comma before *and* in a simple series: He huffed, puffed and blew down the house. Do use a comma at the end of a quotation, inside the quotation marks: "Have more cake," he said.

**composition titles:** Use quotation marks around titles of books, songs, movies, operas, plays, poems, television programs, computer games (but not software), lectures, speeches and works of art. Exception: Use descriptive titles for religious texts (the Bible, Koran, etc.), reference works or orchestral works: The Oxford Encyclopedia of Music does not list Smith's Suite No. 1 for Orchestra.

**compose, comprise:** Compose means to put together: Miami University's Greek system is composed of a variety of sororities and fraternities. Comprise includes all: A variety of sororities and fraternities comprise Miami's Greek system.

**datelines:** Used at the beginning of a story to indicate where stories originate (HAMILTON, Ohio —). Names of many cities, including Cincinnati, stand alone (without state). See AP Stylebook listing under *datelines*. Cities mentioned in a story also use the same format.

**dates:** Abbreviate the month if used with a date: Nov. 11; Dec. 25, 2004. Otherwise, spell out: Classes start in January. Do not abbreviate months spelled with five or fewer letters. Do not use st, nd, rd or th (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>).

**Dr.:** Use only for medical doctors. Not used for Ph.D.s.

**include:** Use to introduce a series when items are only some of the total.

**names:** The first time you mention someone (first reference), use his/her name as s/he would like it to appear: Madonna, Bill Clinton. Put nicknames in quotation marks: Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower. In subsequent references, use last names only, except for children under age 18 or when first names are needed to prevent confusion in stories with more than one person with the same last name.

**newspaper and magazine names:** Do not italicize or place in quotes. Capitalize “the” if it is part of the publication’s official title. (Note: Many newspapers put publication names in italics, which is an exception to AP style.)

**numbers:** The numbers one through nine are spelled out in most cases (exceptions: dates, times, ages, percentages). For numbers 10 or higher, use numerals.

**on:** Do not use before a date or day of the week. The group will meet Monday.

**over:** Use only to describe spatial relationships. For numerical relationships, use “more than.”

**percent:** Always use numbers and the word percent (one word): 3 percent.

**quotations:** Quotes you use should be actual words spoken or written to you by living people. If you use quotes from other sources, you must give credit: “I’ve been framed,” Smith told the Cincinnati Enquirer. Never alter quotes even to correct minor grammatical errors or word usage.

**said:** Preferred in attribution in news stories. It’s more direct and free of innuendo. It also takes up less space.

**states:** Always spell out the names of states with five letters or less (including Ohio) and our two non-contiguous states (Alaska and Hawaii). Others are abbreviated if they follow the name of a city, such as Lexington, Ky. Do not use Postal Service abbreviations except in mailing addresses. For AP abbreviations, see the “state names” entry in the AP Stylebook.

**time, date, place:** That is the proper order for listing specifics about an event: The concert will begin at 8 p.m. Friday in Millett Hall.

**times:** Use a.m. and p.m. (lower case, with periods after each letter). Do not use zeros in whole hours: 5 p.m. (not 5:00 p.m.) Use midnight and noon instead of 12 a.m. and 12 p.m., to avoid confusion.

**titles:** Capitalize titles before names,; use lower case titles after names: President George Bush met with Colin Powell, secretary of state. Do not abbreviate *professor*. Do not use a title after first reference unless it is in a quote.

**time element:** Use the day of the week within seven days of publication; otherwise, use the date. Do not include the year unless it’s not the current year.

**today, tonight:** Use only if the story will be published that day.

**tomorrow, yesterday:** Do not use except in quotes.

# News Elements

FOR  
*Journalism*  
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<http://www.gaoctiles.com/Athens/Aegean/6763>

## The concepts that make news *news*.

There are facts that are newsworthy, and there are facts that are not newsworthy. There are facts which might be newsworthy in one town or at one school, but not in another town or another school. There are facts which might be newsworthy today, but not tomorrow.

What makes a fact newsworthy is how it affects the people in your locality, the people who would read your publication. If the fact is not interesting to them or does not affect them in any way, it is not newsworthy.

Among the most common news elements are:

- **Proximity:** This has to do with location. If the event is happening close by, it will impact your readers more than if it is happening across town, or across the world, all other considerations being equal. A dance at your school, for instance, is more newsworthy than a dance at another school.
- **Prominence:** This has to do with how well known the people involved in your story are. If the person or persons are well known to your readers, the story will impact your readers more than a similar story involving people they do not know.
- **Timeliness:** If something is happening NOW, it has more impact than something that happened yesterday or last week. Often, the most recent development is the feature of the story.
- **Oddity:** If something is unusual, the oddity alone can make it newsworthy, because people want to know why it has happened.
- **Consequence:** If the impact of an event on your readers is major, they want to know all about it. For instance, they might not care that a particular street is being shut down for repairs, until it is brought to their attention that this will reroute the major portion of the traffic into their residential areas. This will affect them in a significant way, and they will want to know about it.
- **Conflict:** Readers have an interest in disagreements, arguments, fights and rivalries. If an event has conflict attached to it, many readers will be interested on that basis alone. Stories that involve conflict are those about sports, trials, war, politics and even Congressional debates.
- **Human interest:** If a situation makes you angry, sad, happy or overjoyed, it contains the news element of human interest. Some stories are newsworthy on this basis alone.

Most news stories will have a combination of news elements.

Compiled from workshop handouts

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By Gregg McLachlan

## **Misspelled names**

### **Tips to never misspell another name again**

Why do journalists get names wrong?

1. Failure to double-check at the point of interview
2. Assumptions
3. Sloppy note taking – Getting names wrong affects your credibility and the newspaper. After all, readers will wonder: If you can't get a name right, how can you get anything else right? How many of us have received an invitation, trophy, plaque or letter with our name misspelled? Remember how you felt? Enough said.

Tips to Never Misspell A Name Again

1. Spell back the name to your subject
2. Show your subject the spelling in your notebook
3. Double-check the name in the phonebook
4. Never assume: Smith isn't always Smith. It can be Smyth. Trisha isn't always Trisha. It can be Tricia. Linda isn't always Linda. It can be Lynda.

## **When a reporter's interests get in the way**

We've all seen this type of lead over the years:

Author John Q. Fuddydudddy once wrote that petunias are God's gift to gardeners.

It's the type of lead which should make newspaper reporters cringe, especially ones who are tuned in to their audience. Firstly, reporters are taking a huge risk that their readers have ever heard of John Q. Fuddydudddy. Secondly, why would readers care?

Before you write a lead that goes something like In the Hollywood movie, My Mother Ate Uncle Joey's Tomato, actor Gino Pasquale said a tomato is a work of art, be aware that you may be failing to connect to a large portion of your audience. Once again, maybe Gino Pasquale said something about a tomato at some point in time. But ask yourself, will my readers care? Will my readers even know of a Gino Pasquale? Will they have seen the movie My Mother Ate Uncle Joey's Tomato?

Most often, these types of leads are derived from a reporter's own interests. Perhaps, they are from a reporter's favorite movie, book or show once seen on television. The pitfall with many of these types of leads is that they represent what interests the reporter, not the readers. Be careful. More times than not, the obscure (FILL IN THE BLANK) once said . . . lead doesn't work.

It's a good reminder that you're writing for readers . . . not about what interests you.

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## The lead-in paragraph and the quote

Give special attention to your lead-in paragraphs before you quote people. These can use up valuable space when you have a 450-word limit. If you're just recycling the quote by using different words to create an intro paragraph, you're wasting space.

Example: John Johnson is angry at the collection agency over the seizure of his car Monday and said he will challenge the action in court. The agency says Johnson owes \$10,000 in outstanding fines. "I'm really mad about this," Johnson said. "They had no business taking my car. I'm going to fight this in court." Word count: 54

Space is at a premium. Double check your lead-in paragraphs to quotes. Ask yourself: Am I progressing the story, or just repeating what's coming next? Don't over attribute in lead-in paragraphs. If it's a fact, let it stand alone. And then make your quotes do their own work.

Example: The collection agency seized John Johnson's car Monday over unpaid fines totaling \$10,000. "I'm really mad about this," Johnson said. "They had no business taking my car. I'm going to fight this in court." **Word count: 34**

## Don't downsize the importance of your newspaper

Over the years, I've witnessed this scene many times: A reporter, starting a phone interview, says: "Hi, I'm a reporter from the Anywhere Tribune. There's a story in today's edition of the Big City Star, I'm not sure if you've seen it. I'm doing a story for the Anywhere Tribune."

Unfortunately, this can be a common opening line for reporters in small markets. It's almost like insecurities force some reporters to justify to the public why he/she is doing a story by mentioning the Big City Star. "Hey, if I mention a real newspaper they'll think the story is important!" a reporter might think.

Remember, your newspaper is important. In fact, a small-market newspaper is arguably more important to its community than a big city paper. Your readers share a unique closeness with you. They seldom have local radio or TV news to fall back on. You're it for local news. Next time you're on the phone, forget the Big City Star. Make it clear: You're from the Anywhere Tribune and you're working on a story that's of interest to your community

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## **Don't forget the follow-up**

Getting scooped by your competition is one thing. Getting scooped because the competition followed up your story that you neglected to follow up (are you following this?) is a gaffe. Remember to read your stories the next day. Ask yourself the key questions:

What's still to be resolved?

What's the next step?

Have I missed anything?

Have I reported on how this affects people?

Take ownership: If you broke the story, then be sure to follow up the story. It's your duty to your readers.

'Follow-up file' – Keep a weekly file of your stories. Revisit them the following week. A few phone calls can reveal a follow-up story. Good reporters rarely leave their readers wondering, "Gee, whatever happened to. . ."

## **Don't be a thingamajig reporter**

Thing: An unspecified object or item (Oxford Dictionary)

Want to frustrate your readers? Tell them about things. Lots of things. Like that thing you did last weekend. Or that thing that drives you crazy. Or maybe it's a thing you've been thinking about doing for months.

Here's the thing: Unless you elaborate, nobody has a clue about the thing.

Have you ever stomped around your house or office yelling "Where's that thing I left over there?"

"What thing?" comes the response.

"The file folder on contact names," you reply.

"Oh, that. Yes, I saw it over by the photocopier," the other person answers.

Life is so much easier when we're clear not vague.

Remember the TV show *The Addams Family*? Remember Thing? Can't remember Thing? Well, Thing was a hand. The hand in the box.

"Oh yeah! Now I know what Thing is!"

The message is simple: Explain your things

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## Why certainly

Next time you do an interview try to remember to use one of the most effective words in the history of conversation. Why? (read on)

Kids are great at asking open-ended questions. They're great at forcing adults to say something that means something. And all it usually takes is one word: Why.

"Daddy, I want some ice cream!"

"Sorry son, you can't have any!"

"Why?"

"Because I said so!"

"Why?"

"Because you have to eat your vegetables first!"

"Why?"

Because they're good for you!"

"Why?"

"If you don't eat your vegetables you won't be getting all those good vitamins that will make you grow up big and strong like your Dad."

It's strange to admit it, but a five-year-old has taken command of the above conversation (interview) in pursuit of answers. And it has been done with one word in a follow-up question: Why.

OK, the process between the parent and child can be a bit painful, but eventually, little Johnny gets an answer with some substance. In your interviews as a reporter, you certainly don't want to use why so often that it annoys someone. Pick your moments and places.

Why is a word that is so basic – almost childlike – that it can often be overlooked by reporters? It's a one-word question that can produce 1,001 answers.

Nobody is suggesting you pepper your interviews with why, why, why, why and never ask an intelligent question. But see the value in why. It's not a stupid question. It's a brilliant word for getting more from your interviews. It's a brilliant word for follow-up questions and/or starting questions: Why would you say such a thing? Why should the public care? Why should the public be interested in this idea? Why is this happening? Etc.

Why is why so important in a journalists' toolbox of interview skills?

Because it works. That's why.

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## **Balanced reporting = credibility**

There are two sides to every story.

It's a cliché, yes, but it's a piece of wisdom that can be forgotten by reporters.

Years ago, I remember some young journalists questioning the need for more than one source in stories. I used every piece of ammunition I had: It's Journalism 101, there are two sides to every story, different viewpoints engage the readers. . . Etc.

In the end, the most powerful tool proved to be a challenge I issued to the reporters: If you feel so strongly that one-source journalism is acceptable, you're invited to host a workshop, *Why One-Source Stories Are Good Journalism*, at an upcoming journalism career development day at a university. Each reporter received the telephone number of the professor hosting the event. Not surprisingly, no reporters accepted the challenge. Fact is, we know multi-source reporting is essential. But sometimes one-source stories still get filed. Maybe it's the end result of our hectic days juggling multiple assignments. When starting your reporting, develop a list detailing the sources you need to contact to write a balanced story.

Your credibility as a reporter hinges on your efforts to produce balanced copy. Readers can't make informed decisions about a topic if they are not given both sides of a story. Remember, readers are skeptical about what they read, hence the cliché: Don't believe everything you read. Let's not add to that stereotype by limiting viewpoints in our stories. Today, getting second, third and fourth opinions is routine. For major home renovations, we get multiple estimates. People get second opinions from doctors. Whether we want a new roof, or knee surgery, we want the facts before we make a commitment. Readers want the same from reporters.

Journalists carry much responsibility with their reporting:

Unbalanced reporting can mislead

Unbalanced reporting can create undue fear

Unbalanced reporting can manipulate

Unbalanced reporting can harm your credibility

At work or in your personal life, what happened the last time you only got one side of a story? Did you make a decision and then regret not getting more information from another source?

You will only be informed if you seek to get informed. Do it for your readers. Do it for yourself. Do it because a good journalist never believes just one side of a story until he/she checks it out, gets other viewpoints, etc.

## Get to the source of attribution

Failure to attribute. It's a source of frustration in our industry.

Just recently, I had a fellow editor point out a feature produced by a journalist at another daily newspaper. The story contained passages and quotes that were verbatim from a press release. The bylined work contained no attribution. To the reader's eye, it was a feature written and reported by a journalist. To an editor's eye, it was a case of a journalist being unethical and attempting to fool readers that the work was written by him/her.

Was it caught by anyone? Probably not. Chances are the reporter slipped one past the editor. And readers got hoodwinked . . . although they'll never know it.

The fact that reporters are continuing to do this today is a worry. How many times does the issue have to make national headlines before journalists finally get the message about credibility?

As an editor, I still see a failure to attribute on occasion. Quotes from press releases are used, but never attributed to the press release. Quotes and content from wire stories are used verbatim, but not attributed. It's a serious issue.

In Canada in 2004, at least two reporters – one left his position, another was terminated – for failing to attribute parts of their work to other sources.

A major metro daily in the U.S. reported that an extensive review of a columnist's work found he sometimes used quotes from other news outlets without giving proper credit. After going over more than 600 of the writer's columns, the paper said the writer had used quotes from newspapers, TV programs or other publications without showing that he got the material elsewhere.

The most common issues I see relate to press releases and wire service stories. They represent some of the easiest traps for journalists. During a hectic day, that helpful quote in a press release or wire story can mean one less phone call. The problem comes when quotes or material are just plopped, unsourced, into a story. The editors will be none the wiser, some reporters will think.

Wrong. Editors do notice. And reporters will be quickly called on it.

The Orlando Sentinel's policy on attribution "forbids lifting verbatim paragraphs from a wire service story without attribution or a shirttail pointing out that wire services were used in compiling the report."

The policy also dictates that in the interest of accuracy and credibility, quotes of individuals taken from intermediate sources (other handouts, press releases, other stories) should be sourced.

The policy is much the same at the Lincoln Journal Star in Nebraska. Its policy states: "Material from other sources, such as press releases, literary works or other newspapers, must be clearly attributed in the body of the story. When we modify wire service material, we should change the byline only when we make significant changes – and even then we must credit the wire service in the story at the end."

It's not a game of trying to fool readers or slipping one past editors. It's about being credible.

# News Story Rubric

CATEGORY	5 Exemplary Writer	4 Competent Writer	3 Developing Writer	2 Underachieving Writer	1 Unsuccessful Writer
<b>News Value</b>	Explicitly states a problem being addressed. Contains at least four news elements.	Includes a problem. Contains at least three news elements.	May or may not address a problem. Contains at least two news elements.	Does not address a problem. Contains at least one news elements.	Addresses no problem; contains no news elements.
<b>Details</b>	Provides ample detail to allow reader to experience an event as though s/he were there. Uses "5 senses" as appropriate.	Provides enough detail to convey meaning but reader may feel detached from the event. "5 senses" used inadequately /inappropriately.	May or may not use sensory details. A "bare-bones" story. Tends toward vagueness.	Vague to the point that reader might not understand the core issues under discussion.	Writing is general and lacks any level of detail.
<b>Story Structure</b>	Begins with engaging lead of <25 words. Contains nut graph and quote at or near top of story. All graphs <35 words, with varied graph lengths.	Begins with engaging lead. Contains nut graph and quote at or near top of story. Some graphs may be more than 35 words. Graphs may not be varied in length, leading to a somewhat monotonous read.	May lack lead or nut graph. Paragraphs frequently longer than 35 words.	Lacks appropriate lead or nut graph. Paragraphs consistently longer than 35 words.	Lacks recognizable news story structure.
<b>Bias / Opinion</b>	Contains none of the writer's opinion. All information is directly attributed to a source.	Contains none of the writer's opinion. Most information is attributed to a source.	May imply writer's opinion. Reader may not know where writer obtained some information.	Writer's opinion evident. Attribution lacking in many instances.	Largely opinion; could be considered an editorial. Contains little or no attribution.
<b>Copy-editing</b>	Contains no errors of AP style, grammar or mechanics.	Contains a few errors of AP style, grammar or mechanics.	Contains several errors of AP style, grammar or mechanics.	Errors exist throughout the story, interfering with reader comprehension.	So many errors as to consistently interfere with reader comprehension.