

Writing For Media

Week 3

Organising and Developing a News Story

Inverted-Pyramid Style

- When reporters cover news, they are always thinking of the stories they must write.
- They usually write the lead first, often composing it mentally while interviewing sources or checking records.
- When they write the story, they must present the news in a clear style that flows from para to para.
- The lead should interest readers; the body, or middle, of the story should hold them to the conclusion.
- After the lead—that is, from the second or third para to the final word—an inverted-pyramid story is structured to present the news in order of descending importance.

- The most important of the W's and H are put into the lead.
- The second most important are in the second para, the third most important in the third para and so on.
- Each para further explains or complements the paras before it.
- Writers do not conclude news stories by saying "the end" or by inserting an editorial comment to wrap things up. They simply quit writing after they have reported all the pertinent information they can get into the allocated space.

- They often conclude a story with a direct quotation, letting a source talk directly to readers.
- The quotation should tie readers emotionally to the story, reminding them that the writing has ended but that the story and that the people involved in it have not.
- The final paras can also report additional facts.

Organising an Inverted Pyramid: Guidelines to Follow

- **Write a terse lead:** Write a brief lead para of no more than 35 words that gives the major news of the story. Write a second para providing major points of the news event that would not fit into the opening para.
- **Provide background:** Use the third or another early para, and more paras if necessary, to provide **background**, which explains things for readers.
- **Present news in order of descending order:** Continue reporting news of the story using paras in order of descending importance. Inverted pyramids are seldom constructed chronologically. When reporters want to write a chronology, they often use the 'hourglass' method.

- ***Use quotations early and throughout.*** A good time to introduce direct quotations is after the audience has been given the major news and background info. Sprinkle quotations throughout the story instead of stringing them together. Quotations are useful because they let people in the news communicate directly to the audience.
- ***Use transitions:*** A paraphrase, a background para, or even a direct quotation can be used as transition to move readers smoothly from one para to another. Transitions alerts an audience that a shift or change is coming up. Transitions can be developed in several ways:
 - Numerically – first, second, third, etc.
 - By time – at 3 p.m., by noon, three hours later, etc.
 - Geographically – in Putrajaya, outside the home, etc.
 - With words – also, but, once, meanwhile, etc.

- ***Do not editorialise:*** Reporters are eyewitnesses to news. Their job is to tell audience what they saw and what other people said. They should not include their own personal opinions.
- ***Avoid “the end.”:*** Continue reporting news until the end. This helps readers know that even though the writing has stopped, the story has not. An effective way to end a news story is with a direct quotation.

Hourglass Style

- **Hourglass style** is a style of writing in which the major news of a story is reported in the first few paragraphs and then a transitional paragraph (also called a *turn*) introduces a chronology of the events of the story.
- This style is often used by reporters covering trials or police and fire news.
- Transitional paras include: *Police gave the following account of the accident, the victim told the jury what happened and Paul said that he was attacked shortly after he left work.*
- After the turn, the rest of the details of the story are told in chronological order.

Advantages of Hourglass Style

- The important news is presented high in the story.
- The writer can take advantage of narrative.
- The most important info is repeated in the narrative so that readers have a chance to absorb it.
- Unlike the top-heavy inverted pyramid, the hourglass has a balanced structure.
- It keeps readers in the story and leads up to a real conclusion.
- It discourages editors from slashing from the bottom.

When to use the hourglass style

- An hourglass cannot be used in every news story.
- It would be impractical, for example, for a personality profile, a weather story, an obituary or an advance on a holiday celebration.
- But in a story that has a succession of events, such as a trial, a meeting or a police or fire story, hourglass style can be used effectively.

Circle Style

- Another popular style, especially for feature stories, is what writers call “writing in a circle” or “coming full circle”.
- In this form, a writer begins with a scene built around an event or key source.
- Descriptive writing draws readers into the story.

Advantages of Circle Style

- Writing in a circle is an effective alternative to the inverted pyramid because it helps simplify a complex story for readers and make it human.
- Other advantages:
- The writer can use narrative and descriptive writing.
- Readers can attach to a key source and feel as though the story is about the source as well as a broader topic.
- The style is not top-heavy like an inverted pyramid.
- The story flows better and keeps the readers involved.
- The circle is more effective storytelling and can keep readers interested until the end.
- Editors cannot slash the story from the bottom.