

NEWS WRITING

3



When you write stories, don't be afraid to start over from scratch if you feel the story is not necessarily shaping up the way you want. I have found it incredibly valuable when writing stories that it is worthwhile to start over sometimes. In the wire world, we update constantly and I find it valuable at times to just start from scratch.

Jeremy Pelofsky, Correspondent, Reuters



LEARNING OBJECTIVES After completing this chapter you will be able to:

- develop a strong news story idea
- identify the differences in straight news and feature lead styles
- research, interview and write a news story
- employ the variety of writing elements used in news writing
- understand how to organize a news story so that it flows
- explore online media use for news stories.

Scholastic Journalism, Twelfth Edition. C. Dow Tate and Sherri A. Taylor.
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NEWS WRITING

To upgrade the school's image, your new superintendent decides that students will be required to wear uniforms on campus. Since the story has many of the news value components discussed in Chapter 1 – a broad audience, timeliness, proximity and conflict – you decide that it's clearly worth covering.

The high school publication that decides to publish a **news story** on this new uniform policy will need to create an objective report emphasizing the timely impact of the story for its readers. However, there's a good chance that with a story such as this, the readers may have heard about the change on their own.

Before covering an issue such as this, a student reporter will need to address the following questions: What will be new information for the audience? What does the audience need and want to know? The answer will partly depend upon how the reporter is delivering the information and how quickly.

For a student newspaper that publishes every six weeks, covering the creation and details of a month-old policy can be frustrating. By the time the “news” about the uniforms comes out, students may already be wearing the required collared shirts and khaki pants or skirts. Others may have faced suspension over the issue and some may be resisting the policy with rolled up shirtsleeves or other modifications of the mandated uniform.

The best student reporters will investigate these and other developments, to look for the timeliest angle possible. News writing, especially in the case of breaking news, is about getting readers the most current information that genuinely impacts them. This is the information that will usually be presented in the opening paragraphs of the news story.

In recent years, student newspapers have gained access to a broader range of media to deliver information to their audiences. News websites allow coverage to begin as soon as a newsworthy event occurs, such as the day the superintendent introduces the uniform policy. An enterprising student reporter may send out this basic information to readers via the newspaper's Twitter feed. He may go on to write an online story that includes the basic facts administrators provided in an interview. Such timely reporting gives readers a clear understanding of the issue from the start, rather than letting them rely on the distortions and exaggerations of rumors or lunchroom gossip.

Many good reporters will cover such stories via electronic means on the day of the policy announcement – or, even better, when the uniform policy is still being discussed in departmental meetings or school board retreats. However, the reporter who approaches such a story a month later still has many options for excellent coverage. This reporter should research the latest developments and new information on the uniform policy. Are parents protesting the change because of the high costs of clothes that meet the dress code? Maybe some are even scheduled

“ WORDS of WISDOM

I think self-editing is even more important in the online world. It's a weird contradiction to have all the space in the world knowing that readers will only read so much online. These days, I try to keep my articles to about 400 to 500 words. After a few hundred words, readers tend to get distracted. There are so many different news sources that readers have many articles to sort through.

But I will do 900 words on an interesting news feature. I don't have a fear of the longer stories because many readers, when I first began writing for an online publication, told me that they liked my articles because they were real articles in length and content.

Jeff Mays, Senior Reporter/Producer for DNAinfo.com



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SILVER CHIPS ONLINE

NSPA Pacemaker Winner (2004-06), Marylander Award Winner (2007-09)

Partly Cloudy

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Silver Chips Online > Print
Tags: print

Oct. 23, 2001

Fire alarm shortens seventh period

by Kevin Chang, Page Editor

A fire alarm sounded at the end of 5B lunch today, sending students to Blazer stadium for over twenty minutes.

The unplanned alarm sounded at 12:27, just before the end of period 5B. Students were allowed back into the building at 12:48, 21 minutes later.

During this year's first and only planned fire drill, on October 11, administrators discovered that there was not enough room for all classes to be in the stands. Many students who were unable to find room in the bleachers stood by the fence separating the field from the stands or in clusters by the bleacher stairs.

The placement of classes was revised after that drill, but overcrowding remained a problem. According to Mark Curran, chairman of Blair's Crisis Planning Committee, every room assignment was modified after the earlier drill. "New instructions have been printed and are now in the process of being posted," he said, adding that all rooms should have signs by Monday, October 29.

In the new plan, Curran said, "every classroom has a row and a section to themselves." The revised plans also move PE classes to the track instead of the stadium for fire drills. "At lunch and between classes, we're just getting everybody in the stadium." Students in other rooms, such as offices and workrooms, are sent to the center of the field in the new plan.

After students were allowed to re-enter the building, the administration made an announcement that a faulty sensor in the elevator shaft was to blame for the alarm and that students should go to seventh period. Curran said that the alarm "just went off."

Curran said that today's drill was run "absolutely" better than the October 11 drill. During the that drill, he said, seven minutes and ten seconds passed before all students were inside the stadium, a figure which was reduced to six minutes and forty-five seconds for today's drill.

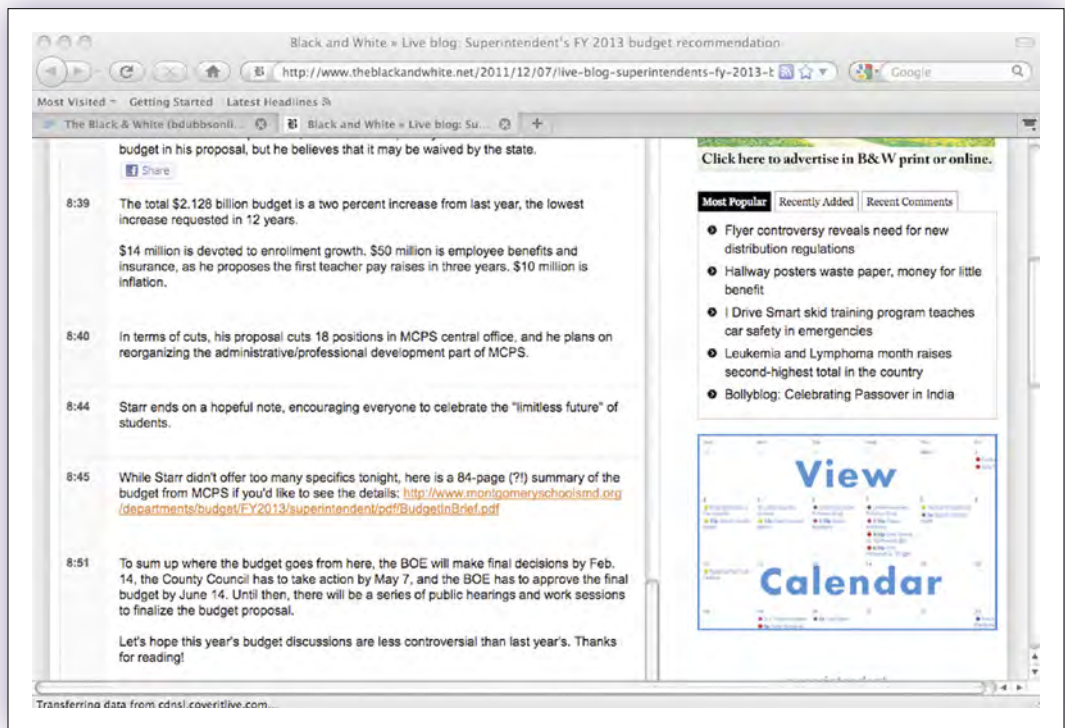
During unplanned fire drills, one fire truck and one EMT vehicle are dispatched to the school. The first firefighter on the scene accompanied by an administrator to the location of the alarm, where he conducts tests on the area. The firefighter uses a specialized gas meter to check levels of ozone, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and natural gas, among other substances. If and when the building is deemed safe, students are allowed to re-enter the building. There is a \$500 fine for intentionally causing a false fire alarm.

FIGURE 3.1 "Fire alarm shortens seventh period," by Kevin Chang. *Silver Chips Online*, Montgomery Blair High School, Silver Spring, Md, Oct. 23, 2011. Reprinted with permission of *Silver Chips Online*.

The *Silver Chips Online* story is an excellent example of how websites can be the perfect vehicle for breaking news. A brief story the afternoon after a fire alarm sounds can clarify misinformation spread by rumor. The story used an interview with a valid source, the assistant principal, to cover the basic questions about the cause and origin of the fire, as well as the extent of the damage.

FIGURE 3.2 Lucy Chen, theblackandwhite.net, Walt Whitman High School, Bethesda, Md. Reprinted with kind permission.

Black and White demonstrates how high schools have begun covering news events live. Through the technological advances of liveblogging and livestreaming, high school news websites have given their readers and viewers timely information on events of the utmost importance. In the *Black and White* liveblog, high school reporters continually posted the latest information from a budget meeting where major cuts were expected.



to speak during next week's board meeting. What about the local businesses that are now selling school uniforms downtown? How much are businesses benefiting? Are more jobs available for students? How many students have been put into in-school suspension for violating the new dress code? Why and how have they violated the policy?

For a news-feature angle on the story (see Chapter 5), a reporter should look at the impact of the new uniform policy. Teachers may believe the halls are quieter because students dress more formally. Some parents may have had to cut back on other expenses to cover the costs of the uniforms, especially if they have multiple children at the school.

As reporters look for the most relevant angle to cover, they should always consider the story's planned date of publication.

THE NEWS LEAD

Once the reporter determines the most appropriate angle for the school uniforms story, he will need to identify sources, write questions and conduct the research and interviews (see Chapter 2). From the collected material, the reporter then selects the most important information to convey to the reader. This is usually presented in the **lead** – the opening paragraph or paragraphs of the story – which should be written to grab the reader's attention. The **straight news lead** clearly and directly presents the reader with the story's most important news in the story. The straight news lead is often used in a breaking news story as part of the **inverted pyramid** structure, in which the most important information comes at the top of the story while the rest of the facts and details are organized in descending order of importance (see Figure 3.3).

In the straight news lead, the writer's task is to evaluate which of the 5 W's and H (*Who, What, Where, When, Why* and *How*) are most important to the reader and work those into a single sentence, or sometimes two. The writer should open the lead with the **feature fact** or the most interesting and important information of the story. However, detailing all 5 W's and H will often make for a cumbersome or excessively long first sentence. Those basic journalistic questions not answered in the first sentence should be addressed as quickly as possible in the story's opening paragraph or paragraphs.

FIGURE 3.3 Inverted pyramid graphic.

In the following lead, the writer decided to emphasize the *What* as her lead's feature fact:

Tuition for the 2012–2013 school year will rise by 3.3 percent to \$31,350, the smallest percentage increase in 25 years, Chief Financial Officer Rob Levin said.

Chairman of the Board of Trustees Christine Hazy (Steven '00, Charissa '03, Trenton '05, Courtney '11) announced this number in a letter on the Parents' Portal that opened re-enrollment in February.

Rebecca Nussbaum, The Chronicle, Harvard-Westlake School, Studio City, Calif.

The writer could have started the lead with the *Who* as in, "Chief Financial Officer Rob Levin announced a 3.3 percent tuition increase ..." However, the fact that there is a tuition increase coming is more important to the student body than who said so.

In the following lead, can you explain why the writer chose to make the *Who* the most important aspect of the story?

Media Academy Principal Benjamin Schmookler has cut his own position due to the budget crisis and says his day-to-day duties will be turned over to fourth-year teacher Sarah Mazzotta on July 1.

Alia Furnes and Kim Mejia-Cuellar; Green and Gold, Media College Preparatory High School, Oakland, Calif.

In this case, the *Who*, the principal, comes first, because he is cutting back his own position – a relatively unusual move for an administrator facing a budget crisis.

Leads can also begin with the *How* and *Why* of a story. (Good reporters more rarely lead with the *When* and *Where* because those aspects are typically less important than the answers to the other basic questions.) In the following example, the writer leads with this online story's *Why* element:

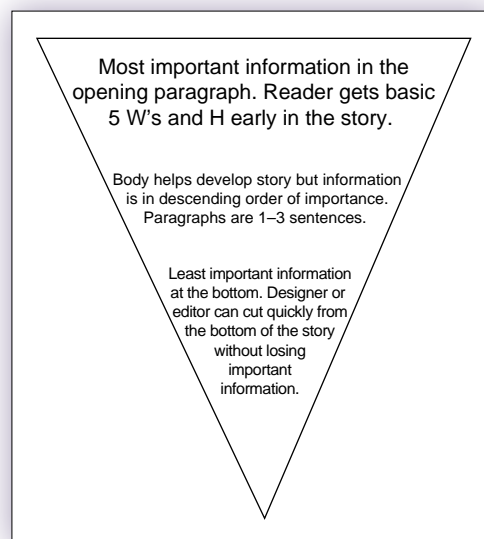
In a first step toward a one-to-one computer model, wherein students will bring or be provided with a personal computing device to use at school, iPads are being distributed to faculty and staff as soon as practicable, Head of School Jeanne Huybrechts said in an email to the faculty Monday.

"We are at a crossroads, and the path that leads to a one-to-one computer model seems the right one to take," Huybrechts said.

This announcement follows the release of the iPad 3 last Wednesday.

Lara Sokoloff, Chronicle Online, Harvard-Westlake School, Studio City, Calif.

While the other key questions are answered within the opening paragraph, the reporter understands the excitement of the *Why* – the iPad distribution as a step toward providing a computing device for each student. The writer then uses the principal's statement of that goal as the feature fact. Good writers understand that the start of the sentence will get the most reader attention and should therefore showcase the most relevant or exciting information.



Test your knowledge

What's the most important consideration when selecting the angle of a news story?

ALTERNATIVE NEWS LEAD APPROACHES

News leads don't have to be a straight presentation of the facts, especially when a different approach is more likely to catch a reader's interest. The traditional approach to news leads involves identifying and directly stating the 5 W's and H of the story. This section will offer different ways to think about the news lead, often using fascinating details that will be most intriguing to you and the reader.

Very early admission benefits 13 seniors

By Natalia Arguello-Inglis

A COLLEGE offered admissions interviews to seniors this month and admitted thirteen seniors on-the-spot, the first time on-the-spot college admissions have occurred at Lowell.

The Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences decided to offer this opportunity for the first time to students at the school after being impressed by Lowell graduates who attended in the past, according to counselor Jeffrey Yang.

According to Yang, the college will most likely return to Lowell to hold on-the-spot admissions interviews in the future. Lowell is the first school on the West coast that MCPHS has chosen to make on-the-spot admissions available to

The opportunity was announced both on SchoolLoop and in the senior bulletin, and students were required to sign up with Yang for an interview. Students were also asked to bring a copy of their personal statement, common application, transcript and standardized test scores.

Students were informed of their admissions and scholarships decisions immediately after the interview and all thirteen of the Lowell students who applied were admitted, according to Yang. Yang began discussing the possibility of holding on-the-spot admissions interviews three years ago with MCPHS associate director of admissions Alan Beaudoin.

This is the first time on-the-spot college admissions have ever been made available to Lowell

students, Yang said.

Many students find that on-the-spot admissions gives them an advantage over those who apply regularly. "For me it was more beneficial just because I consider myself a better interviewee, so I get an advantage because I can actually talk to the admissions people instead of just being another number in the thousands of applicants," said senior Nicole Gee, who was accepted to MCPHS after her interview with Beaudoin on Oct. 18.

Getting ahead in the race for college admissions allowed the accepted seniors increased their peace of mind. "It feels good to be accepted to one college already, because now I know I at least have that," Gee said.

A VERSION OF THIS STORY FIRST APPEARED ON WWW.THELOWELL.ORG

FIGURE 3.4 *The Lowell*, Lowell High School, Cardinal Edition, Vol. 216, No. 3, April 11, 2011., www.thelowell.org. "Very early admission benefits 13 seniors," by Natalia Arguello-Inglis. Reproduced by permission of Sharn Matusek.

To make this a strong straight news lead, the writer includes the specific number of on-the-spot admissions and explains the oddity of such recruiting in the opening sentence. The reporter then answers the next-most important question: why the administration has started instantly admitting Lowell students. News stories written in the inverted pyramid structure give the reader the most important and interesting information early in the story with the least important information later. Notice how the last paragraph isn't an editorialized summary, but an objectively reported quote about a non-essential but interesting reaction to the on-the-spot admissions.

Here is an example of an alternative news lead that makes good use of striking details:

Family members, strangers, oddly-shaped bell peppers and cats are among the subject matter of the senior photography show, "The Best of Three," which began on Monday.

Ingrid Chang, The Chronicle, Harvard-Westlake School, Studio City, Calif.

The writer could have simply included the exhibit's title and viewing schedule, but instead included the intriguing mix of subject matter in the show, to get readers' attention and spark their interest.

Here is a different example of an alternative approach to a news lead:

With a goal to raise \$3,000 for breast cancer research, the volleyball team will host its second Volley for the Cure game Oct. 13 again Marion Harding.

Lexi Perrault, Blue & Gold, Findlay High School, Findlay, Ohio

The inclusion of the financial goal for the fundraiser makes this lead stronger. Reporters who break down the 5 W's and H to write their leads should also ask themselves, what makes this story interesting?

Another alternative approach news writers should take for leads is to ask: How does this story really impact the readers?

Starting this semester, seniors may take online courses to fulfill certain graduation requirements.

Caitriona Smyth, The Lowell, Lowell High School, San Francisco, Calif.

The writer could have used a longer lead with facts about the new Cyber High program that is now open to all seniors after last year's pilot program. Instead, the writer decided to answer the question: How are my readers affected by this program?

Quick Exercise

Explain what important questions are not answered in the following straight news leads.

- 1 Some boys were arrested following Friday night's soccer game.
- 2 The state passed tougher teen driving laws.
- 3 A new fundraising effort to raise more than \$5,000 will begin Monday.

14 In-Depth

Prop 1 & 2: In the eyes of...

Pools and kindergarten classrooms are all on the line Nov. 2 as Proposition 1 and 2 wait to be passed for the Kirkwood School District. Advocates for and against the two bond issues have come in the form of high school swimmers, middle school science teachers and concerned taxpayers. In the middle of thousands of arguments and yard signs expressing resident's feelings about Prop. 1 and 2, *The Kirkwood Call* tried to make sense of it all. We tried to read beyond the numbers and financial information of the issue and focus on the most important outcome of the bonds: people. Here are their stories.

...an NKMS science teacher

With clustered bumper stickers, crowded tables and not a single gas jet to be found, Ruth Baldwin cannot stand her classroom.

Joe Weber
in-depth editor

"Space is an issue," Baldwin said, surveying her room. Baldwin, a science teacher at North Kirkwood Middle School, has taught for 20 years in the school's science facilities. Every day she teaches eighth graders about the complexities of the universe while dealing with the complexities of an out-of-date science classroom.

"This classroom was basic in 1957," Baldwin said. "In 20 years, it has gone below basic."

Built-in gas jets used to show students the effects of heat expansion, but now cheap candles do the job. An everyday faucet stands where lab sinks once gave students handling science equipment a safe place to dispose of scientific material. After decades of use and an un-pluggable leak, the essential piece of equipment had to go. When two new computers and a giant orange and white ActivBoard were placed in the room, Baldwin could no longer use the electrical outlets for turning on hotplates.

"If you don't have the space and you don't have the time, you can't do as much," Baldwin said. "It really hampers what we think of as science."

For a teacher as dedicated and enthusiastic as Baldwin, hampered science is not on the agenda. If passed, Proposition 1 will offer new renovations and changes to the middle school science rooms that would allow teachers like Baldwin to teach in up-to-date facilities with the current science-education standards. Instead of creating heating devices out of baby food jars, sand and candles, middle school students would simply turn a knob and have access to essential tools for science education.

Pulling dirty bins and cramped beakers out of an old supply closet, Baldwin can only laugh in frustration.

"In the last 20 years we've lost gas, we've lost electric, we've lost the lab sink. And as great as technology is, that takes up space in a classroom that's already too small."

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Meredith Boachain photographer

Ruth Baldwin, NKMS science teacher, helps eighth grade students during her seventh hour class. Baldwin has taught in Kirkwood for 20 years.



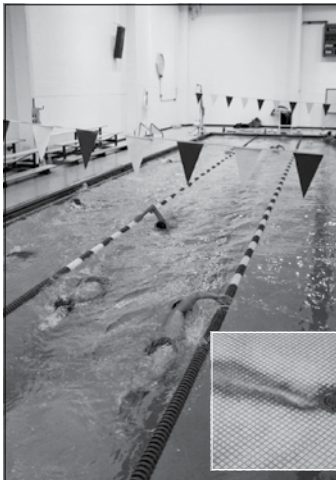
Photo courtesy of Ruth Baldwin

A rusted sink pipe shown above led to the recent flooding of a NKMS science classroom.



Meredith Boachain photographer

New technology barely squeezes into the front of Ruth Baldwin's room. Her original demonstration table was put on wheels to make room for an ActivBoard.



Dylan Brady photographer

Kirkwood boys' swim team practices at Meramec Community College in Kirkwood. For many, the pool's chemicals are infamous for causing irritation in the swimmers' eyes and lungs.

...the swim team

If Proposition 2 passes in November, it will provide an indoor swimming pool for physical education classes, public swimming and school and club swim teams. Currently, KHS water polo and swim teams conduct their practices at the Meramec pool, built in 1969, which has athletes saying they swim in disgust.

Annie Travis
features editor

"Right now we have to share the pool with old people who do water yoga classes," Zach Hawkins, senior and water polo player, said. "[The classes] leave the pool and deck really dirty. At practice last year there was a huge hairball at the bottom of the pool that we needed to use a net to fish out."

Hawkins said the pool deck is sweltering and chemicals put into the pool are so strong swimmers' eyes burn and they cannot breathe. Hawkins even reports athletes with asthma have had to sit out of practice because of attacks. David

Niemann, junior and member of boys' swim team, said a teammate vomited during practice because of the harshness of the chemicals.

"The fumes become so pungent it is necessary to take 15-minute breaks during practice to go outside and drink water and breathe the fresh air," Billy Fries, junior and former boys' swim team member, said.

Fries said the addition of an aquatic center at KHS would give the swim teams an opportunity to hold invitations and host home meets without leaving the school. Having a pool on campus would also prevent parents from having to drop off younger students at practice, making transportation easier.

Hawkins hopes for better maintenance and communication about scheduling changes with the addition of an aquatic center at KHS. Niemann simply wants a pool that is not more than twice his age and lacks a leaking roof.

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The fumes become so pungent it is necessary to take 15-minute breaks during practice...

Billy Fries, junior

FIGURE 3.5 *The Kirkwood Call*, Kirkwood High School, Kirkwood, Mo. Reproduced by permission of Mitch Eden.

The Kirkwood Call addresses an upcoming school bond referendum by profiling the different people and organizations impacted by the proposed bond. News websites can cover area, state and national issues by localizing them for the student audience. An important role of news writing in school publications is to help students understand issues beyond the school walls that impact their lives.

FIGURE 3.5 (continued)

October 27, 2010 15

...a retired taxpayer

Nancy Ellis has lived, enjoyed and paid taxes in Kirkwood for 34 years. Coming from a family of educators, she cares deeply about the well-being of students and faculty in the Kirkwood School District. Propositions 1 and 2, however, make her feel uneasy. "If money was unlimited, we would all want it," Ellis said, "but money is not unlimited."

As a retired teacher and IBM employee, Ellis helped create the Kirkwood Citizens for Fiscal Responsibility (KCFR), a group opposed specifically to the upcoming bond proposals on the upcoming Nov. 2 ballot. Worried that recent tax raises for Kirkwood residents have become too high, Ellis believes KSD must start judging changes to schools on a need versus want basis.

"They have quality education, and I'm thrilled with that," Ellis said, "but there's quality education, then there's fluff."

Jim Miller, a 30-year Des Peres resident and fellow KCFR member, recently completed a five-year analysis on his own tax payments to KSD.

"In those five years, my taxes to the Kirkwood School District increased 48 percent," Miller said. "I only want to invest in the things I feel are absolute needs."

Both Miller and Ellis have spent most of the last three months doing extensive research on Kirkwood tax raises, listing their findings on www.kcfr.com,

a website dedicated to opposition of the bond issues. According to Miller, another bond proposal reflects the district's lack of recognition to the needs of taxpayers not directly affected by the school improvements.

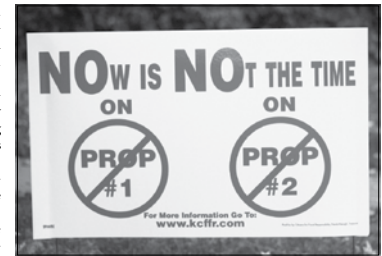
Though Miller wants the best for the students and faculty, he has no children or family who attend the schools. After willingly agreeing to significant tax raises over the years, he sees another bond initiative as the tipping point.

"The school board, in my mind, should balance the needs of the student, the staff and the taxpayers. We all have needs," Miller said. "I have lost confidence and my trust in the school board in being able to weigh and balance those needs."

With such a diverse range of financial stability of Kirkwood residents, Miller and Ellis worry most about citizens who love living in Kirkwood, but struggle to keep up with tax increases.

"You look around Kirkwood and you see these beautiful homes, but you also see little bitty houses," Ellis said. "Those people are very loyal Kirkwood citizens. They need to have some consideration when it comes to spending their money."

For the hours of number-crunching, attending school district meetings and sign-giving KCFR has undergone throughout the stressful months before election day, Miller and Ellis still smile and laugh



Maggie McWay photographer

when reflecting on their work. Both believe the only way to achieving their goal is to keep personal anger and argument out of the debate and simply stick to the facts. In a community as close-knit as Kirkwood, disagreements can only leave hard feelings for so long.

"I have a neighbor down the street, she's got a sign that says vote for Proposition 1 and 2," Miller said. "I have a sign in my yard that says don't vote for Proposition 1 and 2. We are still friends."

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...a KHS senior

Sarah Schwegel, senior, has spinal muscular atrophy type 2, forcing her to travel by wheelchair. Proposition 2 would affect her directly, as it includes plans to make Lyons Stadium more handicapped-accessible.

Although Schwegel believes KHS is fairly handicapped-accessible, with the exception of the power doors malfunctioning and classes being on the second floor, Lyons Stadium is not. Currently, simply getting into the stadium is a hassle.

"I have to go around to the visitor's entrance, and that sidewalk is still not the best, and I have to [go] all the way around to the home side," Schwegel said. "Since it's so crowded around the bleachers, I have to sit on the track. There are no seats accessible to us on the bleachers except for at the top."

Schwegel feels the stadium's accessibility should be improved, regardless of the proposition passing. "It's not fair if the proposition doesn't pass that the field won't be accessible," Schwegel said. "There's going to be a lot of kids with disabilities coming up within the next few years, and it's not fair to us. We should be able to sit in the bleachers like everybody else."

Maggie Hallam
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Maggie McWay photographer



Photo courtesy of Johnny Frohlichstein

Buzz Gerstung, works on painting lines on the upper grass athletic fields for the field hockey game that day.

...a KHS field technician

Though the possibility of turf on the upper athletic fields have soccer and field hockey players pushing for a "yes" vote on Proposition 2, new fields would also affect faculty members who work on all KHS fields, including Bill "Buzz" Gerstung, athletic field technician. Before any team can get into the game, Gerstung is there preparing. As far as the difficulty of maintaining a grass field versus turf, Gerstung sees the two as different types of maintenance.

"[Working on the turf] is more labor-intensive right now," Gerstung said. "You can't let anything sit on there. It all has to be cleaned off."

The duty of constantly painting new out-of-bounds lines and growing new grass would no longer be an issue, but tedious jobs such as completely clearing off the turf of any foreign substances adds a new responsibility. Ideas of always-green turf fields may excite most KHS athletes, yet Gerstung has his own preferences.

"Personally, I'm a grass guy," Gerstung said.

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The first 100 days of Victoria Swartz

New principal addresses school's problems

By Michaela Marincic

When a president takes office, the first 100 days of their term is usually a crucial time to show the nation what changes they will bring with them.

But while Principal Victoria Swartz may not be moving into the White House, she has already started some new programs and faces important school issues to solve.

So today, on her 104th day as principal, we look back at her accomplishments, policies and plans for the future.

Students in need

Problem: Home issues such as unemployment and bad family relationships affect students' performance in school.

Solution: Swartz brought social service organizations together to discuss possible options such as offering counseling or ways to attain food and clothing.

Staff members, students and parents met with groups such as the Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation and Hancock County Family First for a round table on Jan. 14.

Reaction: We were all collaborating, working for the greater good of the students," Freshman Principal Janice

Fanuto said. "Without Mrs. Swartz pulling this together, there are resources that we now have that we would not have had otherwise."

Survey*: On a scale of one to five (one being the lowest, five the highest) students rank Swartz's effort to help students in need, on average, a 2.25. Teachers give her a 2.5.

Thursday mornings

Problem: Some teachers complained about students talking in the hall during Thursday morning teacher collaboration, forcing principals to supervise the hallways.

Solution: She decided students must stay in the cafeteria until 7:30 a.m. Thursdays.

To make the cafeteria more inviting in the mornings, Swartz and Director of Food Services Paulette Hartman have been working to add breakfast drink dispensers such as cappuccino or smoothie machines.

"My hope is that next year we are able to provide students with a nice breakfast area in the morning so that students feel free to congregate there," Swartz said.

Reaction: "It's a school building, and if you are going to invite kids to be here at a certain time, you should allow them to occupy the school," science teacher Tim Opp said. "Why

invite them to school if you are not going to let them in?"

Survey*: 80 percent of teachers agree with how Swartz handled Thursday mornings, whereas 82 percent of students do not.

Increase attendance

Problem: Students with unexcused absences miss class time, which can negatively impact grades.

Solution: Swartz asked assistant principals to identify students who had 20 or more unexcused absences last year and put them on medical letter at the start of this school year. This requires them to have a doctor's note for all absences due to illness.

If these students had fewer than three unexcused absences by second semester, they were taken off medical letter.

Attendance improved about 1.5 percent from last year, although hindered by the H1N1 outbreak, according to Swartz.

Reaction: "I can see how the medical letter can be used to prevent truancy, and that's great," sophomore Karl Payne said. "But for me, who was actually ill and willing to accept the fact that I would have a large workload to catch up on, it's insulting and makes me feel like I'm unappreciated."

Survey*: 88 percent of students and 80 percent of teachers do not notice a decrease in student absences.

Principal visibility

Problem: Principals did not spend enough time getting to know students, observing classrooms and monitoring safety.

Solution: Swartz advocates "coaching days" for principals, herself included. On these days they are not supposed to be sitting in on classes or talking to students.

Swartz also decided she and the assistant principals should go to soccer games, which they typically had not attended in the past.

Reaction: "Students don't know who she is, so it comes off as if she doesn't care," junior Liza Schumacher said. "I know she does from working with her through Student Council, but she doesn't come around to classrooms enough."

Survey*: 80 percent of students and 100 percent of teachers said they had not seen principals in the hallways and classrooms.

*Random survey of 100 students and 25 teachers

Swartz's to-do list

- Set up co-teaching for mentally handicapped students.
- Provide after school OGT study sessions
- Introduce new technology to help engage students in the classroom
- Students think Swartz needs to be more available
- Teachers want Swartz to work on discipline

FIGURE 3.6 "The First 100 Days of Victoria Swartz," by Michaela Marincic, *Blue & Gold*, Findlay High School, Findlay, Ohio. Reprinted with permission.

Blue & Gold takes a packaged approach to this news story, following up on the new principal's programs to address school issues. Many publications typically cover only the arrival of a new principal. Follow-up stories provide important answers to questions that the first story didn't address. *Blue & Gold* achieves a balanced assessment through quotes from the principal, assistant administrators and students, along with survey responses on the principal's first 100 days.

FEATURE LEADS

While the emergence of high school news websites provides a new venue for straight news leads, the feature lead is still an essential tool in high school publications, especially those that publish only monthly or bi-monthly. The feature lead generally comes in the form of an intriguing statement, a contrast, a description or an anecdote. The feature lead will frequently offer the reader a personal or narrative presentation of the news. However, when the news writer chooses to use a feature lead, the **news peg** or that which is new, changed or different about the topic, should immediately follow the lead in a **"nut," "focus" or "wrap" paragraph**.

The following feature lead categories represent only a few of the lead types that educators and journalists teach and use. The reality is that feature leads can take many forms as long as they fit the tone of the story, are free of clichés and are driven by real reporting and facts – avoiding anything that's fictionalized or editorialized. The following examples of feature leads are instead offered to inspire a range of creative approaches to beginning a news story.

Contrast lead

Homosexuality was originally listed in the World Health Organization's compilation of diseases and disorders until 1992. Prior to the 19th century, death was a common penalty for homosexuals. By the 1950s, gay rights in America had improved, but not to the point of equality. Only 60 years later, junior Christopher Fiscus, who is openly homosexual, said he can walk through the halls of CHS without encountering a single instance of intolerance.

WWW

WEBLINK Check out

www.journaliststoolbox.org

This website provides a wealth of links for journalists on everything from expert sources to mobile resources to urban legends.

Generating news story ideas

As discussed in Chapter 1, a good beat system should help generate news story ideas. However, if your paper is still in search of story ideas, the following list might help lead you to important and interesting news stories taking place at your school:

- ↓ School policy changes
- ↓ New club activities
- ↓ Student council activities
- ↓ Student contests and honors
- ↓ Generational changes (comparing current activities to those reported in the previous decade's newspapers and yearbooks)
- ↓ Class projects
- ↓ Fundraising efforts
- ↓ State and national academic testing trends and changes
- ↓ New local, state and national laws relevant to teenagers
- ↓ Local business growth
- ↓ Driving law changes
- ↓ Other changes afoot in your school or local community.

Uproar

by the **732** **148** **75**
numbers Total applications submitted to colleges by this month's deadline Different colleges and universities sought by this year's seniors Number of seniors who applied to at least one school during early admission

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR
 Senior Felos Group member **Joe Bush** speaks to Middle School chapel. Bush spoke Jan. 24 during the second chapel in a series of presentations led by the Tolos Group focusing on leadership and ethics.

Math team succeeds in area competition
 Sixteen Upper School students participated in the ninth annual Metroplex Math Competition Jan. 21. Led by co-captains **Jason Altschuler** and **James Rowan**, the team earned a total of 22 top-eight finishes, including sweeps of the top three in the Geometry and Algebra II categories. Rowan and Altschuler additionally took first and second in calculus. The competition, initially started by St. Mark's, was held at Parish Episcopal School this year.

Coat drive comes to a close
 The eighth grade Community Service board, assisted by Upper School Co-chairmen **Dylan Clark**, **Andrew Goodman** and **George Law**, ran the Coat Drive from Jan 9-13. Three hundred coats were collected and sent to five charities: Austin Street, David's Place, Gooch Elementary, Jubilee Center and North Dallas Share Ministries.

Eighth grader wins MS Spelling Bee
 Eighth grader **Brent Weisberg** won the Middle School Spelling Bee that was held Jan 10. Weisberg will now advance to the next round, the Dallas County Private School Bee to be held Feb. 7 at UTD. Contestants consisted of the winners of humanities class winners, grades fourth through eighth. If Weisberg cannot attend the next round, alternate **Zak Houillon** will take his place.

Storytelling scholar to visit school
 Willard E. Walker, Jr. '84 Visiting Scholar **Dr. David Gonzalez** will come to 10600 Preston Road Feb. 28-29. Gonzalez, a storyteller, musician and public speaker, will speak during Middle School assembly and advanced Spanish classes. He will also speak to Lower School students and the Spanish and DADVO Clubs. The Caduceus Club has also arranged for guest speaker **Dr. Stan Goldman** to speak about testicular cancer during Thursday's Upper School Assembly.

FIGURE 3.7 *ReMarker*, St. Mark's School of Texas, Dallas, Texas. Reproduced by permission of Ray Westbrook.

ReMarker staff create an attractive news brief section each issue to cover short, but important and relevant stories for their audience. The coverage allows them to highlight honors, upcoming events and activities that warrant some space, although not that of a full story. The "By the Numbers" graphic is a visually interesting way to provide more information. The photo and full headlines for each brief finish off a professional, informative package.

HELPFUL
TIPS

News brief coverage

While issues such as drinking and driving, budget cuts and local elections may dominate the front-page of your newspaper, shorter news stories covering day-to-day events in your school community can often play an important role in a high school publication. While daily intercom announcements may feature the upcoming art club meeting or academic decathlon results, daydreaming students may miss such events in a noisy classroom.

High school publications should have a briefs section to quickly cover such events, short news items and announcements. Such coverage can help build a daily readership for a high school publication's website. The briefs can come from the paper's beat reporting as discussed in Chapter 1. But briefs can also offer an opportunity to cover community, state and national news in a condensed format, to give the reader whose primary source of news is the high school publication a way to get caught up on the world outside the school walls.

Some topics for brief news coverage might include:

- ↓ Upcoming club meetings
- ↓ Fundraisers
- ↓ Deadlines for scholarships or organization membership applications
- ↓ Contest results
- ↓ Neighborhood events
- ↓ Upcoming speakers
- ↓ Club officer election results.

“You won’t find outright homophobia here,” Christopher said. “It’s not like someone will walk up to you and outright hate you. You’ll find a lot of people who are apathetic toward it. They don’t really have an opinion; it’s just something they’re accepting. That’s been my experience here.”

A variety of research indicates Christopher’s experience with growing tolerance toward his sexual orientation is not limited to Carmel. A CNN Research Opinion Poll published on Aug. 11 showed that, for the first time, more than 50 percent of Americans believe gays and lesbians should have a constitutional right to marry and have their marriage recognized as legally valid.

Victor Xu, HiLite, Carmel High School, Carmel, Ind.

The **contrast lead** emphasizes the variance, change or contrast in a story. Here the writer contrasts views toward homosexuality in the past and present. The simple fact of a student’s walking down the hallway without incident would seem to have little news value, until his experience is compared with those of homosexuals decades and generations earlier, who faced persecution and even death for their sexual orientation. The description of Fiscus’s localized experience is followed by a “nut” paragraph with a more general news peg – the shift in attitudes toward gays and lesbians as reported in the recent CNN Research Opinion Poll.

Vignette lead

Senior Marcus Robinson lost more than 10 relatives and friends, many to violence. One of the 10 was his close friend, Mandela High School sophomore Lovell Hadnot, who was killed in January of last year.

“His death made me think that every day, I can be a victim of violence,” Robinson said. Robinson is only one of many students affected by the 110 homicides that took place in Oakland last year. Those murders marked an increase over the 95 in 2010.

Kim Mejia-Cuellar, Green and Gold, Media Academy, Oakland, Calif.

The **vignette lead**, or an anecdotal lead, describes a personal example of a larger issue, using a strong narrative to draw readers into the story. In this case, the reporter localizes an increase in the number of murders in Oakland by addressing the impact of such violence on one student at the school. To put a local face on a broader social issue, the writer leads with the deaths of 10 of the student’s friends and family members, many through violence. Readers may not be able to comprehend the 110 murders recorded in the city in 2011. However, reading about a fellow student who has experienced the trauma of murder at first hand brings the issue into sharp focus.

In the next example of the vignette lead, the writer dramatizes the impact of new school district fees through a narrative description of one family’s dilemma.

Junior Olivia Ko has certainly made the most of her high school experience. In addition to competing in three seasons of sports, she is currently enrolled in six International Baccalaureate classes and on her way to getting the IB diploma. However, her high achievement is putting an extra burden on her parents’ shoulders, as the budget for Fiscal year 2011, which was adopted on May 20, is putting the financial responsibility for some academic and athletic fees into the hands of parents.

Next year, students will have to pay \$75 for all Advanced Placement (AP) or IB tests and \$100 per VHSL sport. This means that Ko, who intends to have a similar schedule next year, will be responsible for approximately \$750 in new fees.

Emily Fruchterman, The A Blast, Annandale High School, Annandale, Va.

The length of the vignette lead may vary, but like other feature leads, it should always transition smoothly into a “wrap” or “nut” paragraph that includes answers to the basic news questions. In the story above, the writer uses the wrap graph to answer the basic *When, Who* and *What*.

The descriptive lead

The **descriptive lead** draws readers into the story’s setting and context, often through an extended narrative description.

During Knights’ Way training day, Superintendent Dr. David Schuler had some surprising news for the new crop of leaders.

Last year, he said, three students had requested transfers out of Prospect because of bullying. In his six years as superintendent, Schuler had never before had anyone from Prospect make that request.

“I was shocked,” said Sam McArdle, senior Knights’ Way leader, “and I think everyone else was [too].”

McArdle, who was one of the committee members given the task of planning the first Knights’ Way topic on bullying, used the fact to help highlight the importance of the issue.

Neel Thakker, The Prospector, Prospect High School, Prospect, Ill.

The writer creates suspense by delaying key facts until the second paragraph, and saves the full context for those facts until the fourth paragraph. This extended description helps the reader share in the surprise and shock the student leaders felt as they were given the task of trying to change the culture of bullying at their school.

A straight lead describing the task force and its efforts to address bullying could have conveyed much of the same information, but would be unlikely to engage readers to the same extent as the characters and events presented through this descriptive lead.

As you may have noticed, descriptive leads may sometimes overlap with vignette leads, and both may employ the comparisons of a contrast lead. These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are the broader categories of straight and feature leads.

scene

The death of cursive

With 44 of 50 states phasing cursive out of their curriculum, the Lower School's stance on teaching the art of handwriting is evolving.

It's used every day. For writing checks. For signing receipts. Or just jotting down a few notes. But nowadays, some people don't see the practicality in mastering the art of handwriting.

In 44 out of 50 states, public schools are adopting the Common Core curriculum, which does not require the teaching of cursive. But at 10600 Preston Road, cursive is still an integral part of the Lower School curriculum.

Head of Lower School Barbara York believes that one of the reasons cursive should still be taught is so that kids have the option to write in either print or cursive writing.

"You never know which children will respond best to print or cursive writing," York said. "For some kids, the flow of the cursive writing makes that much easier and they can do that more easily and quickly. For other kids, even after learning cursive, prefer to print."

A reason that cursive is being phased out is the rise of keyboarding. Instead of teaching cursive, schools are taking time to teach how to type and use computers. But York does not agree with the overuse of computers or else she thinks people will become dependent on them.

"There are some changes I think we should do with technology," York said. "I think we should use technology as a tool. But I think that that's what technology should remain. I don't want it to take over other parts of our lives. Now there's a good deal of research that's showing too much use of technology and using it too early is detrimental to kids. I don't want technology to be a necessity to think or produce a piece of work."

Second grade teacher and cursive instructor Susan Morris has another reason why cursive must be taught across the country.

She believes cursive should be kept in curriculums because studies show "children formally taught handwriting improve their

sentence construction and increase the complexity of their thoughts."

Morris says cursive also helps students become written communicators, and it allows students to read cursive in historical documents and handwritten letters.

"It's a more personal way to communicate," Morris said. "I hope St. Mark's will continue to keep it."

As a second grade teacher, she sees students' attitude toward cursive firsthand.

"They do look forward to [cursive]," Morris said. "It's a little bit like a right of passage at St. Mark's that they know in second grade they are going to be taught cursive."

Junior Max Naseck, who learned cursive in Lower School, never came to use it often.

"Cursive is more tedious to write and more tedious to read," Naseck said. "Since second grade, I've transitioned to using mainly print."

To art instructor Max Wood, handwriting is an art and a direct translation of who one is. Wood, who believes the teaching of the fine motor skill is imperative, emphasizes the role of handwriting on her classes, and she is also the sponsor of the new handwriting club.

"If I have any political power, I would urge [politicians] to reinstate cursive because not teaching cursive is one of the biggest mistakes in our own education," Wood said.

With cursive being phased out across the country, York believes people will still use handwriting, either cursive or print.

"I don't think in the foreseeable future we're going to be able to get along without any kind of handwriting," York said.

But even if children don't embrace the use of cursive handwriting, York still hopes Marksmen will be able to use the skill when necessary.

"I would like for all kids to be able to sign a contract in cursive," York said, beginning to grin, "whether it takes them awhile or not."



PAYING BILLS Although some people use print handwriting instead of cursive, most people use at least some sort of cursive to sign their names on checks and receipts.

sign here

Although print handwriting is more popular for school and daily activities, cursive is more common for signatures. Here are examples of Marksmen's signatures.



THE DEATH OF CURSIVE story by Alan Rosenthal, scene editor | photo illustration by Nic Lazzara, graphics director

FIGURE 3.8 *ReMarker*, St. Mark's School of Texas, Dallas, Texas. Reproduced by permission of Ray Westbrook.

This *ReMarker* story takes a descriptive lead approach to a news story on the elimination of cursive writing nationally. The lead reminds readers of the widespread use of cursive writing, to set up a discussion on the impact of eliminating it. While the lead is in a feature style, the writer quickly ties it to a news peg on the national trend. In the same paragraph, he also covers the local school angle by noting the district's decision to keep cursive in the Lower School curriculum.

Don't get too caught up in trying to classify each of your leads. The more important point is to recognize the different ways to get the reader interested in the facts of the story through narrative, anecdote, contrasts, descriptions and other creative strategies.

DEVELOPING A NEWS STORY

Consider the following situation:

The renovation of the gym is one week away from being completed. The first basketball game of the season is set for two days after the scheduled end of the construction. Construction workers have been installing new stands and a new floor, but heavy rains have just caused flooding throughout the area, including the gym. Selena, a reporter for the school's paper, hears from her math teacher (who is also an assistant basketball coach), that the flooding has ruined the new floor.

As an online reporter trying to get the information out to her readers quickly, Selena might send this Twitter message out to her paper's Twitter feed: "Heavy rains flood, ruin new basketball floor in remodeled gymnasium."

The word is out, but what other questions will the readers have? Twitter and Facebook posts have given reporters and other users the ability to instantly convey short bursts of information to a large audience. Still, readers will have questions that go beyond a 140-character tweet or a brief status update. The straight news lead offers little more than the average social media

Test your knowledge

What's a news peg?

FIGURE 3.9 "Right-to-work legislation eliminates fees for students," by Rochelle Brual, p. 4, March 22, 2012. *HiLite*, Carmel High School, Carmel, Ind. Reproduced by permission of Jim Streisel.

Through a strong vignette lead, *HiLite* gives readers a personal look at the impact that labor union legislation has upon students. Students won't necessarily go online and read about this legislation. However, a good news writer can help the reader understand the issue by putting the story in concrete terms featuring real people. The writer uses the lead to attract the reader but provides the news peg – the approval to right-to-work legislation – in the focus or wrap graph right after the lead.

Right-to-work legislation eliminates fees for students

New bill prevents unions from requiring dues

BY ROCHELLE BRUAL
rbrual@hilite.org

Although Kyle Tosh, Kroger bagger and junior, is a labor union member, he said he doesn't remember the name of his own labor union, and he doesn't pay much attention to it either. It sends him emails he never responds to, and it leeches \$7.40 out of his paycheck a week. Other than that, Tosh said he receives minimal contact and unapparent benefits from his labor union, which makes him want to cease membership.

Tosh isn't the only one. Some supermarket chains like Kroger and Meijer require all of their employees to join the labor union United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)—or at least pay the fees to join. However, in January 2012, Gov. Mitch Daniels signed a bill that made Indiana the 23rd right-to-work state, which prohibits unions from forcing workers to pay mandatory representation fees.

"(The union was) like, 'We're going to fight (the right-

to-work law). We're going to help our Kroger employees.' It was total bologna. I don't really care because you're not helping me at all. I could watch it sink, and I wouldn't care," Tosh said.

According to Karen Taff, union member and social studies teacher, the right-to-work legislation was labeled in a way that makes it sound benign. However, Taff said it actually prohibits workers from being able to exercise their legal rights. It will kill the part of the labor contract that requires employees to join unions, and it stifles bargaining with corporations.

Taff said via email, "Since the late 19th century, the labor movement has played a significant role in American history. They were essential in helping to create the broad expansion of the economy and the middle class in the middle of the 20th century. In the last 25 years, much of the power of organized labor has been eroded by industrial and manufacturing jobs being moved overseas. In general, the same economic, social and political factors that have

CONTINUED
ON NEXT PAGE

A History of Unions

The **National Labor Union**, the first federation of American unions, formed and later requested an eight hour workday, but it ultimately failed.



The **Wagner Act**, considered the Magna Carta of labor to some, is passed, prohibiting employers from engaging in unfair labor practices.

#23

Indiana becomes the 23rd state to pass the right-to-work law on Feb. 1.

1866

1869

1935

1955

2012



The **Knights of Labor** forms and accepts all wage earners, boasting up to 750,000 workers in its prime.

x 100,000



The **American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations** forms, becoming the largest federation of unions today.

JIVA CAPULONG / GRAPHIC
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, USHISTORY.ORG,
HISTORY.COM AND WSJ / SOURCES

message. Developing an in-depth news story is one important way that serious journalists can provide something much more useful than the average Tweet or blog post.

A serious news writer such as Selena will ask and report answers to a number of key questions. These might include: Is the rumor from the math teacher true? How bad is the flood damage? Will

IN ACTION

Clarifying the news story focus

Most high school publications hold regular meetings, where the staff members' story ideas for upcoming editions are discussed. Such meetings often generate lists of story ideas, where possible pieces are sketched out and compiled for editors to comb through at a later date. In preparing for such a meeting, it is important to write out clearly focused story ideas, with specific details. Make sure that your ideas are more than just topics, such as "recycling" or "standardized testing." Make sure there are specifics in your story idea, preferably with a local angle. You should always ask yourself the following basic questions to decide if a story idea is feasible and sufficiently focused:

- Is something new, changed or different?
- Do we have solid and accurate sources for the news tip?
- Do we have verifiable facts from which to build the story?

Here are some examples of story ideas:

Poor: "School store. Heard it might be opening."

This is merely a topic without any development.

Better: "The school store is reopening next Friday. The store closed last year after losing a lot of money. The business teacher said the principal approved the reopening. The story should cover the entrepreneurial class plan to oversee cash flow and inventory to improve sales."

This story idea has a definite time peg – the reopening date. The reporter also has a reliable source in the business teacher. As a result, the story is more than rumor. It's the start of a plan for what to cover. A good specific list of sources might strengthen this story idea.

the administration cancel the first basketball game? Where is the monthly dance we usually have in the gym going to be held?

For a more political focus to the story, Selena might also ask: How much did the new flooring cost? How much will repairing the damage cost? Where's that money coming from? What part of the budget is going to be cut to pay for the damage?

The development of the story beyond the lead should answer these questions. The reader should learn something new with each successive paragraph. As shown in Figure 3.3, the remaining information will be presented in descending order of importance. A good reporter will weigh her collected information on the basis of audience impact and interest, and organize the story accordingly.

While a straight news lead on the story above would, like a tweet, highlight the flood damage to the new gym floor and note the source of this information, the next paragraphs should develop other issues, such as the possible cancelation of next week's basketball game. The discussion of the dance would probably come next. Why? Because these last two topics impact the teen audience directly and immediately.

The key to developing a news story is a writer's ability to think through all the relevant questions that need to be answered and to seek out legitimate sources to use and quote.

The sources within a story should all be qualified, relevant sources as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Writers should ask themselves: "Who is going to make an impact on this story?" or, "Who will the story make an impact upon?" In the gym flooding story, the original information comes from the assistant basketball coach. A more authoritative source for information on the gym floor and its consequences for the game might be the head basketball coach. The head custodian would be a relevant source for clean-up efforts. The principal might be able to address long-term plans for the gym and activities held there. The superintendent or district public relations representative might speak to the costs of the renovation and the repairs. To confirm such information, the district insurance company's representative could also be contacted. Basketball players impacted by the flooding would be relevant sources, as would Student Council officers who might have to change plans for the dance. Seniors looking forward to their last gym dance and displaced physical education students could add further perspectives.

News writers should avoid one-source stories. The saying is "there are two sides to every story," but the reality is there are many more, and reporters should try to draw on as many as possible.

FIGURE 3.10 Victoria Reick-Mitrisin, *Spark*, Lakota East High School, Liberty Township, Ohio. Reproduced by permission of Dean Hume.

This *Spark* news story gives the reader an in-depth look at the CarTEens program through a mix of interviews and research. The anecdotal lead provides a strong personal perspective on the program. The interview with the county official is important because of his role as the program's director. The county statistics showing a decrease in teenage driver fatalities, along with the figures on CarTEens participants' reduced likelihood of receiving a second ticket, expand the story to the program's broader impact.

Teens Turn Driving Around

With many teens getting into accidents, a new program called Car Teens has stood out as a way to encourage students to become safer drivers.



PART TWO in a two-part series
Spark covers teenage driving and the various programs that attempt to help teens be safe on the road.

story **victoria reick-mitrisin**
infographic **sara patt**

A tall, 18-year-old girl steps to the front of the small room, which is filled with teenagers like herself. Her demeanor is somber. For the past several Tuesdays, she has related the same story—she tells other teenagers about the day that she killed a man.

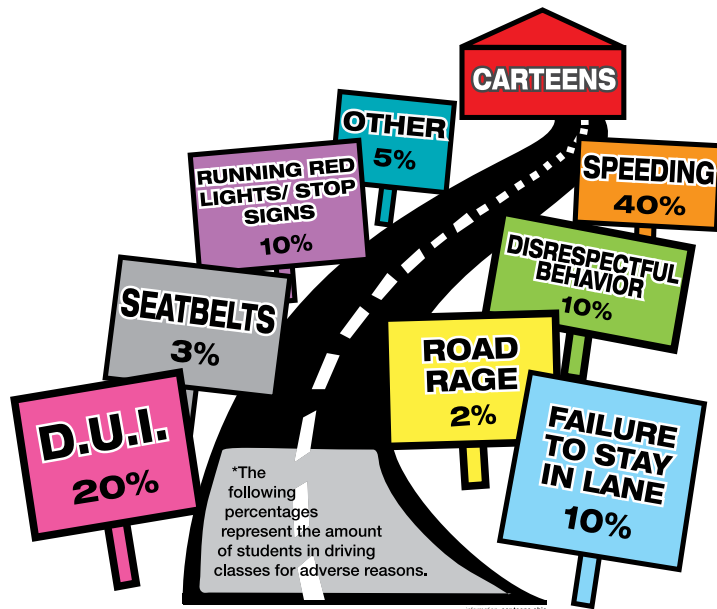
Each Tuesday between 6 and 8 p.m., teenagers who have violated traffic safety laws gather to learn the truth about the dangers of driving. Butler County courts mandate that first-time traffic offenders and one of their parents participate in the CarTEens program for six weeks.

Often, teenagers who attend CarTEens meetings are between 16 and 18 years old and have received their first traffic safety violation, depending on how extreme the infraction is. The CarTEens meeting is taught by teen and adult volunteers who explain the possible consequences of driving.

East senior Lindsey Naughton recently graduated from the CarTEens program. She feels that the six required sessions were an eye-opening experience.

"The one that really hit-home was the video of the family that was hit by a truck," said Naughton. "It made me realize what I could do if I continued to drive recklessly."

Naughton was in CarTEens because of a speeding ticket that she received at the beginning



There are multiple ways in which teens can find themselves
On the Road to CarTEens

of her senior year. She has not received another driving ticket since that time.

CarTEens has been helping Ohioan youth realize the dangers of driving since 1987. The Butler County division was founded in 1998 by James Jordan, who is now the CarTEens Extension Educator for Butler County. Currently, 58 teen volunteers are a part of the program, most of whom have previously graduated from the program.

"Some parents bring their teen drivers through the program before they receive their

my dissertation, the 4-H CarTEens program has an impact on reducing risky driving behaviors in 33 different categories, [such as texting and changing the radio station]," said Jordan.

Annually, 800 teenagers and their parents enter the class, which consists of one of four different sections that cover preventing specific dangerous activities while driving. One class is generally dedicated to a movie about a deadly crash, while another involves the teenagers using drunk goggles. The class always closes with personal stories from the volunteers.

East Principal Dr. Keith Kline supports the mission of CarTEens and believes that it is a necessary part of the community. Last fall, East had an assembly for sophomores in which

"It [CarTEens] made me realize what I could do if I continued to drive recklessly."

first citation," said Jordan. "They do this because of their knowledge of the program and the effective method of teaching done by 4-H CarTEens volunteers."

According to Jordan, driver fatalities of people 16 to 18 years old have declined from their initial 10 percent between 2005 and 2010 in Butler County. Jordan attributes this to the CarTEens program. The rate at which teenagers received their second ticket after attending CarTEens went from 25-35 days to 111 days, based on research done by Judge David Nehaus.

"Based on research that I have done for

CarTEens volunteers came to explain the dangers to the new and future drivers.

"Anything that we can do to help our students be safe in cars is something that we should try to do," said Kline.

Jordan believes that for high school students to become safer drivers, they need to prevent themselves from becoming distracted.

"[Teenagers] are inexperienced drivers," says Jordan. "[They] need to focus on the task at hand, which is driving cautiously, so they can get to their destination in a timely manner and safely." ■

WWW

WEBLINK Check out

www.coveringcommunities.org

This website offers a wide range of topics geared toward training citizen and student journalists in the basic skills.

Body of a news story

The body of the news story will cover aspects that weren't important enough to be in the lead but should be developed for the reader. The news body paragraphs will also provide specifics to help clarify different sides of the issue at hand.

17 | *Spark* | June 2, 2010

Quick Exercise

For the following story, develop a source list with lines of questions for each source.

Two sixth-grade girls were suspended for three days after violating the new district-wide hugging ban. An assistant principal caught them hugging in the cafeteria. The girls had just found out they had placed first and second in a county-wide essay contest. One of the girls has two sisters in high school. You've heard from your friends that one of the sisters said her parents are seeking legal help in the case.

Each paragraph in a news story:

- should usually cover just one idea – news paragraphs are written for a busy reader who might skim and needs to pick up as much information as efficiently as possible
- should advance the story, giving the readers fresh information different from that of the previous paragraph
- should generally be one to three sentences, although exceptions are possible
- should be relevant to the overall focus of the story.

In the body of the following *Harbinger* story on the rise in cyberbullying, Shawnee Mission East's Andrew Goble gives an example of a Twitter site used to post anonymous comments. Within the first two paragraphs he helps the reader understand the reasoning of the Twitter account's creators. He also, by giving the number of posts and followers, shows how public and potentially-humiliating its posts can be.

Wilson started his account with a friend last fall. It posts “gossip” such as rumored party mishaps and potential parties; as of press time, it had posted 40 times and had 303 followers. When they started last fall, their goal was to just make people laugh.

“We thought it would be funny if no one knew who was writing it, just ridiculous events were reported on, in kind of a laughable manner,” said Wilson. “Yeah, [getting tweeted about would] be embarrassing, but it's supposed to be like, ‘Yeah, my antics were reported on.’”

News stories should provide objective development of the story. While the standard of **objectivity** is generally taken to mean that a writer shouldn't put his own opinion in a piece, it also means that writer should show both if not multiple sides to an issue. While some readers may agree with Wilson that the comments are just jokes, the writer also explores the perspective of those who object to the negative impact the tweets could have. Not everyone feels it is harmless. Sophomore Julie Sanders* was devastated when she was mentioned on a post on SMEGossipGurlz.

“I just remember not wanting to go to school,” Sanders said. “It was like the first week of freshman year, so I didn't know anyone and I called [friend's name omitted to protect identity] crying, ‘What am I going to do?’ You feel like everyone is staring at you ... you feel like the whole school is talking about you.”

News sources need to be relevant to the focus. They should generally be identified by first and last name with some explanation as to why they are relevant. In the previous example, the writer decided to change the names of the sources and mark them with asterisks to protect their identity. Anonymous sources should be the exception rather than the norm because concealing

* denotes name changed to protect identity.

FIGURE 3.11 *The Apple Leaf*, Wenatchee High School, Wenatchee, Wash. "Absence of chocolate milk causes uproar" by Nicole Jackson, Sept. 22, 2010. Reprinted with permission.

This *Apple Leaf* news story provides readers with the latest information through a good straight news lead that includes the specific number of petition signatures. Reporting on the actual petition gives the story a stronger news peg than simply reporting a few opinions from people who don't like white milk. The body of the story provides related information on other petitions and the reaction of district officials.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 22, 2010 • THE APPLE LEAF • WENATCHEE HIGH SCHOOL
KRISTEN STONE, NEWS EDITOR

Absence of chocolate milk causes uproar

BY NICOLE JACKSON
MANAGING OPINION EDITOR

Sophomore Tanner Odle has collected about 1,100 signatures in his petition to bring chocolate milk back to Wenatchee High School.

Odle and others began the "Protect Chocolate Milk" campaign the third day of school, after discovering that the Wenatchee School District stopped serving chocolate milk this fall.

The decision was made to improve the nutrition of school menus, said Food Services Director Ken. Getzin.

"It's just really a matter of trying to do the best thing for kids with our menus," Getzin said.

Odle plans on taking his petition to Principal Michele Wadeikis once he's done collecting signatures. He also has a meeting with Getzin on Sept. 28 to present his case for the benefits of chocolate milk.

"It's a great drink. It's nutritious, tastes good, has 16 different nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, magnesium, potassium and there are others," he said.

Freshman Caleb Lewis, sophomores Heaven Henderson and Austin Peart, and junior Jasmine Garcia are a part of the committee fighting for chocolate milk. The group is even selling T-shirts for \$10. (To purchase, contact Odle through his Facebook account.)

High schoolers are not the only students protesting the loss. Elementary schools are speaking up for themselves, including but not limited to Sunnyslope Elementary and Lewis and Clark Elementary.

Angel Ornelas, a fifth grader at Lewis and Clark Elementary, has collected 69 signatures, but plans on getting 100 because of the high school.

"I was going for 75, but since I heard the high school got 1,000, I'm going to go for 100," said Ornelas.

He also plans on mailing a letter to Getzin in order to further his school's request for chocolate milk. "I'm writing a letter to him right now and as soon as I finish it I'm going to send it to him and get the chocolate milk back if I can," said Ornelas. According to him, kids do not enjoy the white milk.

"I've been seeing white milk everywhere on the ground and on the cart. Some people are drinking the white milk but most of them are throwing it down, getting rid of it, throwing it away. They're sick of the white milk," said Ornelas.

Getzin does not think chocolate milk will ever be fully reinstated to the schools but is also flexible in his approach.

"Am I completely dead set against ever reconsidering or even having a moderate approach to it? Not necessarily. I want to see how it goes. Maybe after awhile we bring it back a couple times a month as a special thing," said Getzin.

According to Odle, "there are more pros than cons when it comes to chocolate milk. We should have a choice."



PROMOTING THE CAUSE
GRACE KETCHUM/THE APPLE LEAF

(Left to right) Sophomore Tanner Odle, and juniors Jasmine Garcia and Jonathon Casillas look over the petition that Odle began to challenge the removal of chocolate milk in Wenatchee public schools. So far, the petition has over 1,000 signatures from WHS.

an identity may cast doubt upon the authenticity of the source and the information. In the paragraphs above, Sanders is a better source than a random high school student because she's been the subject of a negative tweet. The writer made a decision to protect her identity because he did not want to re-victimize her and believed her perspective was sufficiently important to include without attribution.

Writers achieve depth in news stories through talking to multiple sources. Professional sources can add insight to an issue because of their background or training with regard to a particular issue. In the following section of the cyberbullying story, the writer uses quotes and information from the co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center to show how harmful the effects of these online posts can be.

Along with Co-Director Dr. Justin Patchin, Dr. Hinduja has identified that cyberbullying is tied to loss of self-esteem in the victim, and that victims of cyberbullying are more likely "to have suicidal thoughts and engage in suicidal actions" than those who have not been. He generally describes cyberbullying as kids "being jerks to each other using technology."

"[When you're an adolescent] you care so much about peer perception, so what everyone else is saying about you and thinking about you, even if honestly they're not," Dr. Hinduja said, "So when there's gossip or rumor-spreading or name-calling or insults or being portrayed in a negative light on Facebook or in a YouTube comment or something like that, it just takes over your world and it really wrecks you."

Good news writers will outline all the different points that need to be covered in the story. If the news story is about a new school policy or plan, are both strengths and weaknesses covered? If the story is about a problem, did it cover the possible solutions? If the story is about a proposed change, does the story cover the reasoning behind it? Does it cover the potential impact or difference it might make? In another section of the cyberbullying piece, the writer addresses potential solutions to the problems raised in the story. The writer also understands that the solutions aren't easy, so he covers potential difficulties as well.

The District Guidelines give the administrators a range of actions to take. The guidelines say that a first offense could range from a conference with student or parent to a short-term suspension. Repeated offences could result in an in-school or out-of-school suspension, depending on the severity.

The trouble, according to Royce, is catching students. Although she has seen an increase in reports of cyberbullying, it is difficult to prove that it happened “while utilizing school property, on school property, in any vehicle used to transport students for district purposes or at a school-sponsored activity or event,” as the district policy states. She guesses that 90 percent of it happens from home.

“We are always happy to investigate, talk to kids, call parents, just to let other parents be aware, but in terms of suspending a student from Shawnee Mission East because of something he did Sunday afternoon in the privacy of his own home,” Royce said, “the courts don’t look very favorably on that.”

Flow and organization

As mentioned earlier, news stories are often organized in an inverted pyramid structure, in which the most important information is presented at the top of the story and the least important at the bottom. If the writer provides smooth transitions among the key facts and ideas that make up this structure, the story will be clear and interesting for the reader.

Developing an outline can help ensure that a story is well structured and intuitively accessible to readers. Start by making a simple list of points to cover in the story. Then work to find connections and transitions between various points, to help you find a logical organization and flow for your writing.

Look for natural connections between different paragraphs and pieces of information. A few examples include:

- action to reaction
- cause to effect
- problem to solution
- time sequence (although be careful not to organize chronologically when more recent events are more important than older ones)
- for to against.

POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES IN NEWS WRITING

Beginning writers tend to make the same mistakes. The following points should help young reporters identify the problems to avoid.

Vagueness

Good reporters avoid leaving unanswered questions in their stories. When reviewing the first draft of a story, these reporters often realize that they didn’t get all questions answered. The key to handling this situation, as discussed in Chapter 2, is to reinterview or research the needed information rather than “writing around” the problem, using vague language such as “recent,” “a lot,” and so on.

WEAK: The increase in the abuse of prescription drugs is because of the low cost, Det. Brady Sullivan said.

BETTER: The reason for the increase has been traced back to several origins, according to East student resource officer Det. Brady Sullivan. One of these is cost. On the streets, OxyContin goes for about \$30 to \$40 a pill and heroin sells for between \$50 and \$100, according to Sullivan. Sullivan noted that Prairie Village’s undercover drug unit is buying more prescription pills like OxyContin from drug dealers than ever before.

Logan Heley, The Harbinger, Shawnee Mission East High School, Prairie Village, Kan.

Test your knowledge

What does objectivity in a news story mean?

Quick Exercise

In an inverted pyramid story, what information would flow naturally after the following introduction?

- 1 (from an accident story)

Three freshmen riding in the back of the pickup were ejected and taken to the hospital by air ambulance.

- 2 (from a story about a new fee to participate in an extracurricular activity)

Board member Sara Benson supports the new \$50 fee because it will help build a new football field.

Transitions

Finding natural connections between the facts and information will give your writing a logical flow, making the development of a story easy to follow. The use of transitional words and pronouns will also help ensure that readers will grasp the structure and flow of your story.

In the following story, the writer uses logical organization and multiple transitional words and phrases to help the story flow. Good writers will strive to help the reader move effortlessly from paragraph to paragraph and idea to idea.

Other examples of transitional words and phrases to consider:

- For emphasis: “as an illustration,” “in short,” “such as,” “specifically”
- For sequencing: “First ... Second ... Third ...,” “additionally,” “besides,” “another,” “initially,” “when,” “later,” “meanwhile,” “next”
- For similarity: “Like,” “just as,” “likewise,” “so,” “also,” “again.”

Harsher dance policy drives students away

BY MARIA ZAMORA
STAFF REPORTER

1 Chaperone training may have helped enforce WHS's stricter policies during the Summer Breeze dance on Aug. 30, but it didn't help attendance at the first dance of the year.

2 Many of the 315 students who bought tickets apparently left the dance shortly after entering.

3 An estimated 40 students migrated to the Pioneer Middle School parking lot to have their own spontaneous dance to escape the volunteer chaperones, who were trained for an hour before the dance about how to maintain appropriate behavior. One rule: No warnings were to be given for unacceptable actions such as grinding. Instead, offending students would be immediately removed.

4 “Summer Breeze was like a straight-jacket,” said Grace Peven, junior. She said the uptight atmosphere and un-lively music drove her across the street to Pioneer's parking lot where students could dance as they wanted.

5 But others, such as ASB President Mallory Gillin, said the dance was fun. Students who grind at dances are driven by “raging hormones,” Gillin said, but such behavior isn't necessary for a good time.

6 “I love dances and I don't grind,” she said. Summer Breeze was organized by the Apple-Ettes Dance Team, which plans to use any profit from the dance to purchase new uniforms and a team workshop. Sophomore team member Brianna “Breezy” Bennett said she felt insulted by the people abandoning the dance. She and her fellow teammates believe that if people had come into the dance

with open minds they would have had more fun. Bennett said that that's okay, because even though students left, they paid.

7 Assistant Principal Kory Kalahar said he “noticed a mass exodus” departing the dance, but did not find out about the Pioneer party until afterwards.

8 It's “a two-way street” Kalahar said, in order for dance restrictions to loosen; students have to step up. “I think people know what's appropriate and what's not.”

9 The dance policy has become stricter after the infringements of the past two years. Drinking, illegal activity, and grinding resulted in angry parents and harsher consequences.

10 If students continue to violate the dance policy, future dances will be cancelled, he said. Fortunately, Kalahar said, there is a four-year cycle of students. Incoming classes are unaware of how dances used to be run. Only upperclassmen remember what dances used to be like.

11 Senior Caden Stockwell said Summer Breeze was a waste of \$5. He understands the restrictions are placed upon student behavior, but thinks they should loosen if students are to have fun. “I had a dance party on Saturday (Sept. 11), and we had more fun there than at Summer Breeze.”

12 Stockwell claimed 170 people attended his dance, a number he estimated was equal to the students who actually stayed at Summer Breeze, even though his dance required some of the same restrictions as a school function in that no drugs or alcohol were permitted.

13 Even though some students were unhappy with Summer Breeze, they plan on attending future dances. The first dances of the year are usually strict, Peven said. “I don't think the other dances will be as bad.”

FIGURE 3.12 *The Apple Leaf*, Wenatchee High School, Wenatchee, Wash. “Harsher dance policy drives students away” by Maria Zamora, Sept. 22, 2010. Reprinted with permission.

- 1 Answering logical follow-up questions makes for a natural transition here. After indicating that the stricter policies “didn't help,” the next paragraph answers the logical question “How so?”
- 2 *General to specific.* Following up “Many” by explaining “an estimated 40” moves the story forward.
- 3 “Instead” is a good contrasting transitional word. Using words such as “although,” “but” and “despite” can smooth transitions that shift from one action to another.
- 4 *Action to reaction.* Good news stories don't merely stack facts on top of each other. This paragraph follows a policy discussion with a quote to represent student reactions to the policy.
- 5 *For to against.* The contrasting transitional word “But” helps connect opposing reactions to the policy.
- 6 Following “dances” with the specific dance names help transition to new information about the reasoning behind the dance.
- 7 The equivalent descriptions “students left” and “mass exodus” serve to make the transition to this paragraph on the administration's reaction.
- 8 Again, equivalent phrases such as “what's appropriate and what's not” and the “dance policy” move the story forward to new information about the reasoning behind the stricter policy.
- 9 “Upperclassman” is followed by specific “Senior” reaction.

Tighter language

Wordy	Concise
Reached an agreement	Agreed
Arrived at the conclusion	Concluded
Be aware of the fact that	Knows
Conducted an investigation	Investigated
Held a meeting	Met
In spite of the fact that	Despite or Although
Absolutely necessary	Necessary
Biography of her life	Biography
Estimated at about	Estimated
A former graduate	Graduate or Alumnus
Gathered together	Gathered

Wordiness

Readers don't have much time. A writer's space is often limited. Tight writing, or eliminating needless words, is an important technique to engage and inform the busy reader. A good news writer will always opt for one word over five when it is sufficient to make the point.

WEAK: The school district's security staff, in an effort in conjunction with the administration staff, has immediately started requiring non-students or staff or those not affiliated with Harvard-Westlake to have in their possession identification cards to show when using the upper school track.

BETTER: The security staff, in conjunction with the administration, will now require people not affiliated with Harvard-Westlake to carry identification cards when using the upper school track.

Michael Rothberg, The Chronicle, Harvard-Westlake School, Studio City, Calif.

Jargon and pretentious vocabulary

Journalists should write for the masses, who have varying education levels. Avoid writing to impress a reader with obscure vocabulary and specialized knowledge gleaned from the thesaurus or Wikipedia. Instead, write simply. Write clearly.

WEAK: In the principal's third endeavor this month to clear the halls and hasten young scholars to their course of study, he formulated and released a new tardy policy.

BETTER: In an attempt to keep kids from hanging out in the hallways, the principal announced his third new tardy policy this month.

Quick Exercise

What is the primary news writing error in each of the following sentences?

- 1 Math teacher Mary Sniezek raised her beautiful bouquet of roses after she was deservedly named South Carolina Teacher of the Year.
- 2 The band director made the decision to lift the suspension in view of the fact that the trombone player was cleared of theft charges.

Editorializing

Editorializing, or using the writer's opinion in a story, should be avoided in news writing. Proper attribution can help the writer maintain objectivity. By telling the reader the source of each piece of information, the writer will make it clear that the views expressed are not her own. Word choice is also critical. Opinionated words such as "hopefully" or "surprisingly" are examples of language that give hints as to the writer's opinion and should generally be omitted.

WEAK: Early release on Fridays, a policy put in place as part of the district-wide initiative Positive Behavior Interventions Supports, or PBIS, succeeded in improving attendance last semester.

BETTER: Early release on Fridays, a policy put in place as part of the district-wide initiative Positive Behavior Interventions Supports, or PBIS, succeeded in improving attendance last semester according to associate principal Jennifer Smith.

Alyne Roemerman, The JagWire, Mill Valley High School, Shawnee, Kan.

Attributing the success of the improving attendance rate to PBIS is certainly debatable, as even the word "succeeded" is opinionated, so attribution is necessary. Without attribution, the reader may believe the writer is presenting her own judgments about the policy.

WEAK: Whitman thankfully raised the second-highest amount of money in the nation for this year's Leukemia and Lymphoma Society high school challenge, as announced during a fun-filled celebration in the courtyard during sixth period April 19.

BETTER: Whitman raised the second-highest amount of money in the nation for this year's Leukemia and Lymphoma Society high school challenge, as announced during a celebration in the courtyard during sixth period April 19.

Katie Guarino and Isaac Rubin, Black and White, Walt Whitman High School, Bethesda, Md.

Numerical distortions

When a friend tells you he placed second in the regional Pet Guinea Pig Makeover contest, your first response may be to wonder what sort of dress a guinea pig wears. Your second response may be to say, "Congratulations! Second place is pretty impressive." But what if you find out that there were only two guinea pigs in the contest? Or that there were 532?

The point here is that numbers are relative and good news writers should remember that. Financial statistics or polling results may find their way into news stories. To present them responsibly and accurately, the story should include a comparison or, at the least, a source's explanation as to the meaning of the numbers.

GOOD: Last year, the school's energy consumption totaled 1.65 million kilowatt hours. This figure is 0.6 percent of the entire country of Haiti's 1997 total usage, according to the *CIA World Factbook*. The same amount of energy could help light 27,600,000 60-watt light bulbs for one hour. According to Proven Energy, it would take 107 constantly operating seven-meter tall wind turbines a full year to reproduce our annual expenditure. Though it may seem massive, this number is actually a decrease from preceding years.

Simone Shields and Alessandro Maglione, The Standard, The American School in London, London, U.K.

These writers do an impressive job of putting the numbers in perspective. Not only do they compare the district's energy consumption to a small nation, they also give us an insight into the decline of energy consumption. The rest of the story goes on to look at how the school's green initiative is beginning to work.

FEATURE

The *Falconer* takes a look at TPHS' school spirit, A12
Sleep disorders and lack of sleep plague students, A16

Pump Until It

POPS

by Natalie Dunn and Daniel Liu

According to an analysis published in the Teachers College Record, the average percentage of students receiving A's in colleges has increased 28 percentage points since 1960. This growing trend of grade inflation has inspired much controversy among teachers and students alike, prompting the question, has inflation trickled into the high school education system, and what potential effects may it have on students today?

According to English teacher Robert Caughey, grade inflation has "definitely" become apparent in high schools.

"I know that [grade inflation] exists at TPHS," Caughey said. "I get a lot of students who have always received A's in English, and when they enter the AP program, they struggle to get a three or four or even a five on an essay. A quick look at their previous grades will reflect that they've gotten all A's ... and that's not a true reflection of what they've learned if their grades [have shown] A's and their writing skills don't."

The effects of grade inflation in high school are most commonly seen in students' academic performance in college, and this can shape how a college or university views a high school in the admissions process.

"Over time, a school, public or private, in the eyes of a university, produces or supports a clientele," Principal Ewet Killen said. "[This clientele] can either do well at the collegiate level or it cannot. Universities are quick to catch on, so if you have students coming out with straight A's and are either not passing AP tests or not successful [in college], why are they going to keep tapping that resource?"

But according to Killen, the overall integrity of TPHS is still strong, allowing colleges to look at the school with a firm belief that its successful graduates will also thrive in college.

Although grade inflation seems to hurt more than it can help, Caughey described its effects on students as a kind of "sichotomous experience."

"You will rarely find students complaining about grade inflation because if they get a class that is easy ... they're not going to complain, because they didn't have to do any work, and their GPAs have been inflated, and as such they are going to have a better opportunity to get into college," Caughey said. "[But I also think] there are students that crave challenge ... [who] get upset, and rightly so, when they aren't challenged. And those students might also complain when they receive a B in a class even though they've worked [so hard]."

In an intense academic environment like that of TPHS, the line between inflated grades and a course that is simply easy can be blurred.

According to counselor Brennan Dean, the notion of inflated grades at TPHS is largely misconceived; many mistake differences in teachers' judgments in grading as grade inflation.

"I don't feel that or know of any teachers that are purposely creating a grade inflation situation in their classes," Dean said. "I believe that teachers here are grading students on what they believe is accurate criticism or evaluation of the students' work. Now if you gave

that student's content to a different teacher, they could grade it differently, and I think that that's where we have the judgment issue."

A continuous debate over the differences between the schooling at private schools and the schooling at public schools also exists.

"It's particularly challenging [for brand new or even established private schools]," Killen said. "You're competing with the public school down the street, and people are paying you lots of money for you to go to that private institution. You have to do something that's going to set yourself apart ... so I am sure there are temptations. I like where Torrey Pines High School is because we're right in the middle of a community where families can often get a private education, but many of them are shrewd and say, 'Why would I pay \$15,000 when I can probably get a potentially more rigorous education at TPHS?'"

According to TPHS student Anthony*, who went to a private school for two years before coming to TPHS, the notion that private schools inflate grades is not completely inaccurate.

"I went to a private school, and I personally didn't see it, but my brother would always tell me about how the people who gave a lot of donations were usually the kids who got good grades, even though they did not deserve them," Anthony said. "My brother had a friend whose grade was inflated because his family donated a lot of money to the school, and he went off to college and by his second year, he was back at home ... He would go in after school, and the teacher would know his family and ... the teacher would bump his grade up."

The simplest way to combat grade inflation, according to Killen, is through certain kinds of calibrating assessments and a more enforced standard in course syllabi.

"For example, in AP classes, the greatest calibration is the assessment itself, the AP test," Killen said. "So if a student in the AP class is getting an A and doesn't pass the AP test, you may have an example of grade inflation. I think syllabi are really important in terms of defining expectations for the course, and then adhering to them through your grading policy. There should be alignment there."

Although teachers are not specifically taught in any way to standardize their grades to limit the potential for grade inflation, the lack of existing standards helps teachers create more unique curricula.

"I don't believe in standards because that means you have to standardize the way kids learn," Caughey said. "And you guys don't learn the same. I think when we create this idea of standards, then we're sort of going into this homogeneous idea — that we're all the same. And it's clear that we're not. I do teach AP, which is a standardized examination, but it's not a standardized curriculum; there's a difference."

However, according to Antoni Lee (10), a lot of teachers differ in the way they grade based on the amount of work they have, a primary contributor to grade inflation.

"Some teachers are lazy, so instead of spending hours on grading their assignment, [just inflating grades helps them] spend less hours," Lee said.

Even an increase of 28 percentage points is not grounds enough to claim the sudden presence of grade inflation, but as times change, the evidence that it is in fact working its way into an educational trend is unmistakable. The effects of this trend however, remain to be seen.

*Name changed to protect identity

Grade Inflation

ART BY HEATHER CHANG/FALCONER

FIGURE 3.13 "Pump Until it Pops," Natalie Dunn and Daniel Lu, *The Falconer*, Torrey Pines High School, San Diego, Calif. Page A11, Feb. 16, 2011. Reprinted with permission.

Sharp-minded news writers will take note of trends that are relevant and newsworthy to their audience, using credible and authoritative sources to analyze them. *Falconer* reporters used a college study as the starting point for asking questions about grade inflation at their own school. The reporters got interviews with the principal and counselors as well as honest in-depth interviews with students to develop a thorough, insightful story.

Quick exercise

Story development

Write out a list of sources and questions relevant to your school and student body for a news story on the following subjects.

- 1 A cellphone company that's a block away from the school announced it will shut down operations in a month. The company employs 1,000 people.
- 2 A major national health center found that cases of skin cancer among women ages 18 to 39 have increased eight-fold in the last 40 years. Researchers say tanning might explain this trend.

Passive voice

Writers should opt for active rather than passive voice. Passive voice tends to be wordy and recent studies show it's harder for readers to understand. In active voice sentences, the subject performs the action expressed by the verb. In passive voice sentences, the subject receives the action expressed by the verb.

WEAK (PASSIVE VOICE): The tournament was won by the debate team.

BETTER (ACTIVE VOICE): The debate team won the tournament.

WEAK (PASSIVE VOICE): After a three-hour closed session, the English teacher was fired by the school board.

BETTER (ACTIVE VOICE): After a three-hour closed session, the school board fired the English teacher.

Test your knowledge

When a statistic is used in a news story, what should accompany it?

ONLINE NEWS COVERAGE

Planning for multimedia news should begin at the same time that you develop a story idea. The more the writer thinks through the multimedia and interactive potential of each story, the richer and more understandable the resulting online news package will be.

If the story has audio or visual possibilities, be sure to capture them. A visual clip of the naming of the Homecoming king can accompany a news brief on the dance. An audio recording of the winning singer at the school talent show can go with a written story about the contest results. The reader's online experience will be enriched through the publication's attention to multiple storytelling platforms.

For example, say that a group of students plans to lead a protest march outside the school over the firing of a popular biology teacher, who deviated from the curriculum on evolution and included biblical references. Video clips of the protest might be part of the coverage to capture the size of the group as well as the sights and sounds of the afternoon. A podcast could provide a degree of emotion not conveyed or extended quotes that may not fit in a short written story. Within an online story, links to biblical passages referenced in the class, legal discussions regarding the separation of church and state, as well as to serious discussions of evolution versus creationism will all give the reader an opportunity to pursue a more complete understanding of the issues. Interactive reader polls on evolution and creationism or the justice of the teacher's firing might help provide context and explore the attitudes of the broader community.

When creating podcasts, record interviews with a handheld voice recorder. Noting or time-stamping the locations of good quotes or discussion can make audio editing considerably easier. Avoid talking over your source to help facilitate the presentation of extended quotes from the interview.

Natural sounds can be used to enhance podcasts or audio clips. In the previous example, the reporter might have captured the students chanting as they march outside the school. The shuffling feet and honking cars might give the listener a vivid sense of the scene.

High school publications can now offer instant coverage of breaking news events, through a range of technological tools. Photographers can use a wireless memory card to send photos directly to the paper's website. Audio-related websites such as Audioboo and Soundcloud can make on-the-spot audio editing and uploading possible for reporters in the field.

USING QUOTES AND ATTRIBUTION

News writing is built on information gathered from interviews. The following story demonstrates the basic formatting for that information.

Some other considerations to keep in mind when quoting sources include:

- As discussed in Chapter 2, use only the most insightful and powerful quotes from your interviews.
- Quote two or three strong sentences that closely relate to each other rather than including five or six rambling sentences with digressions and other topics. You can paraphrase, or omit these irrelevant quotes with ellipses.
- After you've attributed multiple consecutive graphs from the same source, it's okay to omit attribution for additional quotes, if it's clear that the same person is being quoted.

A NEWS WRITER'S CHECKLIST

After preparing a draft of a news story, good writers should reread, edit and rewrite the draft. The following checklist will give you a good list of questions for evaluating your draft.

- Does the lead convey the latest and most interesting and relevant information with powerful, clear language?
- If you use a straight news lead, does it contain the story's key news?
- If you use a feature lead, does the news peg immediately follow the lead?
- Are multiple sides covered?
- Does the story have multiple sources (if possible)?
- Are the sources balanced?
- Are all the names spelled correctly?
- Do you fully identify each source with a relevant identifier, as well as a first and last name?
- Are all assertions of fact backed by clear attributions?
- Does the story avoid editorializing?
- Are all the factual assertions verifiable and correct?
- Does the story include strong and vivid direct quotes? Is one of the best quotes included in the first few paragraphs of the story?
- Does the story use difficult or technical language that needs to be clarified?
- Does the story explain the issue to your readers in a way that is relevant for them?
- Do you give concrete examples for technical or hard-to-understand concepts?
- Does the story generally contain no more than one idea per paragraph?
- Are the paragraphs short?
- Do you separate paraphrases and direct quotes in different paragraphs?
- Do you still have unanswered questions after reading the story?

- 1 **Attribution**, or telling the reader where the information came from, is important to keep the story objective and to avoid giving the reader the idea that the story is a mere product of the writer's opinions.
- 2 A **direct quote** is a verbatim or word-for-word account of what the source said.
- 3 A **paraphrased quote**, which summarizes the source's words, is one way to set up a direct quote. The paraphrase uses the reporter's words to make the story more concise but should be true to the source's meaning. The writer should still attribute the information. "According to," is acceptable once or twice in a story – but overuse may cast doubt upon the source's believability. Words such as "claimed" should be avoided since they suggest that the source isn't credible.
- 4 The attribution for direct quotes usually appears after the first sentence of a quote. Avoid attributions before the actual quote, since it the quoted statement is almost always more important than who said it.
- 5 The word "said" is the preferred choice for attributing a quote. While this word may seem bland or repetitive, readers will accept it as a neutral word. Avoid showy or literary words such as "smiled" or "chuckled," which are liable to distract readers and call attention to the writer.
- 6 In first references to each source, the writer should provide an identifying phrase. The person's title or grade is often used to help the reader understand the relevance of the source (this issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9).
- 7 News writers may also provide context for a quote or information by giving the reader information about the source.
- 8 The verb "states" is used only because the information is taken from a formal written statement—the schools' handbook. "States" should generally be avoided with spoken quotes because it may be seen to grant more validity to this quote than one attributed with "said."
- 9 Notice the preferred order for attribution in "Havener said," which has a more natural rhythm than "said Havener." The sole exception to this ordering rule is if the name is followed by a long identifier or qualifying phrase, as in, "said Havener, a local pediatrician who has seen three similar cases."

Punishments for tweets raise questions

Claire Salzman
opinions editor

Josh Spiller was angry. One of his teachers sent him to the office after he refused to hand over his phone in class. Thursday, Feb. 2, during the school day, Spiller, junior, fired off a Tweet, cursing at his teacher. He thought that was the end of the situation. But Monday, Spiller said, Mike Gavin, junior class principal, called him to his office alerting him his teacher saw the Tweet. The teacher then brought the Tweet to the administration, and Spiller was given three days of out-of-school suspension.

"I felt that it was a violation of my rights," Spiller said. "It was wrong of me to say it, but I still had the right."

That Tuesday, administrators went on the announcements to discuss social media regulations at KHS, stating anything posted on Twitter would be considered the same as a face-to-face conversation. According to Dr. Michael Havener, principal, the administration felt it was reminding students what behavior is appropriate as described by the school handbook.

"We wanted to make sure students knew two things," Havener said. "One: Twitter's a good tool. Two: it also can be a tool that can be used the wrong way, and vulgar language toward a staff member or threats is just like saying it to staff member. When you use it in a negative way toward staff members, it's just like you're saying it in the classroom."

Mike Hiestand, Student Press Law Center (SPLC) consulting law-

yer, an organization that advocates student First Amendment rights, disagrees that Twitter is a personal conversation.

"[Administrators] can't just say that Tweets are the same as face-to-face communication because, well, it's not the same as face-to-face communication," Heistand said. "If they can prove that a particular Tweet had the same sort of impact as a face-to-face meeting that seriously disrupted some normal school activity, then maybe they can justify their punishment. But most Tweets, obviously, aren't that powerful."

Mike Wade, sophomore class principal, understands why students might say the emotional and potentially hurtful things they post online. However, he warns them of the lack of privacy due to the constant possibility that someone could see it.

"I think you're frustrated and you're angry, and you spurt. But guess what? You're spurring to the world. You're not just spurting to your friends anymore," Wade said. "In a school where we can all have our iPads and our iPhones and our computers, all bets are off. It's a different world. There are so many good things this could be used for academically, but it's not for complaining about a teacher."

Including Spiller (who has since returned to school), two students have been punished within the last month for using Twitter in what the student handbook deems an inappropriate way. The handbook, which contains guidelines for how social media should be used, states if conflict occurs on the Internet and creates a disruption in the classroom, the administration will evaluate them according to disciplinary guidelines. According to Gavin, the definition of a disruption has been left "intentionally vague." This allows administrators to judge each

incident case by case, leaving the decision on whether to become involved in the incident up to the administration's discretion.


While 64 percent (89/134) of students feel the administration's supervision of Twitter violates the First Amendment, Havener said the principals are looking out for the good of the student body.

"It's not about taking away First Amendment Rights. It's about using a tool in an appropriate manner and keeping everyone safe and secure," Havener said. "We're a strong believer in First Amendment Rights here at Kirkwood. However, with that comes responsibility."


Timeline

 **@KHSAdministration**
Three weeks ago
Administrators go on morning announcements in order to discuss online conduct and behavior

 **@KHSAdministration**
Three weeks ago
The student was given in-school-suspension as a punishment, which was revised to out-of-school suspension

 **@KHSAdministration**
Six weeks ago
A junior sends a Tweet cursing at a teacher after an incident between the two occurred during class

 **@KHSAdministration**
Six weeks ago
Administrators and lawyers work to create a policy for online conduct

 **@KHSAdministration**
Six years ago
Students suspended for ranking other students' attractiveness online and disrupting the classroom

64% ^(89/134)
of students think punishing students for what they tweet violates the First Amendment

74% ^{103/139}
of students think students should not be punished for what they tweet



Bryce Ramming art editor



photo courtesy of MCT Campus

pg. 8

KC Ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes of KHS's theater productions? Check out Zach Beuckman's behind-the-scenes feature at thekirkwoodcall.com

FIGURE 3.14 Tweeting punishment story from *The Kirkwood Call*. Reproduced with permission of Mitch Eden.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Always remember – no matter what you are writing about, your source probably doesn't know what part of their knowledge is most important for your story or will have the biggest impact for your readers. Don't be afraid to really get down and dirty when asking for details. What might be mundane or ordinary for your interviewee could be the key element that 'makes' the story you are writing.

David Kirkpatrick, Reporter, MarketingSherpa



- Does the story flow smoothly from one idea to another?
- Does the story contain needless information or wordiness?
- Do you feel confident enough in the story's information and quotes to have your name printed in the byline?

CONCLUSION

The news story is the staple of any news publication. Getting the latest information to the reader clearly and concisely provides a critical public service. High school journalists have more options than ever for delivering news to multiple audiences. However, the fundamentals of well-developed objective reporting remain the same.

The strategies covered in this chapter provide a foundation for many of the other writing forms covered later. The varieties of feature style leads will be useful for writing a range of articles and features. Such issues as flow, organization, attribution, depth, concision and active voice are key considerations for every kind of journalistic writing.

SUMMARY

- The news story should get the reader the latest information, based upon how quickly the story will be published.
- Straight news leads and the inverted pyramid structure are often used in breaking news stories to get the reader the 5W's and H quickly in the opening paragraphs, and the least important information at the end of the story.
- Alternative leads such as a vignette or contrast can be used in news stories to grab readers' attention. In those cases, the basic news questions should be answered in a "focus," "wrap" or "nut" paragraph almost immediately after the lead.
- The body of the news story gives information, details and quotes not included in the lead, in descending order of importance.
- News writers develop their stories through multiple sources to be balanced, objective and accurate.

KEY TERMS

contrast lead	lead	paraphrased quote
descriptive lead	news peg	straight news lead
direct quote	news story	transition
editorializing	nut, focus or wrap graph/ graf	vignette lead
feature fact	objectivity	
inverted pyramid		

EXERCISES

- Find three good examples of straight news leads from a daily newspaper or news website. Explain why you believe the writer selected the feature fact in the lead. Identify the 5W's and H in the story. Assess which answers to basic journalistic questions the writer chose to omit from the lead sentence. Explain why you think the writer chose to keep that information out of the lead.
- Look for two national or state stories that have a localized impact for your high school. Explain the localized angle and whom you would interview to develop each story.
- First, identify the 5W's and H from the following three scenarios. Next, write three straight news leads that each begin with a different aspect of the story. Work to tighten the language in each lead and make sure each lead is concise yet informative and interesting. Circle your best lead and be ready to explain why it is the strongest.
 - The National Honor Society had their induction ceremony Thursday. Principal Grant Kendall and first-year NHS adviser Emily Perkins-Rock attended. Perkins-Rock began requiring 10 hours of community service this year for induction. Most NHS members simply had to have a grade point average above a 3.65 before this year. Senior and National Honor Society president Brendan Duloherly led the induction. This year only 25 students were inducted. Last year, 50 students were inducted. Perkins-Rock said she thought the drop in inductees was because of the new community service requirement.
 - The band went to the Sandy Pond Band Festival yesterday. This was the first year the marching band attended the festival. The band placed first. Fifteen bands competed. The band performed a collection of Lady Gaga songs. The band had worked on the contest routine for the last month.
 - The sophomore class held a fundraiser this past weekend. The fundraiser was a walk-a-thon that started and ended at Duncan Maclachlan Park. Seventy-five juniors participated. They raised \$7,000 for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Juniors completed distances of 3K, 5K and 10K. Before the event, sophomore class president Grant Heinlein estimated the walk-a-thon would raise \$3,000.
- From the following set of facts and quotes, write both a straight news lead and two different types of feature leads. Make sure that you follow the feature lead with a wrap or nut graph that includes the news peg.

Facts

Your school has an 82 percent attendance rate. This is the third year the school has had an attendance rate below 85 percent after three straight years of an 89 percent attendance rate. The school board has been studying the issue for the last year. Principal Jake Crandall proposed a plan to the board that will tie school attendance to admission to the high school prom, beginning with next year's prom. All four classes, 9th through 12th grade, are allowed to attend the prom.

The board will consider the plan at the next board meeting Tuesday. Your publication is coming out on the Monday before.

The "no-class, no-dance policy," which means if students have one or more unexcused absences,

they won't be allowed to attend the prom, mirrors a plan at a high school in Iowa. Crandall moved here from a town near the Iowa school last year. In the first year of the policy's enforcement, it improved the attendance rate at the Iowa high school by three percentage points, from 88 percent to 91 percent.

Interviews

Principal Jake Crandall

I know the board was looking for ways to improve our attendance. I just thought we needed to do something that would get students' attention. Prom is not a right, it's a privilege. If students want to enjoy that privilege then they need to come to school. I watched this policy improve attendance in Iowa, so I know it could do it here.

It used to be that kids wanted to make sure they didn't miss school for fear of having to make up lots of work. Four years ago, teachers said there were rumors of a senior skip day, but only 10 people would skip. This year, we had two senior skip days. The first one, we had 30 seniors with unexcused absences. The last one, we had 50 unexcused.

Junior Andrew Beasley

I sure wouldn't miss school. My girlfriend would kill me if I skipped a class and couldn't go to the prom. I bet people would make sure they got up in the morning and got to class if they pass this.

Junior Molly Halter

I didn't go to prom freshman year. I was sick sophomore year. And this year, my family is going to a family reunion so I won't be able to go. I think next year it'll be the biggest event in my high school career. I can't imagine not being able to go my senior year. I don't like the policy. I know I've been marked absent by a substitute when I was there. I just wouldn't want the biggest event of my senior year to be ruined because of a simple mistake by a sub.

Senior Danielle Norton

This won't really impact me. I know I think it's a bad idea. The prom is something I look forward to and I certainly wouldn't want to miss it because of one absence.

Board member Holly Hernandez

We'll certainly look at the proposal. I think we need to be creative in finding ways to encourage kids to get to school. I don't know if parents understand that our funding is impacted by our attendance rate. We lose state funding if kids don't attend school.

- 5 Get a copy of your school's weekly or daily announcements. Write two news briefs from the information, in straight news lead form. List what questions, if any, go unanswered.
- 6 Choose a news story from a major daily newspaper or news website. Circle at least 10 transitional words or natural connections the writer used to help the story flow from point to point. Explain how each of the natural connections worked to link different aspects of the story.
- 7 Choose a news story of more than 10 paragraphs from a daily newspaper or news website. To evaluate the depth in the story, complete these tasks:
 - (a) count the sources within the story
 - (b) summarize the different sides to the story.
- 8 Select a news story from a daily newspaper or news website and make or print two copies. Cut one into separate paragraphs, shuffle the paragraphs, then pair up with another student. Exchange your stacks of cut-up paragraphs and attempt to organize and recreate the original flow of each other's stories (without seeing the originals). Focus on what information is most important and the logical flow of topics. Show each other your original stories and evaluate your recreations, discussing where your organization departed from the originals. Identify key expert or professional sources within the story.
- 9 Brainstorm potential online packaging from two different scenarios:
 - (a) The choir is planning what they are calling their "Yesterday" tour. The choir will travel to three different nursing homes in the area to perform a 25-minute concert at each facility. A month ago, the choir teacher polled the nursing home residents for three song requests that brought back good memories for them. They'll be performing those songs at the concert.
 - (b) The graphic novel club has put together a fundraiser local comic con. The comic con will host games for the town's elementary and junior high students. The graphic novel club members plan to dress up as their favorite comic book characters for the event. The events will include a costume contest, which will raise money for their own trip to the national comic con next year.

