Tips for Writing in a Newspaper

**News style**, **journalistic style**, or **news-writing style** is the [prose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose) style used for [news](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News) reporting in media such as [newspapers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newspaper), [radio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio) and [television](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television).

News writing attempts to answer all the basic questions about any particular event—who, what, when, where and why (the [Five Ws](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws)) and also often how—at the opening of the [article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_(publishing)). This form of structure is sometimes called the "[inverted pyramid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inverted_pyramid_(journalism))", to refer to the decreasing importance of information in subsequent paragraphs.

News stories also contain at least one of the following important characteristics relative to the intended audience: proximity, prominence, timeliness, human interest, oddity, or consequence.

Newspapers generally adhere to an [expository writing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expository_writing) style. Over time and place, [journalism ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalism_ethics) and standards have varied in the degree of [objectivity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectivity_(journalism)) or [sensationalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sensationalism) they incorporate. It is considered unethical not to attribute a [scoop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scoop_(news)) to the journalist(s) who broke a story, even if they are employed by a rival organization. Definitions of [professionalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professionalism) differ among [news agencies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_agency); their reputations, according to both professional standards and reader expectations, are often tied to the appearance of objectivity. In its most ideal form, news writing strives to be intelligible to the majority of readers, engaging, and succinct. Within these limits, news stories also aim to be comprehensive. However, other factors are involved, some stylistic and some derived from the media form.

Among the larger and more respected newspapers, fairness and balance is a major factor in presenting information. Commentary is usually confined to a separate section, though each paper may have a different overall slant. Editorial policies dictate the use of adjectives, euphemisms, and idioms. Newspapers with an international audience, for example, tend to use a more formal style of writing.

The specific choices made by a news outlet's editor or editorial board are often collected in a [style guide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_guide); common style guides include the [*AP Stylebook*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AP_Stylebook) and the *US News Style Book*. The main goals of news writing can be summarized by the ABCs of journalism: accuracy, brevity, and clarity

Whether you're studying journalism or just have a news story to write, the prospect of writing in a newspaper can be daunting. Don't despair! We've collected all the tips, tricks and fundamentals you need to write a clear, easy-to-read, informative story.

## News Writing Is NICE

There are four core elements that must appear in every news story. They are neatly summed up by the [acronym](https://www.yourdictionary.com/acronym) NICE:

* **News:** Be sure to include strictly relevant and definitive data. This consists of the who, what, when, where, how, and why of the story.
* **Impact:** Clearly indicate the meaning of the news and who may be affected by it. Why should readers care about this story?
* **Context:** Provide relevant background and related information pertaining to the news and impact. How does this story fit into the bigger picture?
* **Emotion:** Relay the emotional elements that show the human side of the story. This further solidifies the impact and context of the story, helping readers to understand and relate to it.

Keeping your story NICE means keeping it focused. Including those four elements is vital in the creation of a tight, meaningful story that will engage a reader's attention and leave them with a thorough understanding of the story's subject.

## Types of News Writing

If you're studying journalism, you've probably heard about "hard news" and "soft news." We're here to correct some common misconceptions about those terms.

### Hard News

"Hard news" focuses on hard facts, emphasizing the "News" and "Impact" aspects of the story and generally downplaying "Context" and "Emotion." A good hard news story deals in provable facts and direct quotes. If it draws any conclusions, those conclusions must be [deductive](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/deductive-reasoning-examples.html), provable from the facts provided in the story.

In a student newspaper, a hard news story might relay details regarding an upcoming fundraiser for band camp.

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### Soft News

"Soft news" isn't less important or less rigorous than "hard news." It just focuses more on the "Context" and "Emotion" aspects of the story, deemphasizing "News" and "Impact." Obviously, to be a news story at all, even the "softest" story must have some facts. Good soft news allows for more [induction](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-inductive-reasoning.html) and reflection on the part of the writer, and prioritizes presenting a story that connects with the reader.

Using a similar context as the hard news example above, a soft news story may discuss why band camp is so important to one student in particular.

## Writing Leads for Newspaper Stories

A lead, sometimes spelled [lede](https://www.yourdictionary.com/lede), is simply the first part of a news story. Generally, it's limited to the first sentence (or the first few sentences). In news writing, everything depends on the lead. Readers may be patient when they sit down to read a book, but when they open newspapers or click on their favorite blogs, they expect to be informed, fast.

This [article from NPR](https://training.npr.org/2016/10/12/leads-are-hard-heres-how-to-write-a-good-one/) delves into the many ways to approach the lead. Every good lead has something in common: it tells the reader what the story is, why it's interesting, and why it's important.

Here are some basic tips for writing news leads:

* **Focus on one main idea:** You've got the whole story to talk about your subject in detail. Keep your first sentence tight.
* **Be clear what the story is about:** Suspense has no place in news writing. Think of your lead as the article's [thesis statement](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/thesis-statement-examples.html): here's what happened, and here's why it matters.
* **Grab their attention:** Incorporate [an intellectual or emotional hook](https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/grammar/writing/how-to-write-a-hook.html) to get the reader invested early.
* **Keep the language clear and jargon-free:** If a reader starts your story and can't even understand the first sentence, you've already lost them.
* **Surprise them:** Leads should not be lifeless. They should have a conversational aspect, as if the journalist were speaking directly with the reader.

A good lead can be the salvation of a middling story. And a bad one can kill a good story outright.

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## Writing for a School Newspaper

As a rule, good news writing is good school newspaper writing. Keep it NICE, craft a good lead, and you should be good to go. However, some tips definitely apply to school newspaper writing in particular:

* People love to read about themselves; it's a journalistic [axiom](https://www.yourdictionary.com/axiom). Interview your friends about their favorite subjects. Challenge teachers to answer questions about one another's disciplines. If it gets people's names in the paper, it's guaranteed to bring in more readers.
* The best news comes from good reporting. Be on the scene for sporting events, concerts, plays and other big events at your school. Report on exciting details the audience may have missed.
* Think! It may seem simplistic. It's not. Too many people think a journalist's job is to write down objective facts. That's a scientist's job. A journalist's job is to take note of the facts, then write down their context, meaning and greater significance. Every news outlet needs a good opinion section that takes on current events. Your school deserves one too.

## News Style Tips

Written news is its own prose style. News stories shouldn't be novels or academic reports. They should be concise, engaging statements of fact and opinion. When writing your story, keep these tips in mind.

* **Numbers**: Don't include more than three numbers in a sentence.
* **Phrases**: Don't put more than three [prepositional phrases](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/prepositional-phrases-examples.html) in one sentence.
* **Sentences**: These should be under 25 words and contain one idea. Don't use too many commas; follow the basic subject-verb-object structure. Lean toward shorter sentences and paragraphs that get straight to the point.
* **Voice**: Use [an active voice](https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/style-and-usage/change-passive-voice-to-active-voice.html). This helps to strengthen the writing and make it easier to understand.
* **Words**: Don't use complicated words. Reduce them to something simpler. Also, [use precise words](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/diction-examples.html) to keep your story short and clear.

## The Importance of Good News

I want stories to startle and engage me within the first few sentences, and in their middle to widen or deepen or sharpen my knowledge of human activity, and to end by giving me a sensation of completed statement.

Treat John Updike's words above as a mission statement. Engage your readers with the lead, inform them by following NICE, and conclude with a meaningful summary of what your writing communicated.

To hone your writing skills for your next news story, check out our articles on [sentence structure](https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/sentences/grammar-patterns-for-sentences.html) and the [5 most common grammatical errors.](https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/grammar-rules-and-tips/5-most-common.html) Both are guaranteed to make you a clearer, better writer.

To write an article, you need an angle. When the smoking ban was first introduced in the UK, I decided to do a piece on it as I had a friend who ran a local pub. I interviewed him, talking about the impact it was having on his business. The editor loved the local angle and the article went straight in the next edition. A really simple idea, but it worked. By using local contacts, you can produce something unique that no one else might have thought of or be able to write.

I’ve discovered that one thing to avoid when doing this kind of freelance journalism is voicing your own opinion. No one cares what you think. Readers just want the facts so they can make up their own minds. I found editors tend to strip anything out that is opinion based rather than factual. You can describe what happened and allow an interviewee to talk and give their perspective, but your own thoughts are not needed. This technique seems to work well. Remaining unbiased results in a higher success rate.