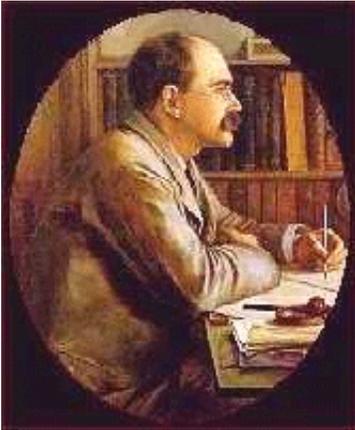


Unit Introduction

Your newspaper is one of the best ways to get information out to the troops. Yet the best results of any readership survey shows only 25 percent of those troops read it. Getting your audience to read your newspaper requires good stories and good writing. A start to good newspaper writing and good news release writing is a strong summary lead containing the most important news elements of the story.

Remembering this poem by Rudyard Kipling might act as sort of a poetic mnemonic for remembering the recipe for all the ingredients in news.



I keep six honest serving men
(They taught me all I know):
Their names are What and Why and
When
And How and Where and Who.

Kipling: *The Serving-men*



directly reflects on your credibility as a journalist.

Thought for the day:

*If at first you don't succeed ...
skydiving is probably not for you.*

Writing leads (like the rest of journalism) is not rocket science, brain surgery or skydiving. It requires practice and attention to detail. But best of all, if you do not succeed on the first try, you will not end up a messy spot on the ground or with a large frontal lobotomy scar – there is always tomorrow.

However, always remember that your success or failure in constructing solid summary news leads

Unit Objective

- Write an internal news story summary news lead

Unit Overview

- **Summary news leads**
- News story structure:
 - the **inverted pyramid**
 - the **news peg**
- **Lead emphasis**
- **Newspaper dateweek**

Importance of Effective News Leads

The lead is not only the first and most important paragraph of a news story; it is the essence of what you know about the event, written crisply and tightly. It states the important facts first.

Along with the headline, the lead must cause the reader to stop and be interested. Obviously, when you write a great story, you want people to read it. You may be at the mercy of the editor when it comes to the headline, but you are fully on the line when it comes to getting the reader interested beyond that. Your lead must grab the reader by the collar and scream "READ ME!"

Studies show that when we look at newspapers we tend to scan headlines and decide which stories we MIGHT read. Then we read the opening sentence or two and consciously or unconsciously decide whether to read on.



Summary (News) Lead

It's one thing to cover a meeting or a commander's speech and write about it in 500 words; if you stumble around long enough, you are bound to trip over the news. But news writing demands that you report the news in the lead, which often consists of as few as 30 words. If you don't understand what your lead is, you don't understand the importance of the facts in the story, and you will have trouble with the entire story.

Hard news stories begin with summary leads. The **summary lead** gives the reader the facts that most clearly and compellingly tell what the story is about, without editorializing or including any unnecessary wording. If you've done your job, the summary lead will draw the reader into the rest of the story, where other details will be provided.

Summary leads for DINFOS (and just about every hard news story in a civilian publication) are one-sentence paragraphs that are 30 words in length or less. Brevity is important -- shorter leads can be hard-hitting -- but be certain not to leave out critical information.

Another reason for limiting summary leads to 30 words or less is that it's been determined that 30 words equals about one column inch of copy. This is long enough for the writer to provide the essential facts, but short enough to keep the reader's interest.

Summary (News) Lead

Write to express, not to impress. News writing is not the place to show off your vocabulary. Tight writing is important.

The New York Times and *Washington Post* sometimes have leads of up to 40-45 words. These are written for a more advanced audience, who are considered to have a better-than-average education. Complex sentence structures, etc., allow them more leeway when it comes to lead length.

But, while it's true that more and more newspapers, including military newspapers, write advanced leads today, it's also true that most readers of the news want the facts **first and foremost**. And a good place to start for any writer of the news is the basics: writing a summary news lead!



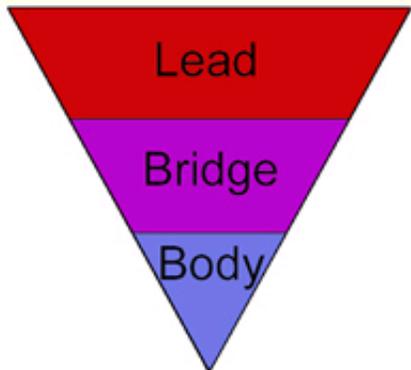
The Inverted Pyramid

In a nutshell, the inverted pyramid method of news writing is **front-loading the most important facts**.

According to recent research, the average news consumer spends about 15 minutes a day reading the newspaper, often on the subway on his/her way to work. This estimate is down considerably from research taken in the 1960s, when readers spent an average of 25 minutes reading the news.

The inverted pyramid structure gives these readers the facts of the story in **descending order of importance**. It allows readers to get the news they want/need fast so they can move on to the next news item without missing anything essential. The distractions and obligations in most readers' everyday lives make this a very important consideration.

The diagram of the inverted pyramid (below) might be deceiving at first glance. It's important to remember that, while the lead may be represented graphically as the largest part of the pyramid, it's *not* the largest when it comes to actual physical *size*. It only looks that way because the lead contains the **most important** information. This theoretically makes it the "largest" in content.



The Inverted Pyramid

Another reason to use the inverted pyramid is a more selfish, albeit practical, one for the editor/publisher: lack of newspaper space. The average commercial newspaper contains about 65 percent advertising, which only leaves about 35 percent for news.

Let's say you've written an article that is 15 inches long if stacked in a newspaper column (what's known as column width). However, your editor has only 10 inches of space left in the newspaper for your story because another reporter just entered the newsroom after covering a major fire downtown. Her story will take up a lot of space, and there isn't enough room for both stories to make the newspaper in their entirety. To trim your story, he's going to snip from the bottom. If you've written it in correct inverted pyramid structure, this trimming shouldn't adversely affect the reader's understanding of the news.

History: The inverted pyramid form of news writing, most journalism historians will tell you, evolved during the Civil War. Reporters sometimes saw their stories cut off in mid-transmission as enemy forces cut telegraph lines. The goal became to get the important information -- such as who won the battle -- up front, then fill in as much detail as time and the enemy's actions would allow.

The News Peg

Simply put, the **news peg** is the reason you're writing a news story: something has to have happened or been scheduled to happen, or there wouldn't be any reason for you to write anything. For example, if there's been a fire in housing, then you'd naturally need a story about the fire for the newspaper. The fire is the news peg.

It's important to be able to recognize the news peg because it will determine how you place facts in your lead and throughout the rest of the story. If a private assigned to your post buys a lottery ticket one evening but the drawing and announcement that the private won doesn't take place till three days later, what's the news peg? It's not the purchase of the ticket; that by itself wasn't newsworthy because lots of people did that. What's news is that the person became a lottery winner during the drawing.

Does that mean you wouldn't report when the person bought the winning ticket? No. But it *does* mean that you wouldn't need to place that fact high in the story. If that fact got cut by the editor/publisher, it wouldn't be missed nearly as much as the facts of the real news peg.

News pegs as labels: The news peg can and should be used as the slug -- the in-house title for your story. If you review the example of the internal format in your Public Affairs Writing Handbook, you'll see how the slug might look and be used. A slug should be one word only, typed in all caps. Keep it short; eight characters or less is best.

The SIX Questions

Remember the summary lead? Just about every reporter learns to write summary leads during a Journalism 101 class in college, and you can bet the reporters at the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* learned it that way, too. When writing a summary lead, you have to consider the six basic questions a reader can ask about any given news event. They are:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **Where?**
- **When?**
- **Why?**
- **How?**

It is not always necessary or practical that a writer answer every one of these questions in the lead. (For one thing, that's a lot of information to be crammed into 30 words or less!) The summary lead *does*, however, answer the most important ones. At a minimum, the four that must be answered in a hard news summary lead are:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **When?**
- **Where?**

The **How** and **Why** tend to be the most difficult items to discern about an event and aren't always essential (or even available) for the lead.



First Lt. Kate Gries, B-1 pilot with the 37th Bomb Squadron at Ellsworth AFB, tells ABC television reporter Cokie Roberts about her job on Web cast.

Those are the same six questions you will typically be asked by reporters over the phone or on camera! Understanding the basic elements of news will serve you well in your role as a media relations expert.

This is most important as you start to understand the commonality between journalism and the other disciplines taught during this course.

The Lead Emphasis

Most of the time, one of the five Ws or the H will be obviously more important than the others. The most important W or H should be the very first thing presented in the summary lead. That's what makes it the **lead emphasis**: it's the most important, therefore it receives the most "emphasized" position in the lead.

This is where being able to correctly identify the news peg will become crucial: identifying the news peg and then selecting the most important W or H is how you select the lead emphasis. You have to go back to the starting block and ask yourself, *"Why exactly am I writing a news story in the first place?"*

Once you've identified the news peg, find all the pertinent Ws and H, then select the most important one. The key to selecting the right one is to remember the reader's point of view.

Which piece of information will likely be most important to those who will be looking at your newspaper?

Selecting a lead emphasis

Here are some general rules to guide you in selecting a good lead emphasis:

The **Who** or the **What** is most commonly used for the lead emphasis because readers want to know about other people or what they are doing.

? Who

? What

? When

? Where

? Why

? How

- If the event affects one person, a **Who** lead emphasis would work well (e.g., who is receiving the award).
- If the event affects more than one, a **What** lead emphasis would work well (e.g., a concert).

The **When** and **Where** are seldom used as lead emphasis because they are rarely as important as the Who or What, but remember that they must still be included in the lead.

The **Why** and **How** are used only when extremely important or unusual. Often, they will not appear in the lead at all, even if they are available right away.

The Who (and how to use it)

The **Who** in a lead answers the reader's question of who did what, or to whom it happened. Who may be an individual, a group of people or an organization.

In most hard news story leads, the reporter will identify an individual by either the full name **or** by some sort of generic description, followed later in the story by the name. How do you know which to do? How do you choose between "chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" and "Gen. Peter Pace"?

Ask yourself whether the person is *so prominent* that you can say with *full confidence* that the name is nationally recognized and your entire audience of readers would instantly recognize the name. If so, you can use the full name in your lead. This can be a tricky thing: you might know who the commanding officer of your unit is, but can you logically expect everyone who reads the base paper to know -- even family members? Remember, your audience includes more than just those who work in the commanding officer's building.

The Impersonal Who

If you can't be sure everyone will recognize the person's name, use instead the **impersonal who** to identify that person in the lead. Later, you can identify that person by name without risk of mystifying readers (*full identification will be covered in detail when you learn about the bridge and body*).

The impersonal who should contain two primary elements:

- the person's **job title** and
- the person's **unit/organization** (and where it is located, if not well-known)

For example, the impersonal who to identify your instructor in this course might look something like this:
"an instructor at the Defense Information School here"



Self-directed exercise: Pick up today's paper, pick out names and determine if you would use the individual's name or the impersonal who to identify the person. Don't forget to ask yourself if you believe *everyone* on your installation would know, too.

What

What tells briefly what happened or is scheduled to happen -- planned or unplanned. The post golf tournament would be a planned event. But someone getting beamed by a golf ball during the tournament is an unplanned event.

Many times the Who and the What overlap. Something has happened to someone, or someone has caused something to happen.

You, as the reporter, must decide which is more important to the readers. Again, it's important that you know and be able to put yourself in the shoes of your newspaper's audience to determine which is likely to be more important to the majority of the readers.



When

When is the time or date of the event. In your summary lead, the when may be expressed in general terms, such as today or this afternoon. Or it need to be more specific, including the time and actual day or the week or date of the event. It all depends on the importance of the when to the story.

For example, in an accident story, specific times are important because it provides the reader the context for how the accident occurred and provides important time references (the time of the accident, when emergency vehicles arrived, how long traffic was tied up, etc.)

The general rule for writing times with days/dates is to use the time of day just before the day/date:

4 p.m. Oct. 21

When

Words not to use for the when:

To avoid confusion, the AP stylebook tells us **not** to use "yesterday," "tomorrow," "next" or "last" when stating the when.

Although some newspapers do use "yesterday" and "tomorrow" as their local style, it's best to use the day of the week or the date. Why? Because by the time the story is read, "yesterday" and "tomorrow" may not be the right days. Say a reporter covers a story Saturday, then writes it Monday, and the editor decides to publish it Friday. When is "yesterday" to the reader? While a reporter may have a pretty good idea when a story will be printed, he or she can't predict when a reader will actually pick up the paper and read it.

When

"Last" and "next" are considered redundant. Verb tense eliminates the need for such modifiers; don't use them to modify a "when" unless it is part of a direct quote.

Readers will know from the wording that this has already taken place:

An electrical storm **caused** a seven-hour power outage throughout the post and surrounding communities Wednesday night.

Here, readers can tell that the event has not yet taken place:

A 10-mile run to benefit the Baltimore Make-A-Wish Foundation **is scheduled for** Saturday, beginning at the post gymnasium.

The Newspaper Dateweek:

Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

Thought we were done with when, didn't you? There's one more thing to learn about the when, and it can be one of the hardest things to grasp at first. But once you get it, it's like riding a bike: you never forget how. There's some math involved, but don't panic! If you can count, you'll be fine.

The **newspaper dateweek** is the tool journalists use to determine whether they should use the day of the week (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, etc.) or the month and date (Sept. 12, Jan. 13, etc.) to tell readers the when of a news event. **Never use both day of the week and month/date; it's redundant.**

The first step toward understanding the dateweek is to remember that it contains a total of 13 days. It doesn't matter whether your publication is a daily, weekly or monthly -- it's still 13 days from one end to the other.

TIP: *To effectively apply the dateweek to your writing assignments, you'll need a calendar current to the time period you're "attending" the online course. We've supplied one with your course materials to help you track assignments and due dates, but you can also use one of your own if you're more comfortable doing so.*

The Newspaper Dateweek: Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

The 13 days of the newspaper dateweek break down like this:

- The day in the center is the the day your newspaper gets published (hits the streets to be picked up and read by your audience).
- There are six days before the publication date.
- There are six days after the publication date.

For DINFOS assignments, your internal unit newspaper will be a weekly; the publishing date will be each Thursday. Therefore, the center of your newspaper dateweek will be Thursday whenever you're writing for your internal unit publication.

January						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

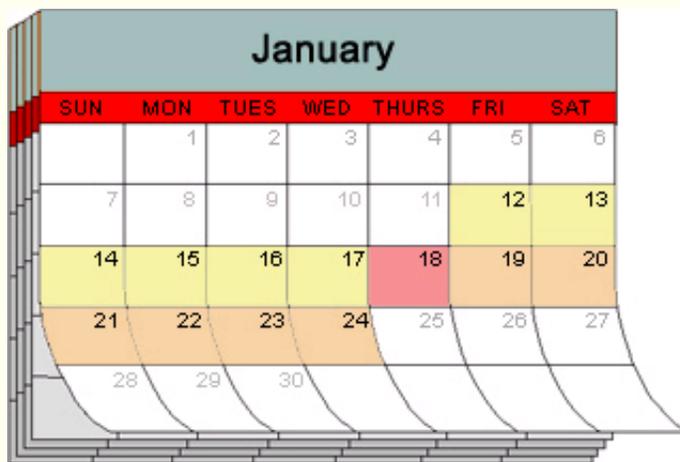
The Newspaper Dateweek:

Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

The six days before and the six days after the publication date are within the newspaper dateweek for that week's publication. When an event has taken place or is scheduled to take place within that dateweek window, the when of the event is given using the day of the week (Monday, Saturday, etc.). If it is scheduled to take place the day of publication, you should use the word "today."

When an event takes place prior to or after that week's newspaper dateweek window, the when of the event is given using the month and the date (Jan. 10, Jan. 25, etc).

Look at the graphic below. For illustration purposes, the dateweek highlighted is that of the issue of the newspaper to be published Jan. 18. The days in yellow are the six days prior to the publication date; the days in peach are the six days after. Note that this dateweek does not include either the previous or following publication date (Thursday).



The Newspaper Dateweek:

Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

Always remember that the newspaper dateweek is not a tool to determine when an event took or is scheduled to take place; it is only a tool to determine whether you will use the day of the week, a month and date or the word "today" to tell readers the when.

Again using the graphic below, let's take a look at how you would apply the dateweek to one of your journalism assignments for this course. Let's say that your deadline for an assignment is **Jan. 15**. You're all going to be working on the assignment at different times, which can make it hard for your instructors to determine exactly when you wrote and applied the dateweek to your assignments. **Therefore, to standardize grading for everyone, you're always to "pretend" that the deadline for your assignment is also the date you first received the data, even if you complete the assignment prior to the deadline.**

January						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

The Newspaper Dateweek: Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

Using the following piece of data, you are assigned to write a hard news story:

- There will be a water outage here. It will affect all fort housing areas. It is scheduled for 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 24. Civil engineers will be repairing numerous leaks. It will not affect post work or barracks areas.

First, refer to a calendar and find the next available publication date. We'll continue to use Jan. 18 for this exercise. You now have the center day of the 13-day dateweek.

Second, count out the six days before and the six days after the publication date. You now have the entire 13-day dateweek for that issue marked.

Third, find Wednesday, Jan. 24. If you've counted the dateweek out properly, you will see that it's within the dateweek for Jan. 18's paper. Since it is within the dateweek for that issue, you will use **Wednesday**, not Jan. 24, for the date of the water outage. Remember, using both is redundant!

January						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

The Newspaper Dateweek:

Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

Now, let's say you received the same piece of data on the same day, except the date of the water outage is Thursday, Jan. 25. Applying the same technique, you would find that the date is outside the dateweek for Jan. 18th's paper. Therefore, you would use the month and date: Jan. 25.

January						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

The Newspaper Dateweek:

Deciding to use either the day of the week or the month/date

One more example, still using Jan. 15 as the day your assignment is due/the day you're simulating receipt of this data, and using Jan. 18 as the day of publication:

Last night, Navy Petty Officer Second Class Daniel D. Dawn took top honors in a local contest. The contest, "Mr. Fitness," was held in Hampton, 20 miles north of the base. Dawn is a personnelman here with the Personnel Services Detachment. He competed against 15 other hopefuls from throughout the state and is eligible for the upcoming regional competition in June at Dry Prong, Louisiana.

This presents a new challenge: when was "last night," and how do we translate it for Jan. 18th's paper? (Similar challenges would be presented by the words "yesterday" and "tomorrow.")

It's actually pretty simple: if this is Jan. 15 (the day your assignment is due), then "last night" means Dawn won the contest Sunday, Jan. 14. Now all you have to do is apply the dateweek and see where Sunday, Jan. 14 falls, just as you did in the last example. If you do it correctly, you'll find that you must refer to the date as "Sunday" for that week's paper.

January						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Where

Where tells the reader where the event happened or is scheduled to happen -- an exact location. Just as with the when, where can be expressed as generally as "here" or as specifically as 7702 Main St., depending on the significance.

Whether specific or NOT specific, the **where must be clear!**

Example: "A free country music concert featuring Vince Gill and open to all post employees and their families will be held at the parade grounds Saturday."

This lead implies that the Where element is the post's parade grounds. What if the concert is taking place at the County Fair grounds in Odenton instead, a community just outside the post? In that case, you must specifically explain the where so as not to confuse the location. Should you use "here" when referring to a story on post? The "here" entry in the AP stylebook states the following:

"The word is frequently redundant, particularly in the lead of a datelined story. Use only if there is some specific need to stress that the event being reported took place in the community. If the location must be stressed in the body of the story, repeat the name of the datelined community, both for the reader's convenience and to avoid problems if the story is topped with a different dateline."

However, it's a good idea to use "here" if not everyone would be able to interpret the where clearly. For instance, on Fort Meade, hardly anyone except those working at or attending DINFOS knows that it's at Fort Meade. Therefore, saying "at the Defense Information School here" in the Fort Meade publication would not be redundant.

Why

Frequently, the **Why** element cannot be answered in an initial release about an event. (Dealing with accidents, etc). How many times have we heard “We just do not know why John Smith shot six of his coworkers ...”

Why can be implied. Summary leads that use a why lead emphasis often fix blame. They often start with “Because.”

Example: “Because gas masks fail to form a tight fit over beards, the Navy today announced that all Sailors will no longer be allowed facial hair.”



How

How explains the circumstances surrounding the event. This should not be confused with **Why**.

Example: By tunneling under the walls, three inmates escaped the prison here Tuesday night.

This tells us how they escaped, but not why (in this case, why is implied!).

An airplane crashes. Witnesses say its engines cut out. **Why** the engine cut out is a fact that may not be known until months later after the investigation concludes its report. The **how**, however, explains the circumstances of the crash.

Example: TAMPA -- A MacDill Air Force Base F-16 Fighting Falcon **collided with a small civilian aircraft** near Sarasota today, landing in a field near an orange grove and nearly missing an outlet mall.

How did the accident occur? A mid-air collision. **Why?** Wait for the investigation ...

Unit summary

- A **summary lead** summarizes the story within a one-sentence paragraph of 30 words or less.
- Information in hard news stories is presented in descending order of importance, with the most important facts in the summary lead. This is called the **inverted pyramid** style.
- At a minimum, the summary lead must answer who, what, when and where. If you have room, answer as many Ws as possible.
- When a person to be identified is not nationally known, you must use the **impersonal who** to identify him or her in the lead. The impersonal who contains two elements: the person's job title and unit or organization.
- The **lead emphasis** begins the summary lead. It is the most important W or H, from the reader's perspective. The lead emphasis can be identified by first carefully analyzing the **news peg**.
- The **newspaper dateweek** is the tool used by journalists to determine how the when of a news event will be given to the reader: as the day of the week, the month and date, or the word "today."