

Unit Introduction

Newswriting One (Leads) reviewed writing the most important paragraph in the news story: the lead.

In this unit of instruction, the focus will be on the second most important paragraph, the **bridge**, and the rest of the story, the **body**.

Unit Objectives

- Write an internal news story news bridge
- Write the body of the news story in inverted-pyramid format

Unit Overview

- The **bridge**
 - WAITS
- The **body**

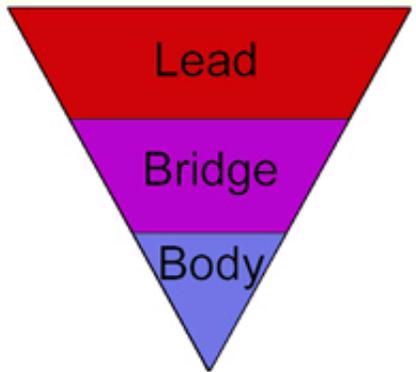
The Bridge

The second paragraph of a news story is called the **bridge**. Just like the lead, a bridge is one sentence only, no more than 30 words.

The purpose of the bridge is to expand on the lead, which is limited by its 30-word maximum length. It also serves as a transition between the lead and the body of a news story.

In the bridge, you can place facts that are too detailed for the lead but too important to be placed in the body.

If well written, you could theoretically print just the lead and the bridge without depriving readers of any vital information; note how many newspapers use "news briefs" that are only two or three paragraphs in length.



WAITS



The acronym we use to determine what kind of information might be important to include in a news bridge is WAITS. A bridge **must contain at least one** of the five elements in the acronym **WAITS**. Usually a bridge will include at least two.

W = W(s) or H not included in the lead

A = Attribution

I = Identification

T = Tieback

S = Secondary information



Ws not included in the lead

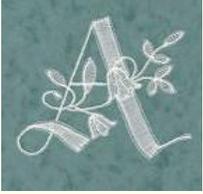
As you learned in the leads lesson, the summary lead must contain at least four of the six news elements: **who**, **what**, **when** and **where**. These elements of information are reflective of the first questions a reader will usually ask.

The **why** and **how**, if available, are routinely placed in the bridge, because they are usually not considered so crucial that they must be part of the lead. They also tend to be longer pieces of information, which often precludes them being included in the lead.

Example:

(Lead:) The deadline to update emergency data forms for soldiers here has been extended to Wednesday.

(Bridge:) The post personnel office staff wants to be sure all soldiers have the opportunity to update this information.



Attribution

Attribution tells readers the **source** (person) or **authority** (directives, regulations, etc.) from which information was obtained.

Editors are unforgiving when it comes to reporters misquoting sources and not correctly attributing information. This is a credibility issue. As a military PAO, if you lose credibility, you have lost just about everything.

Since attribution is seldom used in the lead, it sometimes appears in the bridge.

Example:

(Lead:) Male airmen stationed here will no longer be allowed to wear earrings while off duty, beginning Monday.

(Bridge:) The jewelry has contributed to several fights at downtown clubs, **according to Col. John G. Jones, wing commander**, who instituted the policy after consulting with the base legal office.

Attribution

In the bridge and the body of a story, attribution is best placed at the end of the first sentence of a paragraph. This is because the information itself is usually more important than its source (what is said is more important than who said it).

Whether in the bridge or later in the body, each source should be identified completely on first reference. How to provide full identification for individuals will be addressed shortly.

When attribution is needed

You as a military PAO are not the subject matter expert on everything; writers of news are not qualified to offer opinions in news stories. Readers want to know where the information came from and why they should believe it.

Some of the things that need to be attributed include:

- sources of direct or indirect quotes
- statements of fact that are not readily verifiable or facts that are disputable
- information that is not common knowledge
- policy change statements
- opinions, professional (doctors, lawyers, governmental experts, police, etc.) or otherwise. Opinions are views, judgments or appraisals formed in a person's mind about a particular matter.

When in doubt, ATTRIBUTE. Attribution allows the reader to judge the value of the facts based on the prominence/authority of the source.

When attribution is not needed

Not everything absolutely must be attributed.

Generally, you do not need to attribute:

- facts that are historically true, such as the year the Battle of Gettysburg was fought (1863)
- facts that are easily verifiable, clearly self-evident, commonplace or clear, such as the fact that in our solar system, Venus is the second planet from the sun

Rules for using attribution

- What is said is more important than who said it; avoid beginning a sentence with attribution.
- Do not use "thinks" or "feels" as attributive verbs. "Said" is still the best attributive verb, whether it is used with a direct or an indirect quote!
- Do not split the noun and the verb. Think about the reader. When you split the noun and the attributive verb with lengthy identification, you only create a confusing sentence.
- Partial quotes (He said he "liked it") should be used sparingly if at all.
- When information from a new source is introduced, begin a new paragraph.
- Based on the previous rule, one attribution per paragraph is sufficient.
- Use first person personal pronoun (I, me, our, we, etc.) **ONLY** in direct quotes.
- Be consistent with attributive verb tense: use either "said" or "says" but not both in the same story.
- Never leave a direct quote dangling without attribution.

Note: Types of quotes (indirect, direct and partial) and how to use quotes will be discussed in detail later in this lesson.



Identification

Full identification for each individual includes the following **seven** elements:

- **Service** *if the person is not a member of the host service*: For example, if you're writing for an Army publication at an Army post, it's not necessary to identify Army individuals as being in the Army. However, you DO have to identify by service any non-Army servicemembers mentioned in your stories.
- **Rank/paygrade**, used according to the Associated Press stylebook (unless the person is a civilian)
- **Full name**: always use middle initials in case more than one person has that name
- **Age** *if dead or if this info is essential to the story*: Releasing someone's age is not always possible due to privacy issues; ages of the dead are releasable, but ages of the living may or may not be. In some cases, age is considered essential to the story because it has direct bearing on the story's importance. For instance, if a 27-year-old climbs Mount Everest, it's not as big a deal as it would be if an 88-year-old did it. In the case of the 88-year-old, it's essential.
- **Hometown**, *if dead or info is essential to the story* (similar to age)
- **Job title** *unless it is already in the lead*: When used correctly in the lead, the impersonal who would already include the job title.
- **Organization**, *unless it is already in the lead* (similar to job title)

Note: Be very careful not to confuse job title, rank/paygrade and service. Each is a completely separate type of identification; "Coast Guard" is not a job title, it's a service. "Petty Officer 2nd Class" is not a job title, it's a rank/paygrade.

All these requirements apply to full identification of sources in the body of the story, too.

Identification

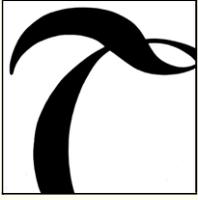
Whenever an **impersonal who** is used in the lead, **use complete identification immediately (first) in the bridge.**

Once a person has been fully identified, use only the last name in subsequent references unless there are two or more people with the same last name mentioned in the story.

Example:

(Lead:)A journalism instructor at the Defense Information School here was named Fort Meade Soldier of the Quarter in a ceremony Tuesday at the post's Club Meade.

(Bridge:)Air Force Staff Sgt. Dwight J. Evans was cited for outstanding performance while assigned to DINFOS over the past three years.



Tie-Backs

A bridge also can bring the reader up to date on past and present events related to the story by the use of **tie-backs**.

A tie-back is a news writing device that allows you to refresh the reader's memory about past events related to the story being written. It is a short recap. It frequently is used in follow-up stories.

Example:

(Lead:) The Canadian icebreaker *MacDonald*, with the help of U.S. icebreakers *Glacier*, *Staten Island* and *Northwind*, is free from the arctic ice pack that threatened to maroon it until next summer.

(Bridge:) *MacDonald* was making the trip back from the research station ice-island T-3 when it began experiencing difficulties in the polar ice.



Secondary Facts

Secondary -- but significant -- **facts** can also serve as a transition from lead to body. The bridge is often used to give the reader information that is significant, but not important enough to be placed in the lead.

Since the bridge often amplifies the lead with attribution and identification, secondary facts are often part of this paragraph.

Example:

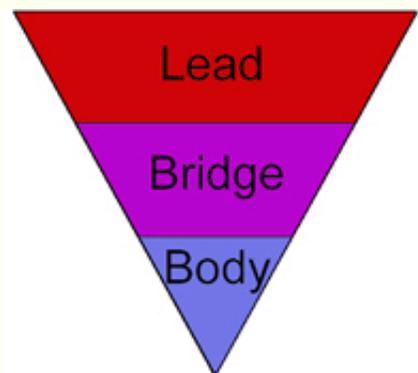
(Lead:) Most of Fort Rucker was without electrical power for three hours after Tuesday's thunderstorm.

(Bridge:) In addition to downed power lines, several trees were uprooted, and considerable damage to mobile homes was reported at the post trailer court.

The Body

The **body** of the story is written in inverted pyramid style -- most important to least important. A hard news story doesn't have a formal conclusion. It just ends when you run out of information that pertains to the story. Remember, after the lead and the bridge, all or part of the body should be easy to cut without losing valuable information; that's the beauty of the inverted pyramid.

Organization is the key. Answer the questions that are most important to the readers first. And produce in the body what you promise in the lead: if the lead says the story is about a fire, then you must restrict the body of the story to giving information only about that fire. Always include all available information that does not violate security, accuracy, policy or propriety. It is not your job as a reporter to decide what gets cut and what does not; that's the editor's job. If you've written the story in inverted pyramid style, nothing truly important will be lost.



Tips for writing the body

- Don't bury important information in the body. Never assume readers will get that far into your story.
- After the lead and bridge, stick to "one idea per paragraph" construction, but break up paragraphs that start to get too long (three sentences per paragraph is about the max).
- Keep sentences short: 30 words or less works all the way through a news story.
- Keep sentences simple: whenever you can, use subject-verb-object structure. That doesn't mean you will never use passive voice; considerations such as the correct lead emphasis may force you to write a passive-voice sentence.
- Use easy-to-understand words and phrases. If you feel the urge to use semicolons, colons, dashes, etc., you probably need to rewrite your complex/compound sentence. Write to EXpress, not IMpress!
- Use strong, active, accurate verbs, but be very careful with adjectives. Do not editorialize.
- Be specific: is he a sergeant or a technical sergeant?
- Avoid repeating facts.
- Smooth out your writing: eliminate words that do not add meaning. Remember brevity!
- Don't use the same word to start every sentence/paragraph. A commonly repeated beginning word is "the."
- Use vivid quotes to liven up the story.
- Let the editor decide what to discard, but if a quote or phrase is speculative and/or lacks authority, throw it out.

Using quotes

Quotes are important to news stories because they add variety and because they add authenticity and a "voice" to the news. Unfortunately, some reporters don't attribute the spoken word correctly. They think they can just put quotation marks around anything they like, or toss in an opinion and not say who said it.

Remember this very basic but important rule: Direct quotes are only for the verbatim spoken word as it left the speaker's mouth or as it was previously recorded in a document. Anything else is considered paraphrased, or indirect, information.

Never, EVER fabricate a quote or alter a quote and leave it in quote marks -- not even to fix someone's grammar. Doing so is the same as altering a photograph: it is *unethical* and *dishonest* because it is changing the facts. *It is not a journalist's job to change the facts, but to report them.*

Using quotes

Use quotes sparingly and only when they are memorable. They can be useful for setting off controversial material, helping fortify a point and highlighting language.

Quote abuse is one of the most common problems in journalism. Beginning journalists have a tendency to quote material that doesn't say anything unique. For instance, if you quoted the commander saying, "*The duty day runs from 0730 to 1630,*" you would start losing your readers. This type of quote is neither memorable nor effective.

A good rule for knowing when to use quotation marks, according to successful freelance writer Art Spikol, is to "**Use them to set off revealing, significant statements -- not to give statements significance.**"

The direct quote

A **direct quote** states EXACTLY what a person said, EXACTLY the way he or she said it, and it appears inside quotation marks:

"Our graduates serve both soldiers and the American taxpayer," said Hobson. "The public's interest must be our interest. There is no excuse for fiscal irresponsibility; the public won't accept it, and neither should we."

Direct quotes must never be altered, for any reason whatsoever. If a quote is too "bad" to use verbatim because of grammatical errors or for other reasons, simply paraphrase and run it as an indirect quote.

The indirect quote

When you change the words someone said while leaving the meaning intact, the result is an **indirect quote**. This is called paraphrasing. There are no quote marks on indirect quotes:

School graduates serve both soldiers and the American taxpayer, said Hobson. "The public's interest must be our interest," he said. "There is no excuse for fiscal irresponsibility; the public won't accept it, and neither should we."

When paraphrasing, be absolutely sure that you aren't changing the meaning of what the person said. If you do, you have not reported the facts accurately.

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The partial quote

When you use some but not all of a direct quote, you're using a **partial quote**. Only the portion of the quote that's used verbatim should appear inside quotation marks.

Here's a complete direct quote:

"For 50 years, we have tried to provide the Army with finance officers who can move tanks, troops and mountains with their comptroller skills," Hobson said. "That's the power of the purse string in today's Army. We need finance officers who can handle the task fairly and with fiscal responsibility."

Using information from the same direct quote, here's a mixture of direct, indirect and partial (underlined) quotes, all resulting in the same information being presented to the reader:

For 50 years, the school has worked to provide Army officers who can "move tanks, troops and mountains with their comptroller skills," said Hobson. "That's the power of the purse string in today's Army. We need finance officers who can handle the task fairly and with fiscal responsibility."

The partial quote

Partial quotes should not be used frequently. If you use them at all, try to limit them to one or two per story, maximum. Here's why:

- People begin to wonder what you're omitting -- and why.
- Partial quotes can be hard to read and interpret.
- They interrupt the normal flow of a sentence.

Usually it's better to use a direct or indirect quote than to resort to a partial quote, but they can be used occasionally for variety.

Tips for using quotes

- Don't let quotes tell the entire story. Sprinkle them here and there; don't "slosh" them everywhere.
- Provide the quote itself before the attribution most of the time, because what is said is more important than who said it. Mix it up occasionally only for variety's sake.
- Keep the person's name and the attributive verb together.

- Correct example: "...," *said Carlton F. Fisk, a civilian machinist.*

- Incorrect example: "...," *Carlton F. Fisk, a civilian machinist, said.*

- Don't use words such as "thinks," "feels," "believes," etc., as attributive verbs; "said" is the best attributive verb for ANY type of attribution!
- Be consistent with attributive verb tense: use either past-tense (said) or present tense (says) throughout, but not both in the same story. (This applies to other verbs in the story, too.)

Tips for using quotes

- Use first-person personal pronouns (I, me, we, our, us, etc.) only in direct quotes. If you paraphrase a quote, you must change personal pronouns to words such as he, she, they, them, etc.
- When you begin to quote a new person, begin a new paragraph; don't mix quotes/information from two or more people in the same paragraph because it can confuse readers.
- When mixing direct and indirect quotes in the same paragraph, place the attribution with the direct quote. Never leave a direct quote hanging without attribution.
- **Never** alter a quote and still run it within quote marks -- not even to "fix" grammar problems! However, punctuation is fixable *as long as it does not change the meaning of the quote*.
- **Never fabricate a quote!** Your job is to report the news, not make it up.

Unit summary

- The **bridge** serves as a transition between the lead and the body of a news story. It contains supplemental but significant information that is too important to be buried in the body.
- There are five elements that can be included in the bridge; journalists use the acronym **WAITS** to help them remember the elements:
 - **W** = Ws or H not in the lead
 - **A** = Attribution
 - **I** = Identification
 - **T** = Tie-back
 - **S** = Secondary facts
- The **body** expands on information given in the lead and bridge and contains additional facts in descending order of importance. Writing in the inverted pyramid style is not only important, it is imperative.