1974

Newswriting for Beginners: A Suggested Lesson Plan

Gene Adair
Ouachita Baptist University

Recommended Citation

NEWSWRITING FOR BEGINNERS

A Suggested Lesson Plan

An Honors Special Studies Project

Presented to

Mr. William D. Downs Jr.

Department of Journalism

Ouachita Baptist University

Gene Adair

April 24, 1974

INTRODUCTION

This lesson plan accompanies a set of transparencies illustrating various aspects and problems of newswriting. I feel that this type of presentation, with its use of visual aids, will make a greater impression on the student than a straight lecture approach.

The three lessons detailed in this project are concerned strictly with basic news<u>writing</u>. Hopefully, the student will already have had some introduction to news<u>gathering</u> before being exposed to this presentation.

The focus of this project is on fundamentals, and little attention is given to the more advanced problems one encounters in writing interview, speech and feature stories.

Included with this lesson plan are some suggested homework projects based on points raised by the presentation.

NEWSWRITING FOR BEGINNERS

A Suggested Lesson Plan

LESSON I: GETTING ORGANIZED

Introductory Remarks: Once the reporter has gathered the facts
he needs for a newsstory, he is faced with the problem of organizing
those facts into a readable, unified account. As he starts putting the
story together, a key question should be in his mind: "How can I get
the message across as clearly as possible?"

To demonstrate how to solve this problem, I want to show you some
raw data and both a right way and a wrong way to construct a newsstory
from it.

(At this point, the instructor places Transparency I-A on the
projector. Pointing to each item one-by-one, he should read them aloud
to be sure that each is understood.)

Explanatory Comments: This raw data was drawn from an actual news-
story released by the Associated Press. But before I show you how they
handled it, I want you to see how the story might be written by a novice
reporter.

(The instructor places Transparency I-B on the projector and
quickly reads the story aloud before continuing his remarks.)

Explanatory Comments: This demonstrates how not to write a story.
The material is so badly organized that it would be very difficult for the
reader to catch the significance of the story. The real news--the fact

that McCord was named executive editor of the Democrat—is buried in the
third paragraph. What should have been just background material—McCord's
previous position with the Democrat—is placed in the first paragraph.
It is not immediately clear how the material in the second paragraph (about
the Democrat's being sold) is relevant to the first paragraph.

Thus, you see how easy it is to obscure your message when you don't
organize your facts properly. Now, I'll show you how the AP organized
that same information.

(The instructor places Transparency I-C on the projector and reads
the story aloud.)

Explanatory Comments: This time, the message comes through loud
and clear. McCord's being named executive editor is given its rightful
place at the very first of the story, and the rest of the information
is subordinated to this main bit of news. As you read through the story,
you'll notice how the material becomes more detailed but less significant
(in terms of news value) with each succeeding paragraph. The second para-
graph supplies the background on the change-of-hands at the Democrat,
showing why McCord was promoted to the new position. The third paragraph
tells about McCord's previous position with the paper, adding that no
replacement for him had been found yet. The fourth paragraph answers
a question some might have about changes in another key staff position.
But it doesn't really add much to the essential news and could easily
have been cut from the story.

This pattern of telling the most important part of the story first
and then filling in the less important details is the most basic and most
common structural device used by journalists. In newswriting jargon, it's
called the inverted pyramid.

(The instructor places Transparency I-D on the projector.)

This simple diagram illustrates the inverted
pyramid. You'll notice how it's divided into two parts. Here at the top,
we have the lead, which is usually the first paragraph (but sometimes
the first two or three paragraphs) of the story. The lead summarizes the
most important information, providing a central theme around which the
rest of the story is built. The rest of the story is of course the body,
and you see how it tapers as the story progresses. The body tells in
more detail what the lead has already described and also gives background
information which helps clarify the news event. The least important facts
are placed at the last of the story, represented here by the lower tip
of the pyramid.

There are several advantages to the inverted pyramid form: (1) A
reader who hasn't the time or inclination to read the entire story can
get the essential news at a glance. (2) By the simple logic of its form,
it makes it easier for the reporter to write the story quickly. (3) If
an editor has to cut the story's length because of limited space in the
paper, he can do so from the bottom up with little fear of leaving out
something essential. And (4), if additional facts become available,
they can more easily be inserted into a story written in this fashion.

I do want to point out, however, that the inverted pyramid is not
the only structural pattern used by reporters. For feature stories,
the upright pyramid is sometimes used. In these cases, the actual news
value is minor, so the writer delays reporting the main facts until
the end to give the story suspense and a climax. Other stories, especially
those which interpret the news or provide background information, are
structured more like rectangles. Here, the elements of the story are of

3

equal value, with no one part overshadowing the other.

I mention these other patterns mainly so you can be aware of them. As you gain experience, you'll encounter them more and more. But for now, you should concentrate mainly on mastering the inverted pyramid form.

I'm going to turn now to the problem of achieving _unity_ in news-writing. You've already seen in the examples I've shown you how important the arrangement of detail is, and I want us to look at this a little more closely.

(The instructor places Transparency I-E on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: First, let me re-emphasize what I said about the lead of the story. _The lead sums up the story's main idea and provides a central theme around which the rest of the story is built._ In this example, written in inverted pyramid form, the lead tells about the lay-offs of 46,000 auto workers--the main news. The next paragraph gets more specific, telling how the slump affects General Motors. The third paragraph gives the details on Ford and Chrysler. And finally, the last paragraph mentions the "mid-March sales figures", which ties in with the lead's reference to "new car sales during the spring." Thus, you see how the inverted pyramid, when handled properly, creates unity. And it all begins with the lead.

Sometimes, however, your information doesn't tie together so easily as in this example. You may be confronted with different elements or events that somehow have to be combined into a single news account. Again, the solution lies largly in how you contrive your lead.

(The instructor places Transparency I-F on the projector.)

Here are a couple of different leads. The first is actually a

two-paragraph lead, one graph dealing with Kissinger's Russian talks and the other dealing with his West German talks. So, as you would expect, the rest of the story is in two basic parts. The nine paragraphs immediately following the lead elaborate on the Russian talks, and the rest of the story develops the second topic, the German talks. Thus, the reader is not given any information for which he is unprepared.

In the second example, a single sentence ties together several unrelated events. The fact that these events were all auto crashes which occured on the Labor Day weekend provides the unifying factor. A different story on each accident could have been written, but this lead combines them into a single account.

I need to emphasize at this point that the inverted pyramid is not a cut-and-dried formula, and this becomes especially evident when you consider the body of the story. Imagine that you have two different reporters covering the same news event. The chances are that they'll use the same basic element for lead emphasis, but from there on, their stories are likely to differ a bit. This is because in many stories, especially longer ones, there may be a number of details of equal importance, and the decision of where to place them often becomes arbitrary. Thus, two stories on the same subject may vary in the arrangement of details and still adhere to the inverted pyramid concept.

With this in mind, you can see that there aren't really any ironclad rules for constructing the body of a story, except of course for this rule: When certain details are obviously minor, save them for the last.

Even though approaches to arranging the material after the lead can differ, good reporters always strive for some kind of unity so that

the "flow" of the paragraphs is clear and smooth. Let us examine now some different techniques for unifying the elements in a story's body, keeping in mind that these aren't rules but only general guidelines.

(The instructor places Transparency I-G on the projector.)

Explanatory comments: This example might be called a "spiraling" story, because each paragraph unfolds from the one preceding it. Notice the underlined words in the first three paragraphs. These are the elements which are given further elaboration in the paragraphs following the ones in which they are mentioned. In the lead I've underlined "International Joint Commission"; the next paragraph tells you exactly what it is. Next, we have "lakes situation", and in the third paragraph you're told more about its relation to the meeting that's to be held. Then there is a mention of "United States delays", and the last paragraph elaborates on the cause of these delays. Thus, the story unwinds along a logical line of thought.

(The instructor places Transparency I-H on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: This example shows how reporters sometimes use certain linkage words and phrases to mark the transitions from paragraph to paragraph. Notice how the first two paragraphs establish the actual news--the fact that federal money has been alloted for the building of bike trails and that some think this will usher in "a new age of cycling." From here it goes to the background information, and the transition is established with the statement that there are indications that a new age "already has dawned." "As late as 1969" in the next sentence puts it into a historical context. In the next paragraph, "three years later" keeps the information in a historical context but moves it forward in time. And it's the same thing in the fifth paragraph

6

with the phrase "went even higher last year." Finally, the last paragraph brings us back up to date with "under guidelines going into effect today." Thus, such words help the story "flow" more smoothly, and at the same time introduce the reader to new information. In addition to the ones this example illustrates, common transitional or linkage words include "however", "although", "except" and "for example".

This same story also illustrates another method of arranging certain types of information: chronological order. I've just shown you that beginning with the third paragraph, the material is placed in a historical context and goes from 1969 to the present. It was organized this way because it largely consists of background facts of equal weight. And chronological order is usually as good as any for handling such information. Still, this story is basically an inverted pyramid, because the last paragraph—possibly the last two paragraphs—could be deleted with the story still making sense. In fact, if you're really cramped for space, it could be cut down to the first two paragraphs or even just the first paragraph.

Concluding Remarks: It is very rare that you'll find a story exemplifying only one method of achieving unity. Usually, it will contain a combination of several. The reporter, faced with any given body of facts, should always strive to present those facts in the clearest way possible. Hopefully this lesson has provided you with some insight into ways of doing that.

LESSON II: WRITING LEADS

Introductory Remarks: In many ways, the lead is the most important part of the newsstory. It should give the reader the news at a glance.

The body of the story may be fine, but if the lead is awkward or confusing, the reporter has, for the most part, defeated his own purpose. As I said in the last lesson, the lead should sum up the essential news and provide a unifying theme for the story. Let us examine some ways to write leads effectively.

(The instructor places Transparency II-A on the projector.)

<u>Explanatory</u> <u>Comments</u>: These examples show two different ways of writing a lead from the same set of facts. Both sum up the news, but they do it to different degrees. The first answers all the traditional questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? <u>Who</u> is Charles A. Wyatt,Jr. <u>What</u> is his being injured in an accident. <u>When</u> is 12:15 p.m. today. <u>Where</u> is the Tenth Street-Abbot Avenue intersection. <u>Why</u> is a brake failure. <u>How</u> is his losing control of the motorcycle and striking a telephone pole. The facts are all there, but consider this: <u>The</u> <u>lead</u> <u>is</u> <u>almost</u> <u>50</u> <u>words</u> <u>long!</u> So much information is included in this single sentence that an undue strain is placed on the reader.

Yet, up until twenty or so years ago, this was the way that many newsmen thought all good leads should be written.

Look now at the second example. This lead is only 22 words long. It doesn't include as much specific information as the first lead, but it is much easier to read. Most newsmen no longer consider it necessary to include in the lead all the five Ws and the H. Instead, they try to make their leads as concise as possible, giving emphasis to the <u>most</u> <u>important</u> elements. In this second example, the <u>what</u> (man seriously injured in an accident) receives the main emphasis. The <u>how</u> (motorcycle collided with telephone pole) and the <u>where</u> (Tenth Street and Abbot Avenue) are also made specific but are not as important. The

who (an Evansville man) and the when (this afternoon) are more vague,
while the why is left out altogether.

Now, we're going to look more closely at some leads which
emphasize one particular element.

(The instructor places Transparency II-B on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: When the story centers around a specific person,
the "who lead" is almost always used. Consider these examples. In
the first one, the news is that a certain man, Melvin K. Horton, won
a School Board election, defeating three other opponents. So the
name--the who--is the emphasis of the lead.

In the second example, the who is indefinite, but it is still
the highlight of the lead. The eight indicted National Guardsmen are
what make this story news. So the names don't even have to be specific
for it to be a who lead.

Sometimes the name involved is not the most important element
but is still featured at the opening of the lead. This is especially
true in stories in which the President's name appears. You've all
read leads beginning "President Nixon last night said . . ." In actuality,
what he says or the particular event involving him is often more important
than the fact of his involvement. But his name is an automatic attention
getter, and it suggests a human aspect to the story.

However, you should keep in mind that if the name is not an impor-
tant feature of the news and attracts no attention in itself, it is best
to leave it out of the lead or at least not begin the sentence with it.

Perhaps the most common element featured in leads is the what,
the basic thing that happened. In these next two examples, the event
is the feature of the lead, because that's where the news is. More

9

gasoline coming into Arkansas in spite of a fuel shortage is certainly news, as is the fact that consumers are starting to rebel against rising electrical costs.

You'll notice that the first lead contains a who element— the Arkansas Oil Marketers Association. It is certainly permissable to give credit ("according to," etc.) to the information source, so long as it's not unjustifiably overplayed.

(The instructor places Transparency II-C on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: The when element is a common part of many leads: "The President today announced . . ." or "The Red Cross drive will be held tomorrow . . ." The importance of when is based on the fact that news—most straight news anyway—is by definition an event of current interest. Thus, the time element should always be made clear. However, it is usually a very inconspicuous part of the lead, taking a back seat to the more important information. Still, on occasion, the when is of enough importance to merit prominence, as in these leads which I'm now showing you.

The first lead is about a deadline for filing for political office, so the time element is unquestionably the most important feature of the news.

The second lead is a bit different and might be called a "duration of time" lead. A seven-hour search is news in itself, so the reporter played up that fact. Another reporter might have given initial emphasis to the what: "Three-year-old Linda Vaughn was found unharmed . . .", etc. Both forms, in this case, are acceptable.

I do want to warn you, however, about the misplacement of when. A common mistake of novice reporters is to begin a lead like this: "Last

10

night, the Chamber of Commerce . . ." or "On March 15, the Ouachita Baptist University symphonic band . . ." In these leads and most of the ones that you'll be writing, the when really does not deserve to be mentioned first. The times that it will be featured, as in the examples I've shown you,will not come very often.

Much of what is true for the when element also applies to the where element. Usually, the place involved in a news event is of secondary importance and should thus be kept for last in the lead: "So-and-so will be held today at City Hall," etc.

Yet, there will also be times when the where takes first place, as these next two examples illustrate. The first concerns a land sale for the construction of a shopping center, so you can readily understand why the location would be the feature of the lead. The second concerns some stores in the same area which were burglarized; their proximity to each other is an important aspect of the news.

(The instructor places Transparency II-D on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: The why and how are probably used the least as the key elements of a lead. This is because they are usually hard to sum up in just a few words. Most reporters prefer to develop them in the body of the story. Yet, the cause of an event and how it occurred are often so crucial to the news that sometimes a reporter should go out of his way to give emphasis to them.

Look at these examples of why leads. In each case, the writer gives added significance to the what of the story by citing the causation. The first lead opens with a strong phrase ("The worst financial pressures since the Depression . . ."), which both grabs the reader's attention and gives instant insight into the problem

11

being discussed—that colleges are being forced into "hard-sell" recruitment. The second lead is a bit more vague about why ("Pressed by demands from parents . . ."); still, the phrase helps draw attention to the story and prepares the reader for the body's detailed account of the parents' demands.

The next two examples are how leads. In the first, the circumstances surrounding the saving of a boy from drowning (". . . teenager leaped fully clothed into Miller's Lake . . .") are unusual enough to merit initial emphasis. The second example is a lead for a sports story, and it is in such writing that most how leads are used. This particular lead tells how the Bobcats won the game via a last-second free throw. Such an approach is very common in all kinds of sportswriting because readers are generally interested in the circumstances which lead to a particular outcome in an athletic contest.

How leads should be handled carefully to prevent wordiness. If the how of a story is especially involved, and it often is, it is best to use another type of lead.

I hope this discussion so far has led you to conclude that what to use as the feature of your lead is dictated mainly by the material with which you have to work. When you examine your raw data in preparation for writing a story, try to determine if the strongest element is the who, what, when, where, why or how. After you've figured out that, the rest of the story becomes easier to write.

(The instructor places Transparency II-E on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: These leads, and the next few I'm going to show you, are labeled according to their structure, tone and the nature of the material. The first two are called cartridge leads,

12

because they are very short, to-the-point and carry a lot of impact. However, they should be reserved only for "big" news. When a reporter writes that "Germany has invaded France", he assumes that the readers are sufficiently familiar with the preceding circumstances to understand what is going on. Likewise, he expects them to know just who "Governor Samuel A. Fitzhugh" is. But while such leads are effective, they must be used with great discretion, because it is only rarely that one can assume that background on a news event is known by every reader.

The next two examples are punch leads, which are still short but milder and more vague than cartridge leads. The emphasis is not so much on specific names or places as on the situation itself. In the first example, the "two state supreme court justices" are not named so that the focus is on the fact of their being indicted for bribery. In the second example, the focus is on the schools' not opening; names and background information are excluded. As in the cartridge leads that I showed you, the reader would have to have some familiarity with the subject beforehand in order to understand the lead. Still, even for the uninitiated, the lead has a certain "teaser" quality, and the reporter using the punch lead should always supply the definite details in the second and third paragraphs.

The astonisher lead, illustrated by the next two examples, is a longer type than either the cartridge or the punch. But even though it may run as long as 35 words, it still attempts to quickly arrest the reader's attention. The first example accomplishes this through the use of a superlative-- "One of the state's most colorful political figures . . ." Usually, reporters are warned against such usages, but when they are justified, as in this lead, they can be effective.

13

The next lead doesn't need any superlatives, since the material itself
is "grabbing" enough. Note the strong opening: "A shotgun blast shat-
tered . . ."

(The instructor places Transparency II-F on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: Quoted remarks can often be effectively
used in leads, especially in accounts of speeches and interviews. In
the first of these examples, a direct quotation ("Consumers must unite
to fight high food prices" . . .) concisely summarizes the content of
the speech being reported and thus makes for a good lead. More often
than not, however, direct quotations are so involved and wordy as to
be cumbersome in opening a story. The reporter is usually better off
using an indirect quotation, in which he sums up the source's statement
in his own words, or a partial quote, which the second example illustrates.
Here, the writer, rather than quoting all of Hearst's remarks, first
provides a background summary in his own words (". . . his 20-year-old
daughter's appearance with heavily armed bank robbers . . .") and then
includes a portion of Hearst's statement (. . ."is one of the most
vicious things I've ever seen or had happen to me."). This commonly
used device makes the lead sound more authentic, and it is not as
awkward as using a full quotation. (Of course, in the body, most
reporters alternate their paragraphs between full direct quotations,
partial quotations and indirect quotations.)

Question leads, which are illustrated by the next pair of examples,
are good for stories concerning matters of public debate. If the story
is about a controversy concerning the use of the city's ball park, the
first example would be a good lead to use. The second example would
be effective for an account of the search for a new city manager.

14

However, since questions tend to slow down the transmission of the facts, the reporter using such a lead should never leave the reader dangling but should give the answer as quickly as possible. Also, such leads are not suitable for stories concerning a <u>settled</u> issue. If a new city manager <u>has</u> been chosen, a question lead is unnecessary. It is better to say "John Doe has been hired . . ."

Concluding Remarks: I've given you only a sampling of the variety of lead types. Some imaginative reporters have produced leads which almost defy description but are still effective. As you gain experience, you may want to experiment with unconventional openings. But for now, it is best to remember a couple of basic guidelines. First, be able to isolate the strongest element—the <u>who,</u> <u>what,</u> <u>where</u> or whatever—and give emphasis to it in your lead. Second, make sure that any device you use—question or quotation, etc.—is suited to the material of the story.

LESSON III: WRITING READABLE COPY

Introductory Remarks: Style in newswriting has two basic meanings: (a) the rules regarding spelling, abbreviation, capitalization, quoting, punctuation, use of numbers, etc., and (b) the way journalists write— how they structure their sentences, how lively and imaginative their word usage is, etc.

In this lesson, it would be impossible to cover all the points connected with the first meaning of style. Various pamphlets, such as <u>The Associated Press Stylebook,</u> are indispensable references for journalists, and I suggest that each of you obtain a copy.

The second meaning of style, however, is what I <u>do</u> want to discuss.

The main goals of journalistic writing are clarity, accuracy and brevity. Since newswriting is intended for a mass audience, both the well educated and the less well educated, it cannot be too complex or too condescending. The journalist's task is to strike a happy medium in style so as to reach and inform as many readers as possible.

Some people make a great distinction between journalistic writing and literary writing. However, the influence of such writers as Ernest Hemingway, who wrote novels and short stories in very unadorned prose, has blurred this distinction a bit. And recently, a number of so-called New Journalists, such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and others, have attempted to turn reportage into literary art.

Still, the writing that appears in most newspapers across the country is quite a bit different from that which English professors try to teach in their composition classes.

(The instructor places Transparency III-A on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: At. the left side of this transparency, a page from a novel is reproduced; at the right is a segment of a newspaper column. You only need to glance at the two examples to see a basic difference between literary and journalistic style—paragraph length. The rules of standard English composition dictate that unity of thought should determine paragraph length; in journalistic writing, especially for newspapers, these rules aren't usually observed. Instead, reporters generally limit each of their paragraphs to one, two or maybe three sentences, breaking what may be one set of ideas into several paragraphs.

One of the main reasons for short paragraphs is simply appearance. Set in narrow newspaper columns, long paragraphs are unattractive and thus less readable. (Of course, short paragraphs also simplify the

editing process; when additions or deletions have to be made, it is much easier to work with short paragraphs.)

(The instructor places Transparency III-B on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: The short sentence is also characteristic of newswriting. The theory is that the longer the sentence, the more likely it is for the reader to become lost.

Look at this first example, the material for which was drawn from an Associated Press release on a federal loan program for college students. Basically, there are three distinct ideas presented: (a) under the measure, any young person whose parents have an adjusted family income of $15,000 or less is eligible for a loan; (b) the measure allows the student to borrow up to $2,000 a year; and (c) while the student is in school, the government pays all the interest costs. Combined into one sentence, these ideas are confused and hard to understand. The second example, however, shows how the AP handled them. They placed one idea to a sentence, and the result is clarity.

The first example is a single sentence of 43 words. The second example consists of sentences of 22 words, 13 words and 15 words, respectively. Although the word total is greater in the second example, isolating the ideas in shorter sentences makes it more readable.

You should take note, however, that occasional long sentences (over 30 words or so) are by no means a cardinal sin. It is best to vary sentence length to avoid monotony.

Concerning sentence structure, you'll notice that each of the sentences in the second example follow the basic subject-verb-object pattern. This is generally the most direct and effective way of communicating information, but sentence inversions, if used with discretion,

17

can help create variety.

(The instructor places Transparency III-C on the projector.)

<u>Explanatory</u> <u>Comments</u>: Choosing the right word is crucial in journalism, especially in writing for newspapers because of the general audience involved. Technical jargon is acceptable in technical journals, and "elegant" words and phrasing are fine for <u>The</u> <u>Atlantic</u> <u>Monthly</u> and <u>The</u> <u>New</u> <u>Republic</u>. But for mass consumption media, the emphasis is on simplicity. And achieving that is not always as easy as it might seem.

Words should be chosen for their conciseness, their familiarity and their specificity, as these three sets of examples illustrate.

The first set shows that when two words are fairly synonomous, it is usually better to pick the shorter of the two.

However, conciseness or brevity is not always the best rule. In the second set of examples, you'll note that while <u>meeting</u>, <u>buried</u> and <u>rain</u> are shorter than <u>rendezvous</u>, <u>interred</u> and <u>precipitation</u>, <u>well paying</u> and <u>customs</u> are longer than <u>lucrative</u> and <u>mores</u>. The key here is familiarity—always choose the word that is most apt to be understood by your readers. Sometimes it may be shorter, sometimes not.

Specific words are always better than general ones. You'll notice that in the first set, I've listed <u>dog</u> as better than <u>canine</u>, but in the third set, I've listed <u>poodle</u> as even better than <u>dog</u>. Your writing becomes much more lively and interesting when you use to-the-point detail. However, you must make sure that the specific word you use is accurate. Don't say a man <u>skipped</u> if he didn't.

The point then is to use whatever words you <u>need</u> to convey meaning. Don't use a word simply because you think it might sound interesting. Be

18

sure that it's the right word.

(The instructor places Transparency III-D on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: Careless reporters with uncertain vocabularies sometimes choose the wrong words altogether—words that don't mean what they think.

Inferred, as used in the first example, is a troublesome word. It means deduced, and it seems unlikely that one can make a deduction from his own speech. Implied, which means signified or suggested, is the correct word.

In the second example, it is redundant to say consensus of opinion, since consensus means an agreement of thought. Use the word by itself.

To flaunt is to make a gaudy display, and conformity was obviously not flaunted.if he cast the dissenting vote. The correct word in the third example is flouted, which means scorned.

In the fourth example, over is used to mean in excess of. It actually means above, so the correct choice of words here is more than.

No one dies from a disease; rather, one dies of a disease.

These examples show only a few of the ways that words are commonly misused. Journalism textbooks are full of other examples, and it would be useful for you to study them.

(The instructor places Transparency III-E on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: Superfluous words, phrases and clauses are among the biggest hindrances to clear writing. Every reporter should be able to recognize unnecessary words and eliminate them from his copy. Let us look at a few examples.

Article adjectives—a, an and the—can sometimes be eliminated. You needn't write "The Kiwanis Club members" or "a part of the problem";

the _a_ and _the_ can be dropped with no meaning loss. However, since articles often are necessary, you should avoid writing sentences such as "South now is leading country in all indices of growth." When use of a certain article is questionable, recite the sentence to yourself with and without the article. You'll usually be able to decide whether to use it or not.

The adjectives in Example 2 are redundant. All facts are _true_ or they wouldn't be facts, and guests are usually _invited_. Thus, the nouns can be used by themselves. (Adjectives are always used with discretion in straight news **copy** because they usually imply a subjective evaluation. Rather than describing a murder as a _dreadful_ crime, most reporters let the facts themselves tell the story.)

In Example 3, redundacy is again the problem. The adverbs _completely_ and _obviously_ add nothing. If something is destroyed, the effect is complete; if something is clear, it is obvious.

Phrases such as _for a period of_ and _by means of_ are almost always unnecessary. Simply say "He spoke for several hours" and "He traveled by train . . .". And why include _the color of_ when you can say "His eyes were blue"? As for "_The hat of_ the boy", you can substitute a possesive form—"The boy's hat".

The verbs in Example 5 can be made more direct. "They _met_ to discuss" or even "They _discussed_" can be used instead of "They _held a meeting_", etc. Likewise, "Congress _decided_" and "He _left_ them" are more to the point than the original wordings.

Clauses such as _which will take place at_ (say "The meeting at the church . . .") and _who are_ (say "All personnel involved in the incident . . .") can be eliminated.

Although I haven't illustrated them on this transparency, wasteful

words often arise in sentences involving dates, such as "The Music Club will meet at 3 p.m. on Friday." The on can be dropped.

(The instructor places Transparency III-F on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: When and when not to use the active voice is another key problem in learning to write forcefully and directly. The active voice usually has greater impact than the passive, as this first pair of examples illustrates. It is better to say "The County Sheriff's office is investigating the matter" than "The matter is being investigated by the County Sheriff's office."

However, the noun receiving the action is sometimes the most important part of the idea being expressed by the sentence. Look at the second pair of examples. "The Music Lovers Society" is less important than "David Loe." Therefore, using the passive voice places Loe's name at the first of the sentence and gives it the emphasis it deserves.

Thus, the question of when to use what voice is determined by the relative importance of the subject or object of the sentence.

(The instructor places Transparency III-G on the projector.)

Explanatory Comments: Cliches and other tired sayings are another obstacle to clear writing, and it is impossible to list all of them here. But as you read through these examples, you should get an idea of what kinds of phrases and figures of speech to avoid.

Of course, it is impossible to avoid using such expressions occasionally, especially during election years. You should, however, be very careful of them, remembering that cliches are simply substitutes for originality of thought and poor ones at that.

Concluding Remarks: I hope this lesson has given you an idea

of what a delicate instrument the English language is and how easy it is to abuse it. Readable copy almost never results from careless use of this great tool of communication.

Thus, every journalist should have some mastery of grammar and spelling. He must never adopt the lazy attitude that he shouldn't concern himself with correcting his own mistakes because the copy editors will catch them. A dictionary and a grammar handbook of some sort should be standard references for every reporter.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK PROJECTS

FOR EACH LESSON

LESSON I: GETTING ORGANIZED

    1. Have the class find from one to three examples in newspapers of stories that adhere strictly to the inverted pyramid form.

    2. In the examples they find, have the class explain the different devices and techniques used to unify the stories.

    3. Have the class copy the raw data from Transparency S-I and write a story in inverted pyramid form.

LESSON II: WRITING LEADS

    1. Have the class find six newspaper leads emphasizing a different element (who, what, when, etc.).

    2. Have the class try to find examples of cartridge, punch, astonisher, quotation (direct or partial) and question leads.

    3. Have the class copy the leads from Transparency S-II and rewrite them, featuring a different element in each one.

LESSON III: WRITING READABLE COPY

    1. Have the class go through newspapers and find as many examples of weak or incorrect usages as possible.

    2. Have each student find one example of a story which he or she considers particularly well-written. Have them explain their reasons for their choices.

    3. From Transparency S-III, have the students copy the story and rewrite it in more readable form.

REFERENCES

Campbell, Laurence R. and Roland E. Wolseley. How to Report and Write
    the News. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.

Charnley, Mitchell V. Reporting. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart
    and Winston, Inc., 1966.

MacDougall, Curtis D. Interpretive Reporting. 4th ed. New York:
    The Macmillan Company, 1963.