



AI Generated

Writing For Mass Communications (Part 10)

Seven Problems Editors Have With Reporter Copy

By

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You can read the first part of this series about ‘writing for mass communications’ [here](#), the second part [here](#), the third part [here](#), the fourth part [here](#), the fifth part [here](#), the 6th part [here](#), the 7th part [here](#), the 8th part [here](#), and the 9th part [here](#). The points I’m sharing are from seminars I taught for radio and television news departments during my career as a news manager. The following is from a manual I wrote about 40 years ago.

These are real comments from editors —

1. **‘Not enough self-editing.’** Reporters have a vested interest in the words they put on paper and are often reluctant to change them.
2. **‘Wrong lead.’** The writer used a secondary theme for the main point of the story.
3. **‘Poor organization.’** This is often the result of not locating the main theme and getting it high in the story.
4. **‘Misuse of the delayed lead.’** Too many hard news stories are given a soft news approach.
5. **‘Overwriting.’** It is not necessary to use every quote, every soundbite, every observation. In journalism quantity does not count — the quality of the quote, soundbite, and observation do.
6. **‘Dullness.’** This can be the result of overwriting. It also stems from poorly selected verbs, long sentences, lack

of interesting soundbites and quotes, and uninteresting video technique.

7. **'Holes in the story.'** Unanswered questions.

In Conclusion

Great writing is a process. I'd like to end this series about great writing with some quick thoughts about that process —

A. **The Lead** — It introduces the theme of the story. Ask yourself three questions before you write the lead:

1. What do I want to say? What is the theme of the story?
2. Will this be a straight news story or a feature story?
3. What facts should I put into the lead?

Next, write the lead —

1. Make the lead short (usually less than 20-30 words).
2. Make statements in the lead. As a general rule stay away from 'question' leads, 'quote' leads, and 'you' leads.
3. Use concrete nouns and action verbs.

B. The Body — It supports the theme of the story.

1. Stay with the major theme of the story. Do not allow yourself to get caught up into secondary themes to the story.
2. Use everyday language; the words the majority of your audience knows and uses.
3. Use short sentences. Most sentences with more than 25 words should be broken into two sentences. Eliminate unnecessary words. If one word says well what three of your words say, use the one word. If it is possible to cut out a word, cut it out!
4. Write in a conversational rhythm — short, long, short, long, etc.
5. Match words with visuals. This increases clarity and memory.
6. Favor the **present tense**. Give the viewer the sense of immediacy — what's happening now.

7. Keep items brief. Find the major theme and stay with it. If you can't tell the story in the allotted time, go back to the beginning and cut, or do the story in two parts.

C. **The End.** It summarizes the theme of the story.

Bring the story to a natural conclusion. Tell the viewers where they've been and what it means to them. Look for surprise endings!

Here's a short way of remembering the writing process:

'Tell them what you're going to tell them (lead), tell them (body), tell them what you told them (end).'