The basic journalistic writing style is the inverted pyramid.

Its purpose is to deliver the most important facts first, thus accommodating the reader's rush to obtain information. The top of the inverted pyramid contains only one or two sentences (21 words or less) with the most important information first. This is the lead (pronounced *leed*). After the lead, the next most information is given about the story, and so on, until all of the information has been given.

The lead is a summary of the story using the *five Ws and the H* — who, what, when, where, why and how. A good summary lead employees what has been call the *WHAMMY* — the story element that whams the reader up the side of the head. That element rarely is the time element, so don't begin with the "when."

When writing a lead, think of your task as that of the spoiler; you're going the ruin the end of the story at the very beginning.

The writer's is to report facts and the opinions of others. You are not entitled to your own opinions as the writer, so leave your comments out of the story. The introduction of the writer's own opinion into a story is called *editorializing*. Do not do it.

The more people you talk to, the better the article. You may use direct quotations or paraphrase what someone says, but always remember to identify who says what.

Sentences should have an average of 20-28 words. This is an average, so you don’t need to spend time counting; just be aware that sentences and paragraphs are much shorter than what you’ve been taught with composition. But keep in mind that the summary lead will be stronger if it is restricted to no more than 21 words.

Terms to Know

Five Ws and H — Always answer the who, what, why, where, when, and how elements in the article.

Lead — The opening of a story, usually a summary of the most important information.

Headline — A title or attention grabber above the body of an article. The author of the story usually does not write the headline.

Angle — A particular point of view or way of looking at a subject.

Fact-checking — Checking that your facts are correct. Amy, Aymee, and Amie are all pronounced the same way and can be easily misspelled. Look up the names of specific people and places and anything else you are presenting as fact to be sure you are stating the facts accurately. Also, context is important. You might be stating a fact truthfully, but a wrong context could make that statement inaccurate. Strive for accuracy.

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