

SCIE3001 – lecture 3

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News writing tips

- Active voice
- One idea per paragraph, sentences 20 to 30 words
- Make it interesting

News introductory paragraphs

- Focus on effects rather than origins
- Look at what happened when, rather than how and why
- Short, sharp sentences
- Capture what is unique/newsworthy

Ask ...

- What is happening that is newsworthy?
- Who cares?

Remember news values

- Power elite
- Celebrity
- Entertainment
- Surprise
- Bad news
- Good news
- Magnitude
- Relevance
- Follow ups
- Media agenda

Make it easier for the reader

Logical flow of meaning:

Logic is:

- What follows sensibly from what is already known from previous paragraphs.
- Takes the reader through the story bit by bit
- Can go wrong early in the story

More logic

- Most intros have at least two elements: a subject and an object linked by a verb.
- But which of the elements in a par will be developed in the par that follows? And after that?

Example:

- Retailers (1) have reported record Christmas sales (2).

Is this a good second par?

- Shops will be open until midnight on Christmas Eve.

What should the second par contain?

Maybe this

(Par 1)

Brisbane retailers have reported record Christmas sales.

(Par 2)

Retail Trades Association general secretary Norma Fleming said several department stores and major shopping centres had recorded December turnover figures well in excess of budget expectations.

But ...

What is wrong with this second paragraph?

It says the same thing, doesn't it?

Retailers have reported record Christmas sales.

Spending this year in several departments stores and shopping centres had exceeded budget expectations, Retail Trades Association general secretary Norma Fleming said yesterday.

Logic and transitions

- Every par in a news story must be directly linkable to the preceding par.
- So that the reader recognises the context and follows the meaning development of the story.
- Exception: when there is a modification or transition, for example ... however, but, meanwhile etc.

Scientists as a news source

- We have talked about your value as a source or contact for journalists and the potential career benefits of boosting your public profile
- We have also talked about the importance of making sure you communicate your research clearly and succinctly in writing or verbally.
- And knowing what the important and most interesting parts of your research is most likely to ensure you are clearly understood when talking to journalists, or producing media content yourself.

Of course ...

- To every up side there tends to be a down side, and the downside from the point of view of the journalist is when your source has been brainwashed by media training.

So ...is there any real point?

It is an increasing challenge for journalists to negotiate a path around the many barriers between themselves and the majority of “official” sources these days.

It seems a new industry has grown around those with sufficient money to hire a “flak” – be it a media advisor, communications officer or public relations specialist.

When a journalist seeks a comment or clarification, they are directed to people in these roles, who often say they can’t comment until they have spoken to their superiors. By the time they do (if they do) hear back from them it is often to say they have emailed through a response. So it becomes a **secondary source**. (mediated response, not direct conversation).

In other words they have had the time to come up with information which suits their objective.

Or if they do actually speak to a primary source, the person is so media trained that they avoid answering any questions, instead sticking to a script they have been taught.

Their mouth opens and shuts, and words come out, but they are basically worthless in terms of answering any questions from a journalist, or bring a perspective worth pursuing.

This obviously has significant implications for democracy, but then again so do news values.

Listen to the following interview

And make a note of the three main points being made by UK pollie Ed Miliband

<http://www.crikey.com.au/2011/07/04/ed-miliband-groundhog-day/>

Homework before tomorrow's lecture

Come up with three talking points about your scientific paper.