

# Writing Feature Copy

*Death to boring, cliché stories; it's time for some fresh, well-written feature-style copy*

Points to consider **before** writing yearbook copy:

- decide what readers will want to know
- get information first-hand by attending events and interviewing participants
- research background information and read related articles
- ask specific questions, avoiding those with “yes” or “no” answers
- listen carefully
- write copy that unifies and gives the spread content direction

Points to consider in writing the **lead**:

- be simple, direct and concise
- try for 25 words or less
- focus on facts reader doesn't already know
- feature most important aspect of the story
- combine a style and grammatical approach consistent with topic
- use colorful, specific, visual nouns and sensory verbs
- avoid beginning with “a,” “an,” and “the”
- avoid use of “this year,” 2007-08 the name, initials and/or mascot of the school
- avoid editorializing adjectives and adverbs

Points to consider in writing **body** of the copy:

- show depth, paying attention to detail
- use a quote-transition format
- don't become monotonous
- edit for conciseness, getting rid of padding
- cover all sides and viewpoints
- be sure to delete the following words/terms from copy
  1. name of school
  2. nickname of school/team
  3. “this year” or 2007-2008
  4. indefinite terms (many, a lot)
  5. editorial adjectives (spectacular, disappointing, beautiful)
  6. editorial adverbs (seemingly, apparently)
  7. future tense (“next year's team will be...”)
  8. incorrect agreement (The jobs was done by the students.)
  9. Lists (activities, courses, officers)
  10. “under the direction of”
  11. editorial verb forms (looks as if, seems to)
  12. run-on sentences
  13. passive voice (The ball was thrown by Tom Smith.)
  14. quotes without substance

Points to consider in writing **closing** of the copy:

- should logically conclude the story
- may be direct quote, written from research material, stinger, or summary
- ties in with the lead; comes full circle

## **Tips for better writing:**

1. Don't use no double negatives.
2. Don't abbrev.
3. Check to make sure you haven't anything out.
4. Personally, in my opinion, a writer should not make too much use of too many words or phrases which he does not necessarily need in many cases.
5. Don't write run on sentences you have to use punctuation.
6. About fragments.
7. In a series of separate independent clauses (with a coordinating conjunction like and but for and so) before a direct address or quotation and after an introductory element you should use commas.
8. Don't, use commas, when they are, unnecessary.
9. Use semi-colons; only between; independent clauses don't scatter them about; indiscriminately.
10. A writer mustn't shift your point of view.
11. Keep your tense consistent. You didn't want to shift from present to past tense.
12. A noun must agree with their antecedents.
13. In good writing, a noun and verb agrees with each other.
14. Poor spelling in your writing makes a bad impression on a lot of readers.
15. Slang freaks out some readers and makes others blow chow, so put a lid on it.
16. Don't repeat; don't be redundant. Don't say the same thing twice; say something only once. In other words, don't be repetitious. Repeating is something you shouldn't do.
17. Writing dangling modifiers, the reader will be confused.
18. Be sure to have one clear noun reference for each pronoun. This is important.

# Writing Lead

*There are lots of possibilities; Variety is the key to success when it comes to leads*

The most important key to writing strong copy is to begin with a dynamic lead. A good lead will grab the reader's attention and make him or her want to read on for more information. Writers must understand the various types of leads and incorporate them into copy where they are most effective.

**Descriptive** (AKA Sights and Sounds) This lead is used to help formulate a visual image in the reader's mind. The opening paragraph helps portray the setting or mood for the reader. One of the most effective.

"Seventies disco pulsed throughout the burgeoning AMP room where a throng of students danced among a whirlwind mass of multicolored polyester, go-go boots, and funky tie-dye." Decambian, Del Campo High School

"Rising above the spectator's taunting cries, 20 rubber soles screeched against the scuffed wooden floor. Entranced, fans' eyes followed the leather ball's path from one end of the court to the other." Bulldog, Grandview High School

"The new Doc Martins squeak on the concrete as you forge a path through a sea of backpacked teenagers. Excitement mixes with dread as you and your friends merge together in alphabetical blobs that were once straight lines to receive class schedules for the next nine months." Rampages, Casa Roble High School

**Quote** This lead consists of a direct quotation and is used when the quote is most striking part of the story.

"Ah, it's finally 2:30 and I'm free at last. Well except for..." Virginian, Virginia High School

"This is Dusty Morgan at K-108 FM and it's 6:45-time to get out of bed. We have the new single from The Cranberries and then we'll announce the cancellations and delays."

**Comparison and Contrast** This lead is used to point out opposites and extremes. It's good to use when there is a comparison to be made.

"For eight days each semester, freshmen weren't the littlest students at Northwest." Lair, Shawnee Mission Northwest

"Living with 398 men may be some girls' ideas of heaven, but for Kit Taylor, a Louisville graduate student, it's just a job." Talisman, Western Kentucky University

"If bigger was always better, these guys would have been the worst. The word "big" just didn't fit in with this year, but maybe it didn't matter." Cayuse, Walnut High School

**Allusion** This lead utilizes makes references to well-know art, music, etc.

"For some students, a Jekyll and Hyde metamorphosis takes place as they transform from quiet, composed students into frenzied, screaming maniacs." Gem of the Mountains, University of Idaho

**Question** This lead is very easy to over use, so be careful. The question must lead the reader to the most important element of the story. Be careful, though; it's easy to get silly.

"Most 16 year olds get excited about getting their drivers' license, buy what about their pilot's license?" Aries, R.A. Millikan, High School

"Can you believe it didn't rain on the homecoming queen?" Colonel, William Fleming High School

"Do you think you are a nice person? A good looking person? Obviously your answer probably will not be completely objective. Often we must rely on unbiased, outside parties to help us take a better look at ourselves. The NCA or North Central Association rating committee did just that."

## LEADS...PAGE 2

**Summary** This lead summarizes the event by answering who, what, when, where, why, and how or at least the most important of the 5 W's and H.

"City Auditorium hosted the 26th annual Miss Manhattan-K State pageant with Carolyn Kirgis, senior in home economics and liberal arts, receiving her crown." Royal Purple, Kansas State University

**Astonishing Statement/Exclamatory** This lead consists of a short striking statement.

"Take off, you hosers! Wildcat, Ole Main High School

"It seems everything they wear has an animal on it!" Pointer, Van Buren High School

**Teaser/Suspended Interest** This lead helps pique the reader's interest by holding back some obviously necessary information.

"They didn't have a pool. They didn't have any divers. And they didn't have any time to practice. But they did have Floyd." Aegis, Lincoln-Way High School

"They began their task Friday, October 23. They knew it wouldn't be easy, but like anything challenging, they had to try. Orient, Ball State University

"Dressed in blue, Abigail Adams stood 18 inches high in junior Michelle Smith's dining room." Pioneer, Kirkwood High School

**Satirical** Helps add humor to the book.

"In the 100 degree heat of the week of June 20, the students found that studying and keeping up with school activities was much easier than they ever would have imagined."

**Direct Address** A lead used to pull the reader into the story. This would be one of the few places where it would be appropriate to use second person-"you."

"You've heard of diving into your work; well the water polo team found this task nearly impossible." Decambian, Del Campo High School

## Leads to Avoid

1. The date/label lead... "The 2009 football team was coached by..."
2. The "this year" lead... "This year the drill team had a great year!"
3. The "purpose of" or "goal of" lead... "The purpose of the Chess Club was to promote better chess and give people some thing to do at lunch."
4. The quote lead which says nothing... "The football team had a great year."
5. The question lead which can be answered "No."... "Do you know what happened in the English department this year?"
6. The "nothing lead"... "Lots of fun events dominated the campus scene. The students had more school spirit than ever before."

# Writing Captions

They're not a chance to be funny; it takes a lot of work to write good journalistic captions

It's true that one picture may be worth a thousand words, but no photograph can tell readers the who, what, when, where, why or how of the action. That's why captions are essential. Caption writing is not a task that can be done by sitting in the yearbook office or by any method of second-guessing about what might be going on in a photograph.

## *The do's of caption writing:*

- a natural extension of photo, so *don't state the obvious*
- first three to five words (lead-in) grab attention and link photo and rest of caption
- lead-in states the *obvious* in an *unobvious* way
- use a *variety* of lead-in patterns
- include the *five W's and H*
- use a variety of *adjectives* and *adverbs*
- consider the action *before* and *during* the photo, and *reaction* to the event
- use *strong, visual, specific nouns*
- use *colorful, lively, vital action verbs*
- write in *present tense, active voice* (unless changing tenses to make logical) in the first sentence
- keep them *factual*
- identify *all people pictured* (up to seven, and then just the main participants)
- use complete sentences
- use complete names
- *interview* teachers, sponsors, officers, coaches and other sources

## *The don'ts of caption writing:*

- don't begin with name leads or overuse the same lead pattern
- don't begin with label leads
- don't state the obvious
- avoid excessive use of verbals (ing-words)
- don't use "During" as lead
- don't use "Pictured above," "Shown above," "seems to," "attempts to"
- avoid use of "to be" verb (is, am, are, was, were, be, being...)
- don't pad the caption
- don't use "gag" or joke captions
- don't comment, question or talk to the picture

## *Special caption considerations in sports:*

- identify both the school's players and opponents by jersey number and name
- stating position of player adds depth to description of the action
- consider those players which led up to this action shot
- tell result of this play or outcome of the game

## *Special caption considerations for posed group shots:*

- begin with name of group
- identify from left to right, but don't write that as part of caption
- give clear row designation of Front Row, Second Row, Third Row, Back Row
- row designation should be set in different typeface or in parenthesis