

News Judgment Tipsheet

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Identifying and weighing the elements that make a story important or interesting to a reader can help you decide whether to pursue a story, what to emphasize in the lede and how to organize the story.

Among the elements to consider:

Importance/Relevance:

- Consider whether the issue under debate will have a major impact on the community – a potential change in government or policy, for instance.

Timeliness:

- The story is more interesting and relevant if it happened recently and if it will quickly result in change.

Proximity:

- The story is more meaningful to people if it happens close to them – geographically or in terms of their personal interests.

Prominence:

- Stories that involve well-known people offer attract reader attention. If the subject is prominent, identify him or her in the lede. If someone is not well-known, focus on the event and place the identifications in the second paragraph.

Audience:

- If a large number of people are affected by an event or issue, it is more important to the reader.
- If a large amount of money is at stake, the story has added “weight” as well.

Conflict:

- Stories that show a strong disagreement or a clash between individuals or groups draw more attention.

Novelty:

- Stories about highly unusual situations are intriguing. The old dog’s tale says it best: When dog bites man, that’s not news. When man bites dog, that’s news.