

Writing Headlines (Titles) tipsheet

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Four functions of a headline:

- 1) it gets the reader's attention
- 2) it summarizes or tells about the article
- 3) It helps organize the news on the page
- 4) It indicates the relative importance of a story

A good headline should be: accurate, clear, grammatically correct, strong, fresh and immediate. It should catch the reader's attention

The two most basic rules for headlines:

- 1) They must be accurate.
- 2) They must fit the available space.

Some basic rules:

- All of the basic journalism rules apply to headlines.
- Keep it simple and direct.
- Use the active voice.
- Use strong, present tense verbs. Every news story headline should have an active verb.
- It is not necessary to use the verb "to be."
- Don't start a headline with a verb.
- Use logical sentence structure (subject-verb-object).
- Avoid the use of articles (a, an, the).
- Capitalize the first word in headlines and all proper nouns, otherwise use lower case.
- It's ok to start a headline with a number.
- Most headlines are flush left.
- Use periods for abbreviations only. Use single quotation marks.
- It's ok to use a comma in place of word "and."
- Don't use proper names unless they are well known.
- Attribute headlines that convey opinion.
- Headlines should be accurate in tone as well as fact. Don't put a light headline on a serious story.
- Don't repeat the lead in the headline. Write a better headline than the lead.