

Hard news story structure tipsheet

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Checklist for writing clear, well-structured hard news stories:

- In the inverted pyramid structure, it's first things first, second things second.
 - Begin with a strong lead that summarizes the story.
 - The second paragraph should support the lead, adding more details. OR, a strong quotation supporting the lead can be very powerful here.
 - The third paragraph should support the first two, adding yet more detail, and so on throughout the story.
- Be sure your first attribution is in the lead or second paragraph.
- Use simple sentence structure -- subject-verb-object.
- Keep sentences brief.
- Make only one point per paragraph, and limit paragraphs to one or two sentences.
- Write in the active voice as much as you can.
- Write in the past tense.

Remember:

- Think of each paragraph flowing from the source, or essence, of the story down the pyramid until the end.
- All of the 5 Ws and H usually don't belong in the lead. Lead with only the essence and include the rest in later paragraphs.
- Paragraphs at the bottom of your story may be cut make the story fit in the newspaper.
- The inverted pyramid structure helps the reader get as much of the news as he can as quickly as possible and allows him to stop reading whenever he chooses.