Once writers have fashioned the lead, they face the task of organizing the rest of the message. They must decide what will come after the first sentences or paragraphs that hook the audience. The ranking decisions discussed in Chapter 5 that help them write the lead are invaluable in helping them develop the body of the message. Again, with audience needs and interests in mind, the writer outlines how the message will evolve.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, journalists have traditionally used the inverted pyramid form of writing to get to the point quickly and to set priorities for basic news stories. The principle behind the inverted pyramid style—to order information according to its value to the audience—is valuable in much writing today and is becoming more valuable as audiences read more news online and spend less time with each story they read there. The process of ordering information for the inverted pyramid involves critical thinking, an important skill for all writers.

Different styles of writing might be more suitable for other audiences or for a particular medium. Students will find various organizational styles in print and online publications: newspapers, magazines, company newsletters, and so on. If you find yourself reading a story from start to end, study it to identify the elements that pulled you into and through the message. Save it. Some day you may want to adopt the style for a piece of your own.

This chapter discusses

- the inverted pyramid form of writing,
- news peg and nut graph,
- other organizational formats, and
- how to unify writing.
The Inverted Pyramid

Leads must get to the point quickly, and messages must provide important information right behind the lead. Newspaper editors have recognized that need for decades. Henry A. Stokes, as an assistant managing editor for projects at the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, Tennessee, once wrote in a staff memo that reporters had to ensure stories attracted reader attention.

Stokes told staff writers they were to “tell the news in an identifiable, functional format that guarantees the reader will receive the best information we can provide, written in a way that the reader can quickly and easily understand.”

As a result, the newspaper adopted the four-paragraph rule: Tell the essential message in the first four paragraphs of the story. Details that could be cut would follow.

The format Stokes advocated was the inverted pyramid style of writing, long a standard in journalism. With the inverted pyramid, information in a message is organized in descending order of importance. The most important and compelling information comes first and is followed by information of lesser value. His advice years ago still applies in today’s electronic and online media world where important information must be stated immediately.

To be successful at using the inverted pyramid, writers must be able to evaluate and rank information, and they must know what is most important to their audiences. This simple model shows how the inverted pyramid works:

Lead summarizes information. Next few paragraphs back up the lead.

Next section provides background and additional important information.

Next section has information of lesser importance about the topics introduced in the lead.

Final section contains least important information, which could be cut.

In the inverted pyramid, the lead paragraph or paragraphs summarize the most important news values and elements and hook the audience.

The next paragraphs usually give additional crucial information that would not fit into the lead. Background information to provide context comes next. From there, subsequent paragraphs develop the topics presented in the
lead, introduce other important information, expand the significance of the information, and give details.

Each section will vary in length, depending on what the writer has introduced in the lead and whether he or she is building the message with quotes. A local government reporter might devote four or five paragraphs to dialogue from a meeting before moving on to other city council actions set forth in the lead paragraph.

The inverted pyramid format helps a writer organize information logically, whether the topic is a single subject or has multiple subjects or elements. If the writer plans to develop several issues in the message, the summary multiple-element lead would set up the organization in the following way:

The Cityville City Council voted unanimously Tuesday night to renew the city manager’s contract for three years with a raise each year and to annex 325 acres south of town and just west of the Newtar River.

Through the inverted pyramid, the writer sets up the order of importance in the lead and how the message will be organized. The most important item is the city manager’s contract, which includes a pay raise. Because no one objected to the annexation of acreage, it carries less importance because it is not controversial. It can be discussed second. The important point, the action of annexation, is contained in the lead. The rest of the story follows the lead like this:

In discussing City Manager Larry Morgan’s new contract, council members agreed that Morgan had done an exemplary job in his six years as manager.

“We couldn’t find anyone better,” said Council Member Dick Haynes, who made the motion to give Morgan a 10 percent pay raise in the first year of the contract and 5 percent in the second and third years.

“We have maintained quality town services with only modest tax increases while Larry has been here,” added Council Member Loretta Manson.

The council voted to annex the Heather Hills subdivision following a public hearing in which no one objected to the annexation plan. Residents who spoke said they wanted to come under the town’s water and sewer services and to gain improved fire and police protection.
The inverted pyramid is more than just an organizational tool. It has been identified traditionally as a writing style that uses simple words, short sentences, and one idea to a paragraph. It also represents critical thinking: It forces writers to evaluate information and rank it in order of importance. Some critics have said the inverted pyramid puts pressure on reporters to craft an attention-getting, information-packed lead, leaving them little time to follow through with a well-organized message. To be successful, writers must do both: write a compelling lead and organize a story logically. In reality, time constraints or deadline pressure may interfere with both functions.

Why Use the Inverted Pyramid for Media Writing?

Newspapers traditionally have used the inverted pyramid format for two primary reasons: to give readers the most critical material quickly so they can move to other stories if they wish and to allow a story to be cut easily from the bottom, leaving important information intact at the top of the story.

Newspapers have a limited news hole, or space, to fit editorial content, so story lengths can change at the last minute, depending on where a story is placed on a page. For online sites, the story length is potentially limitless, but online writers and editors know audiences have limited time and their work must capture and retain readers.

Many beginning writers question why they should follow the inverted pyramid style of writing when they plan careers in public relations, advertising, or marketing. They object to what they see as a rigid way of writing or formula writing—a basic format devoid of creativity.

At first glance, the objections seem valid. But as students use the inverted pyramid, they will discover plenty of opportunities for description and for their own style to develop. They will also learn that their audiences expect upfront delivery of essential information and that critical thinking goes along with the inverted pyramid style. For the inverted pyramid, writers must gather information, list or rank information, write a draft, and rewrite, as outlined in Chapter 1.

John Sweeney, professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, teaches advertising courses. He advises all students, no matter their major, on the value of learning the inverted pyramid structure.

“Before you can develop your own style, you have to master the basics,” he tells introductory writing students. “You have to be taught to be meticulous. To
say it succinctly, concisely, precisely. You have to be able to distill information, whether it’s a 30-second TV spot, or a piece of newswriting, or an ad distilled from a 100-page document on product data.

“Writing also has to have access: Anyone can read it and understand it,” Sweeney advises. “You have to focus on what’s key, get to the heart of the matter, and put the issue in perspective.”

Communicators first must be able to master the traditional before they can be avant-garde. Mastering the inverted pyramid style of writing gives any student journalist or communicator the basic plan for writing messages that focus on what is important and emotionally compelling for the audience. Whether writing for print or online, the inverted pyramid style organizes information so that it is accessible, appealing, simply stated, and easy to understand.

The Inverted Pyramid for Other Media

Research supports the belief that the inverted pyramid retains value today, when the majority of messages are becoming shorter and more direct. Consider broadcast messages, which usually begin with a short, catchy headline to grab the viewer’s attention and then summarize the main points. Because broadcast news stories are short, it is imperative for TV and radio reporters to fit in as many compelling facts as possible in the few seconds allotted. The inverted pyramid allows for the speedy, information-rich writing that broadcast demands.

Corporate communication offices and nonprofit agencies, whether staffed by professionals or volunteers, more and more follow the traditional inverted pyramid style. It puts their agenda where readers and editors can see it. Even advertising depends on the inverted pyramid style, communicating to consumers in an abbreviated way a product’s qualities and the reasons for buying it.

Although it works best in shorter pieces, the inverted pyramid style can be adapted for longer, more complex pieces, many of which use the inverted pyramid format early and then other organizational patterns later. For example, nondeadline pieces, such as feature stories and documentaries, attract readers best by getting to the point and summarizing first. Simple pyramiding in nondeadline writing can attract readers by creating a mood, setting the stage for more detailed information, or providing a memorable image.

The growth in online news consumption has made the inverted pyramid more important than ever. Many online news readers are quickly skimming the Web or their mobile phones for the latest headlines. Bombarded with an
increasing array of news sources, online readers want to know quickly what is the point of a story.

In one sense, news Web sites themselves are one giant inverted pyramid. News sites put the most important information on their homepage, often in the form of brief one-paragraph story summaries called "blurbs." If the blurb entices a reader, he or she may click deeper in the site to get the full news story. And from that news story, the reader may have the option of reading original source documents, archival material, or other news stories related to the original article. Because the online reader with each click can exercise the choice to go deeper in to the material, online writers don’t have to cram tangential information in to every story, but they do need to think about ways they can construct an inverted pyramid of links that will make it easier for the reader to read more information if he or she desires.

Organizing a Story

The basic work of organizing a message in inverted pyramid style is done when you use the steps outlined in Chapter 5 for writing leads. The writer first identifies news values and the elements needed to structure a lead. News values and elements introduced in the lead will be developed in greater detail within the message. The writer will use the remaining news values and elements in subsequent paragraphs based on ranking information important to audiences.

In summer 2008, a sailboat operated by a student crew from Texas A&M University capsized in the Gulf of Mexico. The initial stories reported the boat missing after the crew failed to check in by radio at a specific time. Updated stories followed the 26-hour search, then the rescue efforts.

Broadcast media and online sites continually updated the leads and information at the top of their stories as the ordeal unfolded. Reporters had basic information to consider:

- **Who:** Four student crew members and two coaches
- **What:** Capsized, then were found after drifting
- **When:** 26 hours Friday to Sunday
- **Where:** Gulf of Mexico
- **How:** Boat rolled on its side
- **Why:** Boat lost its keel
Look at the news values we discussed in Chapter 5 and determine which ones apply here. The human interest angle is crucial as is the timeliness as the news is updated. Conflict and oddity could be relevant in man versus the sea and the rarity of a student crew floating in the Gulf of Mexico for more than a day. Other news values such as impact, prominence, or magnitude may not exist.

Consider the lead from MSNBC after the crew was found:

Four student crew members and the captain of a capsized Texas A&M University sailboat are alive after 26 hours in the Gulf of Mexico without a life raft—thanks to a heroic coach who gave his life to save two students, as well as their own survival training.

The lead identifies the elements *who*, *what*, and *how* with the elements *when* and *where* understood. A second paragraph—a direct quote—expands on how they survived.

“The students are here today because they did a great job. They were positive, they didn’t panic. They kept working as a team and taking care of each other,”

Steve Conway, skipper of the “Cynthia Woods,” told TODAY’s Matt Lauer Monday from Galveston, Texas. “We pretty much did a textbook drill. We held onto each other very tightly, and we used our belts and our rigging to lash ourselves together.”

Later graphs answer why the accident happened.

For any natural disaster or breaking news event, reporters will update information continuously. Story angles will focus on what readers and viewers need to know to prepare for storms and protect themselves and their property, or the details as police search for suspects.

**Applying News Elements and News Values**

A news value, such as oddity, may be referred to in a lead but then be developed fully later in the message. Remember the lead in Chapter 5 about the wedding dress? Although readers have the basics from the lead that something was lost, they may want more information about how the house was lost. The body of the message answers that question.
FARGO (AP)—He lost his home, but saved a wedding dress.

Joe Westbrock dashed back into his burning apartment building Saturday afternoon in south Fargo after alerting others to the blaze.

Westbrock, who lives on the third floor with his girlfriend, said there was little smoke or fire on the floor when he rescued his girlfriend’s wedding dress. He said he also grabbed a laptop computer.

“She said her wedding dress was up there, and without even thinking, I just ran back in,” Westbrock told Fargo’s KFGO radio.

No one was injured in the fire.

Westbrock said he saw the fire after hearing a loud banging noise. When he realized the danger, he pulled the fire alarm and knocked on doors to alert others.

“My dad was a volunteer firefighter, so I’ve seen all the videos growing up,” he said. “I’ve gone through all the drills with him. I used to be a lifeguard in high school...everything just kicks in to be calm, collected and try to be levelheaded. Some type of instinct told me to run and grab the fire alarm and knock on people’s doors.”

He has not been able to get back into the building to see if anything else is left.

The wedding is set for early next year.

Damage to the apartment building has been estimated at more than $750,000. Dozens of people were displaced by the blaze.

Fire officials say they cannot determine the cause of the fire, but Fire Department Capt. Dan Freeman said officials do not consider it suspicious.

In this story, the writer uses a short lead that focuses on who and what. Graph 2 gives readers information about where and when and answers how he lost his home and saved the dress. Readers reach paragraph 5 before they learn no one was injured.

Beyond the news value of oddity, the story has impact because of the dozens of people displaced, human interest because of the dress and Westbrock potentially saving lives by pulling the alarm, and magnitude in the damage estimate. Conflict and prominence are not relevant.

Instead of writing a straight news story about a fire that caused $750,000 in damage and displaced dozen of residents, the reporter chose to emphasize one aspect to attract readers and make them pay attention.
You also might have noticed in the organization of the story that the information came in paragraphs of varying lengths. Paragraphs in an essay for an English composition or literature class differ from paragraphs in all forms of media writing. In an essay or composition, a paragraph can be a whole presentation or argument on a topic. But in mass communication, a paragraph is identified as a single unit of timely information and usually is one to three sentences long. It conveys a solitary fact, thought, or “sound bite” from the larger message. When a writer is concerned with transmitting information quickly, his or her ideas about paragraphing change.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, journalists rarely use the word “paragraph.” In the newsroom, a paragraph is a “graph.” This abbreviated word symbolizes the abbreviated form that paragraphs take in news stories. A graph generally will have several sentences, but on occasion it may be one sentence long and transmit a single news element or news value.

**News Peg and Nut Graph**

Newspaper reporters talk about the *news peg* when developing stories. The peg, just like a peg on the wall where you hang a coat, is what a writer hangs the story on. It is the reason for writing the message. In the sailboat story, the news peg comes in the lead: The crew has been rescued.

Every piece of writing—whether it appears in print or is aired or shared—has a news peg. Writers, no matter their skill or medium, have a reason for composing a message. That reason is spelled out in the *nut graph*: the paragraph that defines the point the writer is making. The rest of the message expands and clarifies the singular idea in the nut graph.

In some cases, the lead serves as the nut graph, particularly if it is a summary lead, and sometimes the nut graph is more than a paragraph long. The nut graph should be in the first four to five paragraphs or writers risk losing audiences who want the point quickly. In today’s writing of shorter paragraphs, the nut graph might be lower because audiences don’t have to wade through long copy. When writers use anecdotal or descriptive leads, as described in Chapter 5, they must summarize and focus the message for audiences after drawing them in.

Look for the nut graph in this *Washington Post* story by Dan Morse:

*We could all use one from time to time: a dog that can find the darn cellphone.*

*Maryland has three. Their job is to sniff out phones smuggled into prisons.*
“Seek,” Sgt. David Brosky told his dog Alba yesterday, offering a public demonstration at the former Maryland House of Correction in Jessup.

Alba made her way through an unoccupied prison cell until she came upon a rolled-up pair of jeans on a bed. She sat, a signal she had found something.

“Good girrrrrrrrrl,” said Brosky, a corrections officer, handing the dog a ball, a reward for finding the black cellphone tucked in the pants.

The state’s trained dogs—Tazz and Rudd, along with Alba—could be the solution to a problem facing prison administrators nationwide, a solution taking hold in the Washington region.

Smuggled cellphones allow inmates to run criminal enterprises, threaten witnesses and warn fellow inmates about the movements of correctional officers, state officials said.

By the second paragraph, readers have a clue to the story: dogs sniffing phones in prison. In graph 7, the actual nut graph, readers learn the point: Smuggled cellphones allow inmates to continue criminal activities from within prison walls.

Remember The New York Times’ descriptive lead about the Austrian monks from Chapter 5:

HEILIGENKREUZ, Austria—As noon draws near, the monks glide into the church, their white cowls billowing behind them. They line up in silence, facing each other in long choir stalls. Wood carvings of saints peer down on them from the austere Romanesque nave.

Bells peal and the chant begins—low at first, then swelling as all the monks join in. Their soft voices wash over the ancient stones, replacing the empty clatter of the day with something like the sound of eternity.

Except, that is, for the clicks of a camera held by a photographer lurking behind a stone pillar.

It has been like this since last spring, when word got out that the Cistercian monks of the Stift Heiligenkreuz, deep in the Vienna woods, had been signed by Universal Music to record an album of Gregorian chants.
When the album, “Chat: Music for Paradise,” was released in Europe in May—and shot to No. 7 in the British pop charts, at one point outselling releases from Amy Winehouse and Madonna—the trickle of press attention turned into a torrent. (The CD will be released in the United States on Tuesday.)

By graph 5, readers learn the news peg that is included in the nut graph: The CD will be released within days in the United States, hence coverage by U.S. press.

Other Organizational Styles

Although the inverted pyramid works for much writing, other formats might seem better for a particular message because of the event reported. Some formats use the inverted pyramid format to introduce material, then move into another organizational pattern.

Chronological Format

In some cases, making the decision about how to organize the body of a message is easy. Chronology—telling events in the same order in which they occurred—often can meet audience needs. A breaking news story about a bank robbery, for example, would have a summary lead telling that the robbery occurred, where, and when. Then, after the nut of the news is clear, events would be revealed chronologically. The writer would organize the rest of the story by using time elements, as in the following article:

A masked woman robbed the First Guaranty Savings and Loan on Main Street shortly after 9 a.m. today and escaped into a thickly wooded area nearby. Police have made no arrests.

The robbery occurred when the woman entered the bank and approached a teller. She handed her a note asking for money and saying she had a gun in the sleeve of her sweatshirt.

Although the teller did not actually see a gun, she gave the woman an undisclosed amount of cash. The woman put the money into a purple sack, ran from the Savings and Loan, and disappeared in the woods behind the bank’s parking lot.
At 6 p.m., police were still looking for the suspect, who was described as a white woman in her mid-20s. She weighs about 150 pounds and stands about 5 feet 6 inches. She has shoulder-length blonde hair. She wore a purple sweat-suit and had pulled a stocking as a mask over her face. Bank employees could not describe her facial features.

Here, the lead, or the first paragraph, states who did what, where, and when and the latest information. Graph 2 starts how events unfolded. The last time element tells readers the status of the investigation at the newspaper’s deadline.

In breaking news stories that are continually updated, such as those online, chronology works well as a format. New information can be added in the lead and first few paragraphs. All the details that have unfolded chronologically can remain. Any additional information that adds to the timeline can be inserted easily.

While some messages can be developed chronologically, organization generally is not that simple. Not all messages involve action that evolves over time. For example, a high school principal writing in the school newsletter cannot use chronology to inform teachers about changes in ordering classroom supplies. Although teachers may be interested in the events that led up to the changes, they want to know the specific changes immediately. That is when another format, such as inverted pyramid, is needed.

**Hourglass Format**

Some writers have adapted chronological development to longer stories in what they call the *hourglass format* of writing. A summary lead followed by the inverted pyramid style gives readers the most important information in four to six paragraphs, allowing them to stop at the end of the inverted pyramid segment. Then the writer sets up more information with a simple statement by a source, such as “The police chief described the events this way.”

Beyond the transition statement, the message unfolds chronologically. Writers can use the style for many kinds of stories, such as telling of the search for a lost child, recounting a day in the life of a popular singer, or bringing out the details of a baseball game. Electronic media writers often use the hourglass format. For example, a local television station aired a story about a crime that police had been unable to solve. After noting the latest information, the reporter said, “Here’s how police have recreated the sequence of events.” The details that
followed were a chronological account of the crime. The story ended with the reporter showing the local telephone number for Crimestoppers.

**Mapped Format**

Assistant Professor Jacqueline Farnan and newspaper copy editor David Hedley discussed another variation on the inverted pyramid style called the *mapped format*. They noted that the inverted pyramid becomes confusing for longer pieces, but they believed it served as a way to introduce the most important elements of the message.

Mapped format is a technique to indicate points of interest within the message, just as a map includes highlights for its readers. The mapped format benefits topics, such as business and government, that are of interest to readers. It also aids readers in finding information of particular interest to them in longer stories.

A mapped message is organized into sections. The first is the inverted pyramid lead. Following the lead, a series of subheads in a subject–verb–object form define categories of information. Readers can quickly find the segments of information that most benefit or appeal to them.

Subheads for an expanded story on the bank robbery would look like this:

- Robber Approaches Teller
- Escape into Woods
- Police Still Searching

The mapped format can also help the writer organize. Assume you are writing a story on the cost of funerals and the alternatives to traditional burial. Your research finds categories of information: reasons why funerals are expensive, caskets and their costs, funeral home expenses, cost of burial plots, cost of cremation versus burial, memorial services, and how to cut costs. After drafting the lead, you can group categories of information under subheads, which help organize the story and readily identify parts of the story for readers.

Newspapers are not the only medium to use mapped formats. For example, CNN.com uses subheads in its full stories. This style helps readers quickly find information and helps search engines better understand the key topics on each page.
Numerical Format

A writer might organize a message numerically or by points. For example, a city council votes on three issues: water and sewer rates, a rezoning application, and the town manager’s contract. The writer would list in the multiple-element lead the actions taken and the votes, thereby setting up the three points to be expanded, in that order, in the body of the story.

Writers covering a speech will often use a numeral or point-by-point format that follows the organizational structure of the speech. For example, a speaker discusses three major risk factors in heart disease. The writer notes the three risk factors in the lead: smoking, lack of exercise, and lack of a well-balanced diet. The points serve as transitions from the lead to the sections of the message. The reporter’s story might read:

Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, but it can be reduced with lifestyle changes such as no smoking, regular exercise, and a well-balanced diet, the chairman of the American Heart Association’s Wayne County chapter said Tuesday.

Gus Rivas said Americans should pay attention to the risk factors at an early age and get children to be aware of healthy lifestyles.

More than 3,000 children smoke their first cigarette every day. This number will translate into more adults who are at risk for cardiovascular disease.

“Children consume more than 947 million packs of cigarettes in this country per year,” Rivas said. “More than 25 percent of high school students who smoke tried their first cigarette while in the sixth grade.”

Youngsters need to exercise, he noted. Studies show that today’s youth do not get enough regular exercise.

“Riding a bike, walking, even doing household chores can establish fitness patterns,” Rivas said.

A well-balanced diet low in fat is essential to reduce the risk of heart disease, Rivas said. About one out of four children is obese, and obese children are at a risk for obesity as adults.

The writer followed the lead, using the three points or risk factors as a way to organize and unify the story.
Unifying Writing

Any story, memo, news release, or online message needs unity to be a coherent and complete piece. Each paragraph in a written piece must follow the preceding paragraph logically and build on previous information. Each section of the piece must fit the subject or theme. Unifying writing takes careful thought and planning, and it requires rewriting or reorganizing after a draft is done.

Transitions and repetition of certain words are ways to unify writing and to get readers from the beginning to the end. The first two or three paragraphs set up many of the unifying elements—for example, people, places, things, controversy, or chronology.

Repetition of Words

Some writers are uncomfortable repeating words in their writing. They pore over the thesaurus or dictionary, looking for synonyms that might not be as good as repeating the word itself. Repetition is okay; it offers unity in a message and gives readers familiarity. Repetition is also clearer; readers are not stopping to match synonyms and words.

The topic will determine the words repeated. A memo that covers changes in employee benefits should use the word “employee” throughout rather than switching from “worker” to “staff” to “professional.” The same applies in writing about an organization; “organization” or the organization’s name can be used throughout rather than “group,” “agency,” or “company.”

Transitions

Transitions are cues for readers. They set up changes in location, time, and mood, and they keep readers from getting lost or confused.

A simple sentence or word might be needed as a logical bridge from one section of the message to the next. Any transition should wrap up the previous thought and introduce the next one.

“We must continue our efforts to reduce teenage pregnancy, and our programs are aimed to do that,” the governor said.

While the governor defended his policies, others in state government cited lack of action on welfare issues for his dwindling popularity.
The second sentence uses “while” and “others” to indicate a shift from the governor’s words to those of state government officials.

Most writers are accustomed to simple words or phrases as transitions. Look at some of the following words and phrases that give readers certain information about where a story is going:

- **A change in opinion:** but, on the other hand, however
- **Clarification:** in other words, for example, that is, to illustrate, to demonstrate, specifically, to clarify
- **Comparison:** also, in comparison, like, similarly, on the same note, a related point
- **Contrast:** but, in contrast, despite, on the contrary, unlike, yet, however, instead of
- **Expanded information:** in addition, an additional, moreover, in other action, another, further, furthermore, too, as well as, also
- **A change in place:** above, higher, beneath, nearby, beside, between, across, after, around, below
- **Time:** while, meanwhile, past, afterward, during, soon, next, subsequently, until then, future, before, at the same time

Look at how a few transitions work. In developing a story chronologically, time serves as a transition. Refer to the First Guaranty bank robbery story earlier in this chapter. The time elements pull the reader from shortly after 9 a.m., when the robbery occurred, until 6 p.m., when the woman still had not been caught. In other stories, time-oriented words and phrases could be “at the same time,” “later that day,” “Tuesday,” and “last week.”

A story about voter reaction on election day uses polling sites around town as geographic transitions: “Voters at Precinct 35 (Town Hall) said…,” “Those voting at Precinct 15 (Main Street Presbyterian Church) said…,” “Precinct 2 voters (Blackwell Elementary School) said….” Other geographical phrases would be “on the other side of town,” “at his father’s 25-acre farm,” “next door,” and “at the White House.”
Tone to Unify a Message

Familiarity with your audiences will help determine what tone to set in organizing and writing a message. The tone of a story can act as a unifying device. A PTA newsletter editor knows that her audience is busy, fast-moving, and distracted by children, work, day-to-day routine, and a deluge of information. She knows her audience is in need of quick tips about kids and school. She must write lively copy with short, pithy sentences and paragraphs. Active parents need newsletter copy that looks like this:

Spring cleaning may leave you with trash and treasures. Please donate them to Southview School’s Trash and Treasure sale! This year’s sale is planned for May 9. Jennifer Chen will begin receiving donations April 26 at her home, 322 Dale Drive. For more information, call 499-2342.

In contrast, a lead in The New York Times on a story about a Supreme Court ruling has a more formal, serious, thoughtful tone that will carry into the story:

WASHINGTON—The Supreme Court on Thursday embraced the long-disputed view that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to own a gun for personal use, ruling 5 to 4 that there is a constitutional right to keep a loaded handgun at home for self-defense.

A writer’s knowledge of audiences will determine the mood or tone that will best maintain interest and retain it throughout the message.

Quotes to Unify Stories

Quotes can be effective transitions throughout writing. They add liveliness and allow people to speak directly to readers and listeners, helping them feel more connected to personalities and events. They can supplement facts and add detail. News stories and news releases should have a good balance between direct and indirect quotes. Information on direct and indirect quotes, attribution, and punctuation of quotes is given in Chapter 10.

In a profile story about boxer Tony Thompson, writer Zach Berman of The Washington Post uses quotes to pace the story and allow Thompson to explain why he fights.
Thompson doesn’t love boxing. He derives no joy from training. He fights for the reward, not the act.

“I really don’t like getting hit,” he said. “I really don’t like to train for boxing. I’m just good at it. It’s what I do to make a living. If I had my choices of making a living, I’m not one of those people who would say boxing...Boxing was so far down the list for me.”

Quotes can refer to the lead and wrap up a piece, they can leave the reader looking to the future, or they can add a touch of humor. But sometimes writers have to be careful in using a quote at the end. If the story is cut from the bottom, readers should miss only a chuckle, not important information.

**Unifying Devices in Practice**

Let’s go back and look at the short article on the wedding dress and the fire. What are the unifying devices? First, see what the lead set up.

**He lost his home, but saved a wedding dress.**

Throughout the story the writer refers to wedding and dress.

The second paragraph identifies Joe Westbrock and makes it clear that a fire is the cause for Westbrock losing his home and identifies the home as an apartment building.

**Joe Westbrock dashed back into his burning apartment building Saturday afternoon in south Fargo after alerting others to the blaze.**

**Graph 3 uses an indirect quote from Westbrock as reasoning why he went back into the burning building. Repeated are the themes of smoke, fire, and the wedding dress.**

**Westbrock, who lives on the third floor with his girlfriend, said there was little smoke or fire on the floor when he rescued his girlfriend’s wedding dress. He said he also grabbed a laptop computer.**
Graph 4 alerts readers that although he went back into the building, no one was injured.

No one was injured in the fire.

Graph 5 gives readers more information about Westbrock and his actions. The word “wedding dress” is repeated.

“She said her wedding dress was up there, and without even thinking, I just ran back in,” Westbrock told Fargo’s KFGO radio.

Graph 6 continues explanation about Westbrock’s actions to save neighbors, which was introduced in Graph 2.

Westbrock said he saw the fire after hearing a loud banging noise. When he realized the danger, he pulled the fire alarm and knocked on doors to alert others.

Graph 7 adds insight into Westbrock’s thinking and repeats terms of “fire” and the theme of alerting residents.

“My dad was a volunteer firefighter, so I’ve seen all the videos growing up,” he said. “I’ve gone through all the drills with him. I used to be a lifeguard in high school...everything just kicks in to be calm, collected and try to be levelheaded. Some type of instinct told me to run and grab the fire alarm and knock on people’s doors.”

The short graph 8 gives readers more information: The building has not been cleared for residents to return.

He has not been able to get back into the building to see if anything else is left.

Graph 9, also short, returns to the wedding theme.

The wedding is set for early next year.
Graphs 10 and 11 broaden the story to the fire and its impact on others besides Westbrock. Similar language appears: blaze, fire, apartment building, people.

Damage to the apartment building has been estimated at more than $750,000.
Dozens of people were displaced by the blaze.

Fire officials say they cannot determine the cause of the fire, but Fire Department Capt. Dan Freeman said officials do not consider it suspicious.

Writing is a series of choices—choice of language, pertinent facts, introductions, organizational pattern, tone, quotes, and topics—to unify copy. All need to be made in an informed way, based on what writers know about their audiences.

Books and other writers can give you tips on how to organize your writing. The best way to learn is to apply the techniques through your own efforts. Do not let organization just happen. Remember the stages of writing. Make an outline. Consciously apply a certain organizational style to your writing. Let someone else read your piece to see whether it makes sense.

Good organization helps you reach your audience. Return to the Associated Press drug bust story on page 83 in Chapter 4. The reporter uses all the strengths of simple writing, repetition for unity, and quotes as transitions to pull readers through an emotionally compelling story that could have been just another routine drug bust story. The following chapters will guide you further in knowing your audience and writing for it.

Exercises

1. You are a reporter for The Cityville Chronicle. You have picked up the following police report—written last night—from the town police department. Write a message with a summary lead, then develop the message in chronological order.

Report: Tony’s Restaurant Robbery
Investigating Officer: Sgt. Rodney Carter

At 10 p.m. a robbery at Tony’s Restaurant was reported. Owner Tony Hardy said he was working late preparing the payroll when a man wearing a stocking mask entered the back door of the kitchen at about 8:40.
Hardy said the man told him to go into the office and open up the safe. Hardy took almost $3,000 out of the safe and put it into a blue, waterproof sack.

The restaurant closes at 9 p.m. Hardy said he thought the robber knew he was there alone, but he didn’t think the robber was a Cityville resident.

Hardy said he got a good look at the man: a stocky white man, about 5’6”, and round-faced. He estimated the man’s age to be 24. Hardy said the man’s shoulders were so broad that he might have been a weight lifter. Hardy suggested that if the thief wanted to lock him up somewhere, the storage closet off the kitchen was as good a place as any. The thief agreed and locked him up there. The thief wrapped a clothes hanger around the door. He told Hardy he had a partner, and that Hardy wouldn’t live to see his family and relatives if he came out of the closet before 15 minutes had passed.

Hardy said he waited the 15 minutes even though he didn’t believe the story about the partner, or at least a partner who would be stupid enough to hang around for 15 minutes. He had no trouble getting out and then called the Cityville police.

We have some leads on the suspect and the investigation is continuing.

2. From the following information, write a summary lead for The Cityville Chronicle that focuses on who, what, when, and where, plus human interest. Then develop the message in hourglass format.

From the Cityville police chief, Alston Powers, you learn the following:

Two sisters were playing at a Laundromat about 5 p.m. yesterday. The girls are the daughters of Nancy and Phillip Childs of Cityville. The girls were with their aunt, Janice Childs. The 3-year-old, Jennifer, climbed into one of the washing machines. Her sister, Elizabeth, 7, closed the door. The machine started filling up with water. When she realized the washer was running, Elizabeth ran to get her aunt. Ms. Childs tried to open the washer door but could not, because the washers are equipped with automatic locks on the doors.
Powers said the girl was trapped in the washer for more than five minutes before she was rescued. He said a customer had put coins into the machine before the little girl crawled inside, but the customer hadn't used the machine because he thought it wasn't working.

On the telephone you talk to Chris Gibson, of 124 Basketball Lane, Cityville. He was on his way home from work and stopped at the Glen Rock Shopping Center to buy groceries. He heard screams coming from the Glen Rock Laundry and Dry Cleaner. He ran inside the Laundromat to see what was going on. Ms. Childs ran up to him and asked him to save the child. She asked if he had any tools, so he ran back to his toolbox in the back of his truck and got a hammer. Gibson said he took the hammer back inside and smashed the glass in the washing machine door. He then reached in and pulled her out.

A Cityville Hospital spokesperson said Jennifer was admitted yesterday afternoon and was listed in good condition. Her parents could not be reached for comment.

3. You are a reporter for The Cityville Chronicle. You are to write a story from the following information. Focus on a summary lead with a local angle. Organize the story in inverted pyramid.

A group of 55 cyclists from the United States arrived in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam yesterday. They ended a 1,200-mile course through Vietnam. The trip took them 20 days. The course was fairly grueling through some of the country's mountainous areas as well as flat parts. The group camped and stayed in villages along the way.

The U.S. Cycling Federation, which arranged the tour, said it planned to organize another event next year. Officials said the tours are a way to allow U.S. residents to get a close-up look at the country and their people.

When the group arrived it was greeted by firecrackers, flower necklaces, and cold towels. Bob Lester, 33, of Cressett, was one of the cyclists on the trip. He said, “This trip was the most amazing thing I have ever done in my life. I would recommend the experience to anyone who can
pedal a bike." The cyclists are expected to return to the United States in two weeks.

The tour was part of an effort to open up Vietnam to outsiders and to present a different picture of the country than people had come to expect from the Vietnam War.

Among the cyclists were seven Vietnam veterans and three Vietnamese Americans, all from the United States. The 55 cyclists were from 23 states.

Several of the Americans said the journey had erased any doubts they might have held about Vietnam and its people.

4. You are to write a story for the next issue of The Cityville Chronicle. Write a summary lead, then organize the story point by point. Make sure to unify your writing. Your audience is Cityville residents.

LuAnne Neal, director of public affairs for the state Department of Commerce, tells you today the state is launching a three-part train safety program. The state has had its share of train crossing accidents, one recently in Johnston County where a man was injured when his car was hit at a crossing. The worst accident occurred five years ago when an engineer was killed and more than 350 people injured when a train derailed after hitting a truck near Haysville.

First, the state is asking that state highway crews work in cooperation with the Department of Commerce to inspect train crossings in the state. Engineers who ride the trains will spend the next month noting intersections that don’t have lights or warning signals that possibly might need them. Highway workers can do the same in their jobs.

Second, the state is compiling statistics on the most dangerous railroad crossings in the state, that is, the ones with the most accidents. That way officials will know where to focus state and federal monies in improving the most dangerous crossings.

Third, a public education program will caution drivers on crossing railroad intersections. Too many times an accident was caused because a
driver tried to beat the train to the intersection. That kind of action endangers not only the driver but everyone on the train, whether it is a passenger train or a freight train. The state will put flyers at drivers’ license offices and in license renewal tag offices around the state. The flyers will be distributed to all students taking drivers education. Notices will be sent to all people who are renewing their automobile or truck license tags.

References

