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A GUIDE TO WRITING
FOR HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISTS

By

Janet Blank-Libra

B.A., South Dakota State University, Brockings, 1981

Presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism
University of Montana
1988

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June 21, 1988
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Blank-Libra, Janet D., M.A., May 1988

A Guide to Writing for High School Journalists (145 pp.)

Director: Warren J. Brier *WJB/CEHosD*

This thesis is a high school journalism writing text that addresses the educational needs of a high school journalist. One of its major strengths is that it speaks directly to high school journalists. The author has taken into consideration their unique circumstances in the world of journalism, using her experience as a high school journalism teacher and books written about writing and journalism as resources. Many high school texts address journalism as a skill, a trade. Those texts work to ensure that young journalists know the skills and language of the trade. Writing, however, is more than a skill used in a trade. At its best, it is an art. This guide assumes that young journalists need more than reporting and information-gathering skills. They need to worry about the ingredients of good writing, including grammar.

This book, therefore, addresses ways in which a high school journalism student can learn to write well. The ingredients of good writing are stressed--sometimes more than once. For example, writers should obviously know that strong writing combines an organized message with sentences containing strong nouns and verbs. They must learn to use adjectives and adverbs sparingly. The need to write concisely is stressed in many books, but the issue often is not dealt with in depth.

The book is organized so that students will immediately enter the task of writing. They first will learn how to write leads, then how to organize a story. In chapter four, they slow down to consider the need to be honest, ethical journalists. The strategies involved in gathering the news and the various types of stories, including the headlines that top them, are discussed in the remainder of the book.

The list of writing tips on pages 26 and 27 focuses on problems the author has seen high school journalists struggle with. Students are encouraged to return to the list and use it as a checklist for their work.

The articles of high school journalists from across the country are used as examples. Most of the stories are award-winning Quill and Scroll entries. Students are able to examine these stories and see what made them winners. Also included are comments about each story--negative and positive. Students might glean ideas for their own publications from the examples in the book.

The theme of the book is simple: young people must learn the basics of good writing before they can become good journalists.

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Introduction

As a high school journalism teacher I wished many times for a book that addressed completely the issue of writing. The texts my students and I used were good, but they lacked something. They didn't get to the basics of how to be a writer--a good writer. This book is a guide to becoming a better writer.

A writer never stops trying to become better. Writing is personal. So personal, that many people fear it. This book, I hope, will help you overcome any such fears. The world is a vast and miraculous creation, and you are a part of it. Write from the part of you that knows that. Lose your fears. You will not always please your teacher; you will not always please yourself. The important thing is that you try.

Many an astronomer has looked through a telescope to see new stars, new depths. Like the astronomer, you can look deeper, find more mysteries, see more bright stars that really do twinkle as the storybook rhyme claims. The lives that are unfolding in your school are worthy of stories, whether about individuals or groups of individuals. Your task as a journalist is special. You become the channel through which these lives are shared. You're like the screen on a television. Without it, we wouldn't see within the issues, the people, the places, the events.

Singer Anne Murray asks in her song "A Little Good News,"

"Wouldn't it be nice if there was some good news?" Well, there is. And now you, as a high school journalist, can find some. Granted, bad news is inevitable, but it doesn't always have to be the main news.

All people should be able to use their language well, and it is inevitable that you will use it. Why not use it to the best of your ability? My hope is that this book will guide you toward a lasting, professional use of the English language. Knowing that you can use the language well is a satisfying feeling. You use words every day. I hope you want to use them well. Doing so can be a joyful experience.

Open yourself up to your potential. Let down those defenses. Quit worrying about who's good enough and who's better. You wouldn't be in a journalism class if you didn't have an interest in writing. When I say joyful, I mean joyful. Yes, writing is work, but it's the kind of work that, even though sometimes difficult, is enjoyable. Put your best into it.

You are learners. Write, rewrite and rewrite your stories. Every time you do that, you slide another inch forward toward the writer you want to be. The pro on a fast-paced newspaper may not always have that luxury. But somewhere in that person's past, learning took place. Skill and speed came with experience. It is your time to be a learner--not to join the race. Granted, sometimes you may be required to work under deadline pressure for a few hours. Usually, however, the high school student has two days to a week or more to get a story, write and fine-tune it. Your goal should be to produce publishable material, to communicate clearly with your readers--and to be proud of your accomplishments. Let's get started, and thanks for reading my introduction. I don't know you personally, but I have faith in your

abilities. I've watched students with no personal faith in their abilities open up to the writer within and grow to be some of the best. I smile when I remember the surprise on the faces of some of those non-believers as they finished a story, handed it in and knew that it was good without having to be told. I have found that the main ingredient in a good story is caring. When the writer cares, it shows in the product.

In the book The Story of English by writers Robert McCrum, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil, McCrum writes, "The English language surrounds us like a sea, and like the waters of the deep, it is full of mysteries."¹ That's nice. Let's go fishing.

¹ Robert McCrum et al., The Story of English (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1986), 12.

CHAPTER 1

Journalism and You

Not one sun has set upon a world without news. News rises from the local, national and international levels. It happens in the home and school. Events occur. Situations change. Human interest is stirred. News ignites our curiosity and compels us to discover the truth.

News is new information or reports of recent happenings. The public often receives that news from the journalist. That's you. As a journalist, you must decide what news is most important. Not everything can be printed, so your judgments often will determine what news your readers receive. Take your job seriously--your readers do.

"All the News That's Fit To Print" appears on the front page of The New York Times. In other words, editors have selected the news they consider most important. They are working for the public.

You should, therefore, be nervous. You have enrolled in a class where you will write for others. Not only will you bring the people you write about into the public eye, you will expose yourself to that same audience. Consider yourself accountable to it. Feel scared and challenged.

Your objective seems simple--inform the public. But the process leading to the disclosure of news is complex.

That's journalism. Take it or leave it. The art of writing must be taken seriously, and in no profession must it be taken more

seriously than in journalism. You are responsible for every word you write. You are also responsible for every word you do not write, for in journalism what is left out is as important as what is included. Mark Twain aptly described journalism when he said, "Use short words and simple language and brief sentences. This is the way to write English. Don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in." ¹

Learn to write in a simple, direct and disciplined style.

Students sometimes enter journalism planning to exercise their poetic souls. Your duty, however, is not to wax poetic but to develop a skill for writing carefully and factually. Mark Twain you may not be (yet), but you can write a straight English sentence. Writing is work. Face that fact now.

Lean writing, then, is a key to good journalistic writing. Your work should rely on nouns and active verbs and shun superfluous adjectives. Adjectives are not forbidden, but they must be used sparingly or your work will suffer from adjective overload. More is not always better.

This does not mean your writing will be without pizzazz. Your style, the energy of the verbs you choose and the subjects you write about will give your stories vigor.

Consider this. You are shopping and need to choose between two stores in a mall. One appears cluttered. Your eyes cannot focus on any one thing. The other store is well organized, and principal points of interest are visible. Which would you select if you were hurrying?

¹ Warren Brier, "A Discussion about Writing," (Classroom supplement, 1984), p. 2.

Similarly, most people do not have hours to read the paper; therefore, writers must cater to their needs.

You will soon learn to employ news judgment--knowing what should go in a story and what should not. Besides unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, unnecessary details bog a story down. Filter out weak details. The dregs of the information you have gathered should not be allowed to settle even to the bottom of your story.

The journalist's form of writing is special. Many believe it is the best. It employs a creativity based on discipline.

Journalistic writing adheres to a format that works for the reader. News stories are not essays or classroom compositions; news-writing may seem like an unfamiliar language at first.

The format used includes a lead, a body of paragraphs built upon details relevant to the lead's central idea, and an end.

CHAPTER 2

The Lead

The lead, the first sentence or sentences of a news story, must steal the reader's interest and work to pull him into the next paragraph and on through the story. If the beginning tone is flat, you will lose your audience.

The success of a lead hinges on two main considerations:

1) that it usually be one sentence long or about 30 words; 2) that it tell the reader what the story is about or hints at what is to come.

The Lead's Length

A one-sentence lead may sound trifling. Before you become skeptical, think of your needs as a reader. Many of you keep pace with part-time jobs, heavy class loads, a home life, extracurricular activities and social engagements. Reading the newspaper takes time; therefore, a short lead gives you a chance to assess whether you should continue to read a story. If the message is clean and simple, the reader will be less likely to be confused.

Never forget that you are not only a writer but also a reader. You must understand your readers' needs.

Gaining Interest through the Lead

Ah, you say, liberally sprinkled adjectives will catch the reader's eye. Wrong. Do not clutter your writing. In journalism one must string words together in styles that are creative and not verbose. Strip your sentences of words that serve no purpose. Your job is to show

your reader what is going on. To do that you need strong, active verbs. Examine the following sentence:

The students left the gymnasium.

Compare that to:

The students trudged out of the gymnasium.

The second example tells the reader more. He can picture the students' moods.

When a writer uses active verbs, he keeps himself in the active voice, which is more direct and vigorous than the passive. This advice is important not only in lead constructions, but in the rest of your writing as well.

Consider the following examples of active and passive voices.

Passive Voice. Starting a Crimestoppers organization at Central High was proposed by Jane Winsom, student body president, at the Tuesday night student council meeting.

Active Voice. Student Body President Jane Winsom proposed Tuesday that a Crimestoppers organization be started at Central High School.

The first lead is less direct. Besides being a stronger lead because of the active verb, the second lead is also five words shorter. You have eliminated unnecessary words by using the active voice. Other information, such as when and where, also were not needed in the lead.

What is the best way to learn to write good leads? 1) Practice; 2) Read a good newspaper. Studying the professional journalists' work in dailies and weeklies will improve your writing ability.

The 5 W's--

Which of Them Belongs in the Lead?

Leads can be difficult to write. The best writers sometimes

attempt a lead four or five times before getting it right. Take a deep breath and get organized. You know the facts that will go into your story. Think of yourself as a chef. Good cooks have plenty of ingredients to work with.

Consider the ingredients the reporter has at hand: who, what, where, when, why and how. They do not all go in a lead. A chef's food would end up in the garbage disposal if he stirred into it everything the cupboard held. You should not overload the lead with details.

Usually, "what" and "when" top the list of lead ingredients. The "what" generates interest. Most leads cannot function without it.

The time element is frequently a major factor in a story. People want fresh news. They also want to relate it to their lives. If they read in the newspaper that an accident took place at 6 p.m. Friday, they will probably try to remember or unconsciously think of what they were doing at that time. Look at the following lead and examine how the "what" and "when" are used:

Vandals shattered Central High School's 11 entrance-door windows facing First Street between the hours of midnight and 4:30 a.m. yesterday, according to Police Chief Albert Sonne.

The emphasis is on the "what"--a group of vandals shattered the windows.

The time element also is important here. Students will be interested in when the vandalism occurred. Using words like yesterday, last night and today often help ease the time element comfortably into the lead. Here, the specific times are likely to create interest.

NOTE: Eliminating the words "the hours of" will make the sentence more concise.

The "where," of course, is Central High School. The writer also adds a secondary "where"--facing First Street. We need to know it happened at Central High School, but do we need to know that the windows face First Street? Students know where the entrance-door windows are. Eliminate those three words and the lead becomes tighter.

Although "where" appears in many leads, it is not used as frequently as "who." If the person in the story is well-known, the "who" is used. For example:

Student Body President Sally Dunn says a shadow has been creeping over school spirit--and she has a plan to stop its growth.

Students know who their student body leader is. Students or others whose names are not well known should not be named in the lead. Some names make news, but not all.

Notice that "why" and "how" are not in the first lead. They are usually introduced in later paragraphs.

Look at the lead again--this time slightly rewritten.

Vandals shattered Central High School's 11 entrance-door windows between midnight and 4:30 a.m. yesterday, according to Police Chief Albert Sonne.

The deletion of unnecessary facts and words has made the lead easier to read.

At this point, you know news judgment must be used to determine lead content. You will encounter problems when writing leads. Here are some solutions to common lead problems:

1) Oust the Overstuffed Lead. A stuffed animal will hold only so much foam before it starts bursting at the seams. So it is with a lead. Examine the following lead:

Students Against Drunk Driving seems to have withstood the test of time and is here to stay. Louise Banten, former president, says there has been student interest, and she is positive that this year will be a good one. Meetings are held every other Tuesday in room 14. Mr. Larry Harney will again be the club's adviser.

Whoa! Not only is the lead dull, but it has no focus or coherence. Decide which facts belong in the lead. If none seems good enough, gather more information or examine the rest of your notes. The lead should provide only a few strong details.

Consider the following rewrite:

Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), started last year at Central High School, has attracted 60 new members this year.

That sentence tells you in just a few words that the group is succeeding. The rest of the story might describe the group's purpose and goals, the number of students who had initially joined and why they have been successful. When the meetings are to be held could be unobtrusively slipped into a sentence in the story. Something like the following might work:

Students will meet every other Tuesday to outline new club strategies and discuss progress. Club adviser Larry Harney says the meetings in room 14 will last about one hour.

2) Avoid Quotation Leads. A quotation lead will rarely sketch the story's central idea successfully. Study the way the following quote was used in one high school newspaper:

"Cindy, Curt and I are looking forward to a really good year," George Pool, president of Youth-in-Government, said.

Have you learned anything from that lead? Quotations scattered throughout the body of a story give it life but seldom work as leads. Occasionally, a full quotation works if dramatic or colorful enough:

"I was tired of living, so one day I decided I didn't want to go on. I slit my wrists."

You might want to give the source of the quote after it or you might let it stand alone and give the source in paragraph two.

Partial quotations are usually more appropriate in leads. For example:

A teacher in a sophomore psychology class says laughter really can be the best medicine, because it often makes "the pain go away."

3) Question the Question Lead. One lead in a high school newspaper said:

Do you know your rights?

Well, one has many rights. The lead did not work. Another read:

Is senior high as good as students think it is?

The writer cannot know what most students think. But how about this one:

How would you like a free trip to Hawaii?

That question lead will entice most students into reading further.

4) Choose the Positive Angle. Enough bad news exists without reporters finding more. Look at this lead:

Although Furley High School's 28-member speech team did not do well as a whole at the Florida State Speech Meet, three individual competitors earned firsts.

Why not focus on the fact that three did well? That's the news. The fact that the team did not do well will be evident in the statistics, facts and quotations given in lower paragraphs.

5) Boost Limping Leads. The writer coaxes the reader into paragraph two through the lead. One high school newspaper printed a story with this lead:

In a world filled with high expectations, the little, but often most important, things go unnoticed.

It is awkward and says little. The second paragraph said:

Central High School students have organized a club to recognize individual achievements and positive happenings in the school system.

The solution? Pitch paragraph one and start with paragraph two. The writer needed to get to the point. You might consider being even more brief. How about:

Students at Central High School will be getting more recognition for their accomplishments.

6) Use Plain Talk. After writing a lead, consider whether the news is written as you would have told it to a friend in the hallway. Use "plain talk." Consider this lead:

After a one-and-one-half-year study, the Graduation Requirements Committee, composed of teachers, community members and students, has made the recommendation that students be taken off of the open-campus policy so that high standards of education may be upheld.

Whew! How about:

Students would lose their open-campus privileges under a proposal made by the Graduation Requirements Committee.

When trying to sound dignified, people often lose their straightforwardness. Avoid stuffy writing.

7) Think Ahead. When taking notes for your story, mark those facts and quotes you think are lead material. Put a star beside them. This procedure makes you think ahead and speeds up the writing process.

Lead Variations

Although you are more likely to use the standard lead-writing procedures outlined above, you may sometimes want to tackle something new. Challenging yourself in this way can improve your writing skills. The following section outlines three lead variations--the you, the

narrative and the descriptive leads.

1) "You" Leads. When your entire audience identifies with your lead, the "you" construction works. What if someone wrote:

Have you made reservations to dine at the Downhome Cafe for its opening house celebration?

Not everyone wants to. Not everyone can afford to. The use of "you" is inappropriate here. But if the writer said:

You can box away your winter wardrobe; spring arrived today.

Most Midwesterners, for example, would relate well to that. Consider your audience before attempting a "you" lead.

2) Narrative Leads. Although this type of lead works best with feature stories, it sometimes works with straight newswriting, as well. In the following example, a news event is explained in an editorial that starts with a narrative lead.

David Zucchini wrote the story for The Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 30, 1983. Zucchini earned best deadline writing award in 1984 from the American Society of Newspaper Editors for his Mideast coverage. The story was printed one week after the event.

"The hows and whys of a bombing that killed 229"

BEIRUT, Lebanon--Dawn, Beirut. It is a still and hazy morning, Sunday, Oct. 23. Beirut is stirring after another night of artillery and mortar thumping in the sooty hills above the capital.

On the highway to Beirut International Airport, past a grimy vista of shrapnel-scarred shanties and dying pygmy palm trees, a yellow Mercedes cargo truck swings into an airport parking lot. It makes a slow circle as if to turn around. It is 6:21 a.m.

¹ Roy Peter Clark, ed., Best Newspaper Writing 1984, (Florida: Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1984), 13.

In less than 20 seconds, the truck will speed across 620 feet of pavement. It will penetrate to the very heart of the atrium lobby of the U.S. Marines Battalion Landing Team (BLT) headquarters. Its driver will trigger between 2,000 and 5,000 pounds of explosives, literally lifting the roof off the four-story, concrete structure, suspending it momentarily in the air and then crashing it and the four floors beneath upon themselves like a matchstick house.

At least 229 sleeping Marines and Navy sailors will be killed, most instantly, some after unspeakable suffering. Others, among the dozens of wounded, will be burned, crippled or maimed for life.

Zucchino's lead takes the reader through about the first three paragraphs of the story. The editorial, incomplete here, continued on to tell readers "the hows and whys" of the bombing.

The following story also uses the narrative lead style. Joe Nawrozski, a finalist in the deadline writing competition, wrote the story in December 1983 for The News American in Baltimore. His story is a feature that evolved from a current news event.² This is called a news feature. The author uses a "cliffhanger" strategy, because you do not know the "what" until the story starts coming together in paragraphs 7 through 10. The entire story is printed here.

"A family stops a thug"

After living peacefully for 25 years in Pikesville, Mary and Irving Berman Tuesday night had to go to war.

And they won. Boy, how they won. Just ask James Matthew Carter.

The Bermans, both 55, of the 4100 block of Raleigh Road, returned to their split-level home about 10 p.m. after doing some Christmas shopping. Nothing unusual. Sidney, 56, Irving's brother, was watching television upstairs, and Vincent Dicrescenzo, 61, Mary's brother, was downstairs.

As Mary was about to close the front door, something happened. As she tells it:

"I'm trying to slam the door shut and I feel somebody

² Clark, Best Newspaper Writing 1984, 218.

pushing from the outside . . . I thought it was company or something."

The next thing Mary Berman saw was a foot slip inside, then a hand holding a gun.

"I said to myself 'Well.' I grabbed the gun. I kept holding the gun and just screamed as loudly as I could. He got just inside and I kept fighting him, pushing him to the door," she said.

Meanwhile, her brother--hearing the screams--thought Mary had fallen down the steps and ran to the front hallway. Irving and Sidney were also running toward the ruckus.

"It seemed like all three of them hit this bum at once. That's when his friend outside ran. But we got the gun away and Vince sat on him. He's 200 pounds and I kept his legs down," Mary said.

Irving and Sidney helped immobilize the man, whom Baltimore County police identified as Carter.

"And do you know what this guy was saying to us?" Mary said. "He said that he made a mistake, that he was in the wrong house."

He certainly was.

After police arrived and arrested Carter, 19, of the 3400 block of St. Ambrose Avenue, the tally was taken.

Vince had been bitten on the forearm and went to the hospital for stitches.

Sidney received a minor injury to his leg.

Mary and Irving came away physically unscathed.

And Carter. Besides being in the county jail charged with assault with intent to rob, he is nursing a head injury and a cut lower lip.

Now, because Mary and her family fear the second man who never made it inside might attempt a return, she said Irving and Sidney and Vince are going to get guns and learn how to use them.

Actually, Mary said, the intruder was lucky the family's black Labrador, Oliver, barking madly, couldn't get out of the basement.

The author has spun a story form the facts and used a creative technique that takes you back to the days of "Once upon a time" Most adults find this style as captivating as they did when they were children. People never grow weary of a good story.

3) Descriptive Lead. The descriptive lead draws a picture for the reader and lures him into the story.

Nawrozski wrote the following award-winner with a descriptive lead.³

³ Clark, Best Newspaper Writing 1984, 221.

"Young man saved in daring mountain rescue"

Old Rag Mountain was dressed in its Halloween clothes. There was no moon, just fog and heavy rain--driven by wicked winds swirling up through Shenandoah National Park in Virginia--limiting visibility to no more than 40 feet.

A low ceiling of gray clouds draped the summit, preventing helicopters from entering the search for Shawn Crawford, and by late Tuesday afternoon, each passing hour became critical.

Crawford, 18, of Perry Hall, had been missing since Sunday afternoon when he left a group of hikers and struck out on his own to go "bushwacking."

The story goes on to relate how Crawford is located and saved.

The first sentence uses imagery to draw you into the story. Few adjectives are used and they are carefully selected, such as heavy rain, wicked winds or low ceiling of gray clouds. They add meaning to the story. Likewise, verbs are carefully chosen, such as winds swirled or clouds draped.

If used effectively, a descriptive lead is the bait that catches the reader.

The lead, of course, is just the beginning.

CHAPTER 3

Putting a Story Together

The Inverted Pyramid

Now that you have hooked your reader with the lead, continue with the body of the story. Newswriters normally use the inverted pyramid format. Its objective: to give the information to the reader in order of decreasing importance--the most important details come first, the next most important second, and so on until the least important facts end the story. Since the story descends to less significant facts, an editor can lop off the last facts in a story without losing essential information.

If you have written an effective lead, you should be able to move into your story gracefully. If you find yourself struggling to find a transition to your second paragraph, perhaps you need to re-examine your lead. Does it work?

The story's body addresses the remainder of the five W's and perhaps the "how." It supports the lead, supplies background information and includes material in the form of facts, figures and quotations.

Most newspaper editors will expect you to keep your paragraphs short, usually two or three sentences. Long paragraphs may seem less digestible to readers who are in a hurry to devour essential ingredients of the story.

Writing the Story

By now, you should be ready to write a story.

To start, examine the following routine story about a high school student. Note that the lead is direct and the facts that follow are in inverted pyramid order.

Santina named Youth of the Year

The local Exchange Club named Mandy Santina, Central High School senior, Youth of the Year and awarded her a \$300 scholarship.

Walt Kartoor, Exchange Club president, said Santina was selected for her leadership ability and academic standing. According to school records, Santina ranks 2nd in her class academically.

"Santina's work as class president, her extracurricular involvement and her outgoing personality gave her the ingredients to be a winner," Kartoor said. "We are confident she will use the scholarship wisely."

Santina will compete at the district level for district Youth of the Year April 1.

Kartoor said about 50 students will participate, making the competition keen.

Santina will write a three page essay on "America's Responsibility . . . Youth's Destiny" for district competition. She says she has already begun mentally composing the essay.

"I believe I have duties as an American citizen. The rights our forefathers gave us weren't meant to be part of a free package deal," she said. "I will write the best composition I can."

A win at the district level would boost Santina into the national competition in Dallas, Texas, next summer.

And so on. The remainder of the story might outline Santina's high school career. Quotations from faculty and friends would be appropriate.

Note the use of quotations throughout the story. They bring the sources's thoughts directly into the story and give it life. Without quotations, stories dry up.

But quotations must be carefully used. If using a direct quotation, reporters must make sure they are writing word for word--verbatim. If you're not sure you have a source's exact words, paraphrase his remarks or call him to verify his precise language.

A Trial Writing Assignment

Using the facts given below, write a story. Remember, adjusting to the inverted pyramid format is a first step in assuming a reporter's role. But it is not the only one. In this exercise, however, focus on the inverted pyramid format by using your news judgment. Write a solid lead and then go down from there. Be concise and use strong verbs.

You are an observant reporter for your high school newspaper. As you walked to school this morning, you noticed some workers putting together pieces of fence at the local zoo. You call the zoo director, Cheryl D. Carson, and ask her about it.

She tells you:

Yes, we're enclosing the zoo in a fence. It'll be 10 feet high and will be topped with three strands of barbed wire.

Why? you ask:

Well, the zoo is an investment that becomes more and more important as space in the wild for animals disappears. We must insure the survival of these animals. I've been zoo director now for 20 years. It's important to me. Our buildings and animals are worth about \$2.5 million. We bought a two-year-old giraffe last week for \$10,000. That's a good investment.

You ask what initiated the decision to put up the fence:

She tells you:

We've had problems with vandals. They've been bothering us for two years now. They've painted buildings and hurt animals. We've had an ostrich strangled, a monkey stolen, a gorilla stabbed and birds poisoned. We want to finish the fence by mid fall to stop this abuse. These people are sick. They have no compassion. But this fence will stop them. It'll be about four square miles around, so we needed to start now.

You ask if the fence will change any zoo policies:

She responds:

Yes, when we're finished, we're going to charge an admission fee of 50 cents for adults. Children 15 or younger will get in free. Schools and other organized groups can call us in advance, and we will give them passes.

Do high school students visit the zoo much? you ask:

She says:

Yes. They come quite a bit on their own, especially on

nice days. It's a nice place just to go for a walk. They also come in organized groups quite a bit. We take them on formal tours then. The biology and environmental ecology classes take field trips here. It's a plus for them and their teachers. Students can see first-hand what they're studying. Since we have an open zoo here, they see the animals in their natural environments--or as close to that as we've been able to come. Kids really seem to enjoy this place.

What is all this going to cost you? you ask:

She says:

A lot. Probably \$150,000. That money is coming out of the zoo's general budget. It will eventually be replaced by the admission fee. This plan is a good one. It will be good for the animals and good for the public, too.

Now, write. It would be a good idea if you compared stories with others in your class. Have they considered other information more important than what you did? How much does news judgment vary from person to person? Which story do you think comes closest to what it should be? Discuss the story and together create an outline for what you think the story should be.

What Are Other Students Writing?

To show you what other high school journalists are writing, the first- and second-place winners in the newswriting division of the 1987 Quill and Scroll high school journalism writing/photography contest follow in their entirety. Judge them for yourself. Comments accompany each story to give you additional material for thought.

The first-place story was written by Paul Diedrich for the Valley High School newspaper in West Des Moines, Iowa.

Paul's story about a student dying after inhaling Dust Off was a balanced, compelling story about how teens are forced at much earlier ages today to face the consequences of their actions and the reality that drugs or foreign substances can kill. Paul covered a difficult

topic without sensationalizing it. Here is Paul's story.¹

Tragedy prompts ban, suspensions

by Paul Diedrich

Franklin "Fas" Sanchez died Thursday, Dec. 4, while apparently trying to get high, according to a student who was present at the time the incident took place.

"No one made him do it, no one told him to do it, no one helped him do it," said Tom Roberts, junior, who was with Sanchez when he inhaled Dust Off during a photography class.

"He did it on his own. He had done it earlier. If anything people told him not to do it," he said.

Sanchez collapsed during a third-hour photography class while "huffing," inhaling Dust Off, with Matthew van Hauen, sophomore, and James Winters, junior. According to senior Dave Martyn, another student in the class, Tom Roberts ran out of the darkroom to get Ron Dinsdale, art teacher.

Mike Jacobsen, junior, who was in the room at the time, said Dinsdale was relieving Rick Baker, photography teacher, who had left the room for a few moments.

Dinsdale was first on the scene, then (Mara) Brown started CPR. (Bart) White and another teacher came in and started helping," said Jacobsen. Brown is an art teacher and White is a hall monitor. School nurse Karen Doughan was also called in for assistance.

Conflicting reports have circulated about whether Sanchez was ever revived during resuscitation efforts at the school.

He was taken from the school to Methodist Medical Center by Life Flight helicopter where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

Dr. Thomas Bennet, state medical examiner, announced in a preliminary report that the cause of death was "cardiac arrhythmia (ventricular fibrillation) caused by inhalation of Freon."

According to Martyn, this huffing "happened a lot," but it has gone unnoticed by almost all people involved. Dan Gleeson of Brown Photo, a carrier of the product Dust Off, said he had "no idea that it was being used as an inhalant." Brown Photo employees don't warn customers of the dangers involved with Dust Off, and Gleeson said they probably won't start because there is a warning printed on the can.

Principal Robert Brooks was also unaware of the huffing that was being done by students. "We could have had 125 students walking around with cans of it, and I wouldn't be

¹ Paul Diedrich, "Tragedy prompts ban, suspensions," Valley High School newspaper, Des Moines, Iowa, 12 Dec. 1986: 1.

able to stop them because I wasn't aware of this huffing fad," said Brooks. Brooks also said that no one had ever been turned in for anything like this, but "now that the horse is out, we're going to say 'Okay, students, you can't bring it to school.'"

The Sanchez death has opened many eyes to the huffing fad. It is now against the rules to have Dust Off in school. According to junior Steve Burk, he, van Hauen, Winters, and junior John Hodson have been suspended for five days for huffing Dust Off. Jerry Magill, assistant principal, refused to comment on the suspensions.

Some students reacted strongly to this unfortunate accident. Anger erupted when students being interviewed by television reporters complained about having a press conference so soon after the Sanchez death. "I don't think it's right that there was a press conference and cameras because the parents already knew Fas was dead," said Brenda Cox, sophomore.

Brooks responds to this by saying that "we didn't call them (the reporters) in. They just kept arriving one by one."

Whether the school can be found negligent in their dealing with the situation also has become a question. Brooks feels the school handled the problem as well as can be expected. "If I had to say, 'Administrators, paramedics, Life Flight, now this is going to happen and this is what I want you to do' it would be the same thing," said Brooks. But he did add that "we're going to remind teachers that they are not to leave students unattended." Brooks said that he doubts anything will be done differently with regard to how students are supervised.

According to Baker, even if he had seen the Dust Off, he wouldn't have thought anything about it. Baker said he had used the "reliable product" for 19 years, but had never heard of anyone inhaling it. Baker said he had heard of things such as marijuana being used in the darkroom in the past, but "this had absolutely no warning signs with it at all." Since Dust Off has been banned from the darkrooms, Baker said the school is thinking about buying an air compressor. "It's an incredible tragedy," said Baker. "It was very hard to believe it was happening."

The funeral was held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in W st Des Moines, with over 350 students attending. Three of the pall bearers, Mike McCoy, junior; Greg Holliday, junior; and Brian Schroeder, junior, are Valley students.

Huffing Dust Off was not forced on Sanchez, according to Jacobsen. "I told Fas it was stupid before he went back there, but he went anyway."

The story was well written. One point that

Diedrich should have covered was just exactly what Dust Off is.

Students unfamiliar with the product were left wondering what its

particular use is. Diedrich also writes that the school was considering the purchase of an air compressor. The average student wouldn't know what its function is.

Consider the following points:

1) Paragraph 13 starts with: Whether the school can be found negligent in their. . .

Stop right there. The school is not a "their." It is a singular word and the pronoun that agrees with that is "its."

2) In the second to the last paragraph the phrase "with over 350 students" should read "with more than 350 students."

3) And one last thought to consider is that occasionally the writer's paragraphs start getting too long. Where might you have made changes?

As writers, you should have noticed that, in general, Diedrich did an effective job of attributing information to proper sources. He also did his research well and talked to the necessary people.

The second-place story was written by Brian Muilenburg for the Homestead High School newspaper in Mequon, Wis.

Brian's story is a close second to the winning story, because he treated a sensitive topic well. The story is about a young man who waged a successful battle against cancer.

Student battles cancer and wins

by Brian Muilenburg

Nearly a year after being told that he would probably not make it, John Shebesta, senior, has made a successful

² Brian Muilenburg, "Student battles cancer and wins," Homestead High School newspaper, Mequon, Wisconsin, 1986: No. 3, 1.

comeback against cancer.

Shebesta, 18, was informed in December 1986 that the recurring pains in his midsection were a case of Burkitt's Lymphoma, a type of cancer which spreads to the spinal column from almost anywhere in the body. Doctors estimated that even with chemotherapy, Shebesta's chances for survival were only 50 percent.

"I was shocked," Shebesta said. "There's no way you can prepare yourself for something like this."

Upon being diagnosed, Shebesta was immediately started on chemotherapy treatment at Children's Hospital of Milwaukee. Among the many discomforts he had to endure were a series of spinal taps and bone marrow tests.

Shebesta noted, "The bone marrows are the worst. They stick a huge needle directly into your bone. It feels like someone is sucking out your insides through a straw."

Burkitt's Lymphoma occurs in four stages. Fortunately, Shebesta's case was discovered in stage three, enabling doctors to effectively battle the sickness.

Rather than adopting a self-pitying attitude, Shebesta chose to take a positive outlook on the situation.

Dr. Steve Lauer, the hematologist/oncologist who has supervised Shebesta's recovery, said of his patient, "His attitude has had a lot to do with the healing process."

Mr. Paul Shebesta, John's father, agreed. "A positive disposition and sense of humor can overcome many types of dilemmas and emotional and physical problems."

Although Shebesta's spirits were lifted by an onslaught of well-wishing friends and relatives, he did have a wry comment to make about bedside etiquette. "People come in and say, "I know what you must be going through," which is ridiculous. Although they mean well, the only way anybody can understand it (chemotherapy) is to undergo it themselves."

After missing a total of two months of school, Shebesta said he has had to work hard in order to keep up with the rest of the class. Many of his nights and weekends were gobbled up as he strove to retain his former class standing.

Shebesta is not letting his disease thwart his plans for the future. Although his sickness bars him from entry into the Air Force, Shebesta still hopes to attain his ambition of becoming a pilot via civilian channels.

Though he has only one more session of chemotherapy remaining, Shebesta will have to go in periodically over the next four years to ensure that the cancer stays in remission.

Shebesta wished to thank those members of the Homestead staff and student body who gave him their moral and academic support.

Shebesta concluded, "It's been a living hell, but I can finally see some light at the end of the tunnel."

Brian's story ends on an up note. Considering the serious

nature of the topic, that's nice. Not only does Shebesta have hope, so does the reader.

The reader gets to know Shebesta through the story. Be sure to note that not only did the reporter talk to Shebesta, but he also spoke to the doctor and to Shebesta's father. Those sources added depth to the story.

Learning to put a story together takes practice and know-how. The following list of tips will guide you in your efforts to produce strong stories.

Tips for Writers

1. Read the newspaper daily. Become familiar with newswriting style, and writing will become easier for you.
2. Learn the guidelines set by a journalism stylebook, such as Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.
3. Avoid writing sentences, such as:

When asked what she learned during her week at journalism camp, Smith replied, "I learned how to write leads and stories, handle interviews and design pages for the school paper."

Be straightforward. Try:

Smith said the camp focused on developing journalistic skills. "I learned how to write leads and stories, handle interviews and design pages for the school paper," she said.

4. Practice the rules of editing outlined in chapter 8.
5. Avoid overworked phrases like throw caution to the wind, had his heart set on, rained cats and dogs, fit as a fiddle and sly as a fox.
6. Strive for unity. Chuck unrelated ideas or you'll have the never-ending and never-read story. Use details that are relevant to the central idea.
7. Use a thesaurus. You'll be amazed at the number of words that you know and never use.
8. Most of what you write about will be fading into history even as

you record it. For that reason newspaper reporters employ the past tense for most story telling. One exception, of course, is the advance story. For example:

The local Barbershop Quartet will perform tonight at 7 at the Civic Arena.

The reporter needs the future tense here. The present tense often creates problems in the wrong places. How about this lead:

Tara Olefson takes over as tennis coach at Central High School.

Sounds odd, doesn't it? It reads like a headline and does not work as a lead or a backup statement in a news story.

Those tips can help you produce better stories. So can the following advice that William Randolph Hearst, founder of the Hearst newspaper empire, once gave his staff.

"I have asked a number of times to have the reporters and correspondents on our papers use short sentences.

"The fault in most newspaper writing is that the reporter tries to tell everything he knows in one sentence.

"The result is hard reading and often hard understanding of what is written.

"It is easy to break up the articles into short sentences and to paragraph more, and so make the article more easily understood.

"Please ask the reporters and copyreaders to write in short sentences, and please insist that they do so, and please employ reporters and copyreaders who will do so."

³ Edmond D. Coblentz, ed., Newsmen Speak (California: University of California Press, 1954), 116.

CHAPTER 4

Truth--the Ultimate Goal

In 1987 the United States celebrated the Constitution's 200th birthday. Phrases like "let freedom ring" and "we the people" and "capture the spirit" appeared frequently in ads and in speeches.

American journalists were reminded, or should have been, of the right to free speech and press guaranteed them in the First Amendment of that far-reaching document.

That First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

You are allowed to write the truth--to provide others access to information and opinions they might otherwise have no avenue for learning about. People, our predecessors decided, had the right to learn and grow. Freedom of the press is to be for the good of all.

But those freedoms guaranteed you by your ancestors ask something of you in return--responsibility. Give your public honest stories.

Sometimes, a reporter may report an inaccurate fact. It is, whether he meant it to be or not, an untruth. You are responsible for seeing that those types of untruths do not occur. Careless reporting could get you in trouble. If you say the convicted murderer John Doe lives at 200 Elm Street and actually it is Jon Dough who lives

at 200 Elm Street, you have made a grievous error.

The protections a reporter has against inaccuracies are discussed after the following definitions of libel and slander.

Your Rights and Responsibilities

In order to adequately explain journalism law, one could meander through numerous cases that have set precedents for today's journalists. This chapter, however, will stress only the most important facets of journalism law, with an occasional case added to give an historical perspective.

Libel and Slander

The journalist should be familiar with the definitions of libel and slander.

Libel is written defamation. Defamation is anything spoken, written or pictured that could damage a person's reputation or hold a person up to ridicule.

Slander is spoken defamation. Defamation committed on the radio or television is considered libel because it can be assumed that the speaker is talking from a script.

Avoiding Libel

Because you write for a print medium, libel is the charge you must guard against.

The three main defenses you would have against the charge of libel are truth, privilege and fair comment.

Truth. If you can prove the information is true, you will probably be protected against a libel suit.

Imagine yourself to be John Peter Zenger, an American who in 1735 defied the government in the name of truth and a free press.

He went to battle with no more than his courage and bought for all journalists the essence of future journalism.

Four colonial Americans faced sedition actions (a stirring up of rebellion against the government) for printed words before the historical criminal trial of Zenger, printer of the New York Weekly Journal. The Journal had earned a name for its political assault upon Gov. William Cosby. Zenger's attacks labeled Cosby a tyrant and oppressor of the colony.¹

Zenger went to jail for seditious libel.

At that time, the court did not allow defendants to plead that the offending words were true. The truth supposedly only aggravated the offense. The jury's only task was to decide whether the defendant had printed the words.

Zenger's attorney asked that truth be recognized as a defense. He also asked them to consider whether Zenger's words were libelous. The attorney, Andrew Hamilton, was the first to argue truth as a defense. Although it was not that argument that won the case, he had opened the way for future decisions.

He won on another landmark point of view--that people should be allowed to criticize their governments. Freedom of speech prevailed.

Keep in mind that you must be able to prove that any statements being considered libelous are true. That can be hard to do.

Privilege. As a reporter, you can print or broadcast reports of court proceedings, governmental meetings, congressional sessions

¹ Harold L. Nelson and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., Law of Mass Communications (New York: The Foundation Press, Inc., 1978), 23-24.

and even congressional publications. If a person should lie while speaking to an assembly on the floor of the Senate, you can report those statements without fear. You should, however, use your judgement--ethics--when considering what to print. If you know what was said is untrue, should you be reporting it to your readers as if it were true? No.

Fair Comment. Suppose the junior class puts on its annual musical, and the lead role sings in a voice that could rival the screech of a blue jay. And suppose it is your assignment as the fine arts critic to comment on the play and the performance of its actors. Can you in your critique say that the lead sounded like a 45 record played at the wrong speed without getting yourself in trouble?

Yes. Fair comment says that you are free to evaluate the play (including its actors), books, movies or other public performances. They need not be nice reports, so long as they describe only the performance or, if you're doing a consumer report, the product.

Public Figures and Officials

Vs. Private Figures

Because public figures and officials have thrust themselves into the public eye, they must expect publicity--wanted or not. The courts have ruled that comment such as is found in editorials, columns or cartoons or reports on public figures such as politicians, actors or others who are famous cannot be found defamatory unless the reporter is guilty of reckless disregard for the truth. The plaintiff must prove that the reporter wrote untruths with actual malice in mind, and that is difficult to do.

It is sometimes difficult to define who is a public figure/official and who is not. The person who suddenly finds himself thrust into the limelight because he was a witness to a murder is not necessarily a public figure. Be careful to analyze what you say about people. Be ethical.

To further develop your sense of what is right or wrong in reporting the news or writing comment of any kind, a code of ethics has been included in this book.

Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists

Sigma Delta Chi

The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, believes the duty of the journalist is to serve the truth.

We believe the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.

We believe in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our Constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.

We believe those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy and fairness.

To these ends, we declare acceptance of the standards of practice here set forth.

Responsibility. The public's right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media. The purpose of distributing news and enlightened opinion is to serve the general welfare. Journalists who use their professional status

as representatives of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives violate a high trust.

Freedom of the Press. Freedom of the press is to be guarded as an inalienable right of people in a free society. It carries with it the freedom and responsibility to discuss, question and challenge actions and utterances of our government and of our public and private institutions. Journalists uphold the right to speak unpopular opinions and the privilege to agree with the majority.

Ethics. Journalists at all times will show respect for the dignity, privacy, rights and well-being of people encountered in the course of gathering and presenting the news.

1. The news media should not communicate unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the accused a chance to reply.
2. The news media must guard against invading a person's right to privacy.
3. The media should not pander to morbid curiosity about details of vice or crime.
4. It is the duty of news media to make prompt and complete correction of errors.
5. Journalists should be accountable to the public for their reports and the public should be encouraged to voice its grievances against the media. Open dialogue with our readers, viewers and listeners should be fostered.

Pledge. Journalists should actively censure and try to prevent violations of these standards, and they should encourage their observance by all newspeople. Adherence to this code of ethics is

intended to preserve the bond of mutual trust and respect between American journalists and the American people.

Accuracy and Objectivity. Good faith with the public is the foundation of all worthy journalism.

1. Truth is our ultimate goal.
2. Objectivity in reporting the news is another goal, which serves as the mark of an experienced professional. It is a standard of performance toward which we strive. We honor those who achieve it.
3. Photography should give an accurate picture of an event and not highlight a minor incident out of context.
4. News reports should be free of opinion or bias and represent all sides of an issue.
5. Partisanship in editorial comment which knowingly departs from the truth violates the spirit of American journalism.
6. Special articles or presentations devoted to advocacy or the writer's own conclusions and interpretations should be labeled as such.

CHAPTER 5

Attribution and Editorializing

The previous chapter dealt with a reporter's responsibility to be ethical--to be an honest reporter. This chapter, "Attribution and Editorializing," also deals with a reporter's honesty. A good reporter will set high standards for himself in these two areas.

Attribution

Attribution is identifying the source of a quote, a fact, a judgment, an entire interview or any information that would be tough to check. When a reporter does not use attribution (such as "he said"), he is accepting responsibility for the truth of the information he is reporting.

When writing a story, remember that you are not the expert. Your source is. For that reason you must attribute information to the source unless it is general enough that you might find it in several places. The purpose of attribution is to be sure that the reader knows where the information is coming from.

Your readers want you to tell them what the experts think. If you do that well, they will respect your skill as a reporter and writer. Write the story as well as you can and learn from the expert, but never pretend that you are a mine of information on the subject. Attribution will remind you of that.

It is essential that you, as a reporter, learn when and when not to attribute information.

Attribution is not necessary when an indisputable fact is reported or when it is presumed that a reliable source was interviewed. For example:

Darwin Farsworth, Central High School senior, was named State FFA president at the state convention Tuesday.

You are reporting a fact that needs no attribution.

Try this one:

Christmas vacation starts Dec. 21.

However, if you are quoting or paraphrasing the opinion of a source, attribution is necessary. For example:

"The person I am now and the person I'll be a year from now are going to be two different people. I'm going to get what I can out of every opportunity they offer me," Farsworth said.

Obviously, those words are Farsworth's, and because they are a direct quotation they must be attributed to him.

Look at the above example again. The quotation is two sentences long. It is obvious that both sentences belong to Farsworth. It would also be obvious that both statements were his if you were to place the attribution midway between the two sentences. This, in fact, would be the preferred method of attribution here, because it tells the reader sooner who the speaker is. Look at this:

"The person I am now and the person I'll be a year from now are going to be two different people," Farsworth said. "I'm going to get what I can out of every opportunity they offer me."

It is not necessary to say "he said" after the second part of the above quotation.

Opening a quoted passage with the attribution is often awkward. Tuck the attribution into the flow of your story so it is not obtrusive.

You might consider starting a passage, whether a direct or indirect quotation, with the source's name when you have information from two different sources following each other. For example:

"It's crucial that the team start practicing for the season early," said the coach.

Joe Smith, quarterback for the team, agreed, saying, "I'd like to start practicing as soon as possible so we can all be in good playing condition by our first game in September."

Note: The first sentence is attributed to the coach. A general attribution like that should be used only when the coach is properly identified earlier in the story.

You might also consider putting the attribution at the beginning of a sentence when the attribution itself is a major part of the sentence. For example:

Principal Pat Osterbee says she is planning to move on.

The above example is an indirect quote. You are telling the readers what Osterbee said but not in her exact words.

Words to Use in Attribution

Said is a nice word. Use it.

When writing your first news stories, you might feel as if you are drowning in the word said.

Other words, however, like promulgated or stated or averred are stuffy and distract the reader. Said is simple and becomes almost invisible within the story.

Read a few news stories and circle the "saids." Did you find them awkward to read? Probably not. The reader likes them because they are not distracting.

That does not mean other means of attribution are banned. Words like continued, added, noted or shouted may work well within a

story. They can create a mood. If so, use them.

Read the following story and the interjected comments as a summary in the study of attribution.

The Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that public school officials would have more legal power to search suspected students for drugs, alcohol and weapons.

The first paragraph did not need attribution. That information had been in the news and was common knowledge. Now, read the next two paragraphs, noting that they follow the lead closely and include attribution.

Though some restrictions have been lifted involving student searches, it does not mean teachers can randomly search students at will, Superintendent Mary Keaton said.

"The only thing that has changed is that school officials do not have to go through the same procedure as police do in order to search students," Keaton said. "There must always be reasonable grounds for the search."

Let's start with line one. The writer uses an indirect quotation. That means she took what Keaton said and put it in her own words. The reporter still had to attribute the information to Keaton. In the second of the above two paragraphs a direct quotation of Keaton's is used. Since she spoke the words, you must enclose them in quotation marks and attribute them to her. The last sentence is also a direct quote. No attribution is used, because it is obvious that the speaker is Keaton. Continue with the story.

Some controversy exists as to what should be accepted as reasonable cause to search.

"Basically, the searches are a safety check," Keaton said. "If there is reasonable question that a student is in possession of illegal drugs or alcohol, then the administration may indicate to the student that he may be subject to a search of locker and purse."

The Constitution protects students from unreasonable searches and seizures.

"The main thing is what is considered reasonable," Keaton said. "If a student indicated that he was bringing

a gun to school, then walked in the door with his hand inside his coat, a teacher would have reasonable cause to search the student on the spot. However, a teacher cannot take 30 students at once and demand to see the insides of their lockers."

And the story would continue from there. Notice that the reporter included clarifying material when needed. Such statements can introduce the source's information or opinions and help the reader understand them. An example of this would be when the reporter wrote that the controversy exists as to what should be accepted as reasonable cause to search.

Editorializing

The rules of attribution directly relate to the problem of editorializing. Reporters editorialize when they express opinions or attitudes in news stories.

News stories are not the places to air the reporter's private opinions. That is what opinion pages are for. As a newswriter, you shape facts into stories. You explain the facts when necessary. You use direct and indirect quotations to supply information and give your story credibility. But you never give your personal opinions. Three pitfalls await the careless journalist.

Not Attributing Information. Reporters can be guilty of editorializing when they fail to attribute information to its proper source. Suppose you read this in your school newspaper:

Brian Sanders picked the lock on the school vault last night, left the building with \$1,000 and was arrested outside the door.

The reporter, here, has himself convicted Brian Sanders of a serious crime that he may not have committed. Adding "said Police Chief Tracy Addison" would solve the problem.

Emotional Involvement. Because a student reporter is a part of the school, he sometimes finds it difficult to remain detached.

In a story about a retiring teacher, a student might write something like:

Doones has taught chorus, music theory and German for 22 years. He is a fine teacher and will be missed by all.

First, it's boring. Second, it is your opinion that he is a fine teacher. And last, are you really willing to speak for the entire student body when you write that he will be missed by all? Avoid that type of editorializing.

You might feel it impersonal not to say that Mr. Doones will be missed. If so, go out and get proof that he'll be missed. You might get quotes like:

"Mr. Doones can improve anyone's voice in chorus. He's a super teacher. I'm never nervous when I have to sing alone in front of him," Agnes Wittley, junior, said. "I'll miss him, and I think lots of other kids will, too."

Another type of emotional involvement sometimes appears in the student's news story. Implanted in many students is unwavering school spirit. Some reporters let their exuberance slip into their articles. Don't conclude an article about the basketball team winning at the state tournament with "Congratulations, team!" The article will communicate the achievement. Be professional. Some writers will say that the students understand when they put such opinions or expressions in their articles. Whether the students understand or not is not the issue. Be concerned with your professionalism. You'll get better results.

Opinionated Adjectives. How about this:

The hard-working FHA members sponsored a very successful banquet.

Adjectives without attribution can be dangerous. They become opinions, as have both hard-working and successful above. The adviser can say that the members were hard workers. You can't.

Adjectives can, however, play an important role in relaying the news. Use them when they provide information. If the 4-H members plan to hold a banquet in someone's barn, it is not necessary to say the barn is red. However, if the barn is purple and green, it might be worth the ink to say so.

Also, adjectives show the reader. Eliminate modifiers such as brightly colored. If the colors are important, identify them. For example:

The tropical bird left a blur of blue, green and red as it flitted across the gymnasium, reveling in its new-found freedom.

To sum up: Attribute your information to the proper sources, and--unless you're writing an editorial--keep your opinions out.

CHAPTER 6

Information Gathering, Getting Ideas--Part I

"The human heart has hidden treasures," Charlotte Bronte, 19th-century writer, said.¹ Put your finger on the pulse of your school's student life and find those treasures. A high school reporter need never look far for a story.

Hard news, news about daily events, is usually obvious. The drama class is presenting a play. A teacher is resigning. Hard news may happen suddenly. A two-car accident critically injured two high school students. If you're lucky, you might have the chance to cover on-the-spot stories. A group of students, for example, might be protesting nuclear weapons in front of your school. Interview them while they're still involved. Although obvious, hard news stories can still be overlooked. Plan carefully.

Unlike a hard news story, another story might remain dormant until a perceptive reporter nudges it to life. Features wait to be discovered. A boy with cerebral palsy wants to share his struggles and successes. A brother-sister team plans to enter a national rodeo competition. A gymnast dreams of earning the gold in the Olympics.

Reporters are obligated to seek news tips--story ideas. Your heart must house the spirit of a reporter before you can work as one. Nurture that reporter. Study and digest your environment. See each

¹ Charlotte Bronte, The Poems of Charlotte Bronte, ed. Victor A. Neufeldt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 328.

person as unique and every happening as a story. Don't see flowers growing in front of the school; see geraniums, tulips and roses.

The stories within your school or the outside stories that affect your school are your priorities. One outside story example would be when the Supreme Court decided in January 1984 that public school officials had more legal power to search suspected students for drugs, alcohol and weapons. Another example occurred in January 1988 when the Supreme Court gave public school officials broad, new authority to censor student newspapers and other forms of student expression. Paul McMasters, national freedom of information chairman of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, and deputy editorial director of USA Today, said, "This decision cuts the First Amendment legs off the student press" ² All student newspapers needed to cover that story, focusing on the information and getting the opinions of administrators, teachers and students in their schools.

When the time comes to generate ideas, forget the flimsy excuse that nothing is happening. It's not true. If you think the ideas aren't there, you're not looking.

Beginning the News Gathering Process

The word research might conjure up visions of all-night library stints. On the contrary, it means nothing more than asking a few good questions and reading a few articles.

Consider the following three reasons for doing research:

² Washington (AP), "Court says schools have power to censor student publications," (Sioux Falls) Argus Leader, 14 Jan. 1988: 1A.

1. Research produces background information that increases your understanding of the topic.
2. Research can provide details, anecdotes and quotes for your story.
3. Background information is used to write strong interview questions.

Suppose a state senator plans to speak to an assembly at your school. You might need to write an advance story before the senator's speech. You need to know his political stands. What issues has the senator fought the hardest for while in office? If you get to interview the senator after the assembly, you need to ask intelligent questions, and you cannot do that if you have no background facts.

Such information can be found in newspaper clippings, magazines or political brochures. Call the senator's headquarters and ask the secretary or public relations agent for information.

Perhaps you are reporting on a school-board meeting. Get a copy of the board's agenda. If the board plans to discuss funding for new language arts books, go to the administration office and ask for information about the department's budget. Have the language arts teachers asked for new books in the past and been denied? Has the board discussed it before? What did it decide? Why? Look at the current books. What are the copyright dates?

Note: More than one story may evolve from a meeting. If a topic is important, it may deserve separate attention as well. Touch on it in the summary story, and then write a full-blown story about it.

Suppose a student from your school is missing and you are doing the story. Statistics about missing children or youth will give your story solid details, greater impact and credibility. Refer to the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature and look up missing children,

kidnapping or anything else you think might yield information. (The entries tell what magazines have articles on the subject and when they were printed.) The articles will produce information for your story, and they will give you ideas for questions to ask the police or a family member who may want to talk.

The material for a good story often comes from magazines, newspapers or someone's files. Become a private investigator. Browsing through the card catalogues, documents, current magazines, the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Who's Who, or a source as basic as the dictionary unearths valuable information.

Learn to operate your library. If you are uncertain about anything, ask the librarian. The substance of your library represents the knowledge, discoveries, imagination and creativity of thousands of people. Don't waste their work.

CHAPTER 7

Information Gathering, the Interview--Part II

Interviewing sources is a major part of gathering news.

The high school reporter obtains more information through the interview than any other means. One interview does not always supply enough information. The reporter may need to interview other sources.

If you are doing a story on a student's unusual hobby, talk to his parents, as well as the student. Let's say the student collects snakes. Do the parents support their child's interest? Have they ever bought him a snake as a gift?

A story about an athlete may be better if you interview the coach, the student and possibly the parents.

Learning to be a skillful interviewer benefits writers in personal ways. Awkward situations develop when people cannot communicate. Having nothing to say to a dinner date or dance partner is embarrassing. As you become a good interviewer, you become a better communicator.

Author William Zinsser says, "Get people talking. Learn to ask questions that will elicit answers about what is most interesting or vivid in their lives. Nothing so animates writing as someone telling what he thinks or what he does in his own words."¹

You must learn when to push and when to listen. Notice when the source is confused and you need to clarify yourself. Know when he

¹ William Zinsser, On Writing Well (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 82.

is thinking and silence is okay. Your behavior will be the difference between a good or bad story.

Interviewing skills include the following: producing the query list (next chapter), making a contact, meeting the source, taking notes, keeping up with the source (developing an abbreviation system), getting quotations, making observations and using tape recorders and note pads.

Making a Contact

If you were to go the principal of your high school with pen and paper in hand and ask for a few minutes of his time, he would probably reach for a desk calendar and fit you into an already full schedule.

Always schedule interviews. Don't expect a busy teacher or student to drop everything for you. Call or talk to that person first. That is considerate, and it gives the source time to think about the topic.

Do not call the source unless you are ready to do the interview. Occasionally, the source will want to conduct the interview immediately, especially if you are already there.

Be pleasant and professional when you call or stop to ask for an interview. If the source doesn't know who you are, introduce yourself. Say what you are writing, what it is for (yearbook or newspaper) and why you want the story. Your sources will cooperate better in the future if you develop strong working relationships with them.

Interviewing the Source

The clatter of plates and silverware and the chatter of students in the cafeteria at noon do not provide an appropriate setting for an interview. Neither does a busy hallway or a basketball game. Choose a quiet, comfortable atmosphere.

Take an attitude of professionalism. A quality interview will not result if you and your source are surrounded by students who are listening and probably contributing their opinions. Your interview will become a jumbled mess. Your source may be reluctant to say what he really means while others are listening.

Don't take a friend along. Again, the source may choke.

As a high school reporter, you will interview friends. Maintain a professional attitude, and they will respond to your signals.

Dress appropriately--don't wear your sloppy clothes--for the interview. Avoid using slang, and speak in a clear, precise voice.

The source will feel your confidence. If you speak and dress sloppily, he may hesitate to give you information. Why give information to someone who might muddle it? Even your best friend wants to look good in the newspaper or yearbook.

Some students believe that sources consider reporters nuisances. Not true. People are usually honored that you want their opinions or require their knowledge as experts. In a high school, coaches, advisers and teachers want their activities and students to receive acknowledgment. You are their link to the public.

Writer George Ward Nichols in 1867 interviewed the notorious outlaw James Butler (Wild Bill) Hickok. Of this interview, one writer, said, "In Hickok, George Ward Nichols found a lively and cooperative subject, one who delighted in narrating his own adventures and knew that a celebrity was, as he says, 'Sort of public property'."²

The above tips should help put both you and the source at ease.

² Robert Atwan and Donald McQuade, eds., Popular Writing in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 213.

Taking Notes

Tap a source's knowledge and experiences, and as he enlightens you, take notes.

If your interest wanes, pretend you are a gossip monger, and you cannot miss a single, juicy word or your public will ostracize you. It wants the scoop, and you are responsible for getting it.

Beginning journalists enter their first interview with valid apprehensions. One of the concerns is: Will I be able to keep up with the source?

That fear led a student named Laura to pack a tape recorder under her arm as she left for her interview with the superintendent. Laura returned to the classroom after the interview, rewound the cassette and pushed the play button. Silence. She had been cautioned to take notes when using a tape recorder, and she had not. The interview would have to be repeated.

Journalists learn to be responsible. Laura did not repeat that mistake, learned to take good notes and even became an award-winning journalist.

Write things down. It's that simple. Take along a couple of pens or a few well-sharpened pencils, as well as a note pad. You want your story to be accurate. Keep your notes for at least a week after the story is published in case your source disputes anything you have written.

Check notes you suspect. If your source gives you a fact you believe to be inaccurate, check it later. Did he appear unsure of a detail? Did he seem hesitant to tell you something? Is there someone else you can check with? Protect yourself. Take careful notes and

check those that make you uneasy.

As a reporter, you have gone from the role of observer to temporary specialist. Like the biologist, you need to dissect your subject and bit by bit delve into its many components.

Accurate notes--and lots of them--ensure a solid story. You will not need to use all of your notes if you have taken enough. Most information, however, cannot be trusted to memory. Laura had no choice but to return to the superintendent.

Keeping up by Using Abbreviations

and Tact

When your source starts talking fast, the pressure is on you to keep up. Just as leaves fall from a tree on an autumn day and scatter with the wind, so will the source's thoughts--unless you catch them.

Invent an abbreviation system that will make you a swift note-taker. For example, try leaving vowels out of four-letter words. Read can be rd. Lead--ld. Took--tk.

You can shorten words in other ways. From can be fr or f. Become can be bec. With--w. Average--avg. Create your own abbreviations, and become accustomed to using them. Practice in classes.

If you think you may forget a spur-of-the-moment abbreviation, write the full word in right after the interview, when it's still fresh.

Don't lose your story. If necessary, ask the person to slow down or even stop for a few seconds. He will appreciate your desire to get the facts straight. Read something back to the source, if you want to double-check it. Don't, however, overdo interruptions. The source may lose his train of thought.

One reporter's trick for catching up is to ask the source an unimportant question, and while he is answering that, continue writing down the answer to the question before.

Typing your notes out later helps you see what you have and gives you a good copy from which to organize your story. You may find it helps at first and becomes a hindrance later. If you don't need to do it, stop.

Catching Quotations

Besides jotting down details and paraphrasing information, the reporter must write down direct quotations. To capture someone's comments word-for-word is to get them verbatim. These direct quotations add life to stories. Quotations break up the material and hold the reader's attention.

Zinsser says, "This is a person talking to a reader directly, not through the filter of a writer."³ Quotes allow the individual to reveal himself. Catch quotations that get right to the point, carry emotion or explain something well. Don't use quotations that are weak.

A quotation must be exact--not just "close." Your source knows what was said. If you are unsure about something, check back with the source. He will prefer that to inaccuracies or distortions.

Be Observant

As you talk to the individual, notice his facial expressions and body gestures. Like quotes, they add life to a story, especially a feature, if used appropriately. Using description gives the reader

³ Zinsser, On Writing Well, 82.

a picture. For example:

"I still can't believe it," said Krinkly, lowering his head into his hands and taking a deep breath. "Now that we know the truth, I feel tired. It was a battle."

Tape Recorders and Note Pads

Tape recorders and note pads can affect the atmosphere of an interview.

A tape recorder may make the source uncomfortable. People feel as if each idea or thought they relay must be said perfectly. Worrying about syntax during an interview inhibits the speaker. If it is a problem, don't use the recorder.

A second disadvantage of the tape recorder is that tapes are time-consuming to listen to. When you are hurrying, it won't work to check your notes with a tape.

Third, you can't look back at your notes during an interview if you are using a tape recorder, and you may forget to ask a question about something.

The most obvious disadvantage of the tape recorder is that there is always the risk of malfunction. Laura could tell you about that.

An obvious advantage is that the tape recorder gives you access to exact words and reduces chances for error.

A basic note pad may also intimidate a source. Watching the reporter scribble words onto paper may become an uncomfortable experience. Consider buying a smaller note pad that attracts less attention.

The best way to avoid tension is to provide a comfortable atmosphere.

In Conclusion

Thorough research and well-planned and handled interviews produce good stories. Planning the interview involves creating a query list, the subject of the next chapter, a supplement to this one, and one that must be read before you conduct an interview.

CHAPTER 8

Information Gathering, the Query List--Part III

. . . when the rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. In another moment down went Alice after it . . .¹

When Alice, Lewis Carroll's main character for his books Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, darted into a rabbit hole after a large, clothed rabbit, she discovered a land rich with wonders that were laughable, preposterous and frightful. Alice explored her new world with insatiable curiosity. As a reporter, you must do the same. Look at your school as if you had never seen it before. It, like Alice's land of wonders, holds much at which to marvel. Alice's entrance to that land was through the rabbit's hole. Similarly, your entrance to a story rich with strong information is through the questions you ask.

The more questions you ask, the more information you will receive. Not every question, however, deserves an answer. Your questions must be well planned. Preparing for the interview is a must. As you know, research provides background information that will help you develop strong questions about the topic. Imagination and

¹ The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll (London: Chancellor Press, 1985), 17.

curiosity should do the rest. It worked for Alice.

Without a written list of questions you may forget to ask a crucial one. The source will be annoyed if you are unprepared and impressed if you are informed.

Preparing a Question List

Don't get a news tip and dash off. Doing background research not only gives you information, it indicates what questions should be asked.

Speculate about the story. The six points that follow will help you devise interview questions.

1. Be sure to cover the five W's and an H--who, what, when, where, why and how.
2. Put related questions together. This helps the source organize his thoughts. It benefits you later when you write your story and related ideas are already together.
3. Avoid questions that beg for yes/no answers. Be specific. If you are interviewing someone who bowls on a league, something like: "What is your high score to date?" doesn't work well. He may say, "170" and quit. Try: Can you tell me about the best game you ever bowled?
4. As the source answers questions, develop some of those answers by asking questions not on your query list. It would be impossible for you to think of every possible question before going to the interview. If the source answers the question: "Can you tell me about the best game you ever bowled?" with: "Even though it had been the worst day of my life, I managed to have a high score that night. It was great." Don't let it end there. Ask: What made

that day so rough? How did you forget all that and play well?

Does your mood usually affect your game?" And so on.

5. It often works to state what you know and then ask a question about it. For example: "You've been bowling in that same league for four years now. Do other leagues try to recruit you?" And if he says yes but doesn't say why a switch hasn't occurred, ask: "Why do you remain loyal to that team?"
6. If the subject does not understand your question, rephrase it. Or state what you are trying to get at and maybe he can help you reach the right question.
7. Start with questions that are less difficult or less personal. This puts the person at ease and makes later questions easier to answer. People often find it easier to talk as the interview moves along. For that reason, you do not want to ask your most critical questions at the beginning.
8. Imagine being that person. What questions would you like to answer?
9. Your source may wander off in another direction. If that direction is producing useful, interesting information, let him go. If it is not, bring the source back to the topic quickly. Ask if you can check a fact given to you earlier, and then ask a new question. Be tactful.
10. End the session with a question like: "Do you have anything you would like to add?"

Formulas to Boost Your Interviewing

Skills

Different formulas for interviewing have proven themselves

helpful to journalists. They include the GOSS and the Yak-Yak formulas.

The GOSS Formula

Professor LaRue W. Gilleland at the University of Nevada, Reno, told his students to think of his formula, the GOSS Formula, as a supplement to the traditional five W's and H. He encouraged students to use the technique when they felt an interview was going badly.²

GOSS stands for Goal, Obstacle, Solution and Start. Gilleland said most people or organizations have goals and most will face some obstacle. A goal-revealing question might be: "What problems did you face?" or "What stands in your way now" (Metz 182)?

If the problem has been resolved, the person must have found a solution. He suggests: "How did you handle the problem?" or "What plan do you have for resolving the conflict" (Metz 182)?

The "start" portion of the formula originates from the belief that the goal sought grew from someone's idea. Gilleland proposes questions such as: "When did the program begin?" or "Whose idea was it" (Metz 182)?

The acronym "GOSS" is a memory-aiding device. It reminds students to ask the above questions.

One student told Gilleland of a positive experience with the formula. He was covering a high school track meet. An 18-year-old pole vaulter was visiting from another school and broke a conference record. While other reporters obtained the vaulter's name, school, family information and other factual information, this reporter tried the GOSS formula. The others also discovered he was engaged, planned to go to college and got a quote from him on how he felt about setting

² William Metz, Newsriting--From Lead to "30" (New Jersey:

a record. The reporter who knew of the GOSS formula asked the athlete, "Did you have any obstacles to overcome in setting this record?"³

"Yes," the pole vaulter said, "I had polio when I was 13" (E&P 54).

That reporter described the athlete's journey to health and athletic prowess. No one else had that story.

The Yak-Yak Formula

Metz also writes about the "speech duration phenomenon": the longer the questions, the longer the answers tend to be; the shorter the questions, the shorter the answers.⁴

Through Science magazine, Metz found that "a statistical study of 61 of President John F. Kennedy's press conferences from 1961 to 1963 revealed that the longer a reporter yakked, the longer the President yakked back. And the more concisely the correspondent framed his query, the briefer was the President's reply (Metz 180).

Metz said this phenomenon has been observed in dialogue between astronauts in orbit and personnel on the ground, in medical interviews, psycho-therapeutic interviews and civil service and department store interviews (Metz 181).

This does not mean you should write verbose questions. If you need to have the source speak at length about a particular subject, try the Yak-Yak Formula. If you need little information and want to keep

Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977), 182.

³ "Interview System Derived from Philosophers' theory," Editor & Publisher, 18 Sept. 1971: 54.

⁴ Metz, Newswriting, 180-181.

the source from rambling, try a shorter question.

Remember, an interview is not the stage for a debate or a place for you to exhibit new knowledge.

CHAPTER 9

An Approach to Editing

Over the rainbow, you might imagine, lies a land where every story written is perfect. No deletions, no insertions, no inaccuracies. Perfect.

Unfortunately, clicking your heels together three times--as did Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz--won't magically produce an edited story, nor will it take you home when your responsibility is to finish that story by deadline time.

If readers could actually step into your story, would they slide smoothly along, or would they stumble over an obstacle course of writing problems and inaccuracies?

Your answer depends on whether or not you edited the story.

To edit a story is to prepare it for publication by revising it until it is the best you can do. Editing can correct errors, erase redundancies and mend sentence constructions that limp.

As a reporter you must pay attention to the details of your craft. You must learn to recognize the kinds of errors that slip into print unless caught.

Every writer should check his story for grammar, spelling and accuracy errors. Although an editor will edit your story, you should not rely on him to clean up your writing. The bottom line--it's your responsibility.

Good writers (and editors) do more than just edit for mistakes.

They ask questions like: Does the writing hold my interest? Does it flow smoothly? Does my attention wander at any point? Are my verbs powerful? Have I editorialized? Is the writing tight?

If your answer to any of those questions is not satisfactory, then rewriting may be necessary.

At this stage, you will need to work more thoughtfully. You may have written quickly so as not to lose track of flowing thoughts. Now, you must slow down and read your story word by word and close up so as not to miss anything. In the first draft you allowed most of what appeared on the paper to survive. Not so in draft two.

Writers must familiarize themselves with the symbols used when editing a story.

Chart of Editing Symbols

capitalize	you are a writer.
transpose	in your <u>mind</u> <u>own</u>
insert word	putting it ^{on} paper
delete word and close up	professional of writers
correction	writ ⁱ ng task
lower case	Irish Tea
separate	organization to be done
stet (keep as is)	common <u>variety</u> of stet
new paragraph	<u>You'll probably never</u>
insert letter	exper ⁱ ence
insert apostrophe/ comma	you'll Next time, you'll
bring together	sch ^e dule

spell out

chap. 12

abbreviate

chapter 12

The remainder of this chapter focuses on specific guidelines to follow when rewriting and editing a story. At this point, you have completed the following stages in the writing process: 1) getting the news tip; 2) learning more about the topic, if necessary; 3) compiling a list of questions for the source; 4) writing the first draft.

The writing process involves three main activities: preparation, composition and editing. Editing includes rewriting.

Preparation involves everything discussed in chapters six through eight.

When composing, many writers find they become more efficient and creative by first concentrating on getting down a draft of whatever comes to mind. Later, they return to that draft and improve it. It might be wise to get into the habit of writing in that way. If you pause as you write, ideas may slip away.

As you adapt this process, you will find yourself becoming a faster writer. Rewriting may become less demanding. Newspaper reporters often do not have time for major rewriting efforts. They must think and write clearly during the first draft. As a beginner, it will benefit you to learn to write and then edit extensively. These efforts will improve your writing.

What the Editing/Rewriting Phase Requires

The first step in the editing/rewriting phase is to read your story. In fact, read it once aloud. Your ears may pick up problems that your eyes did not.

Second, analyze the story content. Have you omitted information vital to the story?

On the other hand, have you included unnecessary or irrelevant information? Does it mislead or confuse the reader?

Once you have decided what should be or should not be in the story, you may continue with the rewriting phase of editing.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Does the writing hold my interest? If you find your eyes wandering from your story to the nearest window or your mind flirting with the idea of pizza for lunch, chances are your story will not grip the reader.

Would a different lead work better? Perhaps the lead does not reflect the major focus of the article. Change it.

Have powerful verbs been chosen? Do your verbs lend strength to your story? The power of a story does not lie in adverbs and adjectives. The power lies in the verbs. And that power can explode into a picture in the reader's mind or the power can fizzle on the page. It's up to you. That point has been mentioned more than once in this book because of its importance in the writing process.

Do your paragraphs follow a logical order? If it is a news story, have you written in order of descending importance?

Have you talked the article through with your editor or teacher? A second opinion sheds new light on a story. It is often difficult to judge one's own work.

Have you let the story rest? Consider setting the story aside for a day or two if you have the time. A fresh outlook can help you see your story in another light.

Have you included transitions? Transitions are words that take the reader smoothly from paragraph to paragraph. Transitions are especially important in feature stories. Because features do not follow the inverted pyramid order, the writer must make sure that the story flows smoothly. A hard news story, if well organized, follows a logical order.

Once you have made judgments about the above seven points, consider the remaining guidelines for rewriting:

1. Are there still words that should be cut? Be concise.
2. Are the sentences either all long or all short? Vary sentence length so the writing does not become monotonous.
3. Have you editorialized?
4. Have you used concrete details, not abstractions, in your story?

For example, compare the following sentences:

A lot of students auditioned for the play.

Fifty-two students auditioned for the school musical.

Which sentence tells you more?

After you have considered each of those points, ask yourself the following, and possibly the most important, question: Do I like what I have written?

The success of your story hinges on the way you have written and edited it. The above guidelines provide ways for you to improve a story through rewriting. The next phase of editing is to proofread your copy for mechanical and factual errors. The mechanics of writing will be covered in the next chapter. Think of chapter 10 as a short and useful guide--not complete in any sense. It will,

however, produce answers to questions you have as you write. Consult it and other more complete references for answers.

CHAPTER 10

The Mechanics of Writing

Proofreading prevents technical errors. The most common technical errors concern facts, capitalization, spelling and punctuation.

Factual Errors

Check facts. Don't trust your memory. Accuracy is too important. Be sure the score of the basketball game is correct. Be sure the principal's age is 43. Be sure the correct address is 2880 Second Street.

Errors can damage your reputation as a reporter and writer and can even lead to legal problems.

Capitalization Errors

A few rules for capitalization will be included here. Refer to a style book or a grammar book for more complete listings of rules.

A common noun used to designate a particular person or place should be capitalized. For example: the South--when it refers to the southern part of the United States; the same applies to the West, the East, the North, the Orient.

Capitalize president when you are referring to the President of the United States or when it is a title preceding someone's name, such as President Joan Kinton from the junior class. Capitalize names of individuals.

Capitalize proper adjectives, such as Irish coffee or British cloak.

Capitalize titles when they precede names, such as Captain John Smith or Doctor Sue Griffith or Principal Mary Winner.

Spelling Errors

Spelling errors range from typographical errors, the kind you make when you hit the wrong key on the typewriter, to factual errors, such as spelling someone's name incorrectly.

Of all the errors a writer can make, one of the most serious is misspelling a name. If John Doe spells his name Jon Dough, it had better appear in your story that way. Gail might spell her name Gail or Gayle. Maybe Gale isn't female at all. The point is, check the spellings of names and don't refer to someone as he or she until you are positive which it is.

You can check names in two ways. First, ask the person. Second, if you can't go straight to the source, check the phone book. It seldom misses. Note: If there are six John Does in the book and two are spelled Jon Dough, you will need to know the address of the Jon Dough you want.

The elimination of errors also comes with the addition of a good dictionary to your library and with your training as an editor.

Keep a dictionary handy. If you spell the word occasion as occassion in your story, you've made a mistake. Chances are you'll wonder if you are spelling it correctly as you type it. Don't ignore your inner critic. It will be better if you catch the error than if your editor or teacher does.

Spelling errors can also infiltrate a story courtesy of

slippery fingers. One's fingers manufacture typographical errors and produce them in the following forms: teh, adn, perosnal, obvioous. Close reading will disclose these bugs in your story. Correct them.

Punctuation

The word punctuation encompasses a lengthy list of writing marks or signs that communicate something to a writer.

Entire books have been devoted to the topic of punctuation. A small grammar reference has been placed in this book for your convenience. Read through these basic punctuation rules to refresh yourself.

Are grammar rules sealed in super glue, never to be broken? No. However, before one can break rules in grammar, one must know those rules. Many writers use punctuation "incorrectly" at times to increase the power of their message.

Use whatever references you have available to check your work. A list of basic references you might want to keep handy include: a current dictionary, a thesaurus, a style book for reporters, The Elements of Grammar by Margaret Shertzer or The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White.

The Power of Punctuation

Read this excerpt from the chapter "Research and Writing" in The Writer's Manual, from which all punctuation has been removed.¹

like crudities in our children crudities in our writing
are often difficult to perceive and the critical objectivity
necessary to see them accumulates with time ideally the

¹ ETC Publications, The Writer's Manual, 2nd ed. (California: 1979), 711.

first draft is set aside for several days before revision begins if several days are out of the question at least allow several hours of rest and diversion before tackling the revision because large important changes should be made first revision begins with the questions of how convincing is the argument and how well proportioned are the treatments of various subtopics

Because it all runs together, it is impossible to know when to pause. The message of the passage becomes distorted and meaningless. Now read the passage with the punctuation and capital letters replaced.

Like crudities in our children, crudities in our writing are often difficult to perceive, and the critical objectivity necessary to see them accumulates with time. Ideally, the first draft is set aside for several days before revision begins. If several days are out of the question, at least allow several hours of rest and diversion before tackling the revision. Because large important changes should be made first, revision begins with the questions of how convincing is the argument and how well proportioned are the treatments of various subtopics.

Easier? Do not underestimate the power of punctuation. Using punctuation will usually ensure better understanding of your message. Most people know that a period indicates a longer, more definite pause, and that a comma indicates a shorter pause in the reading material.

The art of using punctuation properly can best be studied by pointing out rules that are often violated because they are misunderstood or because they were never learned well.

The most common usages are outlined in this section. For a solid background in grammar, study a grammar book. Some books, such as Shertzer's The Elements of Grammar, cover the rules briefly and well. You would be smart to purchase such a book as insurance against errors.

Commas

If you write without commas or if you add too many commas, your

readers will become confused. Here are a few of the more common rules for comma usage.

To Avoid Confusion. Sometimes, commas are used to avoid confusion. For example, look at the following sentences from a seventh grade language arts book:²

Before coloring her little sister put all her other toys away.

When the climbers reached the top coats were necessary.

After they finished the table was cleared.

Insert commas in the above sentences where they are needed to clarify the meanings.

To Separate Items in a Series. Commas separate items in a series when there are three or more items. For example:

Blue, purple, and green folders fell out of his locker.

The composition rule is to place a comma after each item in the series that precedes the "and." Journalists who follow the AP Style Book, however, usually do not use a comma after the last item before the and. The above example would be punctuated like this:

Blue, purple and green folders fell out of his locker.

Check with your teacher to see which rule you should use, and then be consistent.

To Separate Introductory Words. Use a comma to separate an introductory word or group of words from the rest of the sentence. For example:

Yes, the pizza is delicious.

² Joy Littell, ed. director, Building English Skills (Illinois: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1978), 469.

Also, consider "ing" phrases, such as:

Running to the mailbox, I tripped and scraped my knee.

Other introductory words might include the following: no, after all, maybe, finally, at last.

To Set Off Interrupters. Use commas to set off interrupters, words or groups of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence. For example:

Editing, I suppose, must be handled carefully.

This book, as I said earlier, should improve your writing skills.

Note what happens with the comma when the interrupter is at the beginning or end of a sentence:

Nevertheless, she was not happy.

She was not happy, however.

Other common interrupters include for example, I am certain, of course, by the way, he said.

To Set Off Nouns of Direct Address. Nouns of direct address are set off just as interrupters are in a sentence. For example:

Leave your story here, Dan, if you finish.

To Set Off Appositives. Use commas to set off most appositives. Appositives are words placed after a noun that make that noun clearer or more definite. For example:

Xanti, the girl in the white coat, wrote the story about the principal.

You may use appositives in stories when giving the title of someone after his name. For example:

Bob Swartzo, president of the FFA club, began the presentation

of the awards.

In front of his name, you would not need a comma. It would read:

President Bob Swartzo began the presentation of the FFA awards.

To Set Off Quotations. Using commas to set off quotations is a punctuation rule you will often use in journalism. For example:

Jane Smith, principal of Central High School, said, "Our school works to provide you all with a sound education, one we can be proud of."

Turn it around and check the punctuation:

"Our school works to provide you all with a sound education, one we can be proud of," Jane Smith, principal of Central High School, said.

Sometimes, you will use partial quotations. For example:

The president of the club said he wanted to "increase the club's enrollment slowly throughout the year."

To Set Off Parts of Dates. Use commas to set off the parts of dates from each other if there are two or more parts. For example:

On Friday, April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater.

To Set Off Parts of Addresses. Likewise, use commas to separate the parts of an address if there are two or more parts. For example:

416 Eighth Avenue, Brookings, S.D. 57006

Note, there is not a comma after the zip code unless the address is located in the middle of a sentence.

To Indicate Opposites or Contrasts. Look at the following examples:

Ipswich, not Roscoe, is the county seat.

This story requires a writer, not a doodler.

To Separate a Compound Sentence. Use a comma before the conjunction that joins the two sentences in a compound sentence. For example:

The nightmare seemed very real to her, and she awoke with a start.

The Semicolon

Use a semicolon to join the parts of a compound sentence when no coordinating conjunction is used. For example:

The story was old; we did not use it.

In compound sentences the semicolon separates parts of the sentence when the clauses are connected by such conjunctive adverbs as: consequently, than, nevertheless, so, hence, however, furthermore, in fact. For example:

I am not thinking clearly; therefore, I am quitting for now.

The Colon

The colon has four primary uses.

After the Greeting. Use a colon after the greeting of a business letter. For example:

Dear Sir/Madam:

In Times. Use a colon between numerals indicating hours and minutes. For example:

2:30 a.m.

To Introduce a List of Items. A colon will often be used to introduce a list of items. Note the use of the word following. It indicates that a list is coming up. For example:

You need the following items to produce a final copy of the paper: correction fluid, a typewriter, a good ribbon,

typing paper of 20-pound stock and your information.

To Emphasize a Statement. A colon can sometimes make part of a sentence stand out better. For example:

The new governor emphasized one item on his party's platform more than any other: improving higher education in the state.

The Hyphen

Study these five major uses for the hyphen.

In Fractions. Use a hyphen in fractions. For example:

Pour in two-thirds of a cup of milk.

In Compound Numbers. Use a hyphen in compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine. For example:

twenty-eight days

Note: Journalists use numerals to represent numbers after nine. For example:

February has 29 days during a leap year.

Write the number out if it starts a sentence.

Twenty-four hours later she still had not discovered the answer to the riddle.

To Divide a Word. Use a hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line when space does not permit completing the word. Note: Words may be divided only between syllables, and one-syllable words must never be divided. For example:

She began writing novels when she was sixteen years old.

In Some Compound Words. Certain compound words need to be hyphenated. For example:

My brother-in-law is named Jacob.

To Separate Prefixes. Hyphens may separate prefixes from words where the meaning would not otherwise be clear. For example:

She re-covered the rocking chair with a brighter fabric.

The stolen diamond was recovered.

The Apostrophe

Apostrophes form the possessives of singular and plural nouns and also work to build contractions. For example:

Possessive of a singular noun--girl's toy, dog's bone,
Leslie's coat

Possessive of a plural noun--women's group, men's stores,
actresses' roles, kids' toys

Contractions: we are to we're, where is to where's,
they are to they're

The Dash

The dash can be used to set off an interrupting statement, to indicate a change of thought or to show hesitation. For example:

My mother had always worried--and she didn't keep these
worries to herself--about rabid animals appearing on our
farm.

When typing, a dash is indicated by using two consecutive hyphens.

In Conclusion for Punctuation

Purchase a style book.

Journalists abide by some special punctuation and usage rules. Purchase a style book that delineates clear and simple rules for journalists to follow. Journalists use a uniform style so that readers will enjoy a similar uniformity in reading ease.

The style book is organized like a dictionary and includes entries such as capitalization, numeral usage, abbreviations, titles. If you

are unsure about the hyphenation of a word, look it up. It may be there. Citywide, for example, is one word, not two; the style book will verify that for you. The style book will tell you to spell adviser with the "e," not an "o" as in advisor.

Do readers notice this consistency? Perhaps not. But you can bet that if you are inconsistent, they'll notice that.

When you have finished editing your story, check it one last time for format.

Format

Format is the way you arrange your paper. Where have you written or typed your name? Did you double space? Did you number the pages? Did you use a "slug" on each page? A slug includes one or two words that tell the editor about the story's content.

Examine the following arrangement. Your teacher may have a specific way for you to arrange the format of each story you write.

Name Slug (key identification Page 1-1-1-1 word)	Last name Slug Page 2-2-2-2-2 --30-- (indicates end)
--	--

Your final copy should be neat. Editing marks often appear on a final copy, but they should be neatly inserted. Don't make the typesetter guess about the story's content. It may not come back the way you want.

Good writing results from re-writing. Zinsser wrote, "If you

would like to write better than everybody else, you have to want to write better than everybody else. You must take an obsessive pride in the smallest details of your craft."³

Zinsser's favorite definition of a careful writer came from watching Joe DiMaggio play baseball. Zinsser said:

DiMaggio was the greatest player I ever saw, and nobody looked more relaxed. He covered vast distances in the outfield, moving in graceful strides, always arriving ahead of the ball, making the hardest catch look routine, and even when he was at bat, hitting the ball with tremendous power, he didn't appear to be exerting himself. I marveled at how effortless he looked because what he did could only be achieved by great effort. A reporter once asked him about this, and he said: "I always thought that there was at least one person in the stands who had never seen me play, and I didn't want to let him down" (Writer's Digest 32).

Write to your audience as a lone gymnast would perform in front of a large audience in an auditorium--as if each move is being analyzed. And most importantly, care about how that audience rates you. Would your story earn a 5.0 or a 9.8 on a scale of one to 10?

How do you learn to write well? Read. Zinsser wrote of his mother:

My mother loved good writing, and she found it as often in newspapers as she did in books. She regularly clipped columns and articles out of the paper that delighted her with their graceful use of the language, or their wit, or their original vision. Because of her I knew at an early age that good writing can appear anywhere, even in the lowly newspaper, and that what matters is the writing itself, not the medium in which it is published (Writer's Digest 30).

Set Standards for Yourself

Most high school students receive assignments well in advance of the deadline. Don't sit on that news tip. Schedule the interview

³ William Zinsser, "On Writing as Well as You Can," Writer's Digest, Sept. 1985: 30-32.

immediately so you will have time to write a draft of the story, let it settle in your mind and then return to it in a day or two--even a few hours helps--to put it in final form.

One last quote from Zinsser:

To succeed you must make your piece jump out of a newspaper or a magazine by being more diverting than everyone else's piece. You must find some way to elevate your act of writing into an entertainment. Television provides easily accessible entertainment and so you must compete with it (Writer's Digest 31).

Write your story so that the reader is not tempted to turn you off and the television on.

CHAPTER 11

Breaking into Feature Writing

In Stalking the Feature Story William Ruehlman prompts feature writers to be active, assertive people, when he says:

A writer can remain within the warm locked room of his imagination; a reporter cannot. If feature writing is to be your bag, you're going to have to crawl out from under your hat and bother people.¹

What is a Feature Story?

A feature story may capture the essence of a lifetime or just a moment in life. You, the writer, stop time, capture the moment and share it with your readers.

Feature stories usually deal with people in ways that put them outside the realm of straight news stories. They make readers laugh, cry and become angry. They often raise awareness of topics such as eating disorders, cancer, self-esteem and child abuse.

Features aren't hard news (straight news), but they are informative. They are colorful and creative. They capture the elements of human interest that captivate us all. A sunset's fading hues of orange and pink and red merge into a brilliancy that attracts our attention. And we don't struggle. If your feature is as colorful, as compelling as that sunset, then your readers will not struggle. They will settle in, caught in the story, and stay, as Paul Harvey,

¹ William Ruehlmann, Stalking the Feature Story (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1977), 11.

the radio talk show host, says, "for the rest of the story."

The feature story does not use a formula like the inverted pyramid. Instead, it relies on a different form of creativity that focuses on color and transitions and direction. A feature will often tease a reader into continuing. If the editor thinks your feature is too long, he will not just cut the last paragraph as might happen with a straight news story, but he will carefully select material that will not damage the story's content.

Also unlike a news story, a feature has a conclusion--as would a piece of fiction. Just be sure to keep in mind that a feature is not fiction. A feature is nonfiction written with the effectiveness of good fiction.

Elements of a Feature Story

The feature also needs a lead and a body, just like a news story. Let's examine the parts of the feature.

The Lead

A feature without a strong lead is like a fish without water. It loses its life.

The lead sets the stage for what is to come, like the opening lines of a play. Hamlet begins with the sentinel saying, "Who's there?" If the reader wants to know, he must continue.

Although the "question" lead technique is usually frowned upon in reporting, many other types of leads work well. They include those that were discussed in chapter two on leads. Topping the list of feature leads are narrative, descriptive and summary leads.

The Body

The body of a feature contains details, quotations, anecdotes, descriptions and opinions that entertain the reader. You tell your story using those devices. You are more likely to use description than you would in a straight news story, so close observation is necessary. What kind of office or home does the source live or work in? Cluttered? Neat to the point of obsessive? M.L. Stein notes in Getting and Writing the News, "People--what they do, say and feel--form the heart of the typical feature story."² Remember, you must make the story interesting.

Transitions are a critical part of putting the pieces of the body together so that they form a unit. Building a pyramid out of playing cards is difficult. Every move counts. The wrong move will cause the cards to collapse. In the body of a feature, transitions do the same job. They hold the story together, giving it unity.

Transitions tell the reader you're shifting thoughts and allow him to understand the relevance of new material. Transitions don't flash on and off to announce their presence. They are subtle.

Phrases like "earlier in the day" and "just before his arrival" are examples of transitions, because they indicate a change is taking place. New information in a story should generally be connected to information that already has been introduced. If it is not, readers become confused.

Look at the following feature. Note the lead and the information

² M.L. Stein, Getting and Writing the News (New York: Longman, Inc., 1985), 243.

in the body of the story. Each idea builds upon the theme--today's "new wavers." Notice how the story flows from paragraph to paragraph.

The writer, Rachel Hall, assistant editor of the Manatee High School newspaper in Bradenton, Florida, earned an honorable mention in 1987 from Quill and Scroll for this entry in its annual writing and photography contest for high school journalists.³

New wave encourages radical political views

The flower children of the 60's are back.

No, they're not 40-year-old men and women returning to their anti-war demonstration days by growing their hair long and wearing their faded bell bottoms. Ironically, yesterday's flower children are laughing at today's--who are known to most people as "new wavers."

Sporting punk styles and haircuts, their music, which concentrates mainly on political activism and protest, seems to be responsible for many of the beliefs they hold--beliefs which seem to have caused them to take notice of the world they live in and unlike the typical teenager, begin to think beyond next week.

One male student at MHS (whom we'll call Mike) shared his views on his involvement in the "new wave age."

Note: The writer moves gracefully from saying that this kind of teenager exists to actually using one as a source for his story. The reader can easily follow this move.

"I developed my beliefs when I began thinking for myself, instead of allowing society to think for me, like most people do," he said.

Mike claims that new wave music set him thinking and made him more realistic and aware of his surroundings. Groups such as Modern English, China Crisis, and Psych Furs made him more aware of issues such as the destruction of the environment, the inadequacy of all governments and the poor condition of the world in general.

New wave groups, Mike said, reflect the political and social views--anti-capitalism, anti-authority and anti-society, among others--that he advocates.

"I'm against capitalism because capitalists mostly use

³ Rachel Hall, "New wave encourages radical political views," Manatee High School newspaper, Bradenton, Florida, 29 May 1986: 3.

fellow human beings' misfortune to make their profits. They can pay a person low wages and keep him in that state of misfortune forever," Mike said.

The Cult, Psych Furs, and New Order, three new wave bands, discuss the same views in several of their songs.

Another band, Vile Rifles, shares Mike's views on authority, especially where school is concerned.

"School passively educates you--they want you to accept what they tell you without thinking. Basically, how well you do in school is determined by how susceptible you are to brainwashing," he said. "They feed you opinions, assuming that you're on the side of the Americans."

Mike claims that although he doesn't believe that any governmental system works, he isn't anti-American or a supporter of anarchy.

"I'm not against the way it should be, just the way it is. Basically, if you look at it, communism and democracy both outline the same ideals. Both systems have proven to be inadequate because they just don't work on a large scale," Mike said. "It doesn't really matter, anyway. Our close-minded ways of thinking will cause us to destroy ourselves. The only way to help prevent it would be to get rid of religion."

A supporter of atheism, Mike says new wave bands such as China Crisis, and The Cult share his beliefs.

"They ask the same question about God that I do: Why is He different from any other gods?" Mike said. "Most of the world's problems are caused by religion. It's also another form of brainwashing, like school. People are taught from birth that God exists, and so they accept it."

Although Mike said he is basically against society and the way it operates, he doesn't believe that the 60's flower children approach to it (retreating to nature like Thoreau) is the way to handle it.

"Society is defeating you if you drop out of it," he explained. "It doesn't go away just because it's being ignored."

Other new wavers, such as Kristine Wikoff, sophomore, take a serious yet less radical approach to the music they listen to.

"I listen to new wave music because it has something to say," she said. "With Top 40 music it seems like all they sing about is love. New wave bands deal more with kids' problems, like how we sometimes feel alone and how we can never seem to do anything right."

Special branches of new wave bands known as "hard core groups" aren't as positive in their approach.

"Bands like Anarchy, Black Flag, and Exploited promote killing and destruction. A lot of their songs are pointless," Kristine said.

Kristine, who was made to change her hot pink dyed punk rock hairstyle last year, seems to sum up the philosophy of the new wave age: "You have to be your own person. You can't allow other people to dictate the way you should be."

Note how Rachel often introduces quotations with introductory comments--see paragraphs four and five and seven and eight. Using this technique eliminates the necessity for using transitional words such as however, because, for example, for instance, etc., to go from idea to idea. Those words can be used, but they shouldn't be a crutch for the writer. Try to maintain your story's flow without them.

The Conclusion

Rachel's conclusion summarizes the theme of the story by explaining what the new wave people are all about.

Another example of a summary conclusion came in this story about sex education in high schools:⁴

Overall, students are in favor of sex education, even though it raises questions about the role of public schools in the family lives of students. If a workable program can be developed, it appears that the students at C.R. Prairie would approve.

The summary conclusion is only one method with which to conclude a story. You might also consider the snapper, the climax and the stinger.

An example of a snapper ending would be to write something similar to what Rhett Butler said to Scarlett O'Hara at the end of Gone with the Wind: "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

One student reporter interviewed a fellow student who had attempted suicide. He concluded with a statement from the source:⁵

He said, "Suicide is a permanent solution to such a temporary problem. And once it's done, it's done. There's no turning back."

⁴ John Hedgecoth, "Students say yes to sex ed," C.R. Prairie High School newspaper, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1986: n.p., n.pag.

⁵ Chelsey Freeman, "Suicide: The Ultimate Effect of Pressure,"

The climax conclusion is one that brings you to the highest point of interest in the story. Some element of surprise or foremost interest in the story has been saved by the author for this kind of conclusion. Often, the writer follows a chronological order of events.

Such a story might tell of a fireman's attempt to save a child in a burning home. The conclusion in one such story told of how the fireman emerged from the home with a sleeping child--that was soon revealed to be a life-size doll.

Other endings shock the reader. They do not follow a chronological order like the climax conclusion. These endings are called stingers. Suppose you were writing a feature about anorexia. You follow the progress of a fictional person with this eating disorder so your readers can understand the disease. At the end of the story, your character dies. That's a stinger. The average reader hopes the victim will pull through. That, however, is not always the case, and the stinger makes that truth a reality for readers.

Narrow Your Focus

Another point to consider in the body of a feature story is to keep the topic narrow. It's easy to go overboard in a feature, so be sure to keep the extraneous stuff out. Think like a child who is cleaning a chalkboard for the teacher. He wants it clean--for himself and for the teacher. You want a clean story for yourself, your editor and your teacher.

Therefore, focus on the topic and stay there. If you're talking

Jefferson High School newspaper, Boulder, Montana, 6 March 1986: 13.

about anorexia, don't suddenly discuss the number of teenagers who have cancer. Or if you're writing an article about the history of Halloween, don't ramble off into facts and opinions about Easter or Christmas.

Types of Feature Stories

Features often fall into one of three categories: news features, human-interest features and personality profiles.

News Features. A news feature is related to a current event or situation of interest to the public. It puts the event into a human-interest perspective.

In the 1980s the suffering farm economy forced record numbers of farm families off the land. The public's attention was drawn to a problem that was unseen by many before major television networks began addressing the issue. A writer from Clear Lake, S.D., took that issue and created a story that emphasized the seriousness of the problems. The author, freelance writer Lois Hatton, had her piece published by the New York Times and was nominated by the League of Women Voters for a Pulitzer Prize.⁶ The story qualifies as a news feature, because it grew from an issue in the news. It is reprinted here in full.

In South Dakota, old autumn ghosts

Waverly, S.D.--Halloween isn't over in this farming community. As children elsewhere put away their costumes, and ghosts and goblins climb back into their tombs, the children around here prepare for more horrors to come. For theirs is a nightmare world of uncertainty and fear, a world of farm foreclosures and bankruptcies.

They hear talk about low prices and no profits. Their fathers return home with empty trucks and thin wallets after selling or storing grain at the elevator in town. They play quietly in the kitchen and they listen as they hear, "What's

⁶ Lois Hatton, "In South Dakota, old autumn ghosts," New York Times, 5 Nov. 1986: 31.

a man to do to take care of his family?" And then they sneak out to the barn and cry.

So 12 children in the second and third grades here made Halloween cards and sent them to President Reagan. They wrote messages in the cards telling him they need help--"in a hurry," wrote Heidi Wall, an 8-year-old dairy farmer's daughter. "Things are not going very good in South Dakota," wrote James Richter, a 7-year-old son of a grain farmer. "They need more prices for their grain."

At dusk, the Dakota sun drops to the horizon, like a giant pumpkin, and, as it disappears, night falls quickly. In the fading light, vacant farmhouses with torn shutters and broken windows seem haunted. White lace curtains blow through the windows: banners of surrender. In deserted farmyards, the wind blows through empty cylindrical grain bins. It makes a grievous sound, like a phantom playing a funeral hymn on an organ slightly off key.

Farmers planted seven white wooden crosses on the lawn of the nearby Deuel County courthouse in Clear Lake. This was their way of calling attention to the large number of foreclosures plaguing the area. The seven crosses were stolen.

Vultures swoop down to pick off the animals--the deer and jackrabbits--killed by motorists. Their presence is ominous, echoing the ghosts of autumns past, the autumns between 1930 and 1940 when, in a single decade, nearly 50,000 South Dakotans moved away. More people were listed in South Dakota's 1930 census than are listed in the 1980 census--692,849 compared to 690,178. The projected figures for 1990 suggest that people may return. But can this be so as more and more farms fall by the wayside?

Meanwhile, Heidi, James, Lance, Jeremy, John, Cory, Calvin Nicole and the others wait for a letter from the President. They want an answer. What will it be for South Dakota's farmers? Trick or treat?

Human-interest Features. The human-interest feature has little news value. Editors like it because they can save it until they need to fill a space. These stories appeal to the reader's curiosity about all aspects of life: people, places and things.

One form of the human-interest story, the "color story," captures the mood and atmosphere of special events like bazarres, festivals, carnivals or parades.

The following is a list of ideas for human-interest features:

1. A student returns to school after having lived in a foreign country.

2. A student rides with a police officer on her nightly route.
3. A popular janitor, bus driver or food service employee may deserve special attention.
4. Why students drop out of school.
5. Life in the concessions stand.
6. A student's struggle with alcoholism.
7. Mood in boys' and girls' locker rooms.
8. Reactions of town's residents to sex education in school.
9. Anatomy of what is in a letter grade.
10. Interview of a visiting team.
11. Academic performance of athletes.
12. The cost of school activities
13. How much money is funneled into athletic activities as opposed to academic extracurricular activities.

Personality Profiles. In the personality profile, you might want to feature a substitute teacher, a disabled student, a national award-winning student or teacher or someone with an unusual hobby. Many newspapers in small schools try to do personality profiles on all of the graduating seniors near the end of the school year. Such articles might feature the subject's special interests. They should describe the person. Age? Flashy or conservative clothing? Mannerisms? Be observant. Better yet, don't do it. Not everyone is feature worthy.

The following personality profile was written by Laura Shoemaker for her school newspaper, the Capital Street Journal in Mitchell, South Dakota. Laura's story won third place in the South Dakota Spring Writing Contest.⁷

⁷ Laura Shoemaker, "MHS gymnast excels at meets despite butter-

The story focuses on the feelings and energy of a young gymnast who will soon be moving.

MHS gymnast excels at meets despite butterflies

by Laura Shoemaker

The 5'3" small-framed gymnast paces restlessly about the gym with an intense look in her brown eyes.

"I have so much nervous energy bundled up wanting to get out that it just kinda psychs me up for the meet," said Audra Recker, MHS gymnast. Recker says she's "not really scared, just nervous to a point."

Recker has been a member of the MHS gymnastics team for the last three years. Her specialty in gymnastics is her floor exercise routine. "I feel more relaxed, because I don't have to worry about falling off."

The fear of falling off the beam or bars can be intense when a gymnast knows that all eyes are on her.

"I feel like I have to get back up there and do the rest of the routine better than ever to compensate for that fall or falls. I try to put it out of my mind and not think about it," she said.

On the other hand, gymnasts do feel a sense of achievement when finishing a good routine. Recker said, "I feel happy, like I accomplished what I was supposed to because you always set out to do a good job on your routine. When you do get a good score even the crowd likes it, and you know you've accomplished something."

Even though Recker's highest scores come from her floor routines, her favorite event is the beam.

"It's a challenge to stay on those four inches. It's interesting when you stick a routine on the beam and you feel like you've accomplished something, because it's such a hard event."

Practice time gives Recker an opportunity to eliminate weak points from her routines. If she detects a weak point in her routine, she practices it over and over that day.

"We really don't practice the vault as much just because it's such a short event. The other areas need a lot more work, so we only practice vault about three times a week, but I do work at that as much as I can," Recker said. She has been performing on the vault for the past two years.

Recker's interest in gymnastics started at a young age. "When I was four and five, I took tap dance, ballet and tumbling as a combined class in Montana. I really enjoyed it."

After moving from Montana to Florida, Recker's interest

flies," Mitchell High School newspaper, Mitchell, South Dakota, 17 Feb. 1984: 3. (Thesis author was adviser for this newspaper.)

in gymnastics increased. Three years later, after moving to Minnesota, she began taking gymnastics even more seriously.

Although Recker lived in International Falls, Minn., it was necessary for her to travel across the border to Canada for lessons in gymnastics. "it was really hard to travel back and forth, so I just took lessons in sixth and eighth grade, and then we moved here," Recker said.

Now, after three years, Recker, a junior, is moving once again, to Ada, Minn., sometime before March 1.

Since the population of Ada is small, it has no gymnastics program. For that reason Recker will be involved in the United States Gymnastics Federation program in Fargo, N.D.

"At the end of March, we have the state competition. The end of April is regionals, and then we go on from there," Recker said.

In order to participate in North Dakota Recker will need to live with a friend of the family in Fargo, until the end of the school year.

Recker's presence in MHS's gymnastics program will be missed.

Beth Barry, MHS gymnastics coach, said, "Audra is a dedicated person. She works very hard to do the best she can. Her difficult moves are original, and the girls learn from her by watching her technique. Audra is one of our motivating people on the team; she is valuable to us."

A few statistics to help show Audra's expertise as a gymnast would have improved the story. The writer might also have interviewed the student's parents for additional input on her interest in the sport.

Length

A feature should be as long as it needs to be. The writer doesn't want to wear the reader out. Keep the story interesting, focus on the topic and eliminate excess verbiage.

A feature idea will often be original. That means it is all yours. Give it your best. Picture your readers as you write. Are you holding their interest?

A Three-point Checklist

1. Is your idea interesting? Write about what you know your readers want to hear.
2. Does your lead attract the reader and hold him?

3. Have you edited so your story is interesting, concise, unified and colorful?

Test yourself a bit further with the following questions about your feature. Use this list each time you write a feature story. Be honest. Before starting, read your feature to yourself once more.

1. Did I enjoy it?
2. Is it creative?
3. Why is it important?
4. Is it also informative?
5. Is it entertaining?
6. What words or phrases weave color and life into the story?
7. Have I removed excess verbiage?
8. Is the story focused?

Closing Tips

Make a file of stories that you might want to do. It's easy to think you'll remember an idea later. Not so. Ideas slip away. Write them down.

Watch magazines, especially teen magazines, and newspapers for article ideas.

And, as Samm Sinclair Baker in Writing Nonfiction that Sells says, "Realize, above all, that in creating ideas there is no end: There is only and always the beginning" ⁸

⁸ Samm Sinclair Baker, Writing Nonfiction that Sells (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1986), 54.

What Are Other Students Writing?

The first-, second- and third-place feature winners from the 1987 Quill and Scroll writing contest follow in their entirety. Judge them for yourself.

The first-place story was written by Margy Adams for the Elkhart Memorial High School newspaper in Elkhart, Ind.⁹ The story concerns a subject that is important to each reader--money. The writer takes a fresh approach to the topic of money by looking at it from a group's point of view.

Teenagers and money

by Margy Adams

"The material things in life aren't important to me, but I do like the stuff," says a Garfield poster. That cat could be on to something; high school students in 1987 generally reject the idea that money is happiness, but openly admit to enjoying its benefits.

High school students of the '80s have matured in the Reagan Age, when inflation has been under control and the economy on the rise, say economists.

This means more stereos, VCR's, vacations and other luxuries for middle class families. It can also mean the difference between sharing the family car or having one for Junior.

Yuppies, or young, upwardly mobile professionals known for their materialistic values, have become the idols of some teens, the nightmares of others and the parents of many. More and more college students are majoring in business or other lucrative fields as opposed to more nebulous choices such as literature, philosophy or social work, according to Ms. magazine.

Does this mean that the only thing high school students care about is making a buck? Not necessarily. Teenagers today are trying to find a happy medium between the barefoot hippie and the Wall Street yuppie.

IDS financial planner Brian Rush has noticed that teens seem to be more concerned with making money now than saving

⁹ Margy Adams, "Teenagers and money," Elkhart Memorial High School newspaper, Elkhart, Indiana, 1986: n.p., n.pag.

for the future. "You (teenagers) have a lot more exciting things to spend your money on (than investments)," he said.

Senior Robin Rogacki is a good example. She said, "When I get a check, I spend it before I can put it in the bank." However, she also added that "I'm worried about never learning how to save money."

As high school students near graduation, the thought of going to college and making it in the "real world" can change their spending habits. Rogacki reflected, "I'm disappointed in myself for not having saved (any money)--I've blown a lot."

Inspired by her "Applied Economics" class, Rogacki is considering investment programs for the money she earns as a cashier at Maurek's IGA because, "I worry about being at college and not having (any spending money)." She is considering having half of each of her paychecks deposited directly into the bank in addition to looking at mutual funds and the stock market.

Though Rogacki is considering money management programs designed chiefly for adults (She is a rarity--less than one percent of Rush's clientele are teenagers.), there is at least one program custom made for younger people. Last August, First Source Bank in South Bend started the Financial Independence Account program for persons ages 16 to 21 that gives teens the opportunity to be responsible and save for the future, according to customer service representative Becky Vervaet, who is involved with opening these accounts.

Options in this program include a checking account, use of a 24-hour teller, a savings account, and the opportunity to apply for Visa or MasterCard. Although the bank encourages clients to plan ahead, account holders are usually more interested in getting more out of their money now.

Coming through the rebellious '60s to the conservative '80s, people's materialistic values haven't changed, speculated Rush. Though what teens want has changed, how much they want hasn't, he said.

Vervaet agreed, saying the bank's virtually problem-free record (referring to the very few bad checks and unpaid credit card bills the bank has dealt with) could have been just as good 20 years ago.

Margy's story is well researched and well written. Good quotations add life to the story. You might also note that the story would be of interest to parents and teachers. It lets them know what teenagers are thinking.

Second-place winner in the features division was Mark L. Blaubach, a senior at Marathon High School in Marathon, Wis., who was then

holding down a job as a stockboy.¹⁰ The writer's story is written in first person and is humorous. Neither of these strategies is easy to accomplish.

The Life of a Stockboy

by Mark L. Blaubach

Most of you who know me know that I work at a particular establishment by the name of "Georges." What do I do there? Well, most people think of me as a stockboy, but that is not my true title. I'm really a merchandise placement engineer. Yeah, that's the ticket; I'm a merchandise placement engineer. As you might have already guessed, many strange and interesting things happen during the course of my job. Like what? Well, I remember this one time . . .

An old lady told me to put her groceries in the red car across the street. To my amazement, there actually was only one red car out there. On other occasions such as this, everybody in Marathon City with the same color of automobile would decide to go grocery shopping at the same time. This time it was going to be easy, or so I thought. All the doors of the red car were locked, except for the back one on the driver's side. I reached in, unlocked all the other doors, and put the bags in the back seat. I went back into the store and began bagging the next order when the old lady came back in and asked where in the _ _ _ _ her groceries were. I told her that I put them in her car, but she kept insisting that they were not there. I had to see this for myself, so I followed her out to her car, which turned out to be very brown. I informed her of this fact, and she responded by informing me of the fact that she was color blind. "That explains it," I thought. In order to rectify the situation, I went back to the red car and retrieved her groceries. She thanked me for the trouble and drove off. Just before I went back into the store, I turned around to see the owner of the red car glaring at me as he re-locked his vehicle. I then recognized him as being Norm Hornung, who probably thought I was some hoodlum stealing his stereo. So much for my insurance discounts.

There was another time when a lady told me to put her groceries in the truck with the "the cute little puppies." I went out and opened the truck door only to find that the cute little puppies were trained killers which, incidentally, were the biggest _ _ _ _ puppies I've ever seen. As they leapt for my throat, there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that they were out for blood. In one instantaneous motion, I threw the

¹⁰ Mark L. Blaubach, "The lighter side: the life of a stockboy," Marathon High School newspaper, Marathon, Wisconsin, 1986: n.p., n.pag.

bags on the seat and slammed the door. I turned around to see that very same door being shredded to pieces by the carnivorous canines. After a few minutes, they decided that the contents of the grocery bags would be much tastier than a 1979 Ford. A smug smirk came to my face as I watched them completely devour their master's dinner. I gave the lady my usual "Have a nice day!" as I walked in. I was about to add, "I just love your 'puppies'," but I thought that would just be a little bit too mean . . . at least for a Monday anyway.

I never forget the time when I found out just how much of a hurry a little old lady could be in. She had purchased a sizeable amount of foodstuffs and kindly opened the trunk so that I could unload my car. I was about halfway through when I saw the little white back-up lights illuminate. "She wouldn't dare," I thought as I speeded up my unloading process. As usual, I was wrong. My kneecaps soon found themselves having a very close relationship with an "I Brake for Rummage Sales" bumper sticker. You may brake for rummage sales, lady, but you sure as _ _ _ don't brake for innocent human beings. I managed to escape the wheels of death by inches and was tempted to risk 10 years in jail by assaulting an elderly person. I managed to restrain myself, however, and threw the last twelve pack into the trunk just as she turned the corner. As she drove off, I kindly saluted her excellent driving skills.

I could go on forever with stories like the preceding, but you haven't got the time and I haven't got the space. I would, however, like you to remember that my job isn't as easy as it looks. It's not what you would call boring either, except when it comes to enduring 6-9 hours of WLJY, which specializes in funeral and elevator music. But before you run down to apply, you maybe should be aware of the fact that Indiana Jones used to work there and quit because of stress. So the next time you see me staring off into space, I'm not day-dreaming; I'm just trying to remember that license plate . . . (Writer's Note: To those of you who have read this column, PLEASE don't show it to George. Thank you and have a nice day!)

Mark's story is one that many students can relate to. In fact, teachers, parents and others may have had similar experiences at jobs when they were young. The writer's use of exaggeration is a plus for this story. It adds humor to the author's already humorous anecdotes.

The third-place winner for features was Greg Baise, a junior at Redford Union High School in Redford, Mich., who wrote about the

censorship of reading materials in high schools.¹¹ He gathers the opinions of people affected by decisions regarding academic censorship. This story, like the top two stories, uses quotations that lend color and credibility to the story. The writer should probably have considered making the first paragraph of the story at least two paragraphs. It is long and might cause readership loss.

Academic censorship: help or hindrance?

by Greg Baise

Throughout the past several months, school boards across the nation have been confronted by various groups, including parents of students and religious leaders, who dispute the ideas being taught to students. Biology books have come under fire because they offer limited views of creation. English books have been criticized for various concepts presented by their authors, as well as for containing profanity, sexual scenes, and violence. To solve this conflict of ideas, these groups have proposed several solutions, including the offering of alternative textbooks and censoring.

"I really do not believe in censorship," stated Mary Haggert, head librarian at Redford Union. "If it is the truth," she commented about the censoring of textbooks, "it should be published. It should be read. It should be understood." Regarding literature in the library, Haggert's policy is "There are some (works) that I feel do not have any literary merit . . . and they should not be part of our library."

Gerard Adams, who teaches advanced English courses and films, feels, "If we were to censor and ban books and films, and, of course, we already do this, I think it would be, and it is, detrimental to education." According to Adams, one of the fundamental purposes of education is to give students the ability to think for themselves. "Censorship precludes this essential purpose of education," said Adams.

Biology and other science courses have been criticized for only teaching certain views on creation. "We deal with science and that is what we teach," stated Kenneth Vollick. In his biology classes at RU, Vollick teaches the several theories of creation presented by the biology text, but he doesn't teach divine creation. Vollick reviews these theories in the text in his classes because "they are basically the popular theories for the beginning of life and they are with-

¹¹ Greg Baise, "Academic censorship: help or hindrance?," Redford Union High School newspaper, Redford, Michigan, 10 Nov. 1986: 5.

in the realm of science."

Carlton Brown, who also teaches biology at RU, goes over both biogenesis, which is life coming from life, and spontaneous generation which says that highly organized life emerges from simple levels of organization. Both these theories are contained in the biology textbook, but Brown also includes various scientists' and philosophers' views on creation. Brown, commenting on the difference between what he teaches and what the textbook teaches, said, "Really, there is no difference. It's just a matter of expanding these two points back to their historical basis."

Both Vollick and Brown feel that censorship has its place in high schools. They agreed that some material does not have its place in a high school. Neither of these two teachers has received any complaints from students or parents regarding material that they have taught in their classrooms.

"Any book that is worthwhile can be controversial," stated Irene Medzigian, who teaches "Masterwords," "Reading and Composition" and "American Literature." Although she has received some complaints about literature that she has taught her classes, she doesn't feel restricted in choosing the material that she teaches.

Adams does feel restricted in choosing the teaching material for his classes. He expressed, "There are literary selections and films that I would like to teach, but I know I would be prevented from teaching them." Several people have protested about the literature that he has taught, the majority of these people being students. One work that they did not approve of was The Catcher in the Rye, by J.D. Salinger. "They objected to his language," related Adams. He also says that these students complained about a scene in the novel that involved a prostitute. Adams commented, "They completely omit and overlook the view of the author, who is not supporting prostitution for teenagers." Two students who objected to reading The Catcher in the Rye, Adams told, did not want to read Black Boy, by Richard Wright. "They objected to the language," Adams related. "Also, one boy . . . said the book attacked God's plan for salvation," he added.

Adams has also received a few complaints about teaching selections from the Bible, from both students and parents. Adams said that these people felt that he should not be teaching the Bible in a public school, even though he was reviewing it as literature, not as theology.

Haggart has never had any complaints about books in Redford Union's library. However, if a person does object to a book in the library, there is a series of steps that they would take in order to ban the book from the library. "There is a form to be filled out," explained Haggart. After having read the entire book, the board of education would also read commentaries and criticism on that work. If, after extensive reviewing, the board can find no literary value in the book, the book will be removed from the library.

Medzigian felt, "The loss of freedom (accompanying censorship) would lead to . . . abridgement of those rights that Americans have always held dear." She summarized, "It would be a dreadful situation, in which we would lose all of the freedoms that we consider important."

Haggart felt that it is more a matter of student's choice on reading material than it is her choice. She concluded, "The students are sophisticated enough to be able to, if they have goofed and bought a book that is trash, bring it to me and say, 'This is trash . . .' The kids censor themselves and the books that they read, far more than I do."

The writer is thorough. At times, however, paragraphs do get long. You might also look at the ways in which Greg introduces quotations. Where might the word "said" have been better than some of the words used? Look at paragraphs two and three. The writer uses stated, commented and then feels to introduce direct quotations. In each case the word said would have worked just as well.

CHAPTER 12

Sportswriting--Playing the Game on Paper

If you are a sports editor, there are a number of things you should say to your writers. First, let them know that sportswriting is like any other writing, so what you have learned in your journey through this book applies to this chapter. The sportswriter needs what all writers need: knowledge of newswriting, confidence, curiosity and writing ability. But you also must know that the sportswriter is a specialist . . . not a generalist. And for that reason, the sportswriter is responsible for educating himself.

Coaches and sportswriters must have a special relationship. The coach wants fair press and publicity and you want vital information. It's a close-knit relationship that requires care. Build strong rapport.

Learn about the sport you plan to cover. Get a rules book. Learn who the players are, their backgrounds, their strengths, their weaknesses. Learn how to write about these things so a person not knowledgeable about the sport could understand the story.

How does a writer gain that understanding of the sport, that knowledge about the team members? The following three tips will get you started:

1. Go to a practice. Talk to the coach and players.
2. Be a student of sports. Read anything you can get your hands on, from books to articles. Get into the habit of reading sports magazines and the sports page in local and national newspapers.

3. Start a file. Ask the coach or coaches to help you. Include in it facts about the players. What are their records? Have they broken any school, conference, state or national records? What sort of year did the school's top basketball or volleyball players have last year? Scoring average from last year? Keep newspaper clips in your file. They provide necessary historical information. If you start a file as a freshman, think what you'll have as a senior. Think of what an asset that file will be to incoming writers. You might also keep story ideas in a folder in your file.

What Sports Stories Need

Interest in sports continues to escalate. Girls have become as involved as boys, and the need for coverage has increased with the numbers involved. The trend used to be toward promoting sports, rather than covering them. That is no longer true. Not only has interest in sports increased, but just general interest in physical fitness has increased. Your opportunities in sportswriting will depend on your school.

Although every story will not include all of the following possibilities, each will include some. Consider pursuing information like the following for your story:

1. An accurate appraisal of what a player has contributed to a game.
2. Strong quotes. Most coaches want to talk. Most will even discuss problems, because they realize the necessity of being honest with the fans.
3. Pre- and post-game statements.
 - a. Get predictions from the coach and players. Do they think they

have what it takes to win the conference? One of the swim team members is out because of an injury. Will that affect their team performance?

- b. Get the after-game reactions, regardless of who won. Better yet, have an interview room for after-game interviews, if possible.

This "neutral" zone will eliminate the problem of boys and girls going into the locker room of the opposite sex after the game.

- 4. **Statistics:** Often, the score tells the story. If the ending score of the football game was 48-0 in favor of your team, it's obvious that your team performed better. The individual statistics will back that score up. But don't forget to tell the story in words. Lively words. Don't overdo statistics. Your readers want a story, not a precise calculation. Consider using your statistics in a graph at the side of your story, like a sidebar. That way, less important statistics will not interfere with the flow of your story.
- 5. **Other story lines--achievement, progress and self-improvement, progress of conditioning, chances of new players, unique aspects of team, such as grades of players if outstanding. (If the team's combined grade point average is 3.7, that's worth a story.)**
- 6. **General questions you might ask:**
 - a. How do you compare the opposing team's strength offensively and defensively with the home team?
 - b. What is the general condition of their team? Your team.
 - c. What are their top swimmers' best times?
 - d. In gymnastics . . . who are the people to beat and why?
 - e. Does the team have good back-up players?

And so on. If you know your sport, you will be able to ask the necessary questions. If you don't, your stories will be weak.

Anatomy of a Sports Story

The anatomy of a straight news story and a sports story are alike. Usually you will follow an inverted pyramid formula for straight sports stories. You will look for the most important, interesting information for your lead and you will develop the story from there. This method satisfies the reader quickly, and in sports this is crucial. The reader doesn't want to wait until the last paragraph to find out who won the game. Story leads will as usual vary with the type of story being written. In sportswriting, you will usually be writing one of three kinds of stories: competition results, personality features and in-depth stories that focus on issues or problems in the sports arena.

As usual, leads for those types of stories will vary. In a summary story you might begin with a summary lead or you might begin by reliving for readers a spectacular or important part of the game or competition. The same applies to features and in-depth stories.

Competition Results

Often, the sportswriter needs just to give readers the results of a game in the story.

Examine the following example of a story that gives competition results.¹

Quickness asset for Elkton

A tough full court press brought Elkton a 76-68 victory over Sioux Valley in a non-conference basketball game Jan. 6

¹ Janet Blank-Libra, "Quickness asset for Elkton," Elkton Record, 15 Jan. 1987: 1.

in Elkton.

According to Elkton coach Bob DeBoer, Elkton used quickness to offset Sioux Valley's size.

It paid off. Elkton forced Sioux Valley to commit 21 turnovers, compared to Elkton's 13.

Elkton's Scott Montgomery led all players in scoring and rebounding with 31 points and 12 rebounds. Brian Kramer added 18 points and Kelly Kramer 15 points and eight rebounds.

Kent Vanderwal and Curt Hillerud led Sioux Valley with 26 and 10 points, respectively. Hillerud also added 10 rebounds, and Vanderwal contributed eight.

Elkton led at the end of first quarter play with an 11-2 advantage. Sioux Valley, however, scored at the buzzer, narrowing Elkton's lead to 20-14.

By halftime, Elkton still held a slight advantage, 37-34, and kept that lead in the third and fourth quarters, despite rallies from Sioux Valley.

Late in the third quarter Kelly Kramer and Montgomery cashed in on three-point plays. Montgomery then was fouled as the third quarter clock expired, and Elkton's lead jumped to 60-48 with a pair of free throws.

In the fourth quarter successive baskets by Kelly Kramer and Brian Kramer gave Elkton a 10-point lead, 72-62.

Sioux Valley coach John Livingston credits Elkton's victory to its hustling defense.

Elkton will participate in the Eastern Dakota Conference Tourney Jan. 15-17.

Sioux Valley	14	34	48	68
Elkton	20	37	60	76

That story gives the reader the game results. It also tells readers what the next event in basketball will be.

One problem that sports writers may contend with when writing competition result stories is the problem of timeliness. If you produce your paper every two weeks, a multitude of events have taken place in the interim. One solution is to lead the story with future events and then tack on reports of games played. This is not just a problem for high school reporters. Even small town weekly newspapers often find this a problem.

If the results given in the story above had been old news, you might have considered leading the story with information about the upcoming

Eastern Dakota Conference Tournament on Jan. 15-17. Don't highlight old news.

Features (including in-depth stories)

in Sportswriting

A good feature story will wake up the sports page of a high school newspaper. Write a feature using ideas stressed in the chapter on feature writing. Also, consider the following ideas:

1. Personality sketches: What does your school's star runner do in her spare time? People like to look into the lives of their sports heroes. Features on personalities in sports are among fans' favorite stories. Don't neglect to do them.
2. Historical feature: If the team has won state tournaments five years straight, look into why.
3. Interview several members of the team about why they think the new captain was the best choice.
4. Consider a story that advises or instructs the reader about the sport. Such a story will help them and gain credibility for you as a writer. Your readers will be glad to know that you know what you're writing about.
5. Crowd mood story: Watch a major game closely. Take notes on reactions. Pick out certain characters. You might write something like: Jon Doe was a cheering jack-in-the-box, up and down through the entire game.
6. In-depth stories: In-depth stories focus on issues prevalent in sports. Today, those issues might include drugs, impossible schedules and the pressure to excel.

The following three sports features cover graduates, teachers and students who are special. The third is an in-depth look at an athlete and his struggle with drugs. The writer makes clear the point that the incident is not an isolated one. Each of the three stories won a national Quill and Scroll award.

Feature on a Graduate

The high school feature story can sometimes focus on a graduate who has done especially well in his career. Greg Bellmer wrote this story for the Sylvan Hills High School newspaper.² He received an honorable mention from Quill and Scroll.

Greg's story is about a graduate who became a success in professional baseball. He not only interviews the baseball player, Kevin McReynolds, but he interviews the teacher who coached McReynolds in high school. Greg uses strong quotes to bring out McReynolds' personality. The occasional wordiness should have been worked out.

'He was an outstanding student and athlete'
Fame, fortune hasn't spoiled McReynolds

by Greg Bellmer

Success has not spoiled him yet.

The fame and glamour of major league baseball has yet to spoil Kevin McReynolds. His former teachers and coaches describe him as a "down to earth" person.

McReynolds, recently traded to the New York Mets, graduated from Sylvan Hills in 1978. He lives in North Little Rock during the off-season and was at the school in December for this interview.

"Kevin is still the same person as he was in high school, except he has a little more money now," head football coach Ron Sebastian said.

While McReynolds was in high school he played on two baseball state championship teams coached by Sebastian.

² Greg Bellmer, "Fame, fortune hasn't spoiled McReynolds," Sylvan Hills High School newspaper, Sherwood, Arizona, 10 Jan. 1987: 5.

Sebastian said that McReynolds was a quiet leader on the teams as McReynolds led the team by example. Sebastian told of a speech that McReynolds made that motivated the team.

"During Kevin's senior year, the day of the championship game, he called a team meeting and told the team by winning this game what it would mean to him," he said. "I knew there was no way we were going to lose that day because Kevin wasn't one to waste words and the team went on to win 7-2."

McReynolds praised Sebastian as not only being a good coach but also a person to look up to.

"I think Coach Sebastian was the person I admired and respected most in high school. I owe a lot to him," McReynolds said. "He never put pressure on on, but he pushed us to be the best. He is just an outstanding coach."

Sebastian said that the respect was mutual between the two and he always tries to go see McReynolds in a game at least once a year.

Sebastian said that Kevin was different from a great number of athletes because he not only worked hard on the playing field but also in the classroom.

"Kevin was always to himself," he said. "He wasn't like a lot of athletes that didn't do the work in school. He was an outstanding student and an outstanding athlete."

During McReynolds last year of high school he was constantly bothered by college recruiters and professional scouts, Sebastian said.

"I spent more time on the phone talking to recruiters than any other year," he said. "Kevin took things all in stride and didn't lose his head, which is amazing compared to all that was going on."

He was drafted out of high school by Milwaukee in the 18th round. He chose to go to the University of Arkansas. While at Arkansas, he majored in wildlife management and said that there was an adjustment period from high school to college.

"Any high school athlete is going to have problems going to college; it wasn't until the end of my freshman year that I finally caught on to the system," he said.

McReynolds has the same praise for Arkansas head baseball coach Norm De Bryn as he does for Sebastian.

"He (De Bryn) was very fundamentally sound; he wasn't noted as being a great coach but his teams never lose games due to fundamental mistakes."

In his second year at Arkansas, he said that is when he heard that many major league teams were interested in him. After his final year of being a Razorback, he was drafted in the first round by the San Diego Padres.

He never got his degree from Arkansas, but he said, "It depends on how good baseball is to me whether or not I go back and get my degree."

McReynolds spent his first year of professional baseball in class A and AA at Reno, Nevada, and Amarillo, Texas. In 1983, he was promoted to the Padres top farm club in Las Vegas. That year, he spent six weeks in the major leagues with the San

Diego Padres.

When asked if he remembered his first game, he said that it was in Philadelphia against the Phillies and that he got one hit in three at bats.

McReynolds started his major league career in grand style by hitting a home run for his first hit.

"I remember running around the bases thinking I'm glad to get that first hit out of the way," he said. "The first hit seems to be the toughest to get, and I got mine right off the bat. But I did not get another hit for my next 25 bats."

Since 1984, McReynolds' agent, Tom Selakovish, had told him a month before he was traded if he was traded at all it will be to the Mets.

The funny thing about the trade is that McReynolds has said that the thing he dislikes the most about the major league is the people in the Northeast.

"The people in the Northeast are the sorriest people on earth," he said. "They do not care about anything except themselves."

When he is not playing baseball or signing contracts, he spends most of his time in Arkansas. He donates a lot of his time and effort with the Arkansas Wildlife Federation.

"I usually don't do a lot of charity work, but the Arkansas Wildlife Federation I really get involved in because I believe in what it stands for," he said.

McReynolds also did put on a baseball camp and enjoyed the time he spent with the kids and thought the camp was very successful.

McReynolds said that his personality has changed since he was a student in high school. "I have opened up, and I'm a little more outgoing. You have to open up, but I still like to keep people guessing."

"When Kevin was in high school, he was always quiet," psychology teacher Patsy Robertson said. "He never caused any problems. A teacher never had to worry about him. He was well-behaved."

Sebastian agrees with Robertson that Kevin was always well-behaved. He also never acted up or showed off in class.

Sebastian described McReynolds as a down to earth person. "He has achieved a lot of fame and money, yet Kevin is still the same person; anything I have asked of him, he has responded positively."

McReynolds also said his parents played a big part of him becoming a success on the baseball field.

Sebastian said that his strong family background has helped Kevin to become a success not only in baseball but in life.

"My father never pushed me or my brothers at anything, but he was always there supporting us. He let us excel at our own pace."

Kevin's story is informative and colorful. He could have done additional work in two major areas. First, his sentence construction is

often awkward. The same applies to the quotations he has chosen to use. Second, the beginning of the story focuses more on McReynolds' former coach than it does on the success of the former student. One more re-write would have improved the story. It is obvious, however, that Greg put a great deal of time into this piece.

Feature on a Teacher

Just as one can reach into the pool of successful graduates to find a sports feature, one can consider faculty members.

"Papa Gorek" provides perfect feature material. A one-time Olympic contender and an escapee from a Communist country, Papa Gorek became the swim team coach at Jason Lewis' school. Jason took third place in sportswriting in Quill and Scroll's national contest with the piece he wrote for the Redwood High School newspaper in Larkspur, Calif.³

'Papa Gorek' swims to freedom

by Jason Lewis

Three-time Czechoslovakian swimming champion Julius Gorek was 21 when he decided to escape from his communist country. Gorek, who currently coaches the boys' swim team, says, "I couldn't take the lies anymore." In 1953, these strong personal beliefs led him to risk his life for freedom.

Gorek began swimming as a young boy and "from then on I was competing," he says. Several years later he was recruited by Czechoslovakian scouts. "It is a different system," he says. "If they saw talent, they got you."

"In 1952, I was swimming in the Olympics," he remembers. Gorek's event was freestyle. "We didn't know anything about nutrition or vitamins. We just couldn't compete with the other countries," he says.

Gorek was frustrated by the deceptions his government was supplying its people. "Everyone was told there was no freedom in the West and there was misery and poverty," he explains. "I knew it wasn't so. If anything it was the opposite.

³ Jason Lewis, "Papa Gorek swims to freedom," Redwood High School newspaper, Larkspur, California, 21 March 1986: 9.

"Czechoslovakia was under Communist rule. All of its borders were guarded and closed," says Gorek. "There were electric fences and watchtowers. A ship was the only way of escape." For three weeks, Gorek went to a riverside and secretly studied the routes of various ships.

Gorek told no one of his planned escape except a close friend. "Not even my mother and sister," he adds. Gorek's father had been a school teacher during the resistance in World War II. He was caught and executed by the Germans years earlier.

"I made my escape during the day when no one expected it," says Gorek. He swam one-half mile out towards a Rumanian freighter. The ship was headed towards Austria. "If I was caught . . . I would have been turned over to the river police or been killed," says Gorek.

"The ship was pulling barges. I grabbed a lifeboat that was hanging over the side and then used a chain to climb on board," says Gorek.

Gorek says that when planning his escape, he didn't calculate the difficulty of climbing onto the lifeboat. "I didn't realize it (the lifeboat) was made of rough wood. When I grabbed it, my hand slid and rubbed across the side. It (his hand) was all bloody and filled with splinters," he recalls.

"People saw me from a nearby bridge," he says, "but they must have thought I was just a crew member going for a swim." Gorek attributes this to the fact that, unlike most escapees who made their break the border, he made his near a crowded urban area. "All of the police with the fast speed boats were concentrating on the border six miles away. No one expected an escape from here."

After reaching the top of the chain and climbing into the freighter, "I jumped into an empty crate and covered the top. All I had with me was a plastic bag with my documents." Gorek hid in the crate for 14 hours.

Inside the crate, Gorek did a lot of waiting and thinking. "Your whole life goes through your mind--your childhood, your future . . . it's amazing." Visions of being found and shot enveloped him. Every so often he would have to open the lid of the crate for some oxygen. "I could hear the crew members running around and see a lot of waistlines."

When the ship arrived in Austria, Gorek sneaked off. Near the shore, he met a priest who helped by guiding him to the Austrian police.

"The Austrians are very nice and very hospitable," says Gorek. "I didn't have any clothes so they gave me some police clothes and smuggled me to the English sector (of Austria)."

Although Gorek very quickly received full citizenship in Austria, "I was still afraid of the Russians. I had heard all kinds of horror stories. I wanted to get as far away from them as I could." In 1958, Gorek immigrated to the United States.

From his present view, 30 years later, Gorek is content to put his experience "in the past." He is in his eighth year of

coaching the swim team and feels, "I'm contributing something." He explains, "I'm passing the little knowledge I have on to the next generation. "I'm trying to make better swimmers and better people out of the kids. It's a labor of love."

Gorek's students return the sentiment. His nickname among the team members is "Papa."

Jason's story is well written. The quotes he chose to use are good ones. Through his story, the reader gets to know Gorek--where he came from and why he now teaches. Go back through the story and note where he places his attribution. If he uses two quotations consecutively, he places the attribution between them--a good technique.

A Feature on an Issue in Sports

Quotes from key individuals carry the reader through this story by Billy Whitson of Duncanville, Texas.⁴ Billy won first place for his story of the personal triumph of a young athlete trapped in his abuse of drugs. He makes it clear that the problem exists among athletes during his in-depth examination of this young person's difficult journey to health. The writer captures the intensity of the athlete's battle.

The lead ends when the reader reaches the line, "Sherrill almost didn't get to make these outstanding plays." Billy paints a picture for his readers, drawing them in before approaching them with the idea of drug abuse and recovery.

A new kind of high
Sherrill overcomes drug abuse for football

by Billy Whitson

Huddled at the line of scrimmage, the Panther defense calls the signal to stop Grand Prairie. Three yards separate the

⁴ Billy Whitson, "A new kind of high: Sherrill overcomes drug abuse for football," Duncanville High School newspaper, Duncanville, Texas, 1986: 7.

Gophers from another touchdown, and they already lead the Panthers, 23-19.

Taking his position, senior Steve Sherrill lines up at pincher. Although his eyes are focused on tailback Cedric Lee, Sherrill drops the ball carrier four yards short of the goalline. Along with his Panther teammates, number 11 has pulled off four straight plays on a goalline stand.

Sherrill almost didn't get to make these outstanding plays. During spring ball, he was forced to choose between playing football or continuing his drug habit. Panther coaches forced Sherrill to admit he had a problem.

"I never really had a problem," Sherrill said. "You don't think about it, you just do it. I was smoking up to 10 joints a day along with alcohol and hard drugs, such as cocaine, crystal and speed."

Until the spring of his junior year, Sherrill didn't feel that he had any reason to quit taking drugs. "I had to have a reason to stop," he said. "You can't quit until you quit for yourself."

He had quit marijuana for his mother for about two months when he was a sophomore. "Although I wasn't smoking, I would still use the hard drugs and alcohol."

Eventually, Steve found his reason in football. "I knew I had a problem, but "the hardest part was admitting that drugs were a problem for me," Sherrill said. "I couldn't stop. I quit for about three months last year for football, but it would just start up again."

Sherrill was not alone in his use of drugs. "There would be about 10 cars at my house every morning," he said. "We would all meet and get stoned before school, during lunch and when we skipped class."

The group talked about quitting a few times, then "the next day I would catch myself taking a drag from a joint and remember what I said. At that point I didn't care," he said.

While Sherrill was caught up in his troubles, his coaches and friends could tell he needed help.

"I had visited with Steve a number of times," head coach Dan Gandy said. "The coaching staff was real concerned and wanted to help."

Teammates also wanted to help. "Steve is a really good player. It was hard to believe what people were saying about him," tailback Devin Jones said.

While others were aware of the problem, Sherrill's parents were not. "My mom didn't understand," he said. "She thought it was just a phase. She was too shocked to do anything. She really didn't know what to do."

"The idea of drug addiction never crossed our minds," Mrs. Pat Sherrill said. "We knew he smoked marijuana, but it never occurred to us he used anything else. He had promised me he would never smoke in our home, and I believed that. The day I found out he had lied to me was when I realized how totally drugs controlled."

Sherrill's father was "another story. I quit baseball in the 10th grade because of drugs, and it was a really big letdown for him," he said. "I was looking for an excuse to quit football for the same reason."

When the Sherrills finally realized what their son was going through, they decided to get help. My dad woke me up one day and told me to get dressed; we were going to a ride," Sherrill said.

Sherrill was taken to Baylor Parkside Lodge to talk to a counselor. "I couldn't believe we were actually there," he said. "I told the counselor that I would maybe smoke one joint a day. I would tell her anything but the truth. I was filling her with a bunch of bull."

Because there were no openings in the lodge that day, Sherrill returned home with his parents. "I told my parents to just give me one more chance," he said.

He was given that one more chance, but he failed. "I got off the pot and alcohol, but the hard drugs were too strong," he said.

One day when he got home from school, Sherrill was told by his mother that Baylor Park had called to say he was filled into the next opening. "I couldn't believe I was actually going to re-hab," he said. "I was so mad. I wouldn't talk to my dad. My mom didn't even exist. At first I thought about leaving, but where would I go?"

After the first week at the re-hab center, Sherrill could see how deeply he had fallen into the drug world. "But I couldn't imagine quitting drugs for good," he said. "For the past three years I had lived to use and used to live."

However, while he was there, he started coming around quickly. "Listening to the other kids talk about their usage, I decided I could do without the pot, drugs and everything," he said.

For the next couple of weeks, Sherrill struggled with the biggest decision a user could make--to go straight. "At the center we were assigned certain things you could do," he said. "I spent most of the time in the weight room. One minute I would say, 'I don't need that crap,' and the next minute I would say, 'It's my life. I'll do what I want'."

Although there were times he thought he wouldn't make the break from drugs, he made it through re-hab with a new outlook. "I felt totally different about life. I didn't need reasons to quit drugs; I had reasons not to use them," he said. "I told my dad I would be in the starting lineup for the Panthers in the fall. There are no words to say how I felt; but after I got out of the center, I knew what I had to do."

Sherrill wasn't alone in the joy of his triumph. "Steve was one of the fortunate ones caught up in the drug world. He was able to whip his problem," Coach Gandy said. "He was mature enough to realize what he was doing was wrong."

Jones has noticed a radical change in his teammate. "Steve is playing like his head is really on straight," he said.

And now Sherrill realizes that his future was in danger before

re-hab. "There is no telling where I would be today if my parents hadn't helped me," he said. "To think that I would probably be lying around with some needle stuck in my arm. I don't brag at the fact that I took drugs, but I am proud that I was strong enough to beat them and go straight."

He also makes it a point to not be around others when they are using drugs. "I don't even need them, but I do think about the times I was messed up. I don't want to go through that mess again, and I won't," he said. "My whole life is different. I was lucky everything paid off for me."

The former drug user has become active in helping others fight the problem of abuse. Last month, Sherrill, his parents and Coach Gandy were among the members appointed to a committee to study the problem of drugs in the schools. Sherrill has been open about his problem.

Lee takes the handoff and slides to the outside. Just as he hits daylight and is on his way to six, his legs fly out from under him.

If only he knew what Sherrill had gone through to make that tackle, he would probably smile with him.

Billy's story is well written. He has captured the essence of a serious problem. One thing that he might have considered doing was to include statistics about drug abuse in high schools.

The Sports Page

Besides the kinds of stories discussed, a sports page can include other information.

The page might include a sports column. Do you have a staff member who has the wit, the knowledge and the desire to produce a weekly column? Readers grow accustomed to reading the opinions of one person. The column might be humorous. It might be a hard-hitting editorial. It might be a commentary on an upcoming or just finished game. It might provide interpretation about an event for the reader.

The columnist is often seen as an expert. Readers look to this person for information and clarification. Any sports columnist must possess these three characteristics: 1) Well-rounded knowledge of the major sports; 2) An honest effort to comment fairly; 3) Ability to think

and express thoughts clearly.

Other topics can also be covered on the sports page. A late-winter lull often leaves sports writers wringing their hands in search of material for the sports page. Through most of the winter, you've been working to get all of the necessary information on one page. Basketball, gymnastics, swimming, volleyball, wrestling, hockey and more have all vied for spots on the sports page. Now, they've all ended. What do you do?

Plan for the winter lull. Have timeless features ready. Remember the extracurricular sports such as biking, skiing, ice fishing, hiking, winter bird watching, intramurals, sports for exercise such as weight lifting and aerobics. That late winter lull can be a chance for you to try your pen out on new topics. Enjoy them.

As a sports writer, take pride in your work. Take pride in becoming a specialist. Your readers will appreciate your efforts.

CHAPTER 13

The Editorial Writer

The editorial writer has special privileges. He gets to give his opinion, and that opinion has the power to sway others' thinking. The license to write and print editorials is a part of every journalist's heritage that must be guarded with care. It is a gift. John Locke, a seventeenth-century philosopher and defender of the democratic process, believed that human reason is the key to the solution of human problems. The editorial writer uses his reason to look at human problems in a variety of ways.

Editorials should be written to provoke a response from your audience. Readers may finish your editorial feeling disgusted. They may be delighted. They may be roused to action.

Your opinion represents the newspaper. In essence, you are saying, "Here is what we think," or "this is what we think you should do." An editorial should be well stated. A dull one will do no more than stretch a yawn from the reader's face. James E. Clayton was one of several editorial writers who banded together to write essays for a book called The Editorial Page.¹ The book was edited by Laura Longley Babb of the Washington Post Writers Group. Clayton recalled one editorial that brought an immediate response. He wrote:

"Occasionally, an editorial writer can point to a specific

¹ James E. Clayton, "Audience and Effect," The Editorial Page, ed. Laura Longley Babb, Washington Post Writers Group (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 67.

action and know it was triggered by an editorial. We once published a brief editorial deploring the condition in which the grave of President Kennedy was being maintained and suggested the Army clean it up. It was cleaned up by noon on the day on which the editorial was printed. The relevant government officials had simply not realized the condition existed until they read about it.

The Purpose of the Editorial

Editorials serve at least three purposes. They include:

To Explain or Inform. Today's readers are overwhelmed by information. It becomes difficult to sort through every issue or event in order to become knowledgeable. An editorial writer may write an editorial specifically to help readers analyze information. The writer is saying, "This is what this means."

Sometimes what the facts add up to is obvious, and sometimes it is not. In the case of the latter, it is up to the writer to clarify what the facts mean for the reader. In this case, an editorial writer can inform the public according to what he believes the facts mean. In a news story, the writer can give the facts but cannot always say what he thinks those facts mean. An editorial is an opportunity for the writer to help the reader.

John L. Hulteng in his book The Opinion Function writes,

We need exposure to the opinions of others--and not just the opinions of those with an ax to grind, the political leaders, the special-interest spokesmen. We need the aid we can get from the analysis and interpretation provided by persons who are steeped in the flow of events but who can keep those events in reasonably dispassionate perspective. The writers, commentators, cartoonists and columnists of the mass media fill that role for a vast number of Americans. In some instances, they fill it ably. In others, of course, they perform less successfully and serve only to add to the confusion"²

² John L. Hulteng, The Opinion Function, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3.

To Persuade. Your newspaper may want to take a stand. You might want to encourage your readers to vote for a certain candidate for student body president. In a persuasive editorial, the writer is saying, "This is what we think you should do." You may want to influence readers to take action, such as writing a letter to their senator or representative.

To Entertain. Most editorials are serious commentaries about events happening in the world--or your school--that are important to readers. But editorials can take a humorous bent. Writers have presented lists of suitable Christmas gifts, talked about the amusing mannerisms of polished politicians, sent Valentines, suggested forms of greetings, made up Twentieth Century fables, and laughed at the perils of working with computers. Both writer and reader have fun, and the readers are tickled into thinking more about the subject. One example of a humorous editorial was included by Hillier Krieghbaum in his book Facts in Perspective (the editorial page and news interpretation). Krieghbaum wrote, "When Robert Ruark, syndicated columnist, defended the use of prepositions at the ends of sentences, Overton Jones of the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch wrote an editorial with every sentence ending with a preposition. It follows:³

Put Those Prepositions
Where They Belong At

Columnist Robert Ruark made some strong statements Monday concerning the rule against using a preposition to end a sentence with. He said there was no logical reason why you shouldn't put one of those "lousy, skimpy little words" at the tail end of a sentence if you wanted to.

There's really nothing for Columnist Ruark to get excited about. Prepositions always are supposed to govern other words,

³ Hillier Krieghbaum, Facts in Perspective (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1956), 224-225.

called their "relative," and only the laziest writer should find it difficult to arrange the sequence of his words so that the relative is last and the preposition is before.

Sometimes, with all the belittling of the tried and standard rules, we wonder what modern literature is coming to. Instead of polishing their sentences, as did the old masters of the language, many of today's writers sit down and simply dash something off. Prepositions are left dangling naked at the end of sentences, and you can't tell where they're going to or where they came from. These unclad words, tied onto nothing, appear about to take off.

In the speaking art, too, conformity with standard rules of grammar should be striven after. Here, errors are easier to fall into. A person who wishes to leave a good impression with his listeners should use the very best grammar he is capable of. With anything less, he should refuse to put up.

It is a sad commentary on the literary world today that fundamental rules of grammar are laughed at. This is the age of skepticism when there's little left to cling to. Fortunately, however, there are a few purists in the writing and speaking arts who refuse to cut corners and whose work can be depended on.

Yes, Ruark, end your sentences with prepositions if you want to. But don't try to influence other writers, who to such a flagrant violation of rules of grammar will never give in to!

Whatever way you decide to write your editorial, you are conveying opinion so as to shape the reactions and thinking of others. If you are successful, a viewpoint will have changed or been considered or a course of action started or altered.

Look at the following editorial. Not only does it inform the reader, but it asks him to support his belief in the need for educating people about AIDS. The writer works to persuade the reader that the public school systems should seize the responsibility and work to improve sex education in schools.

"An Approach to Contain AIDS: Expanded Sex Education in Schools," an editorial by Jason Ohmstede of Helix, Calif., won second place in the national Quill and Scroll contest in 1987.⁴ He approaches his topic by

⁴ Jason Ohmstede, "An Approach to Contain AIDS: Expanded Sex Education in Schools," Helix High School newspaper, (Helix, California), n.p., n.pag.

hitting the reader with alarming statistics--an attention grabber. He then, through facts and opinion, advocates continued medical research and the education of people as ways to stop the spread of the disease. Jason handles a difficult topic well.

An Approach to Contain AIDS: Expanded Sex Education in Schools
by Jason Ohmstede

The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has now claimed 15,000 lives this year. One and a half million people are infected with the AIDS virus and a projected 180,000 people will have died from AIDS by the year 1991. Is it possible to halt this deadly trend and prevent AIDS from becoming the epidemic of the century?

Certainly, society is trying. Medical research on an AIDS cure has been continuously fueled by breakthrough after breakthrough in laboratory investigation of the virus. Also, albeit not as impressive or important, Proposition 64, the brainchild of the Lyndon LaRouche political organization that failed to pass in the general election Nov. 4, attempted to quarantine AIDS victims in order to stop the spread of the disease, for example.

Unquestionably, Proposition 64 was not an effective solution to the problem of stopping AIDS. The quarantine of AIDS victims would have made AIDS research practically impossible.

One step in the right direction, however, is the widespread education of children of the AIDS virus and safe sexual practices. "Widespread" is used here because it is evident that in many school systems across the country, sex education simply does not exist, or the current program is ineffective.

Our country has placed the responsibility of education into the hands of the government. Our public education system should immediately seize the responsibility and take steps to improve the sex education in our schools. Not only will expanded sex education programs in public schools be a step towards defeating AIDS, but it will also help solve other problems regarding sex: teenage pregnancies and venereal disease.

Critics against expanded sex education in public schools have said that sex education should be taught in the home, by the parents and religious leaders of the child.

But this system does not work! AIDS continues to spread, along with an alarmingly rising number of cases of venereal disease and pregnancies among teens. If the parents and religious leaders of our country cannot do an acceptable job, then someone or something must be there to take up the slack. Here is where our public education system can help.

It is up to the experts to determine exactly at what age level sex education will be introduced. But whatever the

decision, it must be introduced at an age where students will be able to understand the information provided and synthesize it so that to prevent the further spread of AIDS.

AIDS is quickly becoming the "Black Plague" of the modern world. Only with continued medical research and education of this society's members, do we stand a chance to conquer the AIDS virus without persecuting the unfortunate victims of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Jason has put together an editorial that merits applause. He states his case clearly and with the awareness that young people must have concerning such critical issues.

Guidelines for Good Editorials

Just as the mythological Atlas must hold the world up to prevent it from spinning off into space, so must you keep your editorial from falling into nothingness. Good editorials must be able to withstand close scrutiny. Anyone who wanted to take the time to dissect your writing should be able to find certain characteristics:

1. Clarity of style: Don't bog your writing down with unnecessary words or information. Stick to your topic. You've read that many times in this book. Imprint it on your mind.
2. Moral purpose: Have a good reason for writing the editorial. An editorial isn't the place to air a personal vengeance or a pet peeve. It's a place to talk about matters that are important, not only to you but to your readers.
3. Sound reasoning: Know what you're talking about.
4. Power to influence public opinion in what the writer conceives to be the right direction: Take your job seriously.

Two problems editorial writers frequently confront are dullness of writing and lack of unity. To avoid those pitfalls, adhere to the preceding four guidelines.

But above all, be informed. Your audience will not consider your message if it is not based on sound information. Be prepared to defend your opinion with solid evidence or information. Never be wishy washy. Believe in your duty as an editorial writer. People need editorial writers.

Hulteng also included in his book a quote from Nick Williams, then editor of the Los Angeles Times. Williams said, "Most of us find our brains numbed by masses of contradictory, unrelated information. On many of the major problems of our time, most of us are mental dropouts--confused, unable to start sorting out the facts and unable to organize them toward any solutions."⁵ As an editorial writer, you can help readers avoid becoming "mental dropouts."

How to Start Writing an Editorial

If sewing a garment, you need cloth before you can begin. You then merge that cloth with other pieces--buttons, a zipper, thread--and create a garment. One of your priorities is to make that garment look good because you're planning to wear it.

In a sense, you also "wear" your opinions. If you're going to put an opinion on paper, you must first generate the idea, just as you would first choose cloth for a garment. The idea for an editorial is its key component.

Take it from there as you would your sewing venture. Add the necessary components. Those components will become clear to you after you have read about your topic, digested the information and sorted through the possibilities for angles the editorial could take.

⁵ Hulteng, 3.

An editorial needs 1) A title (headline); 2) A lead; 3) The body, and; 4) A conclusion. You, or the copy editor, will create a headline when the editorial is finished. To present clearly your information in the body of the editorial, you might consider making an outline. If you plan to present an argument that appeals to readers for action or provokes them into thought, an outline is a good way to form that argument. You might want to explain your opinion, back it up with evidence and encourage your readers to see its merit. Your conclusion may be a summary, an appeal for action or a strong statement designed to make your reader think. The lead, likewise, might be a summary or it might offer the writer's opinion in a straightforward fashion.

The following two editorials, both Quill and Scroll national winners, were written by high school journalists who wanted to make a point. Judge for yourself whether they were successful.

Lisa Robertson of Irving, Texas, was awarded first place in editorial writing for the following piece.⁶ Lisa used clear, specific language, giving credit to what she felt was an effective program in her school.

Succeeding after a second chance
Phase II provides for students needing new educational choice

by Lisa Robertson

He was 16 years old and had dropped out of school. He decided never to go back. Since he never finished the eighth grade, he had to start there. He went to school with junior high kids and knew something was wrong. He didn't belong with 13-year-olds, but he couldn't do the work of kids his own age. He tried from September until April, but it just wasn't

⁶ Lisa Robertson, "Succeeding after a second chance: Phase II provides for students needing new educational choice," Nimitz High School newspaper, Irving, Texas, 5 Sept. 198

working. They tried to convince him to stay. "You only have six weeks left, you can make it," they told him. He couldn't, and he dropped out, again. He wasn't disruptive or dumb; he just didn't fit.

His was a case when the system failed. The IISD tries to place students in situations where they will be the most successful. For some people that is in honors classes, while for others it is in special education programs. Even students with drug and alcohol problems can get help and learn at Phase I of the Alternative School. The system worked for these people, but not for the 16-year-old eighth grader. Finally, the district has created a situation where he could have fit. Right now, it's called Phase II, and it is a wonderfully welcome alternative.

This new "School of Choice" as Principal Margaret Barnett calls it, is exactly the place for students who for one reason or another can't succeed on regular campuses. With a more flexible schedule and a smaller setting to work in, students, we think, who thought they could not do well, will realize that they can succeed.

Industrious, animated and compassionate faculty like Barnett and counselor Joan Porter help those students incorrectly labeled incorrigible--beyond help. We think it is not that those students were beyond help as much as the school district wasn't reaching far enough.

For instance, without Phase II to enroll in, one young man who consistently skipped school was sent to Phase I of the Alternative School. He simply wouldn't stay in class, even going so far as to climb out a window when the teacher left the room for a moment. He had to go to Phase I, and he liked it. He had to work hard because of the strict discipline. The teachers wouldn't let him skip.

Phase II may not be the solution for everyone, but at least now students will have a choice. The 16-year-old eighth grader never did.

Lisa points out that a problem has existed in education and that the school district has worked toward solutions that give students alternatives. Her positive attitude is uplifting.

Third place in the 1987 editorial division of the Quill and Scroll national contest went to Steve Abrams of Clearwater, Fla., for his story about the closing of a free clinic. ⁷

⁷ Steve Abrams, "Board heeds right-to-life extremists; kills clinic," Countryside High School newspaper, Clearwater, Florida, 31 Oct. 1986: 2.

Board heeds right-to-life extremists; kills clinic

by Steve Abroms

Once again, the Pinellas County School Board showed lack of backbone in allowing right-to-life advocates and religious conservatives to influence their decision on the existence of a free health clinic at Gibbs High School by a 5-1 vote.

The clinic was designed to provide emergency first aid, care for students with minor illnesses, health screenings, physical exams for athletes, nutrition and drug counseling, family planning advice, and day care for teenage mothers who wanted to continue in school, according to the St. Petersburg Times. No where did the provisions of the clinic, funded by the Robert Wood Foundation, include the dispensation of birth control devices or abortion counseling.

Unfortunately, opponents were able to arouse suspicion in school board members on hidden intents of the would-be clinic in a four-hour forum despite the reassurance of school officials.

It is apparent that board Chairman Albert Blomquist, who voted in favor of the clinic, has a firm grasp on reality unlike his fellow board members. Opposition focused on provisions in the proposal for limited counseling on birth control and pregnancy as well as a limit on additional non-academic services. The clinic would help provide better health for students who may not be able to learn about it or receive it elsewhere. In addition, this counseling was designed at the clinic to take place only with written parental consent.

Obviously, the school board under the influence or fear of right wing tyranny chose to believe that providing information on sex only invites students to become sexually active.

They can't expect to achieve the desired results by solving two diametrically opposing methods: 1. Educate the students about the evils of alcohol, drinking and driving, crack and other drugs. 2. NOT educating students about other teenage health concerns.

It's time our decision-makers faced the fact that they are not almighty; they cannot put a stop to teenage sex, especially by not educating students about this concern. Not only was the rejection of the clinic a crucial error, but it also showed the weaknesses of coming to grips with the problems of teenagers.

The many good aspects of the clinic have been ignored by the spurient discussion of teenage sex. Clinics are starting to appear elsewhere with the help of foundation grants. For Pinellas County, the decision against one is a major setback. The teenage mothers at Gibbs are especailly hurt. Hopefully, others will learn from this mistake of ours.

Steve's editorial is powerful. He attacks the school board for making what he says was an unwise decision. He gathered sufficient and significant evidence to back his opinions. The lead could be improved

if it were given some punch. It reads a bit slow. Editing throughout would create a tighter message. Again, this writer shows that he is aware of issues that young people need to address.

The Editorial Page

The editorial is not alone on the editorial page of a newspaper. Syndicated columnists, internal columnists, editorial cartoonists, letters to the editor and spots for guest writers give readers a variety of opinions to speculate about. You might consider making any of these a part of your editorial page. If possible, devote a whole page of your newspaper to the editorial function. Readers will begin to look for that section--for your opinions. Look at other student newspapers for ideas. Tackle issues that affect your school in some way, like federal cuts in education spending.

Ideas for editorials are many. Look for topics within your school. It's always good for the school board or the administration to know that you are aware of issues that affect students.

Look over the following list of ideas. Perhaps some would work for you.

1. The lunch program should offer more variety, more choice. (Don't do this one if it isn't merited. Griping about school lunches is an ongoing student pastime.)
2. The food we eat affects the way we act.
3. Drugs--why do people take them?
4. Should the high school have male cheerleaders?
5. A varsity sports bus is needed.
6. Juvenile punishment should be stricter.
7. Cheating is an increasing problem among students.
8. Students should not be able to work while in school.

Cartoons

Look at these three cartoons high school journalists have created. Like an editorial, the cartoon makes a point.

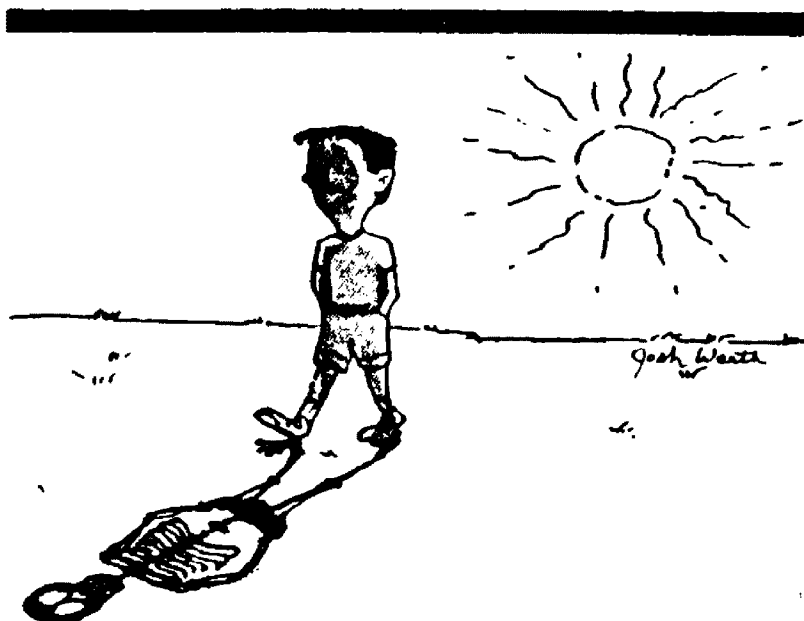
Kyle Mitchell of Austin, Texas, earned second place from Quill and Scroll in an editorial cartoon depicting a confused President Ronald Reagan.⁸ The cartoon is detailed and clear.



Josh Worth of Plymouth, Mich., captured third in editorial cartoons for his depiction of what losing the ozone layer will eventually mean to humanity.⁹

⁸ Kyle Mitchell, "Iran Arms Sale," Stephen F. Austin High School newspaper, Austin, Texas, 30 Jan. 1987: 4.

⁹ Josh Worth, "Prediction for 1987," Canton High School newspaper, Plymouth, Michigan, 15 Jan. 1987: 6.



Throughout the upcoming year the ozone layer will continue to deteriorate.

Darin Davis of Tucson, Ariz., won first place for this editorial cartoon which deals powerfully with the issue of war as reality, not play.¹⁰ Darin's cartoon stands out in idea, content and artwork as a winner.



¹⁰ Darin Davis, "GI Joe," Canyon Deloro High School newspaper, Tucson, Arizona, 23 Jan. 1987: 2.

While the rest of the paper is dedicated to reporting the news and informing readers as accurately and objectively as possible (or to entertaining through features), the editorial page is different. It's all yours. And your readers'. Wear it well.

CHAPTER 14

The Art of Creating Headlines

Without the right headline, the best story may go unread.

Headlines serve a critical purpose in a newspaper. They tug the reader's attention into the stories. Headlines also are important in a yearbook, but the competition is less demanding on a yearbook page than on a newspaper page, where five or more stories may vie for the reader's attention.

Some of you may be on staffs with enough journalists to fill numerous jobs. You may have reporters, a copy editor and an editor-in-chief. If you are even luckier, you'll have editors for sports, features and the editorial page. If you have a copy editor, that person probably will be responsible for writing headlines.

On many staffs, however, each journalist writes his own headlines--a good exercise in discipline and creativity.

Headlines serve many purposes. First, they provide a table of contents. The reader can scan the page and quickly determine the content--something like looking over a salad bar and choosing what you want--what looks best. If you like it, you dig in.

Secondly, headlines that capture interest ensure that stories will be read. To do that a headline must evolve with the following in mind:

- 1) It must be interesting;
- 2) It must include the necessary information;
- 3) It must have a verb, real or implied;
- 4) It must avoid certain traps;
- 5) It must be of a particular length.

Capturing Interest

Headline writers must learn to note the most pertinent facts of a story as they read it and then summarize them concisely in a headline. This usually means using four or five good, short words.

Often, the substance of the headline is visible in the first few paragraphs of the story, usually in the lead. It should not repeat the lead's words, but it should give the gist of the story. This may be less true in feature stories where a headline may try to tease the reader into the story.

Consider the following examples. Note that the lead of each story is included so that you can see how the two tie together.

Gore hits rivals on defense policy

by John Dillin
Staff Writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Al Gore minces no words about his rivals' defense policies.¹

Note the short words in the headline. Also note the active verbs used in both the headline and the lead sentence--hits and minces.

Try another:

Panama rejects report
of US Marine firefight

Panama City--Panama's military rejected a report that US soldiers engaged up to 50 intruders in a two-hour firefight at a fuel depot.²

Again, note the active verb. In this headline, the words are close

¹ John Dillin, "Gore hits rivals on defense policy," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1988: 3, cols. 1-3.

² "Panama rejects report of US Marine firefight," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1988: 2, col. 3.

to those used in the lead. It does not, however, distract here, because the words do not follow the lead exactly. You do not feel re-reading the headline when you read the lead.

The time element is usually not in the headline. Rather, the what element is. The headline tells what has or what is going to happen. Both of the above examples do just that. When the headline is designed to tell the reader what is going to happen, the writer will use the future tense: Jazz band to perform at concert.

After looking at a headline you've written, can you tell what the story is about? Look at this one:

Students attend assembly

It tells little. Try:

Convicts open up to students at assembly

Try to use specific details when describing what or who.

You must be specific in the headline. Compare the following two headlines. Which tells you more?

Many take new class

50 students enroll
in 'Single Living'

Verbs in Headlines

Most editors insist on verbs, whether real or implied, in headlines.

Journalists consider headlines "skeleton sentences." A headline is not a complete sentence but is like one in the sense that it needs a noun and a verb.

A skeleton sentence, or headline, drops articles like a, an and the. It uses present tense to give a sense of immediacy:

Students dye hair purple to prove point

If this were written as a sentence, it would probably read:

The students dyed their hair purple to prove a point.

Now look at the following two examples of headlines using an action verb and then an implied verb.

Action verb: Student Council protests new regulations

Implied verb: Student Council on strike

In the first headline, protests is the verb. In the second, the verb "is" is implied. Implied verbs are linking or being verbs.

Practice writing headlines. Read a story in a newspaper.

Summarize it in one complete sentence and then turn that sentence into a workable headline. Try doing that exercise as you write headlines for your first stories. The job of writing headlines can be fun. Challenge yourself to find the best words to describe the story. Find the verb that will give the headline color and grab the reader's attention.

Advice for Good Headlines

Don't Give Opinions. As always, keep your opinion out of the newspaper, unless you are the editorial writer. Don't write a headline like this:

Brilliant student wins scholarship

The word brilliant isn't necessary. The facts will speak for themselves. Try:

Student wins \$5,000 scholarship

Avoid Questions or Commands. Commands require that the headline start with a verb. Readers find this awkward. Questions cannot easily be answered in the lead of the story. Readers prefer a summary, so that

they know what to expect.

Occasionally, questions and commands can be used effectively in headlines. For example:

GOOD: Teachers on strike; will seniors graduate?
 BAD: Will senior class graduate this year?

And in commands:

GOOD: Target your goals to succeed
 BAD: Take the right classes

Avoid Double Meanings. A headline that can be easily misinterpreted should be kept out of the newspaper. Consider the following example:

Paraplegics must be split up

Don't Split Prepositional Phrases. A prepositional phrase is a group of words that works together as a unit. If it is split in a headline, the reader will find it awkward to read. For example:

Students strike to
 gain privileges

Follow Proper Punctuation. Learn the following rules:

1. If you have two thoughts in a headline, use the semi-colon between them just as you would if they were two sentences. For example:

Murphey wins the race; credits it to 'luck'

2. The comma can take the place of the word "and" in headlines. It's easy to read and makes the headline shorter. For example:

Smith earns appointment, leaves for Naval academy

3. Put quotation marks around exact words. For example:

Principal says 'students looking good'

Just remember, good headlines tell the story clearly, simply and specifically.

Take a look at the following headlines. All are strong headlines taken from good newspapers. Note the word selection and arrangement.

The first example uses a kicker. A kicker is a line of type placed above the main headline; it provides supplementary information.

A family divided by war
Nicaraguan homes suffer the pain of civil conflict³

West Bank still seethes
as general strike is held⁴

US agencies and border residents
grope for better relationship⁵

Cheerleaders heart given to Minn. woman⁶

Tuck in that shirt tail, fella!
My, we've changed over the years⁷

The last example also uses a kicker. That headline topped a feature story about changing styles. It works well as an attention grabber. A less inventive head writer might have written:

People change styles as years pass

³ "A family divided by war: Nicaraguan homes suffer the pain of civil conflict," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1988: 1, cols. 1-3.

⁴ "West Bank still seethes as general strike is held," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1988: 2, col. 3.

⁵ "US agencies and border residents grope for better relationship," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1988: 3, cols. 1-5.

⁶ "Cheerleader's heart given to Minn. woman," Argus Leader (South Dakota), 3 Nov. 1986: 4B-1.

⁷ "Tuck in that shirt tail, fella! My, we've changed over the years," The Catalina High School (Tucson, Ariz.) newspaper, 16 Jan. 1987: 3, cols. 1-3.

Fitting a Headline

A headline must fit into an allotted space. That space will usually range from one to five or eight columns. Each column of a story will be a particular width. Standard column measurement is 22 picas or 4 1/4 inches. Journalists usually measure in a unit called picas. Six picas equal one inch. A "pica pole" will have that measurement on it. Your job will be to fit a headline into whatever space you have, and to do that you must measure the space and then count the letters according to a headline schedule's guideline. A headline schedule gives examples of the headline typefaces and the sizes they are available in.

Your teacher will tell you how many units will fit in one column in your newspaper. Count letters, spaces, numerals and punctuation as follows unless your teacher tells you to do differently: One unit: most lower case letters and numerals and spaces; One-half unit: f, l, i, t, and j; all punctuation, I, numeral 1; One and one-half units: m, w, capital letters; Two units: M, W.

On the following page examine the different typefaces shown. Obviously, the examples do not encompass all of the typefaces available. They do, however, display a wide range. Note that all of the typefaces in the first column are in 12 point. Variations of each style are also shown. A journalist would want to choose a style that is easy to read. Zapf chancery, for example, is not as easy to read as avant garde or bookman or new century schoolbook. Also note the sizes shown in column two. Your story copy would probably be set in 10 point. Headlines usually range from 14 to 72 point, depending on the length and importance of the story.

Avant Garde

Bold: **Typefaces vary in style and size.**
Light: TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Bookman

Typefaces vary in style and size.
Italics:
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Chicago

Plain:
Typefaces vary in style and size.
Outlined:
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Courier

Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Geneva

Shadow:
Typefaces vary in style and size.
Plain: TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Helvetica

Plain:
Typefaces vary in style and size.
Italics:
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Monaco--8 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

New Helvetica Narrow --9 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

New Century Schoolbook--10 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Palatino--14 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Times--18 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN STYLE AND SIZE.

Zapf Chancery--24 point
Typefaces vary in style and size.
TYPEFACES VARY IN

New Century Schoolbook--36 point--bold
Typefaces vary in size and style.

Courier--72 point--italics
Typefa

d SCROLL

ary Society for High School Journalists

School of Journalism
and Mass Communication
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242
(319) 353-4475

ounded by Dr. George H. Gallup in 1926

April 5, 1988

Janet Blank-Libra
R.R. 3 Box 150
Brookings, SD 57006

Dear Ms. Blank-Libra:

This letter is to acknowledge that Quill and Scroll Society has given you permission to use the national winners from the 1987 ANPA/Quill and Scroll National Writing and Photography Contest.

Please give credit to the students and the school represented by the student according to the information that was included on the attached entry blank for each national winner used in your study.

Quill and Scroll is pleased to have been of assistance to you in this masters thesis.

Sincerely,



Richard P. Johns
Executive Secretary

Lois Yvonne Hatton

DAKOTA NEWS AND VIEWS
Writer, Photographer and News Correspondent

CLEAR LAKE, S.D. 57226
(605)874-2032

May 3, 1988

sd
pw — **MEMBER**
South Dakota Press Women
Affiliate of National Federation
of Press Women, Inc.

Janet Blank-Libra
R.R. 3, Box 150
Brookings, SD 57006

Dear Ms. Blank-Libra:

You have permission to use my story "In South Dakota, Old Autumn Ghosts" in your thesis as an example of a news feature.

You have devoted much time and effort towards your thesis. I am sure that it will be a success and a valuable teaching aid for secondary school journalism teachers.

This story first appeared in the New York Times and it later appeared in dozens of newspapers around the country as a New York Times wire service feature.

Thank you for showing an interest in my work.

Sincerely yours,

Lois Yvonne Hatton
Lois Yvonne Hatton

The Poynter Institute

For Media Studies

May 3, 1988

Janet Blank-Libra
R.R. 3
Box 150
Brookings, SD 57006

Dear Janet Blank-Libra:

You have my permission to use the stories from Best Newspaper Writing.

In your thesis and book please cite the source for these selections and mention that the book is published by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida.

As a courtesy, I would also ask permission from the authors at their newspapers. I'm sure you'll have no problem.

Yours truly,



Roy Peter Clark
Associate Director

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