

The Four Major Newspaper Article Formats

Story Structure

Inverted Pyramid

- Useful for single-incident news stories.
- Consists of a summary lead and a development made up of details arranged in descending order of importance: The most important facts coming right after the lead and the least important facts coming at the end.
- Has no conclusion, therefore has one key advantage: the story can be cut paragraph by paragraph, from bottom up.

Inverted Pyramid - Example

Water Main Breaks

A broken water main near 12 Wing Shearwater left a Dartmouth hospital and thousands of residents with less water than usual on Friday.

Municipal water crews discovered the break on a water transmission line in woods behind the base about 9:30 a.m.

Dartmouth General Hospital's supply was threatened by the break but crews rerouted water from other areas to ensure that didn't happen.

Woodside and Eastern Passage residents also had reduced water flow.

Chronicle-Herald July 8, 2000

- The first paragraph of this story is a summary lead containing all the essential facts;
- the second and third paragraphs contain the explanatory detail;
- the fourth paragraph contains some additional details. If space limitations had demanded that this story be cut, paragraphs three and four could have been trimmed and the story – now consisting of nothing but the original lead – would still stand.

- *The **summary lead** in an inverted pyramid story contains all the essential facts.*

The Chronological Account

- When news stories report action or a series of related events, chronology is the answer to the problem of organisation.
- In these cases, the lead may be a summary or partial summary.
- The partial summary is not complete, but merely gives some idea of the nature of the story without disclosing its outcome.

The Chronological Account

- The lead may also be a conventional starting place, such as the first 'episode' of the story.
- The body of the story is then told in strict chronological order.
- The conclusion in a chronological account may be either the final episode in a sequence of events or it may be a statement of some fact outside the chronology.
- In either case, this format does have an identifiable conclusion; it cannot be cut by throwing paragraphs away.

Suspended Interest Story

- This is a specialised story form, and usually more creative.
- Also called *pyramid* form.
- Most frequently used to tell short, humorous stories.
- Sometimes difficult to write because the writer must be careful to save the best for last so that the effect is not lost.
- The final paragraph of the story is where the 'punch line' is revealed.

Suspended Interest - Example

Ronald Sapia wishes his dog would bite

BALTIMORE-UPI

Mr. Sapia, manager of a local shopping centre, was taking his sheepdog for a ride in his car when he was approached by a blond youth.

“Does your dog bite?” the youth asked.

“No,” Mr. Sapia said.

The youth pulled a revolver, ordered Mr. Sapia and the dog out, and stole the car.

Lead – Plus – Equal - Facts

- Many news stories do not lend themselves to the restrictions of the inverted pyramid form.
- These are stories where the details are all of equal importance, so none can be eliminated to meet the demands of space.
- Details in the body of the story are not necessarily presented in order of importance, but they always appear in some logical order.
- Examples of stories written in this way might be music festival winners in various categories or high school scholarship winners.

Lead – Plus – Equal - Facts

- A number of other types of stories call for the lead-plus-equals-facts format.
- An accident story that begins like this, for example:
 - Four persons were treated Saturday at the QEII Health Sciences Centre for minor injuries suffered in three separate accidents.
- This story has to explain each accident, identify the people involved and explain the nature of their injuries.

Lead – Plus – Equal – Facts

Example

WASHINGTON --- The Urban Mass Transportation Administration has approved five key sub-contracts vital to expediting the engineering planning of the Buffalo to Amherst rapid rail transit system, Rep. Jack F. Kemp said today.

Approved as subcontractors to Bechtel Associates, the prime engineering consultants, were the following: The Anderson Drilling Co., of Orchard Park for drilling and soil sampling.

The J.H. Robinson Co. of Erie, Ps., for lab testing and rock samples.

Transit and Tunnel Inc. of Buffalo for studies on underground construction and costs.

Urban Engineers of Buffalo for engineering support services.

Calspan Corp. of Buffalo for safety engineering studies.

Buffalo Evening News

- Since the summary lead mentions the approval of five sub-contracts, the body of the story must identify all five sub-contractors.