

# **It's all in your Head (line)**

By Bobby Hawthorne, former UIL Academic Director

*Revised by Jeanne Acton, UIL Journalism Director*

# The Headline Writing Contest:

- Six stories, six headlines
- 45 minutes (about 7 minutes a story)
- Count parameters
- About speed and creativity

**Sell the story.** A good head involves readers much like a clever ad.

**Tell the facts.** Precise and specific heads inform readers instantly of what they may or may not want to read.

**Be accurate.** All facts, names, numbers, whatever must be correct.

**Be objective.** Don't editorialize.

**Simple but precise.** No fancy words. No weird constructions. Find the right word to communicate the meaning.

**Make tone fit content.** Serious story. Serious headline. Funny story. Funny headline.

## **Story 2 — Write: 1-line headline counting 26-32**

The high school was awarded 21st Century grant programs for the 2011-2012 school year. The federal grant will provide funding for a variety of after-school activities for students.

“The district is excited about this new opportunity,” grant director Steve Robbins said. “We will be able to offer unique activities like sewing, cooking, outdoor sports and more.”

History teacher Penny White said she plans to offer an extreme frisbee class.

“I asked my classes if they would be interested in the class, and I had more than 20 students raise their hands,” White said. “We have a lot of athletic students who are not involved in school teams. This will give them a place to belong.”

Freshman Millie James said she participated in 21st Century grant classes at her former school in Dallas. “I took a really cool e-zine class, and we published a magazine for teen girls,” she said.

The **high school** was **awarded** 21st Century **grant programs** for the 2011-2012 school year. The federal grant will provide funding for a variety of **after-school activities** for students.

High school awarded grant for after-school activities – 43

District wins after-school grant - 32

# Kinds of Head(line)s

- 1-line-headline

Bricklayers engage in mortar combat

- 2-line-headline

Backers hot for chili  
as U.S. official food

- 3-line-headline

Principal adds  
six electives  
to summer school

- Main/secondary headline

# Standing tall

5' -4" guard rises to challenge of leading Tigers

- Main/secondary headline

## Driven to destruction

Police play game  
of cat and mouse  
with illegal racers

- Main/secondary headline

# Whole new ballgame

Nolan Ryan makes smooth transition to job  
helping oversee state's parks, wildlife areas

- Main/Secondary headline

**Up to date**

Senior makes over dad  
for online auction

- Be as specific as possible in your headline.  
Get to the heart of the news.

(not good)

**School board discusses items  
at heated Tuesday meeting**

(better – more specific)

2 board members walk out  
over budget argument

- Avoid semicolons. The headline should be a single sentence, not a collection of sentences.

Hurricane strikes;  
school swamped;  
pep rally cancelled

Better:

Pep rally cancelled  
after hurricane  
slams into school

- Don't pad headlines with school initials or dates. Also, avoid initials and abbreviations in headlines.

Too vague...

2011 MHS FFA plans  
to hold annual rodeo

- More specific...

Willie Nelson to appear  
at FFA rodeo Saturday

- Put all parts of a verb on the same line  
    avoid be verbs and linking verbs. Action. Shoot  
    for present tense or future tense.

(weak)

Spongebob will  
attend Mensa meeting  
purely as spectator

(better)

Spongebob to attend  
Mensa meeting  
purely as spectator

- Put all parts of a verb on the same line  
Strive for present/future tense, action verbs

(weak)

Nichols will  
not appear  
in court

(better)

Nichols avoids  
district court  
appearance

- No articles. Use a comma instead of “and”

**Heat wave blisters California, Texas**

- No clichés.

Swimmers dive into season

Golfers swing into action

Exchange students say ‘Hasta la vista’

Math Club multiplies

Football team tackles opposition

Drama Club acts up

Military recruiters say, ‘I Want You’

- Do not repeat key words or phrases from the main headline into the secondary headline

# Pocket lasers banned

## Authorities ban laser pointers

Just in case you didn't catch it, the repetition is the word "laser" and "ban"

# **Pocket lasers banned**

## **Principal cites injuries, class disruptions**

This headline provides twice as much information in the same amount of space! Yippee!

- Avoid "headline-ese" either in the form of simplified spellings or odd synonyms.

Board to meet  
Tuesday nite

Vball team destroys  
Southside in finals

Senior play  
to continue  
thru Easter

- Avoid initials or abbreviations, unless the initials are instantly recognizable. From the UT-Austin's Daily Texan:

**ACLU considers  
lawsuit for SFA's YCT**

- Avoid passive verbs in headlines.

Internet fraud is  
cause of worry  
for administrators

Better:

Internet fraud  
concerns  
administrators

- It is permissible to use implied passive verbs.

Mosquitos (are) biting into summer fun

Federal grant (is) renewed

- Put modifiers and words modified on the same line

Fire guts Fred Astaire  
Dance Studio, 2 injured

- Put all parts of a verb on the same line

(weak)

Big surprise: Nader will  
run for president again

(better)

Big surprise: Nader to run  
for U.S. president again

- Do not end a line with a preposition

Baseball team ready for  
playoff game, coach says

- Do not end a line with a preposition

**No love lost between  
Longhorns, Sooners**

- When separating two sentences in a headline, do so with a semi-colon.

Bardwell named Educator of the Year;  
experts call it sign of plunging standards

- The main headline should never be dependent on a kicker or other secondary headline.

(incorrect)

If elected in November, Obama  
Says he will get U.S. out of Iraq

(correct)

Getting out  
Obama promises to end Iraq war

- Alliteration in headlines should be used sparingly and in appropriate situations.

Acceptable:

# New Planetary Puzzlers

A distant, oversize world causes cosmic confusion

Take ‘meowt’  
to the cat show  
Annual festival of felines begins today

- Unacceptable:

**Cheney's chest chink**  
Vice president's thumper goes thud

- The headline should reflect the mood of the story.

**Band itching for practice  
as soon as mosquitos killed**

- Be careful of word use and misinterpretation.

## Bears capture playoff birth

Bush, Kerry  
butt heads

Panda mating fails;  
veterinarian takes over

Be sure to eat  
right before surgery

Kicking baby  
considered  
to be healthy

Crowds rushing to see  
Pope trample 6 to death

Police Say Man Hid  
Crack in Buttocks

## A few more rules ...

- Avoid contractions
- Do not end a headline with a period
- Avoid names unless they are easily recognizable
- Always use single quotes in headlines

# Let's look at a story:

Write: 1-line main headline counting 14-20 and a 2-line secondary headline with each line counting 19-25

When sophomore Dominic Brown was seven years old, he built a three-foot high bike ramp at the bottom of his steep driveway. The ramp lasted one jump before his mother dismantled it.

But that one jump was all Dominic needed to get his adrenaline rushing.

"I love to take risks and I love to do stunts on my bikes," he said. "It drives my mother crazy."

On April 7, Dominic will participate in the Texas Extreme Biking Competition in Bandera. He will compete against 75 other teens from across the state in three different challenges.

"This is my first time to compete at this level so I don't expect to win, but I am hoping to place in the top 10," Dominic said.

Dominic said he is unsure whether his mother will attend the competition.

"My mother hates these competitions," he said. "In my last competition, I took a pretty hard fall, and she rushed to the field. It was a little embarrassing."

Despite the dangers of his sport, Dominic said he's never broken a bone or had stitches from his biking stunts. "I guess I am pretty lucky," he said. "My buddy Derek broke his collarbone and left arm last month."

## **Risky business**      14

Sophomore to compete      20  
in extreme biking contest      25

# Let's look at a story:

**Write: 1-line main headline counting 12-18 and a 2-line secondary headline with each line counting 14-21**

Like many high school teens, Shanda Hall fell in love during her sophomore year.

But it wasn't a boy that caught her affection.

Shanda fell deeply in love with the *Twilight series of books*.

"I've read all of the books three times already," she said. "I can't get enough of them."

To honor her love, Shanda started the Twilight Club so students could get together to discuss the books and movies and plan events. The club meets during lunch on Wednesday in Room 203.

"When I first proposed this club, my friends thought I was a little crazy," Hall said. "But now, three months later, we have 25 members."

Shanda said as more students read the books and see the movie, she expects her club to grow even larger.

"Almost everyone who reads the book or sees the movie loves the series," Shanda said.

The next large event for the club is a Vampire Camp Out in April.

"We all plan to read our favorite passages by the fire," she said. "It's not like we believe in vampires, but we believe in the words and messages of the books."

Junior Christine Razor said she joined the group about a month ago.

"Basically, we are a book club/movie club," she said. "It's just that we only discuss one particular series of books and movies."

## **Twilight Zone 13**

Book club focuses on vampire series	17
	17