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
• 30 minutes (5 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.

Two types of stories:

- Straight news stories – usually with a 1, 2 or 3 deck headline
- Feature stories – usually with a main headline (creative), with a secondary headline
The special education teachers are encouraging students to wear blue next Tuesday, World Autism Day, to show support for students with autism.

“This will be the first time the school will observe the day,” special education teacher Rayna Rodriguez said. “It would mean a lot to our students to see a sea of blue on Tuesday.”

The special education department also will hand out blue ribbons for students and staff on Tuesday morning.

“We want our students with autism to know they are supported, not just by us, but by the entire school,” Rodriguez said.

Senior Jenni Blackwell said she plans to dress in blue from head to toe.

“My little brother has autism,” she said. “This is a great idea to bring awareness and support. My mom even bought me blue hairspray.”
The special education teachers are encouraging students to wear blue next Tuesday, World Autism Day, to show support for students with autism.

Special education teacher encourage the students to wear blue for World Autism Day, next Tuesday – 44

- Each line counting 18-24
- Don’t split infinitives.
- Eliminate articles
- Try to summarize and eliminate unnecessary words
Teachers ask students - 21
to wear blue for autism - 23
The Feature Story

Junior Elijah Ramos is a self-described introvert who is about to have to give a speech to more than 1,000 people.

“I would rather write than speak,” he said.

That’s what got him into this situation in the first place.

Elijah won the Peace Project’s national essay contest last month, and next week he will fly to Washington, D.C. to present his essay to lawmakers and policymakers.

“To say I am nervous is a mild understatement,” he said. “I am terrified.”

Elijah wrote his essay in the fall and was notified in March that he won and would be expected to speak at the award ceremony.

“I was so excited I won until they told me I had to speak,” he said. “I tried to get out of it, but the director convinced me that my paper would have a bigger impact if I presented it.”
What are some key words we could use in the main headline?
Saying his peace - 16
Junior to present essay - 23
to lawmakers in D.C. - 20
Kinds of Head(line)s
Dr. Seuss, man of rhyme and reason, dies at 87
Halloween scares up snow across much of Panhandle
Pianist keeps city’s singers in good tune
A waffle lot of love
New club obsesses over breakfast pastry
Meat and greet
Barbecue expects crowd
for freshman orientation
Main/secondary headline

It’s about thyme

Garden club grows herbs, plans to sell for fundraiser
• 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
• Try to put subject and verb on the same line. Keep adjectives and nouns together. Keep infinitives together.

District offers free vaccinations to limit absences

* NOTICE
- “free” and “vaccinations” – same line
- “District” and “offers” – same line
- “to limit” not split between two lines
• Try to put subject and verb on the same line. Keep adjectives and nouns together. Keep infinitives together.

Not good

Fire guts Fred Astaire
Dance Studio, 2 injured
• Don’t pad headlines with school initials or dates. Also, avoid initials and abbreviations in headlines.

Too vague...

2019 MHS FFA helps with annual WCC event
More specific...

FFA provides animals for culture club event
• Avoid be verbs and linking verbs. Action. Shoot for present tense or future tense.

(weak)
Seniors will prank Friday pep rally, class president says

(better)
Seniors to prank Friday pep rally, class president said
• **No articles.**

Junior makes the science finals in D.C.

Junior makes science finals in D.C.
• 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.

Bball team destroys West in finals

Principal to dance at Friday nite game

Senior play to continue thru Easter
• Avoid initials or abbreviations, unless the initials are instantly recognizable.

UIL students attend SAC at UT-RGV
• Avoid passive verbs in headlines.

Obstacle course was run in record time by senior

Better:
Senior sets record on obstacle course
• Do not end a line with a preposition. Avoid splitting prepositional phrases.

Baseball team ready for playoff game, coach says
• When separating two sentences in a headline, do so with a semi-colon.

Seniors fill principal’s office with frogs; juniors leave ducks in counselors’ area
• Try to avoid semicolons. The headline should be a single sentence, not a collection of sentences.

Hurricane strikes;
school swamped;
pep rally cancelled

Better:
After hurricane,
school cancels
Friday pep rally
The main headline should never be dependent on a kicker or other secondary headline.

(incorrect)
Raccoons stealing
Jump drives, hiding them in closets

(correct)
Bandits busted
Raccoons hoard
‘stolen’ jump drives
• 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
• The headline should reflect the mood of the story.

Superman to die, so steel yourself
• Be careful of word use and misinterpretation.

Bears capture playoff birth
Now for some fun ...
Forecasters call for weather on Monday
Amphibious pitcher makes debut
State population to double by 2040, babies to blame
Panda mating fails; veterinarian takes over

Mississippi’s literacy program shows improvement

Breathing oxygen linked to staying alive

Federal Agents Raid Gun Shop, Find Weapons
Be sure to eat right before surgery

Students Cook & Serve Grandparents
Homicide Victims Rarely Talk to Police

Plane too close to ground, crash probe told

Mayor to homeless: Go home

If strike isn't settled quickly, it may last a while

Blind Woman Gets New Kidney from Dad She Hasn't Seen in Years

Autos Killing 110 a Day--Let's Resolve to Do Better
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 12-18 and a 1-line secondary headline counting 26-32

Students and staff at the Friday night spring athletics bonfire got more than they expected. As the band started to play the school fight song, two naked males streaked through the crowd wearing only rubber masks.

“The guys ran right past me,” senior Bella Strong said. “I couldn’t stop laughing.”

Not everyone found the humor in the incident. Principal Kayla Leon is offering a $500 reward for information on the identity of the two males.

“I don’t think they were our students,” Leon said. “Regardless, they should face consequences for indecent exposure. There were lots of young children there. It was completely inappropriate.”

The two males wore presidents’ masks. One was Donald Trump, and one was Bill Clinton.

“I thought it was hilarious,” senior Ben Stevens said. “I know Ms. Leon is not happy about it, but it wasn’t that big of a deal.”
Bare sighting - 13
Leon offers reward for streakers - 32
Let’s look at a story:

Write: 1-line main headline counting 12-18 and a 1-line secondary headline counting 26-32

Senior Mike Carmago’s prom-posral got him more than just a yes. He got a black eye, a concussion and a trip to the hospital.

“It didn’t go exactly as I planned,” Mike said.

That might be a little understated.

Dressed up as a zombie holding a poster saying, “Even during the zombie apocalypse, I chews you for prom,” Mike planned to surprise his girlfriend, junior Becca Aguilera, at her front door. Unfortunately, Becca didn’t recognize him under his makeup and costume and didn’t see the sign.

“My mom does theatrical makeup as a hobby, so she did my face,” he said. “It was so real.”

Maybe a little too real for Becca. She thought he was a real zombie and punched him in face, which sent him flying backwards into the porch swing.

“I was scared to death,” she said. “Mike knows I am terrified of zombies.”
The Knocking Dead - 17
Prom-posal results in black eye 31