

You are a staff reporter for the Leaguetown Press.

Journalism Contest Manual

From the following information, write a news story as you would for your high school newspaper.

You have 45 minutes to finish.

Good luck.

News Writing

District 2 Meet • 2010



You are a reporter for the League-town Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a news story as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as direct or indirect quotes. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have 45 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put number on your paper.

Leaguetown High School, located in South Texas, has 3,600 students enrolled in grades 9-12. This summer the cafeteria will receive a much-needed renovation. The cafeteria was built in 1968. Other than two overflows, no changes have been made to it since. In order to accommodate over 100 students, the school has four lunch lines and begins serving food at 11 a.m. The organization to renovate the cafeteria comes from a bond proposal that passed last month. The district allotted \$3.9 million for the new cafeteria. Principal Shonda Tillman asked for input from the Student Council. The organization then sent four recommendations: circle tables, a coffee bar, a cafeteria large enough to seat at least half of the school and serve the public about the coffee bar recommendations and serve the fourth to the school board for approval. The board will hear comments from the public about the coffee bar recommendations and serve the fourth to the school board for approval. The board will hear comments from the public about the coffee bar recommendations and serve the fourth to the school board for approval. The board will hear comments from the public about the coffee bar recommendations and serve the fourth to the school board for approval.

SHONDA TILLMAN

The Student Council members and I were not even given a chance to drink coffee. The coffee was so hot that it burned our lips. I was so embarrassed that I had to leave the room. I was so embarrassed that I had to leave the room. I was so embarrassed that I had to leave the room.

Feature Writing

District 1 Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a feature story as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as direct or indirect quotes. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have 45 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put number on your paper.

Leaguetown High School, located in West Texas, has an enrollment of 1,300 students in grades 9-12. In January, during the winter break, the school held a 30-day silent auction. The school raised over \$100,000 for the school's new library. The school raised over \$100,000 for the school's new library. The school raised over \$100,000 for the school's new library. The school raised over \$100,000 for the school's new library.

CHRISTIE WOOD

Jan. 3, 2011 was the best day of my life. That's when the dinner finally came out. My name will remain the same for the next five years, but I will never forget the day I was named. The dinner was so good that I had to eat it all. The dinner was so good that I had to eat it all. The dinner was so good that I had to eat it all.

Headline Writing

District 2 Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a headline as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as direct or indirect quotes. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have 45 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put number on your paper.

Story 1 — Write a headline with each line starting with "Leaguetown High School..."

Story 2

Write a headline with each line starting with "The school board..."

Story 3

Write a headline with each line starting with "The school board..."

Editorial Writing

District 2 Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an editorial as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as direct or indirect quotes. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have 45 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put number on your paper.

Leaguetown High School has 1,300 students enrolled in grades 9-12. The school board is considering a new policy regarding the school's new library. The school board is considering a new policy regarding the school's new library. The school board is considering a new policy regarding the school's new library.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE MORGANS

The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years. The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years. The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years.

THOSE OPPOSING THE MORGANS

The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years. The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years. The Morgan family has been a part of the school's history for many years.

Journalism Contest Manual

University Interscholastic League
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Seventh Edition
First Edition: 1981

Original content written by Bobby Hawthorne

Revised by Randy Vonderheid and Jeanne Acton

The UIL Journalism Contests

The purpose of the journalism contest is to save American democracy and Western civilization as we know it.

Lofty aspirations, wouldn't you say? We're kind of kidding and kind of serious. All humor aside, we feel it is critically important the high school student maintain an interest in and understanding of the written word. In this mass media barrage, young people need to develop an ability to collect, decipher, edit, synthesize and prioritize information, and then to articulate themselves on paper in a legible, logical and succinct manner.

Many educators argue that writing is the key to learning. In the book "Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools" compiled by the National Writing Project, the authors conclude that "writing is the single most important skill for students' academic and professional success. Yet in the last 20 years, it has received little attention in our nation's schools, and national assessments show that just one in four American students is able to write proficiently."

The book goes on to point out that an effective writing assignment does more than ask students to report what they have read or experienced. It engages students in such processes as problem solving, reflecting, analyzing and imagining so that they can think critically about what they have read or experienced.

James Howard, writing in *Education Week*, stated, "Writing is an essential means of learning, and the best reason for writing in school is to learn. But unless the schools recognize and exploit the relationship between writing and learning, literacy in our society will not rise much above the functional level and learning in school will continue to amount to nothing more than the tentative storage of data, most of it unrelated and much of it trivial."

Science fiction writer Jeffrey A. Carver wrote, "Practice, practice, practice writing. Writing is a craft that requires both talent and acquired skills. You learn by doing, by making mistakes and then seeing where you went wrong."

In 2010, an ACT study found that only one-third to one-half of the nation's 11th graders are proficient in the content and skills that the common-core standards specify as necessary in English/language arts for access to good jobs or success in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses.

In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported in the "Nation's Writing Report Card" that 60 percent of seniors assessed scored sufficient or higher on the NAEP writing assessment. That means 40 percent of our graduating seniors cannot write prose that successfully informs, persuades or entertains. It's a marked improvement over the past reports, but it's not good enough. Too many of our young students are leaving high school unprepared and unskilled.

The UIL journalism contests stress writing and thinking skills. In the news, editorial and feature writing contests, students are required to process raw information into interesting, persuasive and descriptive articles. The process involves judging data for its news value, compiling information in a logical order, and utilizing the English language to best describe, relate or argue the gist of a given situation.

The rules governing the UIL journalism contests are contained in the *UIL Constitution and Contest Rules*. Supplementary information is provided in the Academic Coordinator's Manual.

Suffice it to say, this manual is not designed to replace a standard journalism textbook but rather to place the UIL spring meet journalism contests within the context of the overall scholastic journalism program and to familiarize students and teachers alike with the basic format and nuances of the contests.

PREPARING FOR THE CONTESTS

The best training is participation in a quality student publications program. Scholastic journalism should not consist of repetitious practice of the UIL journalism contests or other superficial fact-sheet exer-



cises. Instead, the benefits of the UIL contests are best derived when combined with active involvement in a student newspaper, magazine or yearbook laboratory program.

Students enrolled in beginning or advanced journalism and who write or edit for a publication that covers substantial, timely and relevant issues receive far superior training than students who drill by rote the UIL contest practice materials.

Furthermore, quality publications serve the school and community, testifying to the educational commitment of the administration, faculty and community.

With that established, let us turn our attention to preparation for the UIL contests. Every successful adviser has a different system. Most agree, however, that familiarity with the contest format is critically important.

"I use UIL prompts to teach basic writing in my Journalism I classes," said Laura Smith, publications adviser at Canyon HS. "I grade those papers just like I'm judging a contest. The students will begin to improve their skills and often favor one style over another. Even if a student never competes in UIL, that student has gained excellent basic journalism training that will help him or her succeed on a publication staff or even write a better persuasive essay on a college entrance exam."

Bradley Froebel, the publications adviser at Klein Collins HS, said his students understand that they must practice to do well in the contests.

"My UIL competitors love competing," Froebel said. "They take the time to come in on a weekly basis before or after school to complete practice prompts from previous years. During the first practice, I discuss with the students different formulas and ways to attack the different contests. They also read numerous sample stories, and for the headline competition my students go online and read over examples of headlines from different news media sites."

Brenda Schulte, the journalism coach from Nazareth HS, has her students practice every week in a setting that is similar to actual competitions.

"Give your students feedback on every story," she said. "I know it is time-consuming and you probably do not get paid for it, but the emotional rewards are better than cash for your students and for you."

Carol Cox from Archer City HS prepares students in similar ways. She likes to give her students multiple experiences from reviewing the contest manual to attending Student Activities Conferences to competing in invitational meets. She emphasizes "writing, writing, writing."

While Cox asks a lot from her students, she ensures that the practice time is enjoyable. "We also have after-school practice sessions, where I bribe students to attend by baking cookies and brownies for them to eat while practicing," she said.

Lindale HS journalism teacher Mikyela Tedder's recipe for success has always been based around creating a team for the UIL contests. And it's worked. Since UIL starting giving the team award in 2003, Lindale has won six team awards.

Tedder said she starts her journalism students out by learning UIL writing in Journalism I, teaching the basics of writing in journalistic style and reinforcing it with plenty of AP style quizzes.

"After their first year of journalism, I look at the students who are on my publication staffs, choose my best writers and take

them to as many practice meets as possible," Tedder said.

WHO TO TAKE TO MEETS?

Of course, there is always the question: "Who should I take to the practice meets?" Again, there are no cut-and-dried answers.

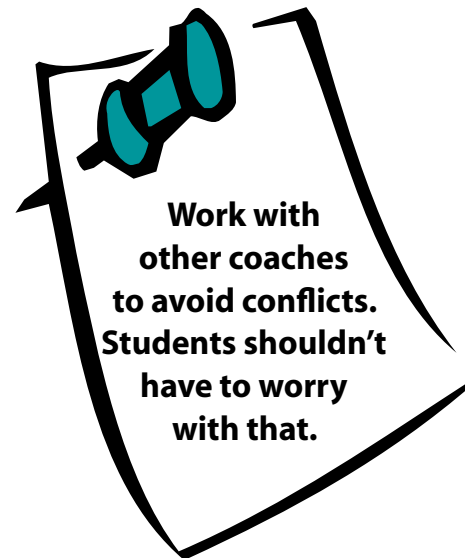
Schulte said her students turn in one story a week. "I rank them 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.," she said. "Before district in March, I pick my top three writers in each journalism event based on their point total."

Smith said her students write their papers using their student ID numbers rather than their names.

"When I finish marking papers, I rank them," she said. "Eventually, several students will rise to the top. Sometimes a student makes a surprising jump in ability."

Before the district meet, Smith said she enters as many students as she can in each invitational meet.

"If one of my students enters an invitational meet, they become part of our 'team,'" she said. "They may not make the district team, but I want them to know



Advice to new advisers, coaches

From Bradley Froebel and Laura Smith

Klein Collins HS and Canyon HS

- If a new adviser wants to achieve success in UIL, he/she needs to attend as many practice meets as possible and offer to judge. You can learn so much from sitting next to some great teachers while grading. They have a wealth of information that is often not contained in this manual or any other instruction packet.

- Let your students see how much you enjoy the entire UIL process. “My students know that I will go anywhere in the state with these kids who give up an entire Saturday to travel, sit all day in an uncomfortable

cafeteria and write for several hours about a town/school they’ve never seen but some place they’d all like to visit,” Froebel said.

- Teach the basics.
- Know the UIL manuals inside and out.
- Teach students to use AP Style and to look up the answers to their questions.

- Your best writers will frequently be kids who are bright, thinking, creative individuals. Don’t get caught up thinking you have to have the “smartest” kid in the class. You want the student who can THINK and WRITE. Also, work ethic and the ability to utilize constructive criticism frequently trumps talent.

that their invitational experience was valued and that they are a part of our team, regardless of the level of competition. I use results from the invitational meets, past years’ results and several class paper rankings to determine who actually makes the team.”

Seniority is not a factor for Smith and her students. “Sometimes a freshman comes in and writes better than an upperclassman,” she said. “If that freshman is the best, he or she deserves the spot. That method also keeps upperclassmen from becoming complacent.”

Schulte, who teaches at a 1A school, relies on other teachers to help her find great students.

“The junior high English teacher lets me know which students are logical thinkers (news, headlines, editorial) and which are creative (feature),” she said. “I recruit them, and my wonderful principal is kind enough to try to get them in one of my journalism classes.”

Schulte’s advice to teachers looking for success is “to recruit students who have a talent for writing and who are willing to make a commitment.”

BENEFITS OF THE CONTESTS

UIL contests aim to teach students important critical thinking skills.

“Many people think it’s all about the writing; the contests are more than that,” Smith said. “The contests teach a student to evaluate information, eliminate unneeded information, put together a concise



and interesting paper, and do all that in a limited amount of time. That skill set improves a student’s performance in other classes, on college entrance exams, in college and in the work force.”

The contests also give students confidence for life after high school, Schulte said.

“And, I think most important, they are a reflection of real-life situations,” she said. “I always tell my writers, ‘You are ready. You are the best. Now, go give your best effort, and after that what happens is up to

someone else.”

This is an interesting point. The adviser must remember and emphasize that the student is writing for a judge—not the student reader. While the judge should be reminded of the differences between the scholastic press and professional media, contestants should angle their entries toward the more rigid, professional standards.

Though there are no guarantees in the journalism contests, sufficient practice can improve considerably your chances for success. And it doesn’t have to hurt.

You can have fun while teaching the material, and your students should have fun while practicing the material.

“My students have a few traditions they partake in on the day of the contest,” Froebel said. “First, we must listen to the UIL playlist as we get in the vehicle

and pull out of the school. This playlist evolves each year but always has a few standards that can never be removed. We also love to pass the time at the meet by playing games like UNO, Farkle and Spite and Malice. And of course it wouldn't be a journalism trip without plenty of food or finding the best restaurants. Very little is done to study on the day of the meet because they practice all year long."

Creating those traditions will make the whole UIL contest process more fun for both students and advisers. It's great to win at UIL, but it's better to enjoy the journey.

Chances are, coaches and students are going to spend a lot of time together preparing for and participating in the four journalism contests. Enjoy each other and enjoy the experience.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT WINNING

In short, there is no one path to success. If advisers work with newspaper and yearbook staffers, they will know soon enough which students are talented and motivated writers and editors. Odds are, they'll be the ones making the trip to district in the spring.

Practice is critically important. Proficiency comes with familiarity. The UIL has available practice material. Inquire about local and area practice meets, and attend them. The better acquainted students are with the contest materials, the more likely they are to succeed. Practice, skill and a little luck will take your students far.

THE DAY OF THE CONTEST

Schulte said she tries to get her students "to focus, relax as much as possible" so they can write a great story like they do every week.

Froebel said he tries to alleviate pressure and stress with a last-minute pep talk.

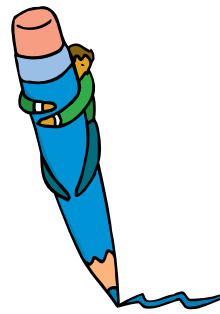
"Then I send them in the room by letting them know how proud I am of them and how lucky I am to be their teacher no matter the outcome," he said.

On contest day, Cox does a quick review with each of her students. "We do this right before their contest so it's one of the last things they'll hear before writing," she said. "My kids also have to eat some of their 'good luck' candy."

The lucky candy has become a tradition for Archer City students.

"I buy each of my students a bar or bag of their favorite candy to eat before contest," she said. "In ad-

The experts say...



- ✓ Attend Student Activity Conferences —coach and students together.
- ✓ Read, read and re-read the Journalism Contest Manual and actual newspaper articles.
- ✓ Encourage students to be club reporters and send news and features to local newspapers for publication if the school doesn't have any publications.
- ✓ Create writing assignments as part of class work.
- ✓ When meeting with the student, take a prompt from an old state meet and note the similarities of the five award-winning entries.
- ✓ Find time to work with journalism students as a group. Practice writing leads, using quotes, etc.
- ✓ Attend UIL practice meets. Learn from the judges' critiques and always study the winning papers for ideas on improvement.
- ✓ As coach, make a file of tips, practice sheets and examples of winning papers for each student wanting to enter journalism.
- ✓ Have fun with journalism. Encourage your students to laugh about dumb mistakes, reward your winners and build on your successes.
- ✓ Build more than just strong writers. Build a team. Encourage your students to eat together, play together and practice together.

dition to the energy burst, they think the candy brings them good luck since we've been doing this for several years and have had some success."

OUR SUGGESTION

Be calm. Find out when and where the contest will be held and then, if time allows, take a little walk. Relax. Think about something else. Grab a light bite to eat (high protein, low carbohydrates). But don't act as if this is the last hour before being hauled to the gallows. If you've done your homework, all will turn out fine.

Same goes for the adviser.

Remind the student that participation is strictly voluntary and that winning or losing is no great matter. Of course, you want the student to do well, but applying undue pressure is no way to ensure it.

If the contest is to begin at 1 p.m., be there by 12:45 p.m. Or earlier. Too many students and advisers try to slip in at the last second, and more than a few have been disqualified for arriving late. When you enter the room, quietly take a seat. The contest director will distribute the material. Read over it. Try to grasp the most important items. Scratch out ridiculous and other unnecessary information. We don't want the contest sheets, so mark on them to your heart's desire.

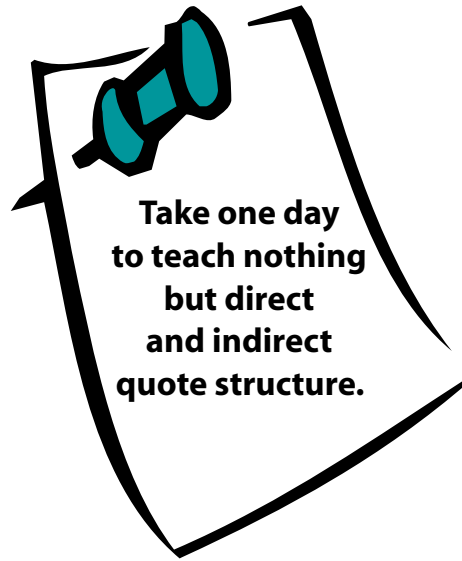
Remember, you have 45 minutes in the editorial, headline and news contests and 60 minutes in feature. You probably have more time than you need.

It would be disastrous to start writing as soon as you're handed the contest fact sheet only to discover vital information at the end of the prompt. You would have wasted the first 10 or 20 minutes allotted, and the chances of re-writing the entire piece in the time remaining are slim.

Think first. Write second.

In the headline writing contest, you're presented with a slightly unique problem: Six short stories for which to write a headline. Rather than reading all six stories at once, read one and write the headline. Then move to story two, etc. If a headline gives you considerable problems, skip it and move on.

Finally, you may use a dictionary and/or a thesaurus. Textbooks, personal notes or other material are not allowed during the contest.



COMPUTER OPTION

Students may use laptop computers at district, regional and state competition in the news, feature and editorial contests. Students who opt to compose on the computer must print and submit entries within the time limitation. In addition, they accept the risk of computer and/or printer failure.

So if the printer melts down or the computer crashes, it's back to square one.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

Participating in UIL journalism, as well as any other UIL academic competition, is a way for students to be a part of their school. Studies upon studies have shown students do better in school if they have different outlets to display their strengths and work on their weaknesses, and journalism almost always ranks at the top of extra-curricular activities that help students in their future.

Several studies in the past 20 years have linked newspaper reading, journalistic study and other media use with widely accepted educational objectives found in the language arts curricula.

Jack Dvorak of Indiana University twice concluded through his research that journalism students have better success in the AP (Advanced Placement) English Language and Composition exam.

Specifically, his study analyzed students who had taken an intensive journalistic writing course as preparation for the AP exam and compared their performance with those who prepared for the same test by just taking the AP English composition or a similar class.

In another study, the ACT (American College Testing) organization compared students who had completed one year of college and who had been on the staff of a high school yearbook or newspaper with those who had not participated with their student publications. In 10 of 12 statistical academic comparisons, journalism students earned significantly higher scores than their non-publications counterparts.

The evidence is there.
Journalism matters.

News Writing

State Meet • 2011

UIL

You are a reporter for the League-town Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a news story as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **45 minutes**. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 850 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Due to state and federal budget shortfalls, the district lost \$4 million in funding for the 2011-12 school year. Because of this financial crisis, on April 22 Principal Foster Reide was forced to lay off five teachers at the high school — two English teachers, one science teacher, one social studies teacher and one Spanish teacher. This loss represents a 10 percent reduction in faculty for the school. Reide said he released the teachers who had the least amount of service to the district.

With the loss of the teachers, head counselor Bob Hayes said he will have to recreate the master schedule. All students will have to complete new choice sheets May 13. Because of the cuts, Hayes said several classes will not be offered on this course list, such as electives in the core areas like creative writing. Only Spanish I and II will be offered, and only juniors and seniors will be allowed to take those classes.

The Parent Teacher Association and the Student Council oppose the elimination of Spanish III and IV from the schedule, and both organizations are circulating petitions to show support for the classes.

■ FOSTER REIDE, principal

"Handing out those pink slips was one of the worst days of my life. It was devastating to see our teachers' faces when I told them they were cut, but I had no choice. Superintendent [Maria] Chavez cut everything she could before we finally cut teachers. This district is now operating on bare bones. The funding issue will affect how we deliver education in Leaguetown.

"I understand that the parents and students are upset about cutting upper-level Spanish classes, but we, again, had no choice. We must offer Spanish I and II for students to get into good colleges, but we can't afford to offer more. With only one Spanish teacher, we are going to have to fill those classes to the brink to fit our students. I imagine her average class size will be 30 to 35 students. Mr. [Bob] Hayes and I talked about stacking her classes, putting Spanish III and IV in a Spanish II class, but that is unfair to Ms. [Celeste] Santos. It will be hard enough teaching 35 students one curriculum. It would be a nightmare for us to add students who need an entirely different curriculum.

"I know the petitions are circulating, but there is nothing I can do. My hands are tied. If students and parents want to affect change, I suggest they talk to their lawmakers and ask for more money for our district. Only then will I be able to add anything back into the schedule."

■ President of the PTA

"Our parents have signed our petition, and it's basically meaningless. I am going to change our children's education. We are not upset with Mr. Reide and Dr. Chavez, but we need to hear us. We believe upper-level Spanish classes are vital for our students' success."

■ JULIE TAMEZ, English teacher who was laid off

"I don't know what I am going to do. There are no teaching jobs open anywhere. I've taught at Leaguetown for eight years. It's my home. It's where my children go to school, but my husband and I cannot afford our home if I am not working. Mr. Reide is a compassionate man, and I know he would have done anything to save our jobs. That is what makes this more heartbreaking. I was working for one of the best principals in Texas."

■ TESSA WILLIAMS, junior and vice president of Student Council

"Our petition isn't going to change anything for next year. I know Mr. Reide can't change much, but we are not stopping until every student signs it. I plan to send our petition and a letter explaining it to every state representative and senator for our area. They need to know how they are hurting our school, our students. Students didn't understand why the state budget crisis was a big deal. They know now, and they are angry. Maybe, just maybe, if the right senator or representative sees this petition, he or she can find a little more money for Leaguetown."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Currently, the average class size at the high school is 27. Classes that will no longer be offered include Spanish III and IV, creative writing, Advanced Placement world history, marine biology and animal science.

I am afraid our average class size may be as high as 34. It is extremely frustrating. Mr. Reide has agonized over this for many jobs as possible. When the numbers came out, the but Reide begged for a smaller number. They shouldn't be angry at Mr. Reide or Dr. Chavez. From the state, but unfortunately, they are the ones

Spanish III and IV cuts, but the alternatives were

take Spanish II until my junior year. I am going if he could make an exception for me, and he said Spanish before graduating. I didn't think the school budget to hurt my education and my transcript for college. I signed the

NewsWriting

The news peg should drive your story in this contest

Most professional journalists and a good many journalism advisers have used the inverted pyramid as their teething ring. While some believe this form of writing to be too rigid for today's newspapers—especially those of the student press—we must accept the fact that it is the formula by which the news contest will be judged.

It is not that the UIL is attempting to churn out wave after wave of young reporters. The advantage of the news writing contest and the inverted pyramid is its strict demands surrounding lead selection and development. Half the battle of writing any news story is finding the most important fact or facts.

So, what will the contest judges look for first? Good news judgment in the lead selection. After that, they will want facts presented in descending order of importance, smooth paragraph transition, full identification of all sources, effective use of direct and indirect quotes, and omission of unnecessary information, without the reporter's editorial comments.

On the information sheet, you will be given a time frame in which all action occurred. For example: Something happened on Tuesday that prompts something else to hap-

pen the next Monday. Contestants are told they are writing for the issue of the newspaper to be distributed on Friday.

This is a crucial point. You must angle the story to provide the freshest, most timely information available.

In many circumstances, the contestant will be given far more information than needed. A useless quote will be tossed in to confuse the issue. Or one outstanding quote will be flanked by inconsequential gab. Students must have a discerning eye. They must recognize those elements essential to the construction of the story, and trash the rest.

The writing should be concise and precise. The sentences and paragraphs should be short and to-the-point.

Direct quotes and paraphrasing should be used effectively. All news questions must be answered—perhaps not in the lead, but somewhere in the story. If the reader completes the story and asks, "Yeah, but what about so and so," then the reporter has failed to do a complete job.

While reporters have argued recently the virtues of "hard news" versus "soft news," the requirement for tight, powerful writing has remained unchallenged and is likely to stay so.

Let's look at this district prompt. Remember as you are reading the prompt that you must find the newest information — the news peg.:

■ **Leaguetown High School**, located in the Panhandle, has 1,600 students enrolled in grades 9-12. On March 4 while two P.E. classes were running the bleachers at the stadium, a 10-foot section of the bleachers collapsed, and 20 students fell approximately 20 feet onto the pile of metal. Two students were transported to the hospital with broken bones and six students went to the hospital for stitches. The other students were treated on the scene and had minor scrapes and bruises. Superintendent Maya Williams closed the stadium for a full investigation. League Construction installed the new bleachers this past summer.

Graduation is scheduled to be held in the stadium, but the superintendent said the district might need to find an alternative site. The athletic department has already moved the district track meet to Southside High School.

So far this year, four bleachers installed by League Construction have collapsed in Texas. This is the first incident where students have sustained injuries. League Construction management refused to comment on the accidents, but school officials said the company is cooperating with investigators. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, March 29.

■ **MAYA WILLIAMS, superintendent**

"We were very lucky that only two students were seriously injured. This accident could have been much worse. Coach Stone Hilltop reacted quickly and pulled every student from the metal rubble within minutes.

"Our district had no idea that three other schools had similar problems. I guess the media didn't report on the other situations because no students were injured. If I had been aware of a problem with our bleachers, I would have closed the entire stadium until we could certify that everything was safe.

"I am not sure where we will move graduation, but with only two months to complete the investigation and then reconstruct the bleachers, I don't believe the stadium will be an option."

■ **MARC COVINGTON, athletic director**

"We will have to shift the district track meet schedule slightly to use Southside High School facilities, but it shouldn't cause any problems. I believe we will start the meet 30 minutes earlier. I am going to meet with the district athletic directors next week to firm everything up.

"We certainly are frustrated with our situation. I do not understand why we were not contacted after the three other incidents occurred."

■ **HAYES HUNTER, sophomore**

"I have a hairline fracture in my right tibia, and I broke six bones in my left foot. I will be in a wheelchair for at least four weeks. I guess things could have been worse, but I am really sore. We had no idea that the bleachers weren't stable.

"Our P.E. class was competing with Coach Stayhorn's class on an endurance challenge. About half of the class had already stopped, but I had plenty of energy left to keep jogging the bleachers.

"My parents found out about the other three incidents, and now they are considering hiring an attorney. They believe the company was negligent in notifying the school of possible problems."

■ **JEROME OCUZZI, assistant principal**

"Graduation is one of my duties, so as soon as this incident occurred, I began looking for alternative sites. Our best alternative is to use the gymnasium at Midwestern State University. It seats 1,500 people. We usually have about 1,200 to 1,500 people at graduation.

"The acoustics would not be as good, but we would be able to fit everyone. Another possibility is the theater at the university, but it seats only 700 people. We would have to limit admission, and we do not want to do that."

■ **JULIE MALABAR, senior class president**

"Our class wants an outdoor graduation. It is a Leaguetown tradition to graduate outside, rain or shine, but we understand that our options are limited. I don't know any senior who wants to limit admission to graduation so I think the bigger site is better."

■ **STONE HILLTOP, physical education teacher and baseball coach**

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw those 20 students fall. They were at the top of the bleachers. There were no warning signs — no creaking or swaying of the bleachers. One minute the bleachers were there. The next they were gone.

"The other students and I pulled the students out as quickly as possible. We had no idea that there were any problems with the bleachers. I certainly would not have

had my students running the bleachers if I had known other schools had similar incidents.”

■ **CECIL SAMSON**, athletic director for Northside ISD

“We had a 4-foot section cave in six weeks ago when our janitors were cleaning the area. Luckily, the janitors moved off the section before it fell.

“Our preliminary investigation shows possible design flaws in the construction of the bleachers. The company

has yet to assume full responsibility, but our lawyers are working on that.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

League Construction installed 34 new sets of bleachers this summer across the state. The 10-year-old business has had no formal complaints according to the Better Business Bureau.

The district track meet is scheduled for April 8-10.

Dissecting the prompt —

COMMENTS: Lead with the most timely information. In this case, it’s the future event. Then set-up the extenuating circumstances.

In the wake of the bleacher collapse at the stadium, the location for the district track meet has moved to Southside High School, and the district is looking for an alternate graduation site.

Let’s dissect the lead:

why

In the wake of the bleacher collapse at the stadium,

what

the location for the district track meet has moved to South-

where

who

side High School, and the district is looking for an alternate

what

graduation site.

Notice there are two “whats” in the lead. The “when” is implied as ongoing currently and the “how” will be answered later in the story.

After you’ve found the lead, the next part of the story should be a quote. Don’t lead with the attribution. Lead with the first sentence of the quote, then identify the source, then provide the verb, then finish the quote if you are using more than one sentence of direct quote. For example:

“I am not sure where we will move graduation, but with only two months to complete the investigation and then reconstruct the bleachers, I don’t believe the stadium will be an option,” Superintendent Maya Williams said.

Note that titles preceding names should be capitalized. Class rank designations such as “senior” and “junior” are not titles and should not be capitalized.

Keep it third person. Avoid “you” and “our.” Don’t write, “. . .at our very own Leaguetown High.”

Don’t editorialize. For example, do not write, “The company is to blame for the accident and should pay for the students’ medical bills.” You must attribute this information to a source, as is done in the following direct quote.

Better: “My parents found out about the other three incidents, and now they are considering hiring an attorney,” sophomore Hayes Hunter said. “They believe the company was negligent in notifying the school of possible problems.”

Use the verb “said” — not says, stated, feels or any other synonym for said. Don’t stack quotes on top of each other. You must work with the quotes, using the best information in the direct quotes and the rest in the indirect quotes. Polish the transitions, making them powerful and precise. Note the transition sentences in the sample story.

Every time you open a new direct quote, open a new paragraph. Every time you close a direct quote, open a new paragraph.

Put the story together using the transition/quote formula. Transitions should drive the story. Don’t repeat information from the transition to the direct quote.

The transition should provide a general statement. The direct quote should then elaborate on the transition. Note how the transitions drive the action of the story.

SAMPLE STORY

The Lead

In the wake of the bleacher collapse at the stadium, the location for the district track meet has moved to Southside High School, and the district is looking for an alternate graduation site.

Direct Quote

"I am not sure where we will move graduation, but with only two months to complete the investigation and then reconstruct the bleachers, I don't believe the stadium will be an option," Superintendent Maya Williams said.

1st transition

Assistant principal Jerome Ocuzzi, who is in charge of graduation, said the best alternative may be the gymnasium at Midwestern State University.

D/Q

"The acoustics would not be as good, but we would be able to fit everyone," he said.

Transition

Senior class president Julie Malabar said she hopes Ocuzzi finds an outdoor venue for graduation.

D/Q

"It is a Leaguetown tradition to graduate outside, rain or shine, but we understand that our options are limited," Malabar said.

Transition

The district track meet location change shouldn't cause any problems, athletic director Marc Covington said.

D/Q

"I believe we will start the meet 30 minutes earlier," Covington said. "I am going to meet with the district athletic directors next week to firm everything up."

And so on...

The bleachers, which were installed by League Construction, collapsed March 4 while two P.E. classes were running them.

"This accident could have been much worse," Williams said. "Coach Stone Hilltop reacted quickly and pulled every student from the metal rubble within minutes."

Hilltop said he saw no warning signs, such as swaying or creaking, before the collapse.

"One minute the bleachers were there. The next they were gone," Hilltop said. "We had no idea that there were any problems with the bleachers."

Same person in transition and direct quote to link paragraphs

After the collapse, two students were taken to the hospital with broken bones and six students went to the hospital for stitches. Sophomore Hayes Hunter fractured his tibia and broke six bones in his left foot in the collapse.

"My parents found out about the other three incidents, and now they are considering hiring an attorney," Hunter said. "They believe the company was negligent in notifying the school of possible problems."

Same person in transition and direct quote to link paragraphs

So far this year, three other sets of bleachers installed by League Construction have collapsed in Texas. League Construction management declined to comment, but school officials said the company is cooperating with investigators.

Note the connection to the quote to link paragraphs

"Our district had no idea that three other schools had similar problems," Williams said. "If I had known there was a problem with our bleachers, I would have closed the entire stadium until we could certify that everything was safe."

Northside ISD had a 4-foot section of bleachers installed by League Construction collapse six weeks ago. No one was hurt.

"Our preliminary investigation shows possible design flaws in the construction of the bleachers," said Cecil Samson, Northside ISD athletic director. "The company has yet to assume full responsibility, but our lawyers are working on that." 🍷

Note how the direct quotes are linked to the transition preceding them. The transition and direct quote are a package.

Again, you are working with a 45-minute time limit. Be as concise as possible. Notice how much of the information provided on the contest sheet for the bleacher story is omitted. Use only the information that hammers a point. Forget the rest.

By the way, did you find editorialization on the part of the reporter in the example? Probably not. The reporter may come to various conclusions from time to time. But nowhere do reporters state that they favor or oppose a situation in a news story.

Notice also that school administrators and others are identified fully. First and last names with titles are used. This, too, is a serious weakness among contestants.

What about titles? Should the reporter use Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. before a source's name? This is optional. In some schools, it would be blasphemy to refer to the principal on second reference as "Brown." At other schools, it's perfectly acceptable. You will not be penalized if you fail to use Mr. or Mrs. You will be if you're not consistent in your use.

Look closely at the lead. It does not have a quote in it. It does not even say "Leaguetown" in the lead. Two big no-nos. Most of the quotes in this prompt are not strong enough to stand as leads. So, the rule of thumb on quote leads is, "When in doubt, don't use them. And always doubt just a little."

As far as using "Leaguetown," you may find a reason to use the word, but remember this is YOUR school and there is no need to remind the reader you are talking about Leaguetown High School or Leaguetown ISD or even the Leaguetown School Board.

Let's move on with another prompt. Read the prompt completely through two times before starting your story. The first read will give you an idea of what is going on. In the second read, begin marking out information you know you don't want to use and underlining information you know is important. Prioritize the information. Don't feel obligated to use every bit and piece of data provided. We will always give you too much information to use.

■ Leaguetown High School has 600 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In January, Superintendent Dean Wisnesky proposed a new policy to allow employees to carry concealed handguns to protect themselves and students from possible school shootings, provided the employees follow certain requirements. Under the plan, the employees would



THE QUESTION LEAD

As a general rule, avoid question leads. They work only when the question is relevant to a large majority of your readers. For example: "Can Leaguetown solve its growing traffic problems? The City Council will meet this afternoon in an effort to answer this question..." While this isn't particularly good, it is acceptable because the question is relevant to the majority of your readers.

In most cases, the question in a question lead has little or no real meaning to the reader. It is merely a chatty way of introducing the subject to the reader. For example: "Have you ever walked on the moon? Well, Neal Armstrong has."

be required to possess a Texas license to carry a concealed weapon and receive district approval. They must also complete classes in crisis management and hostile situations. Superintendent Wisnesky said he proposed the policy because of recent school shootings and because the high school is 30 miles from the sheriff's office. Last year, a student at Southside High School, 45 miles east of Leaguetown, shot and killed his calculus teacher.

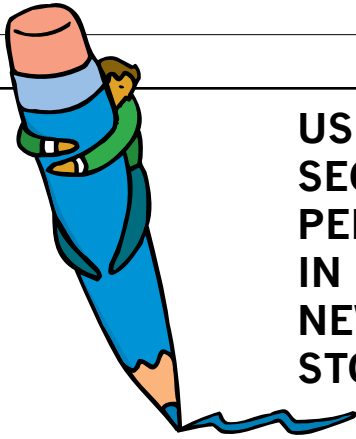
Texas law outlaws firearms on school campuses "unless pursuant to the written regulations or written authorization of the institution." Currently, only two school districts in Texas allow employees to carry handguns on campus. Both the Leaguetown parent group and local teachers' union support the new proposal.

The school board will vote on the proposal at its April 1 meeting. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, March 30.

■ DEAN WISNESKY, superintendent

"When I first started talking about this proposal, teachers thought I was crazy. They thought for sure that it would be illegal, but it's not. And now with what happened at Southside, the teachers are quite supportive.

"I know people say a shooting wouldn't happen here. We're too small. We're a tight-knit community.



USING SECOND PERSON IN YOUR NEWS STORIES

Like the question lead, using second person should be avoided. We hear stories from those who have judged district and regional meets in which entries have been dismissed outright simply because the contestant used a second person reference. In most cases, the disqualification was justified. Using second person includes the reporter in the story. A good journalist is a third-party observer.

This is probably the most difficult part of being a student journalist. Because the school itself is a family, the student reporter is part of that family and wants to be included in that family and its activities. It is important to understand just the opposite. The student journalist cannot be a part of the school or its activities when that person is acting as a journalist.

As mentioned earlier, most news writing judges are looking for the straightforward, third person inverted-pyramid style. Student journalists would do well to stick with it.

If student journalists choose to venture into the wilds of news-feature styles, they must make certain that they understand the risk they are taking.

But the reality is, it can happen anywhere. I don't want to call parents and tell them we couldn't protect their child.

"This proposal will deter students from bringing weapons on campus. Students will know that we are not just sitting ducks anymore. We will be trained and armed. That is going to make a kid think twice.

"The local community college offers a night course in crisis management and hostile situations. It's only \$50 for three nights. I attended back in October, and it's a great course taught by a former

FBI agent. He suggests particular ammunition that is designed to minimize the risk of ricochet. I think we could make that type of ammo mandatory."

■ LORI GULLIAM, English teacher

"I know I am in the minority, but I do not support this proposal. It is ludicrous. Allowing guns onto campus would not make this a safer campus. Teachers are not trained in firearms. A three-night course does not sufficiently train someone to use them. If the superintendent is so intent on having guns on this campus, then he should hire a full-time police officer. That is who should be protecting students, not vigilante teachers."

■ BOONE POWERS, government teacher

"You can bet I will be one of the teachers carrying a gun next year if this proposal passes. The superintendent is right on the money in his thinking. Our students won't even think about bringing a weapon to school if they know our teachers are trained and armed. Luke Colston, the teacher who was killed at Southside, was a good friend. We went to college together. Luke would still be here today if he would have had a gun. He was ex-military and a fine shot. But he had nothing to protect himself. Nothing."

■ LETTIE SALAZAR, president of the parent organization

"At first, I was on the fence about this proposal, but then I thought about that teacher at Southside. That incident could have been much worse. They were lucky that the student didn't open fire on the student body. I want to know that my children are safe when they are at school. If there is an emergency, it would take the sheriff's office at least 30 minutes to get the school. A lot of people could die in 30 minutes.

"People need to realize that the district is not allowing guns in school haphazardly. Employees will be licensed and trained."

■ PILAR SOLIS, sophomore

"Personally, I do not trust all of the employees at Leaguetown to carry guns on campus. If the superintendent is so paranoid that students are going to bring guns to school, then he should buy a metal detector. Guns do not belong on campus. If students can steal a test, then what stops them from stealing a gun? I definitely won't feel safer with my teachers packing guns."

■ **SONIA WEEKS, spokesperson for Texas Education Agency**

“Two school districts allow their employees to carry concealed weapons. We have had no incidents with the weapons at these campuses.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Junior class president Jonathan Dulles opposes the proposed policy. Dulles and more than 20 classmates said they will picket outside of the board meeting Wednesday and speak during citizen’s communication. “The answer to school violence is not more guns,” Dulles said. “The superintendent should focus on education and relationship-building. If everyone got along at the school, we would not have any worries. Bringing guns on campus is going to create an atmosphere of fear, not learning.”

Because we try to emulate high school publications in this contest, we must consider how often a school newspaper is published.

How many schools do you think publish a daily newspaper? Not many. Probably not any. Since schools publish their school newspaper infrequently — bi-weekly, tri-weekly or monthly — it is important to pay special attention to the time angle. If the reporter is covering an event, it is critically important the reporter take an angle that will guarantee the story is timely. Reporters can’t simply report that something happened a week or 10 days ago.

In the situation, the superintendent’s proposed a concealed gun policy which has drawn both support and fire. The school board will vote on the new policy on April 1. You are writing for the issue of your paper to be published and circulated March 30. It serves no purpose to lead with the fact that superintended proposed a concealed gun policy for staff or that a teacher was shot and killed last year at Southside. That is old news.

Look for the most timely angle. What is it here? The school board will vote on the proposal right after the paper is distributed, and students will protest the proposal at the board meeting.

The lead automatically becomes:

While the school board considers Superinten-

dent Dean Wisnesky’s proposal to allow employees to carry concealed handguns on campus, one student leader and several classmates say they will protest the measure at Wednesday’s meeting.

From there, you would want to outline your story:

1. Reason for the protest
2. Reason for the proposal
3. Outline proposal
4. Teacher/student opinion

While the sample story is not perfect, it does an excellent job of grasping the most important facts, capsuling them in the lead and then prioritizing information through to the conclusion of the article.

SAMPLE STORY:

While the school board considers Superintendent Dean Wisnesky’s proposal to allow employees to carry concealed handguns on campus, one student leader and several classmates say they will protest the measure at Wednesday’s meeting.

Junior class president Jonathan Dulles, who is organizing the protest, said he plans to picket outside and speak during the board meeting.

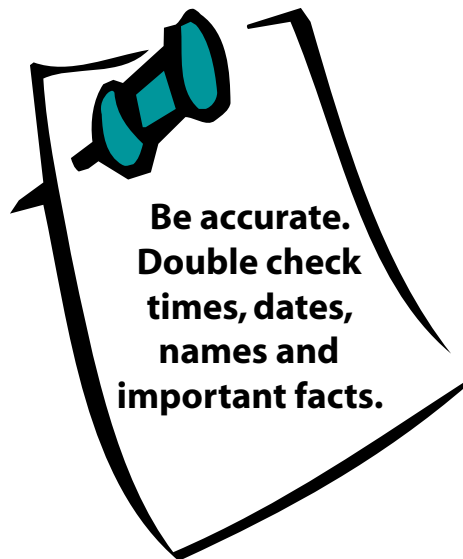
“The answer to school violence is not more guns,” he said. “Bringing guns on campus is going to create an atmosphere of fear, not learning.”

Superintendent Wisnesky said he proposed the policy to protect the school against possible shootings, such as the one last year at Southside High School where a student shot and killed his calculus teacher. He also noted that the high school is 30 miles from the sheriff’s office.

“I know people say a shooting wouldn’t happen here,” Wisnesky said. “We’re too small. We’re a tight-knit community. But the reality is, it can happen anywhere.”

Under the proposal, the district would approve employees to carry guns only after they have completed an approved firearms class. The employees would also need a Texas license to carry a concealed weapon.

“The local community college offers a night course in crisis management and hostile situations,” Wisnesky said. “I attended back in October, and it’s a



great course taught by a former FBI agent.”

Government teacher Boone Powers said he will carry a gun if the proposal passes.

“Our students won’t even think about bringing a weapon to school if they know our teachers are trained and armed,” said Powers, who added that Luke Colston, the teacher who was killed at Southside, was his friend.

“Luke would still be here today if he would have had a gun,” he said. “He was ex-military and a fine shot. But he had nothing to protect himself. Nothing.”

While the teachers’ union and parents’ organization support the proposal, not all students say arming teachers will make them feel safer.

“Guns do not belong on campus,” sophomore Pilar Solis said. “If students can steal a test, then what stops them from stealing a gun?”

English teacher Lori Gulliam said she also disagrees with the superintendent’s proposal.

“Allowing guns onto campus would not make this a safer campus,” she said. “Teachers are not trained in firearms. A three-night course does not sufficiently train someone to use them. If the superintendent is so set on having guns on this campus, then he should hire a full-time police officer.”

Texas law prohibits firearms on school campuses without written authorization of the institution or school. Only two school districts in Texas allow employees to carry handguns on campus. Texas Education Agency spokesperson Sonia Weeks said those districts have had no incidents with weapons on campus.

Superintendent Wisnesky insists that if his proposal passes, the campus would be safer.

“Students will know that we are not just sitting ducks anymore,” he said. “We will be trained and armed. That is going to make a kid think twice.”

Since this is a situation that has opposing viewpoints, it is important that the writer shows both sides within the story. It is also important that the student quotes are high in the story. Remember, this is a student newspaper.

Note how the writer used information within the direct quotes to create transitions.

The Direct Quote from the prompt:

“You can bet I will be one of the teachers carrying a gun next year if this proposal passes.”

The Transition the writer created from the quote: Government teacher Boone Powers said he will carrying a gun if the proposal passes.

A direct quote (expanding on the previous transition) should follow the transition. Powers is in the transition and he said the direct quote. That is how you make the story flow:

“Our students won’t even think about bringing a weapon to school if they know our teachers are trained and armed,” said Powers, who added that Luke Colston, the teacher who was killed at Southside, was his friend.

NEWS JUDGING CRITERIA



- Make sure you lead with the most timely information. Don’t lead with an old fact.
- Present your information in descending order of importance. Most important news first. Less important news from there.
- Make sure your information flows smoothly. Work on blending indirect and direct quotes so that the story reads logically and smoothly.
- People are identified fully and accurately.
- Use active sentences. Avoid passive verbs when possible. Write as concisely as possible. Say as much in as few words as you can.
- Omit all unnecessary information.
- Answer all news questions.
- Write in third person, past tense.
- Follow Associated Press style.
- Do not editorialize. Keep the news story completely objective.
- Secondary consideration given to:
 - Grammar
 - Spelling
 - Neatness

Parts of the prompt

Before we go further in discussing challenges and keys to successes in UIL news writing, it's a good idea to look at what makes up the news writing contest. Below and on the next pages you'll see the elements of a news writing prompt, what we include and what we expect you to take from the prompt and contest. Contestants should remember that this is a situation where the reporter is given the background information of a news story. The quotes are the same as a reporter would have gotten if that person had gone out to interview live. We sometimes include improper English and sentence fragments. People do not always use proper English and sometimes don't speak in complete sentences.

This is the background information and sets up the situation as it has occurred. The key in a UIL contest is to remember that you are a student at Leaguetown High School and these events have actually taken place, or will take place, at your school.


This is your lead. It tells what is going to happen in the near future — the specific information the student does not know. The students already know about the student who attempted to hang himself. The grapevine in the school has made that known.

You will always be given the day the newspaper is published and the day the action will take place.

Quotes give the reporter two things — one, information that can be used as a direct quote that will both make the story more credible and color the story more; and two, information that can be used in transitional phrases and sentences. This information can be used either as a direct quote or as an indirect quote in transitional paragraphs.

News Writing

Regional Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a **news story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **45 minutes**. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 1,350 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In December, a freshman student attempted to hang himself in the boys' locker room because he said he had been bullied for months. Coach Jayson Steede found the student before he had injured himself and talked the freshman into identifying the alleged bullies.

A week after this incident, the administration adopted a zero-tolerance policy for students who bully. The policy states that a student who bullies another student will be suspended for three days and must attend five one-on-one counseling sessions with a school counselor. For a second offense, the student must serve a six-week term at the alternative school.

Principal Shai Tsur said the zero-tolerance policy is a good start to ending bullying, but he also wants to create a better culture at the school, one where students do not allow another student to be a bully. Tsur said every student will take a 20-minute advisory class next year to focus on building a better school culture.

To ensure small numbers, Tsur said every teacher, administrator, librarian and counselor will have an advisory period. He also said he is considering separating the genders for the advisory period. To accommodate the advisory period, Tsur said his tentative plan shortens lunch by 10 minutes and starts school 10 minutes earlier.

Student Council president Elisabel Cordero said while the council supports the idea of the advisory period, it does not support the shortened lunch and earlier start time. Cordero and five Student Council officers will meet with Tsur on Thursday, April 28. Tsur said he is open for suggestions on finding the time for the advisory class.

You are writing for the issue of the *Press* to be distributed Monday, April 25.

■ SHAI TSUR, principal

"We were very fortunate that Coach Steede found the young man before he harmed himself. This incident opened our eyes and showed us that we must act before one of our students seriously hurts himself or herself. We will not tolerate bullying at our school, but we also have to create an environment that doesn't allow bullies to operate. We must change the culture of our school. I want this to be a school where our student body does not allow bullying to even begin. I want our students to be accountable to each other, instead of turning their heads and walking away.

"The advisory period will focus on communication and relationship-building skills. We already have some of the curriculum, and our counselors will create the rest during the summer. The classes will be small, about 15

After you read the principal's comments, you'll see that he gives a pretty good explanation of why he will create an advisory period. He also talks pretty extensively about the hanging incident.

■ SHAI TSUR, cont.

students per class so that students have the chance to get to know one another. The class will not be worksheet-driven but activity-driven. We want to foster a climate of trust and relationship-building. I want every student to feel as if the advisory class is a safe zone with an adult who takes the time to listen.

"I don't believe we have tolerated bullies in the past, but I want an official discipline policy for students who bully. We will not stand for it. If students choose to bully, they will face stiff consequences.

"I have met with the student who attempted suicide and his parents. They like the idea of the advisory period and applauded the new discipline policy. The student said he felt disconnected from every adult at this school. Hopefully, the advisory period can solve that problem.

"I am happy to meet with the Student Council officers about where to get the time for the advisory class. I promised teachers that I would not reduce class time, so we only have a few places to look. Regardless of where we will get the time for the advisory, it will happen. This class is not optional for next year. Some of our students feel disconnected and isolated. We cannot continue this culture."

■ ELISABEL CORDERO, junior and president of the Student Council

"Bullying has gotten out of hand at the school, and I think Principal Tsur is taking the right steps. His advisory period sounds like it will help students get to know each other better. If we are all friends, the bullying will stop.

"We don't agree with an earlier start time for school or losing 10 minutes from lunch. The officers are meeting this week to suggest an alternative. We could easily take a minute or two off of our eight-minute passing period. I think students would prefer adding time to the end of the school day rather than starting earlier."

■ REGINA YSELTA, freshman

"I personally haven't been bullied, but I have seen lots of seniors bullying freshmen boys. I even saw one group of seniors put a freshman in the trash can during lunch. The freshman was really embarrassed and had his mom come get him from school that day. I asked him if he told the principal, but the freshman said he didn't. He thought it would escalate the situation.

"The advisory class sounds pretty cool. It will benefit the freshmen the most. It seems like the freshmen boys are bullied more than anyone else."

■ OLGA CAMPS, science teacher

"Every faculty member I know buys into the advisory period idea. We are frustrated with the bullying as well. Mr. Tsur assured us that it would not be more work for us, and I believe him. It will be nice getting to know students on a deeper level. I don't have time for much relationship-building in Chemistry II."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Lunch is currently 50 minutes long, and school starts at 8 a.m.

It's good to use quotes from Elisabel because she is the president of the Student Council, and she will meet with the principal later in the week.

This student has witnessed bullying within the school and also would be a good person to quote.

There are times you will find the lead in the "additional information," but this time you are just given additional background for the story.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

REGIONAL • 2011

NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique. Give a second copy to the judge who will be writing the contest tips to use as a reference. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. Do not replace written comments from the judge.

1. Open with the most recent information. In this instance, Principal Tsur plans on changing the schedule to fit the advisory period.

In the hopes of fostering a better school culture, all students will take a 20-minute advisory class next year, Principal Shai Tsur said. To accommodate the class, Tsur plans to shave 10 minutes off of lunch and start school 10 minutes earlier. While the Student Council supports the advisory class, it opposes Tsur's proposed new schedule.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes high in the story. After a transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote, or at the end of the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution (said Tsur.) Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes together. Make sure transitions tell information to the reader and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Student Council President junior Elisabel Cordero said the council supports the advisory period but not the shortened lunch or earlier start time.

direct quote

"We could easily take a minute or two off of our eight-minute passing period," Cordero said. "I also think students would prefer adding time to the end of the school day rather than starting earlier."

transition

The advisory period was suggested by Tsur in response to the December suicide attempt in the boys' locker room by a student who had been bullied.

direct quote

"This incident opened our eyes and showed us that we must act before students seriously hurts himself or herself," Tsur said. "We will not tolerate bullying at our school, but we also have to create an environment that doesn't allow bullies to have to create an environment that doesn't allow bullies to operate. We must change the culture at our school."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "Shai Tsur, our principal" or "Some students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The advisory period without attributing that quote to someone, or "The school is overreacting..." These state personal opinion and cannot be made in a news story.

SAMPLE STORY

In the hopes of fostering a better school culture, all students will take a 20-minute advisory class next year, Principal Shai Tsur said. To accommodate the class, Tsur plans to shave 10 minutes off of lunch and start school 10 minutes earlier. While the Student Council supports the advisory class, it opposes Tsur's proposed new schedule.

Student Council officers will meet with Principal Shai Tsur on Thursday to discuss other options on how to add an advisory period into the schedule next year. Student Council President Elisabel Cordero said the council supports the advisory period but not the shortened lunch or earlier start time.

"We could easily take a minute or two off of our eight-minute passing period," Cordero, a junior, said. "I think students would prefer adding time to the end of the school day rather than starting earlier."

Tsur suggested the advisory period in response to the December suicide attempt in the boys' locker room by a student who said he had been bullied. "This incident opened our eyes and showed us that we must act before one of our students seriously hurts himself or herself," Tsur said. "We will not tolerate bullying at our school, but we also have to create an environment that doesn't allow bullies to operate. We must change the culture of our school."

Tsur said every teacher, administrator, librarian and counselor will have an advisory period to ensure small class sizes. "We want to foster a climate of trust and relationship-building," Tsur said. "I want every student to feel as if the advisory class is a safe zone with an adult who takes the time to listen."

In addition to the advisory period, the school has instituted a zero-tolerance policy for bullies that includes a three-day suspension and counseling sessions. A second offense mandates a six-week term at the alternative school.

"I have met with the student who attempted suicide and his parents," Tsur said. "They like the idea of the advisory period and applauded the new discipline policy. The student said he felt disconnected from every adult at this school. Hopefully, the advisory period can solve that problem."

Science teacher Olga Camps said every faculty member she knows supports an advisory period. "We are frustrated with the bullying as well," Camps said. "It will be nice getting to know students on a deeper level. I don't have time for much relationship-building in Chemistry II."

Freshman Regina Yselta said she hadn't been bullied but has seen seniors bullying freshmen boys. "The advisory class sounds pretty cool," Yselta said. "It will benefit the freshmen the most." "We are frustrated with the bullying as well," Camps said. "It will be nice getting to know students on a deeper level. I don't have time for much relationship-building in Chemistry II."

"We already have some of the curriculum, and our counselors will create the rest during the summer," he said. While Tsur said he is willing to listen to the Student Council officer's ideas on the schedule, he is unwilling to make the class optional. "Some of our students feel disconnected and isolated," he said. "We cannot continue this culture."

With all UIL prompts/contests, you will receive contest tips and a sample story when you get your entry back. Study those tips for information you should be looking for, and compare your story with the sample story to see if you found the same information and placed it in similar areas as the prompt writer.

The more leads you know, the better

Students who enter the contest with a working knowledge of one lead — the traditional summary lead — are at a great disadvantage. The most successful students know that they must match the facts to the lead. Occasionally, a summary lead works best. Other times, the best news lead might be a gerund or participial phrase lead that answers the news question “why?”

The following news offered a number of lead possibilities.

Teacher faces suspension for firing gun on campus

■ **SITUATION:** Leaguetown High School is located near Dallas. It is a four-year high school with approximately 1,500 students.

School district officials are considering disciplinary action against history teacher Bill Stevenson after he allowed a student to re-enact the assassination of President John F. Kennedy for a history project. Stevenson had assigned his classes a project on JFK as a part of a unit on the 1960s.

Junior Andrew Parsons told Stevenson that his father, police officer Fred Parsons, owned a rifle exactly like the one Lee Harvey Oswald was accused of using in the assassination, a 6.5mm Italian-made bolt-action rifle. Stevenson said he asked Andrew if he had his parent’s permission. Andrew said yes. But Andrew had smuggled the rifle out of the house without having asked his parents.

On Friday, April 9, Stevenson took Andrew and his class to the football practice field and set up the re-enactment. Andrew and three classmates climbed the coaches’ tower while Stevenson set up an army helmet about 100 yards away as a target. Andrew fired two shots from the rifle as quickly as he could while Stevenson timed him. Two witnesses who had heard the shots gave statements to police.

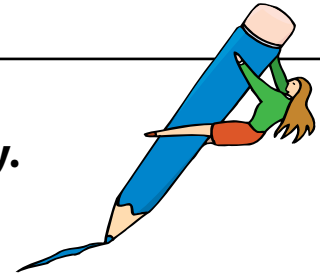
State law prohibits firearms at school. Although normally a student who brought a gun to school would be expelled, no disciplinary action against Parsons is planned. Punishments for Stevenson could range from an oral reprimand to firing. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed on Friday, April 16. ★

Organize your quote properly.

Quote—Subject
—Verb.

Don’t put “said so-and-so.” Noun first. Verb (said) second, as a general rule.

Work on transitions. Too many contestants simply pile one quote on top of another. Drill on the indirect quote bridge. You want your story to flow. And don’t repeat in the direct quote what you’ve introduced in the indirect quote paraphrase.



When did it happen?

- Friday, April 9 — Stevenson took Andrew and his class to the football practice field and set up the reenactment.
- Paper is to be distributed on Friday, April 16.
- School Board will meet Monday, April 19 to discuss Stevenson’s fate.

Organize your information

- Re-enact the event.
- Explain what happened and why it happened.
- Build the story around direct quotes. Don’t just pile quotes on top of each other. Make certain you have transition paragraphs and sentences.
- Provide the reaction to the assassination re-enactment.

Think it through

What are readers most likely to know by the time the paper comes out? What new information can you provide?

What is likely to happen now? How do you know? To whom do you attribute this information?

Now let’s look at a few possible leads. Keep in mind some of these are better than others. For example, it is rarely if ever recommended a news lead that answers “where” first should be used.

NEWS QUESTION LEADS

WHAT

THE FATE of history teacher Bill Stevenson, who allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment, will be decided Monday by the School Board.

Stevenson faces punishments ranging from a reprimand to loss of his job for his actions April 9 when he took a class onto the football practice field and instructed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

WHO

HISTORY TEACHER Bill Stevenson, who allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment, will go before the School Board Monday, where he faces punishments ranging from a reprimand to loss of his job for his actions April 9 when he took a class onto the football practice field and instructed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

WHY

BECAUSE HE took a class onto the football field and instructed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, history teacher Bill Stevenson faces punishments ranging from reprimand to loss of his job.

On Monday, Stevenson will go before the School Board, which will determine his fate.

HOW

BY ALLOWING a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, history teacher Bill Stevenson placed his career at Leaguetown at risk.

He will go before the School Board Monday to determine whether he will be allowed to continue teaching here.

WHEN (*Weak*)

ON MONDAY, the School Board will determine the fate of history teacher Bill Stevenson, who allowed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

WHEN (*Really weak*)

ON FRIDAY, April 9, history teacher Bill Stevenson allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment. Stevenson took a class onto the football field and instructed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

On Monday, Stevenson will go before the School Board...

WHERE (*Don't do this*)

AT THE SCHOOL BOARD meeting Monday, history teacher Bill Stevenson will learn whether his teaching career here has ended. Stevenson faces punishments ranging from reprimand to dismissal for allowing a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

WHERE (*Never, ever do this*)

AT LEAGUETOWN High School, history teacher Bill Stevenson allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment. Stevenson took a class onto the football practice field and instructed a student to fire shots from a rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

On Monday, Stevenson will go before the School Board, which will determine his fate.

These last three leads have another term — called “backing into” the story. The key to the story is that the school board is considering his fate as a teacher and why they are considering it. These three leads give background information that should appear after the future element.

GRAMMATICAL LEADS

NOUN CLAUSE

WHETHER HISTORY teacher Bill Stevenson will remain a member of the high school faculty will be decided by the School Board Monday.

TEMPORAL CLAUSE

WHEN THE School Board meets Monday, it will decide the fate of history teacher Bill Stevenson, who allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment.

PRESENT PARTICIPIAL PHRASE

MAINTAINING IT never “crossed my mind that I was doing something wrong,” history teacher Bill Stevenson will go before the School Board for allowing a student to discharge a rifle on school property as part of an assignment on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

PAST PARTICIPIAL PHRASE

UPSET THAT history teacher Bill Stevenson allowed a student to discharge a rifle on campus, the School Board will decide Monday whether the teacher will remain on the high school faculty.

GERUND PHRASE

ALLOWING A student to fire a rifle on campus has come back to haunt history teacher Bill Stevenson, who will go before the School Board Monday. The board may choose from punishments ranging from public reprimand to dismissal, although several board members said they did not believe Stevenson’s actions merited firing.

CONDITIONAL CLAUSE

UNLESS THE School Board decides to adopt a “get-tough” policy, history teacher Bill Stevenson will receive a mild punishment for allowing a student to fire a rifle on campus during school hours last week.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

(Good) **WITH HIS CAREER** hanging in the balance, history teacher Bill Stevenson, who allowed a student to fire a rifle on school property during school hours, will go before the School Board Monday.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

(Bad) **AT THE SCHOOL** board meeting Monday, history teacher Bill Stevenson will learn his punishment for allowing a student to fire a rifle on campus during school hours.

INFINITIVE PHRASE

TO REENACT the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Andrew Parsons discharged a rifle on campus during school hours —an act that has prompted the School Board to determine whether his teacher, Bill Stevenson, will be disciplined and if so, how.



BIG DUMB MISTAKES

We shouldn’t have to mention these. We really shouldn’t. But now and then, we encounter students who make mistakes this big and bigger. This usually sends judges into screaming fits of frustration. Read ‘em and weep. But don’t imitate ‘em.

REHASH HISTORY

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas in 1963. According to Oliver Stone, the assassination was a conspiracy among the Mafia, the CIA, the Pentagon and big business interests who benefitted from America’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

EDITORIALIZE

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas in 1963, and the U.S. has gone to hell in a handbasket since.

IF YOU THINK history teacher Bill Stevenson was stupid for letting one of his students fire a rifle on campus, get a load of this: the School Board may fire him for it even though he’s the best dang teacher here. If two or three people had been killed, well, maybe. But given that it was just a class project and no one was hurt, we think the School Board needs to turn its attention to really important issues like improving the cafeteria food.

CHAT WITH THE READER

IF YOU THINK you heard popping noises recently, you probably did. A student was firing a rifle on campus, and now he and his teacher are in big trouble. In fact, the teacher, Bill Stevenson, could lose his job!

MISS THE POINT

LEAGUETOWN High School is located near Dallas. It is a four-year high school with roughly 1,500 students. I am a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the official newspaper of the school. I have 45 minutes to complete this contest. I am not going to put my number on my paper.

USE THESE QUOTES TO BUILD THE REMAINDER OF YOUR STORY

■ BILL STEVENSON

"It never crossed my mind that I was doing something wrong. Andrew told me that he had permission to bring the rifle, so I saw nothing wrong with trying an experiment. I first made certain that everything was safe, and obviously no one was hurt. If I had expected a problem, I would have sought administrative approval.

"I have always tried to make history come alive for my students, and to make it as real to them as I can. Perhaps I got a little carried away. Hindsight is always 20/20, but at the time I thought it was a great idea. Chemistry classes use dangerous and semi-dangerous chemicals for classroom labs all the time, and the metal shop kids have access to all kinds of hazards. All that is required for them is proper supervision. I didn't think what we were doing was that much different."

■ ANDREW PARSONS

"I guess I never really expected to fire the rifle when I brought it to school, but Mr. Stevenson said it would be all right just to try an experiment. My dad taught me to shoot when I was 10, so I knew what I was doing. I thought it would be a great way to get an A on my project. I didn't have any trouble firing the rifle, but I did have to change the direction of my second shot because I thought I saw someone moving kind of close to the target.

"Mr. Stevenson is my favorite teacher. His classes have always been fun and exciting, and I hope he doesn't lose his job because of this. All he was trying to do was teach us something."

■ FRED PARSONS

"I was upset that Andrew took the gun without asking our permission, but I was even more upset that Mr. Stevenson actually allowed him to fire it. Andrew should have known better, but Mr. Stevenson certainly should have known better. There is just no excuse for being so irresponsible. People are accidentally killed with guns because they don't know how to use them or are trying some silly stunt. Andrew does have a lot of experience with guns, but I never let him shoot without my supervision. If Mr. Stevenson had discussed his plan with us, I might have

arranged for a shooting demonstration."

■ PRINCIPAL JERRY LINCOLN

"Mr. Stevenson is a good teacher, but this was a very serious breach of judgment. You can't imagine what went through my mind when someone told me that there was shooting on the football field. Firearms are not allowed at school under any circumstances, and especially not to be used. Mr. Stevenson should have known that. Even though this is a very serious offense, Mr. Stevenson does have an exemplary record in his favor. What happens to him is really out of my hands, but I will recommend leniency to the School Board. Mr. Stevenson uses unique and powerful teaching methods which make his classes highly enjoyable for students. I would hate to lose him because of one mistake, albeit a serious one."

■ PHILLIP DONALDSON, police officer

"We took two statements from witnesses who heard the shots, and all the students who were present corroborated the events as I reported them. School officials declined to press charges although they could have. Personally, I think that what he did was highly dangerous. Any gun is dangerous, but old guns are especially unpredictable. I don't know if what happened is worth firing someone over, but some action needs to be taken to ensure that this doesn't happen again."

■ PHYLLIS PRESCOTT, assistant superintendent

District policy and state law on weapons is very clear; they are not allowed on school campuses for any reason unless in the possession of an officer of the law. We elected to handle this ourselves rather than press charges because Mr. Stevenson obviously intended no wrongdoing. The question the School Board has to decide is whether his intent precludes the violation of policy. Certainly Mr. Stevenson's offense was serious, but no harm was done and he has a flawless teaching record.

■ JAMES GUINN, School Board member

"I can't speak for the other members of the board, but from what I know about this case, I do not think that termination of employment is in order. Mr. Stevenson is obviously not a gun-wielding maniac. He just got a little carried away in his teaching. We need more teachers with that much zeal for their work. A reprimand or a brief probation would cer-

tainly be enough to clarify our policy and ensure that such incidents do not occur in the future.”

■ **ALLISON MICHELSON, junior**

“We all thought that Andrew’s project was a neat idea, but I will confess to feeling a bit uneasy about it. I’m glad no one was hurt, but someone could have been. I hope Mr. Stevenson doesn’t get fired, though. He’s such a great teacher. One mistake shouldn’t be enough to ruin someone’s life.”

■ **EXTRA INFORMATION**

The School Board will meet Monday night (April 19) to discuss Stevenson’s fate. It will hear testimony from witnesses and from Officer Donaldson. Andrew received an A on his project although his parents have grounded him indefinitely. Most of the other projects were student-produced books and videos. ★

COMMENTS

The following lead takes a dangerous step of anticipating what the School Board will do. The writer interprets the comments of the board members and administrators in coming to this conclusion. While it works here, it’s not recommended students take this approach.

SCHOOL BOARD members are expected to show leniency Monday when they decide the fate of a teacher who allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment.

History teacher Bill Stevenson could face punishments ranging from a reprimand to loss of his job for his actions April 9 when he took a class onto the football practice field and instructed one of his students to fire shots from his rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of JFK. ☹

- Know how to construct a direct quote. Lead with the first sentence of the quote, then identify the source, then provide the verb, then finish the quote. For example: “Mr. Stevenson is not a gun-wielding maniac,” School Board member James Guinn said. “He just got a little carried away in his teaching. We need more teachers with that much zeal for their work.”

- Note that the story is third person. There’s no mention of “our” school.

- Note also that the writer has used the verb “said” exclusively. If she had wished to use “believes” then



LIST...

FOR NEWS LEADS

- ✓ Does the first word or phrase tell the most important idea in the story?
- ✓ If the WHO is important, is it included with the full name and a title? Have you double-checked to make certain you spelled all names correctly?
- ✓ Is the WHAT or WHAT HAPPENED up-to-date, emphasizing the current or future angle?
- ✓ Are the WHEN and WHERE answered in the lead but subordinated to more important information? Rarely will “where” or “when” be the lead news question.
- ✓ Are the HOW and WHY given a prominent place in the lead, if appropriate?
- ✓ If the lead is more than 30 words, has it been broken into two sentences or paragraphs for easier reading?
- ✓ Does the lead catch the spirit of the story while summarizing it?
- ✓ Is the lead free from spelling, punctuation and grammar errors?
- ✓ Did you leave out the word “Leaguetown” unless absolutely necessary?
- ✓ Is the lead accurate? Are the facts correct?

she must write, (for example) "Guinn said he believes Stevenson should not be fired."

It is important to attribute intent (believes, intends, etc.).

- Finally, note how the story is organized in a series of direct quotes, transition sentences and transition paragraphs.

SCHOOL BOARD members are expected to show leniency Monday when they decide the fate of a teacher who allowed one of his students to fire a rifle on school property as part of a class assignment.

History teacher Bill Stevenson could face punishments ranging from a reprimand to loss of his job for his actions April 9 when he took a class onto the football practice field and instructed one of his students to fire shots from his rifle as part of a demonstration on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The student, Andrew Parsons, used his father's rifle, identical to the gun Lee Harvey Oswald was accused of using in the assassination. Parsons fired two shots at a target. No one was hurt, but district and state rules prohibit firearms on school property.

"Mr. Stevenson is a good teacher, but this was a serious breach of judgment," Principal Jerry Lincoln said. "You can't imagine what went through my mind when someone told me that there was shooting on the football field. Firearms are not allowed at school under any circumstances, and especially not to be used. Mr. Stevenson should have known that."

However, Lincoln said, Stevenson's good teaching record and effective classroom techniques overshadow his misconduct.

"Mr. Stevenson uses unique and powerful teaching methods which make his classes highly enjoyable for students," he said. "I would hate to lose him because of one mistake, albeit a serious one. I will recommend leniency to the School Board."

School Board member James Guinn also favors light punishment for Stevenson.

"Mr. Stevenson is obviously not a gun-wielding maniac," Guinn said. "He just got a little carried away in his teaching. We need more teachers with that much zeal for their work. A reprimand or brief probation would certainly be enough to clarify our policy and insure that such incidents do not occur in the future."

Stevenson assured administrators that he meant no harm.

"It never crossed my mind that I was doing something wrong," Stevenson said. "I have always tried to make history come alive for my students and to



LIST...

FOR NEWS STORIES

- ✓ Does the story tell the most important facts in order of importance?
- ✓ Is the story factual and does it credit the sources?
- ✓ Are paragraphs short, averaging 25-35 words?
- ✓ Is the story free from editorial comment and first person pronouns (unless within a direct quote)?
- ✓ Is the first word of each paragraph different and calculated to keep the reader interested? Is sentence structure varied?
- ✓ Could the last paragraph or two be cut without damaging the meaning?
- ✓ Do the vocabulary and style catch the spirit of the story?

make it as real to them as I can. Perhaps I got a little carried away. Hindsight is always 20/20, but at the time I thought it was a great idea. If I had expected a problem, I would have sought administrative approval."

The board will take Stevenson's intentions into consideration Monday night, Assistant Superintendent Phyllis Prescott said.

"Mr. Stevenson obviously intended no wrongdoing," Prescott said. "The question the School Board has to decide is whether his intent precludes the violation of policy."

Stevenson's students, in the meantime, are hoping the board will be lenient on their teacher.

"His classes have always been fun and exciting," Parsons said. "I hope he doesn't lose his job because of this. All he was trying to do was teach us something." 🍀

Okay, let's go through a few old prompts and see how to handle them.

SCHOOL BOARD WEIGHS BAN ON SMOKING AT STADIUM

■ **SITUATION:** Leaguetown High School is located in Midland. It is a four-year high school with roughly 1,500 students. Leaguetown football games draw a large turnout from the community in general as well as from students. A proposal to ban cigarette and cigar smoking in all areas of the football stadium for all events will be heard by the School Board Tuesday, March 24. Those who want to light up at any point in a game must exit the stadium to do so. Violators of the rule will be removed from the stadium by security guards. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed on Friday, March 20. The ban was proposed by John Tipton, school board member.

■ **MARILYN SMITHSON, School Board president**

"I am also a smoker, so it was with some reluctance that I approved this policy. However, I realize how much smoke bothers non-smokers and prevents them from enjoying the game. We want everyone to have the same right to enjoy the game, and I can certainly do without cigarettes for a couple of hours so that can happen. Other people's smoke blowing in my face even bothers me, so I can certainly understand how it bothers a non-smoker even more. It is important for everyone to realize that we do not want to punish smokers. We just want the most positive and agreeable atmosphere possible for all the fans."

■ **ROBERT HURST, School Board member**

"I think it sends a mixed message to tell high school students not to smoke but to allow people to smoke at high school activities. If smoking is bad for you, and it is, then I think the board should enact this proposal in order to protect the health and welfare of its citizens."

■ **ALVIN THOMPSON, local businessman**

"I'm glad the board has done something. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to take a bucket of water to the game to douse all the cigarettes around me. Smoking is really an offensive habit, and those of us who do not smoke should not have to breathe smoke-filled air. I'm looking forward to a season of smoke-free games."

■ **JOHN TIPTON, School Board member**

"I proposed the ban because I knew that people were fed up with smoking. Fewer and fewer people are smoking in our society, and a small group shouldn't be allowed to spoil the game for everyone. Smokers can surely make it for two hours without a cigarette. If they can't, they can go to the parking lot during halftime. Fairness to non-smokers demands this ban."

■ **JANET ERICSON, senior and two-year smoker**

"I just turned 18, but it really doesn't matter because there's nowhere that I can smoke legally anyway. I just don't understand what the big deal is about. A little smoke doesn't hurt anyone; I'm the one who's actually inhaling it. It looks like bigotry against smokers is the newest type of discrimination."

■ **ALEXIS GUINN, junior**

"What a joke. It's just totally ridiculous to tell smokers that they can't sit down and enjoy the game and a cigarette. If there's too much smoke in the stands, then the non-smokers should know how to get up and walk out. What are you going to ban next, perfume? Are they going to tell me I can't wear it in public because it offends someone?"

■ **FRED TILLERY, fan of Leaguetown football**

"There goes another freedom down the drain. There are a lot of smokers in this town, and I hope they will all boycott the games if this ban is enacted. I'm tired of being treated like a second-class citizen.

I figure if I'm paying my money to go to an event, I should have that privilege. If people have the right to drink cokes and eat popcorn in the stadium, they ought to have the right to smoke as well. It's not as if the stadium is an enclosed space. The smoke goes away in a hurry, so I don't see why it should bother anybody."

■ **EXTRA INFORMATION**

A survey taken by the school board indicated that approximately 20 percent of the community smokes. According to the proposal, smoking would be banned in the stands, walkways, restrooms and all other areas inside the stadium. Penalty for smoking would be removal from school grounds.

Again, let's open with the future angle.

THE SCHOOL BOARD will hear a proposal Tuesday that would ban cigar and cigarette smoking in all areas of the football stadium for all events. Introduced by board member John Tipton, the plan requires smokers to leave the stadium in order to smoke or risk being removed by security guards.

"I proposed the ban because I knew that people were fed up with smoking," Tipton said. "Fewer and fewer people are smoking in our society, and a small group shouldn't be allowed to spoil the game for everyone."

According to a recent survey by the school board, 20 percent of adults in the community smoke. If the plan passes, smoking would be banned in the stands, walkways, restrooms and all other areas inside the stadium. 🐼

Don't start the quotes with the attribution. Lead with the first sentence of the quote, then identify the source, then provide the verb, then finish the quote.

"It is important for everyone to realize that we do not want to punish smokers," School Board President Marilyn Smithson said. "We just want the most positive and agreeable atmosphere possible for all fans."

Don't stack quotes on top of each other. You must work with the quotes, using the best information in the direct quotes and the rest in the indirect quotes. Polish the transitions, making them powerful and precise.

Don't editorialize. Don't write, "Whatever the verdict, someone will be upset. So come out and support your point of view on this hazy issue."

Work on transitions. Now, let's put the story together in the transition/quote formula. For example:

SAMPLE STORY

THE SCHOOL BOARD will hear a proposal Tuesday that would ban cigar and cigarette smoking in all areas of the football stadium for all events. Introduced by board member John Tipton, the plan requires smokers to leave the stadium in order to smoke or risk being removed by security guards.

"I proposed the ban because I knew that people were fed up with smoking," Tipton said. "Fewer and fewer people are smoking in our society, and a small group shouldn't be allowed to spoil the game for everyone."

According to a recent survey by the School Board, 20 percent of adults in the community smoke. If the plan passes, smoking would be banned in the stands, walkways, restrooms and all other areas inside the stadium.

School Board President Marilyn Smithson said she reluctantly supports the plan.

"It is important for everyone to realize that we do not want to punish smokers," Smithson said. "We just want the most positive and agreeable atmosphere possible for all fans."

School Board member Robert Hurst said allowing smoking at the stadium sends mixed messages to students.

"If smoking is bad for you, and it is, then I think the board should enact this proposal in order to protect the health and welfare of its citizens," he said.

But students argue that the message they are getting is that it is okay to discriminate against smokers.

"It looks like bigotry against smokers is the newest type of discrimination," senior Janet Ericson said. Junior Alexis Guinn added, "What are they going to ban next? Perfume?"

But the plan has also drawn local support as well.

"I'm glad the board finally did something," Alvin Thompson, a local businessman, said. "I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to take a bucket of water to the game to souse all the cigarettes around me. Smoking is really an offensive habit, and those of us who do not smoke should not have to breathe smoke-filled air. I'm really looking forward to a season of smoke-free games."

Smoker Fred Tillery said Thompson and other non-smokers could be sitting alone in the stands if the plan is approved.

"There are a lot of smokers in this town, and I hope they will all boycott the games if this ban is enacted," Tillery said.

Tillery said he was tired of being treated like a second-class citizen just because he smokes.

"I figure if I'm paying my money to go to an event, I should have that privilege," he said. "If people have the right to drink cokes and eat popcorn in the stadium, they ought to have the right to smoke as well. It's not as if the stadium is an enclosed space. The smoke goes away in a hurry, so I don't see why it should bother anybody." 🐼

BOY MAY BE REMOVED FROM HOMECOMING COURT

■ SITUATION:

Homecoming will be Saturday, Sept. 20. One of the traditional activities is the selection of the Homecoming Queen. Selection of the queen is a two-stage process. First, names of the nominees are submitted for the ballot. Students then vote for the person they would like to see on the Homecoming Court. The top three vote-getters in each of the sophomore, junior and senior classes are named to the Homecoming Court. This election was held on Thursday, Sept. 11.

The second highest vote-getter among the senior nominees was Bill Scanlon, a 6-foot, 4-inch, 230-pound linebacker. His name was submitted by seniors Ted Merkel and Dan Colburn.

In reviewing the results of the election, Assistant Principal George Barlow vetoed Scanlon's victory. Merkel and Colburn appealed to the School Board, which will rule Tuesday, Sept. 16, on whether to uphold Barlow's decision or to place Scanlon on the Homecoming Court. As a member of the Homecoming Court, Scanlon will be in contention for Homecoming Queen. A final ballot containing the names of all Homecoming Court members will be submitted to students and alumni on Friday, Sept. 19. The top vote-getter will be queen.

You are writing for the issue of the Leaguetown Press to be published and distributed to students on Monday, Sept. 15 — the Monday prior to the Tuesday night Board meeting.

■ BILL SCANLON

"This isn't my idea of a joke. I didn't know my name was on the nomination ballot, and it's kind of embarrassing. Regardless of what the School Board decides, I plan to withdraw as a nominee and as a member of the Homecoming Court. Besides, I doubt Coach would let me come out of the locker room at half-time to pick up my roses should I win."

■ TED MERKEL, senior

"A few of us got together and decided to really foul up this particular tradition. There have always been guys nominated for the Homecoming Court, but there has never been an organized effort to get them elected. Well, we just got organized.

"I don't think Mr. Barlow was right in vetoing the vote. There is no specific rule in the books against a boy being elected. I think his decision was totally arbitrary."

■ DAN COLBURN, senior

"Ditto, dude. Like, I totally agree with Ted. Everything he just said, I'm in complete agreement with."

■ GEORGE BARLOW, assistant principal

"I removed Bill's name because I assumed his nomination was a prank. I had no way of knowing who nominated him, so I couldn't very well go out and find out whether it was a joke. I think this points to a real need for some clarification of the selection process. I think this is something the Student Congress might like to examine.

"Sure, I feel a bit uncomfortable about removing a name from contention. It is my understanding that Bill does not wish to be a nominee and will withdraw from contention if the School Board votes to overturn my decision. I do think the Homecoming Queen should be a girl. Perhaps we need to select a Homecoming King as well."

■ EXTRA INFORMATION

If Scanlon's name is removed, then Linda Holloway—the girl who placed fourth in the voting—will become a member of the Homecoming Court as well as a nominee for Homecoming Queen.

The School Board will meet at 7:30 p.m. in the Administration Building. President of the Board is L.D.

McKinney, a dentist. His daughter Lisa was the 1998 Leaguetown Homecoming Queen. ★

COMMENTS

In this situation, the real news is that (1) the School Board will choose whether to uphold George Barlow's decision to remove Scanlon's name from contention for Homecoming Queen, (2) that Scanlon said he plans to withdraw from contention anyway, and (3) that Barlow called for a review of the Homecoming selection process.

Be especially aware of dates.

Consider the old news: That the Homecoming election was held on Sept. 11, with Scanlon's name being submitted by seniors Dan Colburn and Ted Merkel. All the information regarding this is secondary. There is no reason to describe the selection process.

It is old news that Barlow removed Scanlon's name from contention.

The latest angle — the newest news — deals with events yet to occur. Concentrate on these news elements. Always look for future cues and then build your story around them. Two more tips:

1. Many students were impressed that Scanlon was a 6-foot, 4-inch, 230-pound linebacker. It really isn't that big of a deal, and it certainly does not make sense to identify him on first reference as such. Why single out a person because he's big and plays football? The issue at hand is whether boys — football players or not — should be homecoming queens.

This is not to say that you wouldn't include this information in the story. You would. It might be coupled with Scanlon's quote, "Besides, I doubt Coach would let me come out of the locker room at half-time to pick up my roses should I win."

2. Watch spellings. Several contestants misspelled Scanlon's name. Mistakes like this are devastating.

Consider the following story:

REGARDLESS whether the School Board upholds Assistant Principal George Barlow's decision tomorrow to remove Bill Scanlon as a Homecoming Queen nominee, the senior football player said he has no intention of staying in the race.

"This isn't my idea of a joke," Scanlon, a 6-4, 230-pound linebacker said. "I did not know my name was on the nomination ballot, and it's kind of embarrassing."

His name was submitted by seniors Ted Merkel

Don't panic!

Advisers drill into students' heads to search for the future angle, and then students enter the room and forget everything.

Relax. Take your time. Read the fact sheet carefully once through. On a second reading, mark out unimportant details and circle important ones. If necessary, use scratch paper to answer each of the news questions. Figure out which question is most important, which one second most important, and so on. Now, start writing. You have 45 minutes. That's plenty of time.

and Dan Colburn.

"A few of us got together and decided to really foul up this particular tradition," Merkel said.

Though Scanlon received the second most votes among senior nominees, his name was removed from the final ballot by Barlow, who said he assumed the nomination was a prank.

"I had no way of knowing who nominated him, so I couldn't very well go out and find out whether it was a joke," Barlow said.

Joke or not, Merkel said Barlow had no right to remove Scanlon's name.

"There is no specific rule in the books against a boy being elected," Merkel said. "I think his (Barlow's) decision was totally unfair."

Barlow admitted the decision to remove Scanlon's name was a difficult one.

"Sure, I feel a bit uncomfortable about removing a name from contention," he said, even though he said he believes the queen "should be a girl."

Barlow said the Student Congress should examine the Homecoming election process.

"Perhaps we need to select a Homecoming King as well," he said.

The School Board will meet at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow. If Barlow's decision is upheld, then Linda Holway will replace Scanlon as one of the three senior queen nominees.

Still, Scanlon said he has no intention of being a member of the Homecoming Court.

"Besides," Scanlon said. "I doubt Coach would let me come out of the locker room at half-time to pick up my roses, should I win," he said. 🍀

TEACHER ACCUSED OF PLAGIARISM

■ **SITUATION:** Leaguetown High School, in Leaguetown, a suburb of Austin, boasts of a “top-notch” faculty with 17 of the 143 faculty members having their doctorate and 88 having earned their masters degrees. Fourteen members are working on their doctorate degrees. Forty-eight members of the faculty have been published in different professional publications. One teacher, Mrs. Mary Ann Day, has been a leading researcher in the field of psychological economics. She has published four papers on the subject and has written a textbook, which is used by Leaguetown High School economics classes. She has been offered full-time professor positions at 12 major universities, including Texas A&M University, but has stayed at Leaguetown because of its friendly atmosphere and students willing to learn.

On Monday of this week, Mrs. Day did not report to class and rumors began circling throughout the school that she was fired because much of the book she wrote was plagiarized. Today is Tuesday.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Friday.

■ **RONALD DOUGLAS, Leaguetown HS principal**

“Because this is a personnel decision, I cannot comment. I will tell you that the district has not filed any criminal or civil suit against Mrs. Day. We are in search of a new economics teacher and have already interviewed four quality applicants.

“Mrs. Day is a leader of her field. Her loss will make a significant impact on the faculty here. She was one of the leaders of the faculty, and many faculty members are upset that she is not a member of this faculty anymore.”

■ **JOHN GIARDINO, Economics professor at The University of Texas**

“Our investigation began when a graduate student began a study based on information in Dr. Day’s book. The student found much of the information in the book flawed and other areas copied from previous sources without giving proper credit. Based on this information, we found sufficient evidence that some misconduct has occurred.

“You may or may not know that Mrs. Day earned her doctorate here at The University of Texas, and it is up to us to maintain our integrity, not only in the educational field, but in the professional field as well. This accusation against Mrs. Day is serious and must be fully investigated. I hope our investigation exonerates the professor. I know she is a popular teacher at Leaguetown High School, and she is an honored graduate of this university. It is up to us to maintain our integrity, though.”

■ **LANE JOHNSTON, Economics teacher**

“I wondered about some of the information in the book, but Mary Ann has such an impeccable reputation I didn’t question it. She has a strong personality, and anyone who does question something she has written or said has a good argument on their hands. She has done a lot of tremendous things for Leaguetown High School. I really hate to lose her, but if she has really plagiarized information, she has lost all credibility as a teacher and economist.”

■ **SARAH STEVENS, English teacher**

“Plagiarism is an inexcusable offense. We spend hours upon hours teaching kids to be honest. If we find someone has plagiarized something we always have a strict and solid rule that the person is failed — no questions asked.

“For someone of Mary Ann’s stature to be accused of this is a tragedy. I don’t think she did it. I’ve known her since she started teaching here 18 years ago, and I worked with her editing the textbook in question. I didn’t see anything that should be questioned although I’m not an economist. I know she is hurt by these accusations, and she is probably trying to obtain some good legal advice before she makes any statements to anyone.”

■ **RENEE HOPKINS, senior**

“We found out about the investigation two weeks ago when Alfonso Giardino, whose father started the investigation, started telling everyone what was going on. Alfonso is a sophomore, so he doesn’t have Mrs. Day as a teacher, but he knew what his father was talking about. Since then several kids were questioning Mrs. Day, and when someone questions her, she gets really upset. There wasn’t a day last week that she wasn’t upset when her class was over. One day, she walked out of class after 15 minutes and didn’t come back. I think a lot of the kids saw her weak point and hit it just so they wouldn’t have class.”

“Mrs. Day is a good teacher. She knows what she is talking about. I’ve learned so much about economics in her class that I feel comfortable going to college and taking those kinds of classes. I don’t plan to major in economics, but I do feel like I know what’s going on in the United States, economically speaking.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Although college professors can be fired for plagiarizing other works, the idea is not practiced in high school since few high school teachers write textbooks. According to school district lawyers, there is no state or federal law that states a person will be terminated from his or her job if that person is caught plagiarizing something, nor is there a law suggesting a person be terminated if something of this consequence occurs. Teachers could lose their jobs under the following circumstances: failure to follow school district rules, moral turpitude, breaking a criminal law that directly affects their performance in the classroom or other actions deemed inappropriate by the building principal.

Attempts have been made to contact Mary Ann Day, but she did not return phone calls made by Press reporters or other teachers.

COMMENTS

When you get a prompt like this, you must start looking at what is fact and what is hearsay and decipher between the two. Reporters report facts, not hearsay. The prompt writer is not always going to make it obvious. This is part of what we hope you get out of participating in UIL journalism — the ability to take details and decipher them. You are not really told that Mary Ann Day has resigned, but the principal, through his remark that he is in search of a new economics teacher, has confirmed that she is no longer on the faculty. You also have conflicting quotes about whether she is guilty or not.

It has also not been confirmed that she really plagiarized, so you can’t make editorial statements like “Mary Ann Day plagiarized information in a textbook and has been fired.”

When you first read the prompt decide what is important — future, and what is not important — things people already know. Put yourself in the shoes of the students at Leaguetown High School. Since you are expected to be a student at the school, think of how things would be known at school if this had really happened.

How many people would know that Dr. Day hadn’t shown up at school since some sophomore said his dad found where your teacher had plagiarized a



book you are using for the class? Think about the school’s grapevine, or gossip mill, where you hear about things during lunch or between classes that really tell the news of the school. You don’t want to emphasize that material, but you do want to publish it since you will confirm rumors when you publish it.

In this lunch conversation, you heard that the economics teacher, whom everyone raves about because she wrote a book that is used in the school, has been accused of plagiarism — that same problem you get warned about in class. You also find out she’s not back in school. The story must confirm or deny the rumors that have

been floating around. That is your job as a reporter.

Note that the different people you have gotten quotes from have different responses about the same thing. You talk to the person making the accusation and the person who started the rumors in the school.

You also talk to an English teacher who has threatened students about plagiarism and the principal, who confirmed there is a search for a new economics teacher. Finally, you talk to someone who has been in the class after these rumors surfaced last week.

Note, too, the time element of the news story. Students know there is something going on. They probably do not know the principal is already interviewing people for the position where you’ve had a substitute teacher this week.

That is your first goal.

Sample Story

Four people have been interviewed for the economics teaching position left vacant after Dr. Mary Ann Day presumably resigned Monday.

Dr. Day has been accused of plagiarizing information in the textbook she wrote, one used by the economics classes here.

“Because this is a personnel decision, I cannot comment,” Principal Ronald Douglas said. “We are in search of a new economics teacher and have already interviewed four quality applicants.”

Dr. Day was first accused of plagiarism after a graduate student at the University of Texas found discrepancies in her book while researching for a study.

“The student found much of the information in the book flawed and other areas copied from previous sources without giving proper credit,” said John Giardino, economics professor at the university. “Based on this evidence, we found sufficient evidence that some misconduct has occurred.”

Others, too, saw problems but did not question it.

“I wondered about some of the information in the book,” economics teacher Lane Johnston said, “but Mary Ann has such an impeccable reputation I didn’t question it.”

According to an English teacher, failure is the punishment for students who plagiarize.

“Plagiarism is an inexcusable offense,” English teacher Sarah Stevens said. “We spend hours upon hours teaching kids to be honest. If we find someone has plagiarized something, we always have a strict rule that the person is failed — no questions asked.”

Although the English teacher had strong language about plagiarism, she doesn’t think Day doctored the information in her book.

“I worked with her editing the textbook in question,” Stevens said. “I didn’t see anything that should be questioned although I’m not an economist. She is probably trying to obtain some good legal advice before she makes any statements to anyone.”

Students, too, have known about the accusations.

“We found out about the investigation two weeks ago when Alfonso Giardino, whose father started the investigation, started telling everyone what was going on,” senior Renee Hopkins said.

Hopkins said Day seemed to be upset each day.

“There wasn’t a day last week that she wasn’t upset when her class was over,” the senior said. “One day, she walked out of class after 15 minutes and didn’t come back.”

According to school district lawyers, there is no state or federal law requiring school districts to fire teachers for plagiarizing something. Teachers could lose their jobs under the following circumstances: failure to follow school district rules, moral turpitude, breaking a criminal law that directly affects their performance in the classroom or other actions deemed inappropriate by the building principal.

Attempts were made to contact Dr. Day, but she did not return phone calls.



- Using the word “Leaguetown” (unless absolutely necessary for clarity).
- Starting with “The School Board ...”
- Starting with the “when” of the story.
- Writing a feature lead.
- Adding facts.
- Putting attribution before the quote.
- Missing the news peg.
- Missing important information and people.
- Stacking quotes.
- Forgetting to use student quotes.
- Using all of the information.
- Not using the transition/quote formula.

THESIS LINKS FORMER PRINCIPAL TO KKK

■ **SITUATION:** Leaguetown High School, located in the South Texas, has 1,100 students enrolled in grades 9-12. The school was founded in 1904 and is one of the oldest schools in the state. The gym for the school was built in 1914 and named for the school's first principal, Lee Stewart. History teacher Vincent Montoya wrote about the history of the school for his thesis in his graduate program at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. What Montoya discovered was that former Principal Lee Stewart was a member of the Ku Klux Klan before moving to Leaguetown. Through his research, Montoya found letters Stewart wrote to his brothers in Florida about his participation in the KKK. Montoya also interviewed family members who confirmed that Stewart had been a Klan member.

Because of this discovery, current Principal Barbara Falcon proposed renaming the gymnasium after a more "appropriate" leader in Leaguetown. The proposal drew fire from members of the community and student body. At the last school board meeting on March 15, the school board directed Falcon to allow the faculty and students to vote on the name change proposal. A simple majority will determine if the proposal passes.

Voting will begin March 29 and continue through March 31. Students can vote in the cafeteria or main office. Teachers can vote in the teacher's lounge or main office. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, March 28.

■ **GREGORY KING, school board president**

"Several of the board members support Principal [Barbara] Falcon's proposal, but we didn't think the board should make this decision. The students and faculty should be the voice on this issue. The board will support the vote no matter how it falls. If the proposal passes, we again will return to the students and faculty and ask for their help in renaming the gym."

■ **BARBARA FALCON, principal**

"The school board made the right decision sending this proposal to the students and faculty. I am confident the majority of the faculty supports the proposal, but I am not certain about the students. Many of our students do not have a real understanding about the Ku Klux Klan and the crimes it committed. I hope our students take the time to educate themselves about this issue.

"I suggested this proposal after reading his thesis. I don't want to rewrite history, but our school atmosphere should be inclusive and welcoming to all students. Schools should recognize past leaders who were positive role models for students. Unfortunately, Principal Stewart was not a good role model for our diverse student body. He may have been a good principal back in the 1900s. But we have to remember that when he was principal, the school was for whites only. It doesn't seem right to honor someone who did not believe all children and all people were created equal."

■ **RAY ROMA, freshman**

"My grandparents and parents all graduated from Leaguetown. All my life I've heard stories about how they played basketball in the legendary Stewart Gym. I've waited my whole life to play in the gym, and now Principal Falcon wants to change the name. It's not like he killed anyone or was even in the Klan in Leaguetown. He sounds like he was a decent principal, and I think most adults have skeletons in their closet."

■ **LINDY HALL, girls' varsity basketball coach**

"Stewart Gymnasium no longer represents former Principal Lee Stewart. It represents almost 100 years of memories for families in Leaguetown. We will lose more than a name if this proposal passes. Our students do not think of Lee Stewart when they talk about the gym. Instead, they think about the history that happened there."

■ **JULIO HERNANDEZ, junior**

"I went online and read part of Mr. Montoya's paper, but I didn't understand some parts of it. I am not sure if I will vote or not since I am not an athlete. Maybe only the athletes should be voting."

■ VINCENT MONTOYA, history teacher

"I am not exactly pleased to have discovered this information and reported it in my thesis, but I cannot rewrite history to my liking. I have many wonderful memories in Stewart Gym as a student and as a teacher. I am not thrilled to change the name, but it is something we need to do. We should not honor someone in our community who rode with the Ku Klux Klan."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

In his thesis Montoya reported he could find no evidence that Lee Stewart either drew blood as a Klansman or continued his participation with the Klan in Texas. Stewart's letter said he had "participated in sowing fear into Florida's 'black belt' as a masked night rider." He also admitted to recruiting young white males in Florida to join the Klan.

Montoya posted his thesis on the school website to help inform students and faculty.

COMMENTS

This prompt deals with a problem that could happen in any high school. Everyone has skeletons in his/her closet. One thing you must avoid when writing about a volatile situation is adding personal comments on the issue.

Many times we will give you a news story prompt that would be better as an editorial prompt and vice-versa.

Again, we want to make sure you can approach something objectively, dissect its contents and provide a valid, well-thought out approach to report the news.

Remember that you are a student at Leaguetown, and that this controversy has arisen. It is not up to you take a side — when you get to editorial writing you can do that — but here, you must report the situation objectively.

Your lead must focus on the newest information. For this prompt, we saw many leads like this:

While doing research for his thesis, history teacher Vincent Montoya discovered that former Principal Lee Stewart was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacy group.

This is good information and needs to be in the story, but it's not the entire lead. The lead for this story must contain information about the upcoming vote for a possible name change of the gym. The voting starts the day after the paper is distributed.

Students and faculty have the next three days to vote on a proposal to rename the gym after the discovery that the gym's namesake, former Principal Lee Stewart, was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

This lead combines both the necessary background information and the newest, most important information. Too often students get caught up the most controversial part of the prompt and use it for their lead even when it's old news.

So often in our news prompts, a big action/situation happens, and then the district/community does something. You need that newest action in the lead.

For instance, several years ago, we had a prompt about a former student who was caught living in the gym. He was arrested. Because of this discovery, the administration proposed the addition of new security to the building.

The new security was the lead, not the homeless kid who was arrested weeks ago. If some homeless student was living in your gym and got arrested, how long would it take for that information to get around the school? Not long, right? Remember that. Always look for the newest information.

After you write your lead, look at your quotes and decide which ones are important and which quotes are not. Remember, you are given several quotes and information that we DO NOT want you to use. We want you to eliminate that information to show that you know how to find the proper news for a story.

Particularly look at Julio Hernandez, a student quoted in the prompt. His quotes don't say much and are not meaningful to the story. He is someone you could eliminate on the first read.

This is a heated situation. Make sure you use quotes from both sides of the issue, and make sure you use quotes from the teacher who wrote the thesis that brought this issue to the forefront.

Use factual information from the direct quotes to help you create your transitions. Then, follow those transitions with a direct quote that show the "how" or "why" or show emotion.

SAMPLE STORY

Students and faculty have the next three days to vote on a proposal to rename the gym after the discovery that the gym's namesake, former Principal Lee Stewart, was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

At the March 15 school board meeting, Principal Barbara Falcon proposed that the board rename the gym. Instead of voting on the proposal, which drew fire from members of the community, the board told Falcon to allow the students and faculty to vote on the proposal.

"The students and faculty should be the voice on this issue," School Board President Gregory King said. "The board will support the vote no matter how it falls. If the proposal passes, we again will return to the students and faculty and ask for their help in renaming the gym."

Voting will begin on March 29 and continue through March 31. Students may vote in the cafeteria or main office.

"Many of our students do not have a real understanding about the Ku Klux Klan and the crimes it committed," Falcon said. "I hope our students take the time to educate themselves about this issue."

The discovery of Stewart's past came to light after history teacher Vincent Montoya researched the history of the school for his graduate thesis at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Montoya found letters Stewart wrote regarding his participation with the KKK.

"I am not exactly pleased to have discovered this information and reported it in my thesis, but I cannot rewrite history to my liking," Montoya said. "We should not honor someone in our community who rode with the Ku Klux Klan."

Principal Falcon said she suggested the proposal because Stewart, who was principal when Leaguetown was an all-white school, is not a positive role model for students.

"It doesn't seem right to honor someone who did not believe that all children and all people were created equal," she said.

While Principal Falcon agrees with the board's decision to allow for a vote, she said she is uncertain what the outcome will be.

"I am confident that the majority of the faculty supports the proposal, but I am not certain about the students," she said.

Students can read Montoya's thesis on the school website.

Montoya reported in his thesis that he could find no evidence that Stewart ever drew blood as a Klansman or that he was in the Klan in Texas. For freshman Ray Roma, that's enough reason to keep Stewart's name on the gym.

"I've waited my whole life to play in that gym, and now Principal Falcon wants to change the name," Roma said. "It's not like he killed anyone or was even in the Klan in Leaguetown. He sounds like he was a decent principal, and I think most adults have skeletons in their closet."

Girls' varsity basketball coach Lindy Hall said she disagrees with Falcon's proposal.

"Stewart Gymnasium no longer represents former Principal Lee Stewart," Hall said. "It represents almost 100 years of memories for families in Leaguetown. Our students do not think of Lee Stewart when they talk about the gym. Instead, they think about the history that happened there."

Note all of the background information would not fit in the lead.

An additional information paragraph was needed before the writer began using direct quotes.

Note how the writer included perspectives from both a student and a teacher. You should always have quotes from students in your stories. This is, after all, the student newspaper.

Also note how the story goes from most important to least important. We could cut off the last two paragraphs and the story would be just fine.

Transition Tips

In writing, it is necessary to tie phrases, sentences and paragraphs together so that the reader can move logically from one thought to another. This is achieved through the use of transitions to point out the sequence of thought or let the reader move through the story.

Transitional words.

To Show Time:

then. meanwhile. shortly. thereafter. afterward. now. later. soon. all this time. formerly. previously. at last. finally.

To Cite Examples:

for instance. thus. for example. to illustrate. as an illustration.

To Indicate Emphasis:

indeed. moreover. in particular. especially. in addition to. similarly. furthermore.

To Show Change of Viewpoint:

however. but. nevertheless. of course. also. seriously. in another way. in a lighter view. in addition. in general.

Other methods of achieving flow in your story.

Writers may also achieve continuity or coherence with these tactics:

Repetition of a Key Word of a Preceding Paragraph:

A portable Hammond electric **organ** has been given to the high school.

The **organ**, which may be used in assemblies, in the radio studio or in social hall, will be dedicated at this year's Spring Music Festival.

Use of a Synonym: referring to a key word in the preceding paragraph.

This week's Herald is the first of two issues on which three **Journalism I** students will assist the senior staff.

The **junior assistants** are appointed to learn the duties of the senior editors and thus become eligible to try out for next year's staff.

References to a Fact or Idea of the Preceding Paragraph: For example:

Coach David Boyer's freshman team will meet Southside HS there at 10 a.m. tomorrow **after losing** its first league contest 32-24 to Morton HS Saturday.

Boyer attributes **his team's loss** to "an inability to make setup shots within easy range of the opponent's basket."

Feature Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct** or **indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in North Texas, has an enrollment of 3,100 students in grades 9-12. Over the December break, junior Aaron Stone went with his Boy Scout troop to camp for four days in Smokey Mountain National Park. The trip was going well until the final day. Most of the troop was at the shower area when Aaron heard one of his fellows scream for help. Aaron peered out of his tent to see a black bear attacking the teen. Aaron put his sleeping bag over his head and body to buffer the animal and lunged out of the tent to grab his friend. The bear turned from the other scout and began to maul Aaron. Aaron continued to shout at the bear and yell for help. The noise seemed to startle the bear and, after the initial attack, the bear went back into the woods.

Both teens returned to school in mid-January. The other scout, Cooper Black, attends Southside High School.

At 4 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 12, Aaron will receive the Boy Scout's National Certificate of Merit for Meritorious Action and Heroism at the United Methodist Church. It is one of the highest certificates a scout can earn, and the Boy Scouts of America give only three or four each year. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Friday, Feb. 4.

■ AARON STONE, junior

"I didn't think much before jumping out of my tent. I knew I had to help Coop or he would die. I didn't have much of a plan other than to use the sleeping bag as protection. As scouts, we are taught to be loud and big if we see a bear. I did both. I stood tall, and I shouted a lot. It worked.

"Faith played a huge role that day. I believe that God gave me the courage to leave the tent and help Coop. Logically, both of us should have died that day, but God was there for us.

"After the bear left, the rest of my troop returned to find me and Coop bleeding on the ground. Apparently, we were not in great shape, but I honestly don't remember too much. I was in shock.

"The bear messed up my knee pretty bad. I had surgery on my left leg in Tennessee. I started physical therapy a week after surgery, but I still have a bit of a limp. I am hoping that my knee will be 100 percent before the first track meet. I run the mile relay for the varsity team, and I don't want to let them down.

"The certificate is a big pretty honor, but I am a little embarrassed to get it in front of an audience. I didn't do anything that spectacular. Anyone else would have done the same. I don't consider myself a hero."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Both teens are expected to make a full recovery. Aaron received 50 stitches across his back and left arm. He needed surgery to repair damage to his left knee. Cooper received about 80 stitches across his face, neck and back. He had surgery to his face and both arms.

2011 INVITATIONAL A FEATURE • PAGE 2

...ve, but now we are even closer. We are getting through
...th of us, but we push each other. We are brothers now

...y time, something horrible can happen. That bear
...die at any time. I cherish everything more now. I
...pecially appreciate Aaron. Without him, I know I
...ron came out and diverted his attention. I owe

...years, and I have never had a single problem
...ve been sick because unprovoked attacks

...had happened. Luckily, the park rangers
...part. Making loud noises is one of the
...ed. I don't want to think about what

...park ranger from the Smokey
...this morning. He is in good condition
...it might be a joke. Aaron jokes about bears
...the troop has seen a bear or two on occasion, but

...thought he was very safe at a national park.
...see and brought Aaron home for his physical therapy. He's a pretty
...for a friend, and he hasn't complained once about the pain. And I know

on your paper.

Feature Writing

You have to grab the reader with a powerful lead for this contest

Throw out the inverted pyramid.
The straight news lead. The boring,
fact-driven story.

Give us emotion, description, detail.

Show us a face.

Paint us a story.

News writing pushes reporters to be thinkers in a linear, balanced way. Reporters must figure out what is most important and start their story there.

Feature writing pushes reporters to be thinkers in a creative, almost off-balance way. Rather than solely focusing on the information given, feature writers must hone in on the people.

Good feature writers know that they must communicate with people — to draw upon the emotions and actions of others — if they are to inject life into their stories. Feature writing cannot be done in the vacuum of a professional newsroom or the high school classroom.

Thus, contestants in the UIL feature writing contest are at a huge disadvantage. They are given information sheets from which they are expected to develop interesting stories.

In short, contestants are expected to develop empathy, in absentia.

Strangely enough, it can be done if an ample dose of imagination and freewheeling thinking is applied to the task.

We must stress that all good writing must follow form: Eye-grabbing but relevant lead, logical order of presentation, development of a central theme, smooth transition and intelligent conclusion.

In short, no one wants the UIL contestant to introduce a wave of Dada journalism.

Still, contestants must recognize the difference between form and formula. Many feature writers work by formula: stilted and forced lead, quote/indirect quote transition, stilted and forced conclusion.

Good features refuse to fit a mold. The development of the central theme — and there must be a central theme — comes through the use of quotes and indirect quotes, through the writer's own observations and through the writer's interpretation of those observations. These grab the readers and pull them along so that, while they are never lost, they are never quite certain what lies ahead.

THE FEATURE THEME

The major weakness of most high school feature stories — whether they appear in the newspaper, yearbook, literary magazine or in the UIL feature writing contest — is the absence of a central theme. Every story should be about something specifically. That “something” is the theme, or focus. All too often, the feature will lack the timeliness of a news story and the human interest value of a feature, leaving readers to ask one of two questions:

So what?

Is that all there is?

For example:

KIM BAHASH IS A new student from Afghanistan. She moved to Leaguetown six months ago after the Taliban attacked her village and killed her two brothers. She then moved to Greece where she lived in a refugee village. Then, she moved with her mother and father to the United States.

“I really like the United States,” Kim said, “but it’s hard to get used to everything so quickly.”

When asked how she felt about her new teachers, she said, “I like them very much.” Her favorite color is blue. Her favorite food is lamb, and her favorite hobby is knitting. She said she did not have a favorite extracurricular activity. 🐼

Don’t laugh. Many stories are more ridiculous than this one.

Look at what we have here. A girl whose life has been rocketed into utter turmoil. Her father might have been a successful merchant in Afghanistan, but the Taliban drove him and his family into the countryside. From there, the family fought with the rebels at night. The Taliban retaliated and destroyed their village. The family then fled to Greece, then to the United States.

The reporter covering this story is faced with a dilemma: Write a book, a series of articles, or a single story about a specific aspect of this girl’s life.

Let’s assume the reporter chooses to write the single story. This only makes sense. Most newspapers refuse to run books — or even excerpts of books, unless they were written by former U.S. presidents. In this single story, the writer must select and develop a central theme rather than attempting to capsule the girl’s entire experience into a 700-word feature.

The reporter may write about the exodus from

the Middle East to the United States, beginning with the days prior to the war and ending with the arrival in New York City.

Or the story may center on the problems she’s experienced — cultural and social — since arriving here.

The writer might even contrast Kim’s life today — safe and secure in America — to the situation in Afghanistan, where her friends and family are continuing the struggle.

The proper development of any theme would make for interesting reading. But an attempt to mulch all three into a single mega-story is doomed. The student publication could not handle a 4,000 word story, which would be necessary to thoroughly develop all three angles.

It was mentioned earlier that good writers interpret or draw conclusions from the information presented. This is not to say they editorialize. In theory, reporters are expected to relate what they see and hear to their own experiences. Of course, few reporters have been exiled from their homeland, so they must add another crucial element: empathy.

Reporters must combine the ability to gather and digest facts with the ability to understand the meaning of those facts in human terms. A failure to do so results in a story that is either factually incorrect or grossly misleading. For example, during the course of an interview, you — the reporter — notice that Kim Bahash sits tightly, hands folded in her lap, shoulders curved inward. She has a habit of flicking her eyes right and left when discussing life under the harsh regime.

From this, you might interpret she is still unaccustomed to what Americans take for granted: freedom of speech. What we nonchalantly brandish, she clutches and guards, fearing her words may fall upon the wrong ears.

Such an observation would not be considered editorialization.

What does all this have to do with the UIL feature writing contest? Well, the contestant must recognize and develop a central theme based on the information provided. All quotes must develop a prevailing thought or mood.

Contestants, meanwhile, must realize they are sitting in a contest room, far removed from any action described in the information sheet. Thus, they must open their imagination and place themselves in the middle of the situation described.

The excitement in a newsroom on Presidential election night

■ **SITUATION:** Election night. Barack Obama and John McCain were running for the nation's top position. Six journalism students from Leaguetown High School helped collect results from the various voting booths around town for a local television station, KUIL. Joining in the election night work were Kim Helt, Chris Sumter, Roger DuPree, Emily Swafford, Vince Bedford and Cheri Nixon. The six were stationed in the KUIL Station, located at Swan and 23rd, downtown Leaguetown.

Work began that afternoon at 5 p.m. Polls closed at 7:30. Results began to arrive in the newsroom around 8. It was the job of the students to call each of the voting precincts for updated reports, and, if necessary, to visit precincts for first-hand reports. If something big was happening at a precinct, a reporter was dispatched to the scene.

■ **KIM HELT**, junior

"Our adviser, Mr. (Willis) Anderson, asked for volunteers. I was hesitant about joining because I had worked for the Young Republicans. I figured it might be some form of conflict of interests, but he assured me it was not. So, I went.

"When we first arrived in the newsroom, it was dead. I thought we'd answer the phones a few times, pack up and go home. I didn't know that all the reporters were out on the job. Well, they began arriving around 5 p.m. and all of a sudden, phones were ringing off the wall, we were getting screamed at to get a voting precinct inspector on the line, and all kinds of commotion. It was something else."

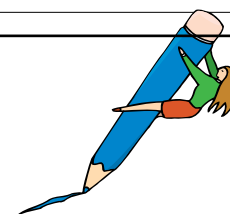
■ **WILLIS ANDERSON**, adviser

"Station manager Brad Brown has been an active supporter of our program here for several years. He has spoken at our journalism banquet and has served as a district contest judge. Anyway, he suggested I ask my best students to serve as gophers on election night. You know what a gopher is — go fer this, go fer that. I asked about 10. Six said they would, and there you have it. He scratches my back. I scratch his. And it was a valuable experience for the kids."

■ **VINCE BEDFORD**, senior

"We learned a lot about the production of an election night report. The newsmen took time to

Rules for vivid writing



1. Keep it active. It is more effective to write, "We won the game" rather than "The game was won by us."
2. Skip the jargon. Do not attempt to write in the language of your subject. For example, if you're writing about a computer analyst, don't inject a lot of highly technical, fuzzy terms. If you're writing about the French Club, don't use the French language.
3. Honor everyday language. Do not attempt to write over your readers' heads or your own. Approach the thesaurus with caution.
4. Use direct quotes for color, pace and emphasis.
5. Avoid synonyms for "said." Especially, be wary of present tense verbs "says" or "comments." Avoid "according to" also.
6. Use the standard noun-verb-object sentence structure. Avoid awkward sentence formations and overuse of punctuation.
7. Arrange facts in a logical sequence.
8. Select the strongest nouns and verbs possible. Avoid adjectives and adverbs. If you use adjectives or adverbs, pinpoint them. It doesn't mean much to say an apple is round, but it does when you describe it as wormy.
9. Keep paragraphs short. A good rule of thumb is to combine short, powerful sentences with longer, more developed sentences. This gives the writing a sense of pace or flow.
10. Be human. Relate your writing to people.
11. Never use a long word when a short one will do.
12. Respect your readers. They are usually smarter than you may think.

show us around and explained the technical stuff. Funny, you turn on the tube and they look so organized. It is the picture of tranquility, no pun intended. But you get behind the scenes, and it's a zoo. People are running all over the place, yelling at one another. A regular madhouse.

"I don't know why I volunteered. I've been on the newspaper staff two years and I'm taking the multi-media course, but I have no plans to enter the journalism field. I want to be a stock market analyst. That's where the real bucks are. Odds are, you're not

going to make the big money in journalism unless your old man owns a paper or something, and mine doesn't."

■ **ROGER DUPREE**, junior

"My hamburger was cold, and the ice in the coke had melted. Aside from that, I had a pretty nice time. There's a closed-circuit television from the station's national headquarters in New York that feeds into the station. They're flipping out programs a mile a minute, and they had the election covered from every possible angle. We had to worry about some of the local races, but you could tell that the network was really throwing its weight around. That impressed me more than anything. Maybe I'll flunk a few years so I can do this again in another four years."

■ **BRAD BROWN**, station manager, KUIL

"Channel 5 has always had a commitment to scholastic journalism. We realize its importance, both in the short and long run. This, we felt, would give the students an opportunity to see first-hand broadcast journalists at work. I think they'll agree that it's not the polished, button-down profession it appears to be. There's a lot of hard work and sweat involved.

"Of course — I would be a fool to deny it — we needed extra help, and the high school kids did a fantastic job. This is about a mutually benefiting program as I can envision. My congratulations to Mr. Anderson for training these young people."

■ **EXTRA INFORMATION:**

Brown recognized the students and gave each a certificate of appreciation at an annual awards day assembly six days after this story was published in the paper.

If this were an actual feature writing assignment, reporters would be negligent not to be there — in the newsroom — election night. But that's not going to happen in a contest situation.

Thus, contestants must project themselves into the fictitious newsroom. They must hear the telephone ringing, the editors racing back and forth, the wire machine clacking. And they must inject that madcap, pulsating sensation into their stories.

It can be done.

IT'S OVER NOW. Finally, the room is quiet. Obama has been elected president, and every-

one has gone home, leaving two janitors behind to clean up the food debris, spilled coffee and wads of paper, strewn in all directions.

In 20 minutes, the janitors will have the KUIL newsroom spic and span — about the way it was eight hours earlier, before the country brought in the first black president, Democrat Barack Obama, embarking on a bold, new course.

"When we first arrived in the newsroom, it was dead," said Kim Helt, one of the six students who helped collect local election returns. "I thought we'd answer the phones a few times, pack up and go home. All of the sudden, phones were ringing off the wall, we were getting screamed at to get a voting precinct inspector on the lines, and all kinds of commotion broke loose. It was something else."

The orders shoot across the room. "HEY KID. Yeah ... you! Get this guy on the phone. We need a statement." Sneers or obscenities fire back. Most reporters remain buried in their stories, afraid to look up for fear of being overcome by the confusion.

"You get behind the scenes and it's a zoo," senior Vince Bedford said. "People are running all over the place, yelling at one another. A regular madhouse."

Cup after cup of coffee is poured. From the pot to the cup. From the cup to the water fountain. Who has time to drink coffee? But everyone seemingly needs a cup. Sandwiches arrive around 10. A bite here. A pinch there. Who has time to eat?

"My hamburger was cold and the ice in the coke had melted," junior Roger DuPree said. "Aside from that, I had a pretty nice time." 🍷

COMMENTS

The writer considered adding Brad Brown's comment that "Of course, I would be a fool to deny it, we needed extra help and the high school kids did a fantastic job."

However, she chose not to. The theme of the story centers around the frantic motion in the newsroom. Brown's comment would add nothing to that. Of course, others might have taken an entirely different approach to this story. They may have angled the story around the educational benefits of the experience or have taken a summary look at the entire event — the more traditional approach of just what happened, who was involved, and what was gained by it all. But I doubt either would have been more dynamic

than the highly-focused angle used above.

As you read through this chapter, note in particular the use of descriptive leads. The success of these leads is the ability of the writer to create an image. Powerful feature writing appeals to the five senses and to the emotions. The fact sheet will provide more than a few opportunities to develop these scenes. You may not “make up” information.

But in developing the tone or mood of the article, you may describe the images that accompany the action.

In other words, if the information sheet deals with two students who have opened an all-you-can-eat catfish parlor, then the contestants must have freedom to describe the scene as they think it might have existed. They must have freedom to describe the greasy smell of fried fish in the kitchen, the clanging of dirty plates, and the gritty sounds of tennis shoes squeaking across a greasy, corn meal-coated floor.

The feature writing contest combines writers’ creativity with journalistic basics to produce a truly interesting and entertaining piece of work.

HONOR GRADUATE DIES WHILE FIGHTING IN IRAQ WAR

■ **SITUATION:** Leaguetown High School is a low-income, rural high school. Each year, it has several young men join the military immediately after high school. In the past two years, 17 graduates joined either the Army, Navy or Marines. Of those, 14 are currently serving in Iraq. This week, the parents of Nicolas Barrera informed the principal, Jack Mileston, their son had been killed in Iraq. The military told the Barreras that 20-year-old Nicolas was killed during an encounter with insurgents but gave no further details. He was on his second tour of duty and was scheduled to come home in May. Nicolas is survived by his parents and two younger brothers.

Nicolas graduated with honors from Leaguetown two years ago. He pitched for the varsity baseball team for four years and led the debate team to state his junior and senior year.

This year, he spoke at the fall National Honor Society induction ceremony before he was shipped out for his second tour of duty. He told the students he was proud to be a soldier, and he knew he could help the people of Iraq.

Funeral services are set for Tuesday, April 25 at



FEATURE Writing Tips

- Build your feature around the best quotes in the prompt. Let people tell the story in their own words.
- Use the weaker quotes to develop your transitions.

the Stoneridge Funeral Home. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, people donate money to the Nicolas Barrera Scholarship Fund at First State Bank.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Friday, April 21.

■ BRIANA BARRERA, mother of Nicolas

“When we didn’t hear from Nicolas for a week, I knew something was wrong. Maybe it was mother’s intuition, but I knew. When I saw the two officers walking toward our door last week, I just fell to the floor and started crying. We all know why military officers come to a soldier’s house. My husband heard me and came running. Then the door bell rang. I couldn’t move. I told my husband not to answer the door. If we just didn’t open the door, it wouldn’t be true. I couldn’t bear to hear the words.

“After the second ring, my husband answered the door. The officers didn’t have to say anything. They handed Leo the letter, and his hands began to shake. The officers said they were sorry to deliver the news, but Nicolas died with honor. Dying with honor? How does that help? My heart was breaking. My boy was gone. He was supposed to come home in a month. I could hardly breathe.

“Nicolas joined the military because he wanted to go to college without having to get loans and financial aid. He never talked about joining the military when he was little, but when those recruiters at the high school told him how much money he could earn for college, he was sold. He wanted to be a high school history teacher and coach baseball here at Leaguetown.”

■ LEO BARRERA, Nicolas’ father

“Nicolas had such a big heart. I remember coaching Nicolas during his first game in the peewee league, years ago. After the third inning, our team

was behind by seven runs. I was frustrated and ready to give up. Nicolas looked at me and said, 'It's OK, Dad. I'm going to hit a homerun for you.' Nicolas got up to the plate and smacked one right to the fence. We didn't win the game, but Nicolas won the hearts of every kid on the team.

"Right before he shipped out for the second tour, Nicolas and I went back to the Little League baseball field. We sat in the stands and talked about the good times and about his future. He told me when he returned he was going to ask Lillian, his high school sweetheart, to marry him. He said he wanted his sons to play on this field one day. Now, that will never happen. He would have been a good husband, a good father, a good coach.

"I don't know how we are going to pull through this. I do know we are going to do our best to keep his memory alive. We are starting a scholarship in his name."

■ LILLIAN FORWARD, senior

"I can't believe he's gone. He was supposed to come home in less than a month. In his last letter, he told me he wanted to ask me something big when he returned. I knew he wanted to get married. We talked about it before he left for his second tour. I would have said yes.

"I feel empty inside. Nicolas was my future. We were going to go to college together and then have four kids. I begged him not to return to Iraq, but he said it was his duty. It was for our future. He didn't want to start our life in debt from college."

■ JACK MILESTON, principal

"Nicolas was a role model for the entire school. After he spoke at the NHS assembly this year, he received a standing ovation. That kid was dedicated when he was a student. Back then, when I left in the evening, I either saw him in the batting cages by the baseball field or in the library researching some new topic for an upcoming debate. He always wanted to give his best.

"Nicolas is a hero now. He died with honor serving his country, and now we must honor his memory. The school district has agreed to contribute \$1,000 to his scholarship fund every year."

■ BILL STEARS, varsity baseball coach

"I loved the kid. In my 20 years of coaching, I've never coached an athlete with so much heart. He

never gave up. He practiced every day of the year and never complained. Unfortunately, he didn't have enough speed to pitch for a Division I school, but that never bothered him. He told me he didn't want to play in the majors. He wanted to coach here at Leaguetown.

"Before he left for Iraq, I told him I would always have a spot on my bench for a coach like him. In four years, I'm going to retire. I was counting on handing my program over to Nicolas. He would have done a great job. Probably better than me. He loved the game more than me, and he knew how to get the best out of people." ★

COMMENTS

So many leads begin with a flat statement. Such an approach may tell the reader what is happening, but it cannot capture the reader's attention. Particularly for feature stories, a lead should set a scene and put the reader in the middle of the scene. In your writing, you want to be able to reach out, grab the reader and bring the reader into the story. Remember you have freedom to describe a scene as you think it might have existed. Note how the writer here puts the reader back in Nicolas Barrera's home.

When Briana Barrera didn't hear from her son, Nicolas, for a week, she knew something was wrong. Maybe it was a mother's intuition, but she knew.

And when she saw the two officers walking toward her door, her worst fear was confirmed.

When the doorbell rang, she cried to her husband, "Don't answer it!"

Maybe if they didn't open the door, it wouldn't be true — if they just didn't hear the words.

Her husband answered the door after the second ring. The officers said nothing. They handed him the letter.

"The officers said they were sorry to deliver the news, but Nicolas died with honor," she said. "Dying with honor? How does that help? My heart was breaking. My boy was gone. He was supposed to come home in a month. I could hardly breathe."

After the lead, you need a nut graph that tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Basically, it's a thesis sentence.

Nicolas Barrera, a 2009 graduate who pitched

varsity baseball and led his debate team to state, was on his second tour of duty in Iraq when he was killed during an encounter with insurgents. The 20 year old was scheduled to return home in May.

Funeral services are set for Tuesday, April 25 at the Stoneridge Funeral Home. The family requests in lieu of flowers, people donate money to the Nicolas Barrera Scholarship Fund at the First State Bank.

After the nut graph, you need to move into the transition/quote formula.

THE REST OF THE STORY

His father, Leo Barrera, said starting the scholarship would help people remember his son.

"I don't know how we are going to pull through this," he said. "I do know we are going to do our best to keep his memory alive."

Mr. Barrera remembers coaching Nicolas during his first game in the peewee baseball leagues.

"After the third inning, our team was behind by seven runs," he said. "I was frustrated and ready to give up. Nicolas looked at me and said, 'It's OK, Dad. I'm going to hit a home run for you.' Nicolas got up and smacked one right to the fence. We didn't win the game, but Nicolas won the hearts of every kid on the team."

Right before he shipped out for his second tour, Barrera returned to that same field with his father.

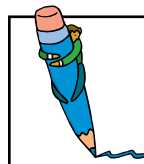
"We sat in the stands and talked about the good times and his future," Mr. Barrera said. "He told me when he returned he was going to ask Lillian, his high school sweetheart, to marry him. He said he wanted his sons to play on this field one day. Now, that will never happen. He would have been a good husband, a good father, a good coach."

Lillian Forward, a senior, said she knew Nicolas was going to propose — and she was planning to say "yes."

"I feel empty inside," she said. "Nicolas was my future. We were going to go to college together and then have four kids. I begged him not to return to Iraq, but he said it was his duty. It was for our future. He didn't want to start our life in debt from college."

His mother said Nicolas joined the military because he wanted to go to college without having to get a loan or rely on financial aid.

"He never talked about joining the military when he was little," she said. "But when those recruiters at the high school told him how much money he



FEATURE Writing Tips

Don't stack direct quotes from different people on top of each other without a transition in between them.

See the sample story to see how a reporter must work with the quotes rather than simply stacking them on top of one another.

Use only the quotes that advance the theme of your story. You are under no obligation to use every part of a quote or every quote on the fact sheet.

could earn for college, he was sold."

She said Nicolas planned to be a high school history teacher and baseball coach. Varsity baseball coach Bill Stears said he would have been a great one.

Stears said he plans to retire in four years and was counting on handing the baseball program over to Barrera.

"He would have done a great job," Stears said. "Probably better than me. He loved the game more than me, and he knew how to get the best out of people."

Before he was shipped out, Barrera spoke at the fall National Honor Society induction ceremony where he told the students he was proud to be a soldier, and he knew he could help the people of Iraq. He received a standing ovation.

Principal Jack Mileston said the school district has agreed to contribute \$1,000 to the scholarship fund every year to honor Nicolas's memory.

"He understood the risk, but Nicolas loved his country," he said. "He showed that through his service. Nicolas is a hero now." 🇺🇸

Note how the writer used longer direct quotes to show the emotion of the story. Don't be afraid to use more than one sentence for your direct quotes in feature writing. Also note the powerful quote ending. A news story ends with the least important information. A feature story should end with a powerful quote.

Dissecting the feature prompt

Before we go further in discussing challenges and keys to successes in UIL feature contest, it's a good idea to look at what makes up the feature writing contest. Below and on the next pages you'll see the elements of a feature writing prompt, what we include and what we expect you to take from the prompt and contest. Contestants should remember that this is a situation where

the reporter is given the background information of a feature story. The quotes are the same as a reporter would have gotten if he/she had gone out to interview live.

We sometimes include improper English and sentence fragments. People do not always use proper English and sometimes don't speak in complete sentences.

This is the background information and sets up the situation as it has occurred. The key in a UIL contest is to remember that you are a student at Leaguetown High School and these events have actually taken place, or will take place, at your school.

You will always be given the day the newspaper is published and the day the action will take place.

Quotes give the reporter two things — one, information that can be used as a direct quote that will both make the story more credible and color the story more; and two, information that can be used in transitional phrases and sentences. This information can be used either as a direct quote or as an indirect quote in transitional paragraphs.

****See the Transition/Quote Formula with this prompt on Page 54.**

Feature Writing

District 1 Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown

Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in West Texas, has an enrollment of 1,300 students in grades 9-12. In January, doctors gave science teacher Barbara Windo a clean bill of health after a two-year battle with breast cancer. Over spring break, Ms. Windo and her daughter, Christine, rode their bicycles from El Paso to Texarkana to raise money for breast cancer research. The bike trip took 10 days and covered more than 800 miles. The mother/daughter team rode about 80 miles a day. Before embarking on their 10-day journey, Christine set up a blog so she and her mother could write about their travels and people could donate money. Before leaving, the duo had already raised \$12,000 for cancer research.

Each day, Christine and her mother posted stories about their experiences and the people they met along the way. More than 200 breast cancer survivors rode portions of the journey with the pair. By the time they arrived home on Sunday, March 13, the Windos had raised \$62,000.

On Wednesday, March 30, a representative from the Susan G. Komen Foundation will come to the high school to accept the donation during the spring pep rally. You are writing for the issue of the *Press* to be distributed on Monday, March 28.

■ CHRISTINE WINDO, senior

"Jan. 3, 2010 was the best day of my life. That's when the doctors finally told my mom she was cancer-free. It was the first time in two years that I had tears of joy. My mom will still be monitored closely for the next five years, but the doctors feel confident her fight is done. The recurrence rate for her type of breast cancer is about five percent.

"The next day, my mom popped into my room at 6 a.m. to announce she wanted to do a fundraiser for breast cancer research. I was not too excited about her announcement since I still had 30 minutes to sleep before my alarm was supposed to go off. I nodded and told her we would talk about it at lunch. Ever since her diagnosis, my mom and I eat lunch together at school. So during lunch, I suggested a race of some sort in the community, but mom shot down that idea because many people in the community ran in the county 5K Race for the Cure in October. Mom wanted something unique. That's when I remembered a story I read about a family bike riding across America. Mom and I used to go for long bike rides before the cancer. I suggested we ride across Texas, and she loved the idea.

"We spent the next two and half months planning the trip and training. I wasn't sure my mom would be ready for a March trip, but she insisted. The local and regional newspapers both ran small stories about our ride to promote

In a feature story, especially one like this, you will want to rely a great deal on quotes. In fact, once you've captured the reader with your lead, your quotes should be able to tell most of the story. Most of your story will center around Christine, so her quotes are the most important.

CHRISTINE WINDO (continued)

the fundraiser. We were shocked by the amount of support.

"We had an absolute blast on the 10-day ride. Sure, it was tough, but the weather was perfect every day, and we received so much support from communities we rode through. Mom and I budgeted for hotels for every night, but in every town, a breast cancer survivor offered us a place to stay. We were able to donate our hotel budget.

"The best day was traveling through the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Both major daily newspapers had run stories that we were coming, so hundreds of people greeted us as we traveled through those cities. We even had a police escort for about 15 miles.

"The blog was my idea. I wanted to keep our friends and family informed about how everything was going, and I love to write. Every night, mom and I wrote about the day. The first two days, we had about 100 hits, but then traffic on the site went through the roof. By Day 8, we were averaging 4,000 hits a day, and the donations and comments were pouring in.

"I have always been close to my mom. My dad died when I was two years old and, since then, it's just been the two of us. She is my rock and my biggest fan. When she first told me about her Stage 2 breast cancer, I couldn't stop crying. She held me and promised she wouldn't leave. From the first day, my mom said, 'We will beat this thing, Chris. We will win this battle.' She wasn't wrong. She did beat it, and I am grateful every day for that. Not every woman is as lucky as my mom. That is why we did this fundraiser. We want research to continue. We don't want to lose another woman to breast cancer."

BARBARA WINDO, science teacher

"Christine and I called our ride the 'Push for the Cure' because we knew we would have to push ourselves to our limits to reach the goal. Christine has been an athlete all of her life so I never worried she would finish. I was a little worried about me. By Day 7, I wasn't sure I had the energy to ride anymore, but then we met Betty. Betty had been diagnosed two days before we rode into her hometown of Red Oak. She is 37 years old and the mother of two toddlers. Betty rode five miles with us, her toddlers in tow. Her courage and determination spilled onto me. I rode those last three days for her.

"We met so many amazing people along the way. I try to keep up with most of them through the blog site. I never imagined we would raise so much money. People have been incredibly giving. I pray this money will help find the cure. We must find a cure."

VAN BULLARD, principal

"We couldn't be prouder of Barbara and Christine. They are incredible role models for our students and community. We are encouraging all students to wear pink to our pep rally in support of Breast Cancer Awareness. I want there to be a sea of pink in the gym. This pep rally will celebrate all our spring sports but, more importantly, this pep rally will celebrate life. Barbara won her battle with breast cancer, and it's time to celebrate."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Christine will attend The University of Texas at Austin next fall. She plans to major in pre-med and literature.

You should consider using anecdotes to create your lead. These quotes offer a help to show what the journey was like. There is at least one anecdote (a story within a story) in several of the quotes from Christine and her mother. For instance, in your lead you could describe the moment when Christine first discovered her mom had beaten breast cancer. Or you could describe when Barbara Windo meets Betty on the trip.

You don't have to use a descriptive lead, but judges often salivate when they see a good lead that shows them a particular moment in time.

Sometimes good information for description or transition can be found in the additional information. This time it's good details that you may want to use.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING CONTEST! DISTRICT 1 • 2011 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY. Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge. 1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a biking fundraiser that a mother/daughter team organized for cancer research. 2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the copy as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much. Eight hundred miles of terrain in 10 days - on bikes. A pretty tough challenge, but it certainly isn't the hardest challenge science teacher Barbara Windo and her daughter, Christine, have faced. Two years ago, Mrs. Windo was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer. Christine and her mother know not every woman is as lucky. "From the first day, my mom said, 'We will beat this thing, Chris. We will win this battle.'" Christine, a senior, said. "She wasn't wrong. She did beat it, and I am grateful every day for that." Christine and her mother know not every woman is as lucky. "I never imagined we would raise so much money. People have been incredibly giving. I pray this money will help find the cure. We must find a cure." In January the day after Mrs. Windo returned entry. Although you have freedom to come up with the plan for the fundraiser. They received a clean bill of health from her doctor, she and her daughter came up with the plan for the fundraiser. They decided to ride their bikes across Texas, from El Paso to Texas, and blog about their travels. More than 200 breast cancer survivors rode portions of the trip with them and thousands read their blog and donated money. "We had an absolute blast on the 10-day ride," Christine said. "Sure, it was tough, but the weather was perfect every day. And we received so much support from the communities we rode through." "By day seven, I wasn't sure I had the energy to ride anymore, but then we met Betty," she said. "Betty had been diagnosed two days before we rode into her hometown of Red Oak. She is 37 years old and the mother of two toddlers. Betty rode five miles with us, her toddlers in tow. Her courage and determination spilled onto me. I rode those last three days for her." Christine said her favorite day of the trip was traveling through the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. The blog was Christine's idea. "I wanted to keep our friends and family informed about how everything was going, and I love to write." Christine said. "Every night, both mom and I wrote about the day. The first two days, we had about 100 hits, but then traffic on the site went through the roof. By day eight, we were averaging 4,000 hits a day and the donations and comments were pouring in." Principal Van Bullard said that he couldn't be prouder of Barbara and Christine and is encouraging students and staff to wear pink to the pep rally. He wants to see a "sea of pink in the gym," he said. "They are incredible role models for our students," Bullard said. "Barbara won her battle with breast cancer and it's time to celebrate."

With all UIL prompts/contests, you will receive contest tips and sample stories when you get your entry back. Study those tips for information you should be looking for and compare your story with the sample story to see if you found the same information and placed it in similar areas as the prompt writer.

TEACHER LIVES ON STREETS TO UNDERSTAND HOMELESS

■ **SITUATION:** Pamela Lund is an English teacher at Leaguetown High School. She sponsors the National Honor Society and is a member of the Leaguetown Press publications board. Last year, she won an award from the National Council of Teachers of English for an article she wrote on teen suicide.

In December, she spent three weeks living as a bag lady on the streets of Washington, D.C. She spent Christmas day in a soup line. In January, Lund wrote a three-part series about her experience for the city newspaper. Several national newspapers picked up her story to run across the nation.

After her series was published, Lund was interviewed by The New York Times and The Washington Post. Next week she will be a guest on NBC's "Today Show." You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Friday, April 21.

■ PAMELA LUND

"The Challenger disaster had a profound effect on me. Christa McAuliffe was a teacher willing to take enormous risks. While teaching is exhausting, I've never thought of it as particularly risky. I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally. I am 50 years old. I needed something to pull me out of my rut.

"As you can imagine, my family was adamantly opposed to the idea. Once they realized I was serious, they supported me. While on the streets, I called home every morning to let the family know I was okay. It was a harsh, eye-opening experience, but I don't regret my decision to do it.

"There's a misconception that the people out on the streets want to be there. That's the farthest thing from the truth. These people are there either because of their own mistake or a mistake of the system. Most of them have a shattered relationship behind them. I asked all of them why they were on the streets, and I couldn't find one person who was there by choice. They might tell that to an outsider. But they admit to each other that they hate life on the streets.

"I think if every American spent a week on the streets, we wouldn't have this problem. When you think of the homeless situation, it boggles the mind. I'm not out to change the world, but if my three weeks on the streets can improve the situation in any way, then the experience was worthwhile. I feel the government is shirking its responsibility. We

JUDGING CRITERIA



1. The lead needs to grab the readers' attention. It also has to fit the mood of the story.
2. Writing should be tight, active and precise.
3. Slang and clichés are avoided.
4. The feature theme must be identified and fully developed.
5. Facts should be presented in logical sequence.
6. Quotes used effectively. Smooth paragraph transition.
7. Persons identified fully and accurately.
7. Feature written in third person, past tense.
8. Secondary consideration will be given to grammar, spelling and neatness, but don't assume they won't be important.

need a shelter in Washington, D.C. If you were out on the streets tonight, you wouldn't find a shelter with space. You'd be looking for a park bench.

"Why did I choose Washington, D.C.? Because the nation's capital represents a lot to me. It's where the rights of human beings and individuals are upheld. For about 10 days, I spent nights in a shelter for women where I was terror-stricken. One night, a woman held a sharpened pair of scissors to my throat and said, 'You shut your eyes one time and you ain't ever going to open them again.' I'll never forget the feeling of those scissors against my throat.

"After that, I slept on the streets near the National Archives, the FBI Building and the upscale department stores. During that time, I got a good look at the problems this nation has with drug abuse, severe alcoholism and mental illness.

■ DAVID LUND, husband of Pamela Lund

"Well, Pam's always been an aggressive, intuitive person. Though I was opposed to the idea at first, I came to realize that for her, this was her mission. She had to do it and she did. I'm proud of her."

■ TAMERA SUTTON, principal

"Ms. Lund has always been a passionate teacher.

When she came to me and asked for extra time off before the December break, I initially said, 'no.' Frankly, I didn't like her idea and didn't want to support such a risky experiment.

"But then, Ms. Lund explained to why she needed to this, and her passion became mine. I called her husband frequently over the holiday to make sure she was okay. I was worried. Ms. Lund's article was incredibly moving. I am proud to call her a part of our team."

■ EXTRA INFORMATION

Lund said while on the street, she dressed in ragged clothing, carried a tattered sleeping bag and wrapped \$2 of quarters in a wool sock as she wandered the streets.

EXCELLENT LEADS

No contest comes with a built-in, all-purpose lead. The examples we show in this manual are just that—examples. Chances are, with a little practice, you could write stories as good or better than the ones in this text. Consider the four leads submitted at a district contest. Although they take different approaches, each is excellent.

NUMBER 1

"YOU SHUT your eyes one time and you ain't ever going to open them again."

Not the usual Christmas greeting exchanged during the holiday season, but for English teacher Pamela Lund, exchanges like that reminded her that life as a bag lady on the streets of Washington, D.C., wasn't exactly a vacation.

"While teaching is exhausting, I've never thought of it as particularly risky," Lund said. "I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally."

And she did. For three weeks in December, Lund dressed in ragged clothing, carried a tattered sleeping bag and spent Christmas Day in a soup line – all in hopes of experiencing first-hand the severe social problems facing the country.

NUMBER 2

WHILE MOST teachers spent Christmas bundled next to a warm fire, Pamela Lund spent her's in a

soup line.

In order to experience the plight of the homeless of America, the English teacher spent three weeks disguised as a bag lady on the streets of Washington, D.C.

"While teaching is exhausting, I've never thought of it as particularly risky," Lund said. "I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally. I'm 50 years old. I needed something to pull me out of my rut."

Dressed in ragged clothing and equipped with a tattered sleeping bag and \$2 of quarters wrapped in a wool sock, Lund set out for what her husband called "her mission."

NUMBER 3

FOR PAMELA LUND, the only way to "pull herself out of a rut" was to put herself down in the gutter. The English teacher spent three weeks in December on the streets of Washington, D.C., disguised as a bag lady.

"I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally," Lund explained. "I am 50 years old. I needed something to pull me out of my rut."

On the streets, she talked to the homeless as one of their own and learned some startling facts.

"There's a misconception that people out on the streets want to be there," Lund said. "That's the farthest thing from the truth. These people are there either because of their own mistake or a mistake of the system. Most of them have a shattered relationship behind them. I asked all of them why they were on the streets, and I couldn't find one person who was there by choice. They might tell that to an outsider. But they admit to each other that they hate life on the streets."

NUMBER 4

THE LINE stretched for blocks. Weary men and women, clinging to worn-out coats or ragged shawls, waited patiently for their Christmas dinner, a bowl of watery vegetable soup. Confined to empty lives on the streets, many by mistake or misadventure, none of these street people were there by choice—except one. Disguised as a bag lady, carrying a tattered sleeping bag and \$2 of quarters wrapped in a wool sock, Pamela Lund took her place among the

forsaken.

For three weeks in December, the Leaguetown English teacher gave up the security and comfort of her home in an effort to experience first-hand the problems of America's homeless.

"I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally," Lund said. "I am 50 years old. I needed something to pull me out of my rut." 🐻

SAMPLE STORY

Because we are suckers for a description lead, let's go with the fourth lead. This leads puts us in a new time and place.

This is the nut graph. It summarizes what this story is about.

Notice how the time element (the news peg) is high in the story.

Notice how the transitions flow into the direct quotes. The direct quotes expand on information in the transition preceeding them.

THE LINE stretched for blocks. Weary men and women, clinging to worn-out coats or ragged shawls, waited patiently for their Christmas dinner, a bowl of watery vegetable soup. Confined to empty lives on the streets, many by mistake or misadventure, none of these street people were there by choice —except one. Disguised as a bag lady, carrying a tattered sleeping bag and \$2 wrapped in a wool sock, Pamela Lund took her place among the forsaken.

For three weeks in December, the English teacher gave up the security and comfort of her home in an effort to experience first-hand the problems of America's homeless.

"I wanted to do something that would challenge me physically, intellectually, emotionally," Lund said. "I am 50 years old. I needed something to pull me out of my rut."

After her experience, Lund wrote a three-part series for the local newspaper, and she has been interviewed by The New York Times and The Washington Post. Next week, she will be a guest on NBC's "Today Show."

"I'm not out to change the world but if my three weeks on the streets can improve the situation in any way, then the experience was worthwhile," she said.

On the streets, Lund learned that the homeless are not there by choice, dispelling the popular myth that they prefer this lifestyle.

"There's a misconception that people out on the streets want to be there," she said. "That's the farthest thing from the truth. These people are there either because of their own mistake or a mistake of the system. Most of them have a shattered relationship behind them. I asked all of them why they were on the streets, and I couldn't find one person who was there by choice. They might tell that to an outsider. But they admit to each other that they hate life on the streets."

She also learned that assistance for the homeless ranges from non-existent to irresponsibly inadequate.

"We need a shelter in Washington, D.C.," she said. "If you were out on the streets tonight, you wouldn't find a shelter with space. You would be looking for a park bench."

Even when space was found, the shelters were more dangerous than the streets.

"For about 10 days, I spent nights in a shelter for women where I was terror-stricken," she said. "One night, a woman held a pair of scissors to my throat and said, 'You shut your eyes one time and you ain't ever going to open them again.' I'll never forget the feeling of those scissors against my throat."

After this experience, Lund moved back onto the streets, sleeping nights near the National Archives, the FBI Building and the upscale department stores.

"During that time, I got a good look at the problems this nation has with drug abuse, severe alcoholism and mental illness," she said.

While it was a "harsh, eye-opening" experience, Lund said she has no regrets about her three weeks on the streets of Washington, D.C.

"I think if every American spent a week on the streets, we wouldn't have this problem," she said. 🐻

CLASS PLAY CHOSEN TO HONOR VICTIMS OF NAZI HOLOCAUST

■ **SITUATION:** The Leaguetown drama department will perform “Playing for Time,” an Arthur Miller play about Jewish women during the World War II Holocaust who used music to cope with the fear and hate they felt toward their Nazi captors. The play will feature 42 cast members and a full orchestra, the largest production Leaguetown has ever presented. To prepare for the play, the actors and crew attended a Saturday work session where they saw graphic films about the Holocaust and listened to accounts from Holocaust survivors. Leaguetown rabbi and Holocaust survivor Eli Zimmerman has served as an adviser throughout the play production. The play opens Friday, April 8 and will run for two weeks. You are writing for an issue of the Press to be distributed Thursday, April 7.

■ **CYNTHIA DENNISON**, drama teacher

“I was deeply moved by Steven Spielberg’s movie ‘Schindler’s List,’ which dealt with the Holocaust. It encouraged me to consider directing a serious play rather than a musical or comedy. Then, I remembered a play I had read in college about Jewish women in the Holocaust, and I decided that we should attempt it. It’s a big step away from the shows we usually do, like ‘Grease,’ but I think we have an excellent cast and crew who will pull this off beautifully.

“I want to show the students and citizens of Leaguetown how it really felt to be Jewish during the Holocaust. We’ve gone through extensive research to find out exactly what life was like, and I think it will change people’s outlooks, if not their lives. I don’t want the audience to feel sorry for Jewish people, but I think they should at least appreciate what they went through. I think our play has the power to do that.”

■ **ELI ZIMMERMAN**, rabbi at Beth Shalom

“I was shocked and surprised that the students were going to undertake this project. Helping them brought back many memories, most of them very unpleasant. I remember sleeping one night when I was 14 years old, and men in uniforms came into my room and grabbed me and my younger sister. We lived in Zwickau, a small town near the Austrian border. I didn’t know what was going on. My mother and father never told us anything because they didn’t want us to be afraid. We were taken to Auschwitz where my father and I were forced to work in the

concentration camp. My mother and sister were killed in the showers, and my father was murdered by Nazi guards. It is a miracle that I survived.

“When ‘Schindler’s List’ first came out, I didn’t want to see it. I was afraid of the pain it would bring. I think I’ve seen every movie made about the Holocaust, and I’ve never seen any portrayal that in any way dishonors the Holocaust victims. But in my opinion, ‘Schindler’s List’ is the most powerful of them all even though watching it was a terribly harrowing experience. In general, any respectful attempt – be it a movie by Steven Spielberg or a high school play – to present what happened is valuable and positive.”

■ **MICHAEL CHANG**, principal

“I will encourage history teachers to offer extra credit to students who see ‘Playing for Time.’ This is an incredible play and has the potential to change lives.”

■ **MICHELLE CHESSMAN**, junior

“My character is one of five women who sings about their fear and anger during the Holocaust. When I tried out for the part, I had no idea what this play would come to mean to me. The whole thing is very personal. It shows a lot of different situations. It doesn’t record the same things everyone has heard about the Holocaust. When we met for our Saturday session, the first thing that happened was that we were stamped with a number. We weren’t allowed to talk for most of the day, and Mrs. Dennison yelled at us and only referred to us by our numbers. We watched a video that showed naked men, women and children being herded into the gas chambers, believing that they were going to take a shower. It helped us get a feeling for the humiliation that these people must have felt.”

■ **MARC STERN**, senior and a Jewish student

“It’s kind of ironic, but the only anti-Semitism I have ever experienced has been here at Leaguetown. Last month I found a swastika drawn in shoe polish on my car windshield. I cannot understand the ignorance of those who are blinded by hate and infected with fear. I want to see this play, and I hope everyone else at school will.”

■ **EXTRA INFORMATION**

More than 6 million Jews were killed in the Nazi concentration camps. The swastika was the symbol of the Nazi party. ★

COMMENTS

Those of you who saw “Schindler’s List” can appreciate how fictional scenes can generate such powerful emotions. At the end of the movie, more than a few spectators were in tears. And several openly wept.

Excellent writing can be every bit as powerful as film.

It is the job of the reporter to capture the emotions, the sensations of the story. This sample story, written by Trisha Ardiana, does just this:

SAMPLE STORY

“**NUMBER 465873!**”

Silence.

Louder, “Number 465873!”

“What? Oh, sorry. Yeah?”

“Number 465873, I tolerate no speaking. Stand when you are called!”

She stood, trembling. This was not what she had expected when her drama teacher asked the cast to come for a Saturday work session. This was too much like real life.

In preparation for the play “Playing for Time,” a story about Jewish women during the World War II Holocaust, cast members listened to stories of a Holocaust survivor, viewed graphic films and engaged in a simulation of life in the concentration camps. The women in the play used music to cope with the fear and hate they felt toward their Nazi captors who killed more than 6 million Jews.

“Playing for Time” opens tomorrow and features 42 cast members and a full orchestra, making it the largest production Leaguetown has undertaken. It is also, drama teacher Cynthia Dennison said, the most hard-hitting.

“I was deeply moved by Steven Spielberg’s movie ‘Schindler’s List,’ which dealt with the Holocaust,” Dennison said. “It encouraged me to consider directing a serious play. It’s a big step away from the shows we usually do, like ‘Grease,’ but I think we have an excellent cast and crew who will pull this off beautifully.”

Principal Michael Chang said he would encourage history teachers to offer extra credit to students who go see “Playing for Time” during its two-week run.

“This is an incredible play and has the potential to change lives,” he said.

The students involved in the play, though, have already learned a great deal about the history and real-life drama of the Holocaust.

“My character is one of five women who sings about their fear and anger during the Holocaust,” junior Michelle Chessman said. “When I tried out for the part, I had no idea what this play would come to mean to me. The whole thing is very personal. It shows a lot of different situations. It doesn’t record the same things everyone else has heard about the Holocaust. It helped us get a feeling for the humiliation that these people must have felt.”

Part of the students’ research for the play included talking with Eli Zimmerman, a rabbi of Beth Shalom and a Holocaust survivor. His family was taken to Auschwitz when he was 14 years old. He worked in the camp while his father was murdered by guards, and his mother and sister were killed in the gas chambers.

“It is a miracle I survived,” Zimmerman said. “Helping [the students] brought back many memories, most of them very unpleasant. I was shocked and surprised that they were going to undertake this project. I think I’ve seen every movie made about the Holocaust, and I’ve never seen any portrayal that in any way dishonors the Holocaust victims. In general, any respectful attempt – be it a movie by Steven Spielberg or a high school play – to represent what happened is valuable and positive.”

Members of the Jewish community also hope “Playing for Time” will help combat anti-Semitism that still exists.

“It’s kind of ironic, but the only anti-Semitism I have ever experienced has been here at Leaguetown,” said senior Marc Stern, who is Jewish. “Last month I found a swastika [the symbol of the Nazi party] drawn in shoe polish on my car windshield. I cannot understand the ignorance of those who are blinded by hate and infected with fear. I want to see this play, and I hope everyone else at school will.”

Dennison said she thought it was important that “Playing for Time” acts not only as a history lesson but as a lesson in understanding as well.

“I want to show the students and citizens of Leaguetown how it really felt to be Jewish during the Holocaust,” Dennison said. “I think it will change people’s outlooks, if not their lives. I don’t want the audience to feel sorry for Jewish people, but I think they should at least appreciate what they went through. I think our play has the power to do that.” 🍀

BIG MONEY, BIG MONEY; I'D LIKE TO SOLVE THE PUZZLE

The following contest deals with a teacher who won big on the television game show “Wheel of Fortune.” The fact sheet provides participants with a time sequence that includes before, during and after. It is the responsibility of the writer to organize information so that the reader can move with ease through this chronology.

■ **SITUATION:** Richard Kelso is a World History teacher at Leaguetown High School. He is 37 years old, a graduate of The University of Texas at Austin and the divorced father of three children, Jerry (16), Cheryl (14) and Kenneth (10). Kelso’s hobbies include collecting Beatles’ memorabilia, reading spy novels and basketball.

During the Christmas holidays, Kelso visited his brother, Andrew, in Los Angeles, California. Andrew, an engineer for Lockheed Martin, is 34. While in Los Angeles, Richard was a contestant on the game show “Wheel of Fortune.” He spent 10 days with his brother, visiting Disneyland, Knott’s Berry Farm and Universal Studios.

The episode featuring Richard Kelso will air March 23. You are writing for an issue of the Press to be distributed Thursday, March 19.

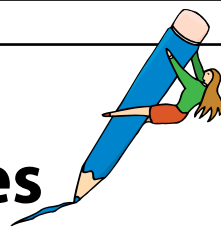
■ RICHARD KELSO

“I hadn’t seen my brother in several years, and so we planned an extended visit. We had a lot of catching up to do. I’m a big fan of ‘Wheel of Fortune’ and thought that as long as I was going to be in Los Angeles, I might as well try to be a contestant on the show. I wrote for tickets and, after a written test and an interview, was chosen to play. They look for personality. They want people who are articulate and outgoing.

“The day I was to compete, they had us in the studio and told us how to spin the wheel, how to talk into the cameras and what to say. They leave very little to chance. Once during the show, a sign flashed beneath a camera. It said, ‘Look here and smile.’

“I wore my best navy blue suit for the show. I wanted to look good for Vanna (White) and the other 43 million people who will be watching. After our briefing, we were walked into the studio where the game is filmed and just like that, we were playing. Let me tell you, it’s a lot harder playing in front of those cameras and a studio audience. I’m guilty of sitting

Using Direct Quotes



Use them early. Don’t bury quotes deep in your story. Showcase them. Avoid quote leads unless the quote is dynamite.

Open the paragraph with the quote. Then identify the source. For example:

Right: “If Dr. McCoy tosses one more of his childish fits, we are going to shoot him,” Captain Kirk said.

Wrong: Captain Kirk said, “If Dr. McCoy tosses one more of his childish fits, we are going to shoot him.”

When a source changes thoughts in a direct quote, it is sometimes best to close the direct quote after the first thought is expressed, then paraphrase the second thought as a transition device into the remainder of the statement. For example:

“Following Harry Potter around the world to find the horacruxes was not as exciting as it looked,” Hermione Granger said. “His endless whining drove me nuts.”

But the job had its advantages, Granger said.

“I did fall in love with Ron that summer,” she said.

Don’t bury the attribution in a multi-sentence quote. Identify the source after the first sentence and then complete the sentence.

Wrong: “In retrospect, I suppose I did whine a bit, but in my defense, it’s not easy being the Chosen One. Everyone always wanted to look at my scar. It really wasn’t fun,” Harry Potter said.

Right: “In retrospect, I suppose I did whine a bit, but in my defense, it’s not easy being the Chosen One,” Harry Potter said. (Now, finish the quote.)

Generally, place the noun before the verb. For example, “She’s about to explode, Captain,” Scotty said. “I don’t think she can take much more.”

However, if the noun is followed by a clause or long title, then place the verb “said” before the noun.

For example: “She’s about to explode, Captain,” said Scotty, who was in charge of engine room.

Critically important: Do not think just because the fact sheet provides information — quotes included — in a particular order that you must follow that order. Mix it up. The best quote in the story may be provided in the final paragraph of the fact sheet.

Remember: The purpose of the contest is to teach you to process information in a creative, descriptive way. You cannot win by rehashing the contest fact sheet.

at home and thinking, 'I could do better than those bozos.' But under those circumstances, I was fortunate just to get words out of my mouth. Pat Sajak puts people at ease. He's a bit of a wise-guy, but he's personable, very down-to-earth. And Vanna is gorgeous.

I was aided by some unusually good luck. My top competitor hit 'Bankrupt' twice, and the other contestant never really got into the game. It was between two of us. I won the first and third games and was chosen to play the final round. The category was "Thing." It was three lines. Since they give you "R, S, L, T and E," I asked for an "N, W, P and U." The board read: ST_TE _ _ _ _N_

"I studied it a minute, and then it hit me. 'State of mind,' I said. To my absolute amazement, I was right. My brother ran up on stage, and we all stood there for a minute, just staring in disbelief. I think they wanted me to jump up and down, but I was too stunned to do that. Pat and Vanna patted me on the back, let me sit in my car and wave good-bye to the audience. Then, they rushed us off-stage in order to begin the next show. They tape about six a day, I understand. As I was walking off stage, it hit me. 'Don't winners get to hug Vanna?' Apparently, they don't. I got a warm handshake instead. While I was holding her hand, I thought to myself, 'I'm the envy of every red-blooded man in America.'

"My winnings totaled \$28,000, and you can bet Uncle Sam had his hand out all ready and waiting. The federal income tax on gifts is pretty steep, and I'll have to sell some of this stuff in order to pay taxes. But I'm keeping the Jeep and the piano. The show is a phenomenon. I can't explain its attraction. It's like an electronic shopping mall, and it's so simple that everyone thinks they can win at it."

■ EXTRA INFORMATION

Kelso won a \$19,000 Jeep Cherokee. In addition, he won a baby grand piano and a dining room set. Kelso said he would sell the dining room set. Wheel of Fortune is the nation's second longest-running television game show, airing on 200 stations across the nation and averaging 40 million viewers per show. Since the show began in 1975, it has won six Emmys and has 25 nominations.

COMMENTS

The possibilities for this story are almost endless. Many students led with a scene that describes the mo-

ment in which Kelso won the game. They described his "absolute amazement" and his disappointment in not being allowed to hug Vanna. Of the students who advanced to the next round, one thing is certain: each kept the reader moving through the story in a logical, precise way.

When the fact sheet contains a situation that includes a before, during and after, then the writer must find a way to keep the story moving in a chronologically logical direction. That doesn't mean the writer must begin at the beginning and end at the end, but he or she must tell the story in such a manner that the reader is never lost.

In the first sample story, note how the writer places the reader into the future. This was an unusual but quite effective technique. After opening with the scene, the writer then explains the situation. He or she describes the story—coming to visit his brother, competing on the show, winning and picking up his prize.

SAMPLE STORY #1

NEXT MONDAY AS WORLD history teacher Richard Kelso sits in his easy chair after dinner and flips the television dial to join the other 40 million fans of the game show "Wheel of Fortune," no doubt he will do so with an added degree of satisfaction—\$28,000 worth to be exact.

Kelso recently won a \$19,000 Jeep Cherokee, a baby grand piano and a dining room set, winnings valued at \$28,000, as a contestant on the game show.

During the Christmas holidays, Kelso visited his brother in Los Angeles, where the television program is taped.

A confirmed "Wheel of Fortune" fan, Kelso said, "As long as I was going to be in Los Angeles, I might as well try to be a contestant on the show."

After writing for tickets, Kelso took a written test and was interviewed before being selected to play.

"They look for personality," he said. "They want people who are articulate and outgoing."

On the day he was to compete, Kelso and the other contestants were taken to the studio and shown how to spin the wheel, how to talk into the camera and what to say.

"They leave very little to chance," Kelso said. "Once during the show, a sign flashed beneath a camera. It said, 'Look here and smile.'"

After a briefing, the contestants were led into the studio and the game began.

"Let me tell you, it's a lot harder playing in front of those cameras and a studio audience," Kelso said. "I'm guilty of sitting at home and thinking, 'I could do better than those bozos.' But under those circumstances, I was fortunate just to get words to come out of my mouth."

"Wheel of Fortune" is the second longest running television game show, airing on 200 stations across the nation. Despite the notoriety associated with the program, Kelso said the host made him feel relaxed.

"Pat Sajak puts people at ease," Kelso said. "He's a bit of a wise-guy, but he's personable, very down-to-earth."

And what of Vanna White?

"Gorgeous," he said.

Kelso attributes his win to some unusually good luck.

"My top competitor hit 'Bankrupt' twice, and the other contestant never really got into the game," he said. "It was between two of us. I won the first and third games and was chosen to play the final round.

"The category was 'Thing.' It was three lines. Since they give you 'R, S, L, T and E,' I asked for an 'N, W, P and U.' I studied the board for a minute and then it hit me.

"'State of mind,' I said."

To his amazement, Kelso was right. Kelso's brother joined him on stage where the two stood, staring in disbelief.

"I think they wanted me to jump up and down, but I was too stunned to do that," he said.

After a quick pat on the back, the winner sat in his car and waved good-bye to the audience. Soon he was rushed offstage to prepare for the taping of the next show. Six episodes of "Wheel of Fortune" are taped every day, Kelso said. The show featuring Kelso will air this Monday, March 23.

As he was leaving, a thought occurred to him: "Don't winners get to hug Vanna?"

Kelso was out of luck. Instead of a hug, he received a warm handshake.

"While I was holding her hand, I thought to myself, 'I'm the envy of every red-blooded man in America.'"

For this second sample story, note the detailed description in the lead "best blue suit." When the prompt gives you such details, try to use them to add more to your story.

Also note how the writer continues with power-

ful description throughout the story "tiny beads of sweat." This detail wasn't in the prompt, but we do give you some liberty in this contest. Our judging criteria states: It is permissible for students to set a scene for the feature prompt. The scene may include details that are not in the prompt.

SAMPLE STORY #2

HE STOOD under the lights, sweating in his best blue suit, racing over in his mind everything they had told him to do.

"Talk into the cameras this way ... spin the wheel like this ... watch for the sign saying, 'Look here and smile' ... try not to be nervous ... answer the questions as briefly as possible ..."

World history teacher Richard Kelso suddenly saw himself sitting in front of his television watching "Wheel of Fortune" thinking, "I could do better than those bozos."

"What was I thinking?" he may have said to himself as reality hit him. "I am one of those bozos."

But "bozo" may not be the best description for Kelso's appearance on the second-longest running game show in television, which will air this Monday. Bozos don't bring home Jeeps and baby grand pianos.

As the stage director gave Pat Sajak his cue, Mr. Kelso's mouth went dry. Tiny beads of sweat had formed on his forehead and across his upper lip. When asked his first question, he could barely speak.

Because his top competitor hit "Bankrupt" twice, Kelso won the first and third games. He wobbled towards Pat and Vanna for the final round.

"Let me tell you, it's a lot harder playing in front of those cameras and a studio audience," Kelso said.

The bonus round began. The category: "Thing." The puzzle had three words. The game gives contestants 'R, S, L, T and E,' so Kelso asked for an 'N, W, P and U.

"I studied it a minute and then it hit me," he said. "'State of mind,' To my absolute amazement, I was right."

His brother, whom he had been visiting when he became a contestant, ran up on stage, and they both just stood there, staring in disbelief.

"I think they wanted me to jump up and down, but I was too stunned to do that," Kelso said.

He got a pat on the back. They let him sit in his \$19,000 Jeep Cherokee for a moment then rushed him offstage so they could begin the next show. As he was walking offstage, he wondered, "Don't win-

ners get to hug Vanna?"

Apparently not.

"I got a warm handshake instead," Kelso said. "But while I was holding her hand, I thought to myself, 'I'm the envy of every red-blooded man in America.'"

Kelso's winnings totalled \$28,000. In addition to his Jeep, he also won a baby grand piano and a din-

ing room set, but in order to pay the steep income tax placed on gifts, he will sell the dining room set.

"The show is a phenomenon," he said. "I can't explain its attraction. It's like an electronic shopping mall, and it's so simple that everyone thinks he can win at it."

The Transition/Quote Formula: An Example (From the prompt on Pages 44-45)

Lead:

Most interesting information. Something that will grab the reader's attention and drag them into the story. Feature leads don't have a set length. They can be one paragraph or five paragraphs.

Eight hundred miles of terrain in 10 days — on bikes.

A pretty tough challenge, but it certainly isn't the hardest challenge science teacher Barbara Windo and her daughter, Christine, have faced.

Two years ago, Mrs. Windo was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer.

"From the first day, my mom said, 'We will beat this thing, Chris. We will win this battle,'" Christine, a senior, said. "She wasn't wrong. She did beat it, and I am grateful every day for that."

Christine and her mother know not every woman is as lucky.

Nut Graph:

A summary of what the story will be about. Why this story is important.

And that is why the pair decided to raise money for cancer research through an 800-mile bike ride across Texas during spring break. The mother/daughter team raised \$62,000 and, on Wednesday at a school pep rally, they will give the check to a representative from the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

Direct Quote:

Connects to nut graph. Often more than one sentence.

"I never imagined we would raise so much money," Mrs. Windo said. "People have been incredibly giving. I pray this money will help find the cure. We must find a cure."

Transition:

Use transition words to help story flow. Transition can be a fact, indirect quote or partial quote.

In January, the day after Mrs. Windo received a clean bill of health from her doctor, she and her daughter came up with the plan for the fundraiser. They decided to ride their bikes across Texas, from El Paso to Texarkana, and blog about their travels. More than 200 breast cancer survivors rode portions of the trip with them and thousands read their blog and donated money.

Direct Quote:

Connects to transition before it. Often more than one sentence. DQs should show the emotion of the story.

"We had an absolute blast on the 10-day ride," Christine said. "Sure, it was tough, but the weather was perfect every day. And we received so much support from the communities we rode through."

Next Transition:

Transitions should introduce new facts or information.

The mother/daughter team called their ride "Push for the Cure" because they knew they would have to push themselves to their limits to ride across Texas, Mrs. Windo said.

Direct Quote:

Connects to transition before it. Often more than one sentence. DQs should show the emotion of the story.

"By day seven, I wasn't sure I had the energy to ride anymore, but then we met Betty," she said. "Betty had been diagnosed two days before we rode into her hometown of Red Oak. She is 37 years old and the mother of two toddlers. Betty rode five miles with us, her toddlers in tow. Her courage and determination spilled onto me. I rode those last three days for her."

And the Transition/Quote formula continues ...

Christine said her favorite day of the trip was traveling through the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex.

"Both major daily newspapers had run stories that we were coming, so hundreds of people greeted us as we traveled through those cities," Christine said. "We even had a police escort for about 15 miles."

The blog was Christine's idea.

"I wanted to keep our friends and family informed about how everything was going, and I love to write," Christine said. "Every night, both mom and I wrote about the day. The first two days, we had about 100 hits, but then traffic on the site went through the roof. By day eight, we were averaging 4,000 hits a day, and the donations and comments were pouring in."

Principal Van Bullard said he couldn't be prouder of Barbara and Christine and is encouraging students and staff to wear pink to the pep rally. He wants to see a "sea of pink in the gym," he said.

"They are incredible role models for our students," Bullard said. "Barbara won her battle with breast cancer, and it's time to celebrate."

Note: The time peg was in the nut graph. If the prompt has a time peg (and it usually does), try to place it high in the story.

Tip: Cut a Sample Story into different paragraphs. Have your students put the story back together. This will help the students understand and see the link between the transition and direct quote. While the order of the story may vary from the original, the transitions and quote should still be together.

State Meet Feature Writing Contest

At the State Meet contest, students will conduct a 30-minute interview as a group with an individual of our choice. In the past, interviews have been conducted with the governor's press secretary, the first black editor of the UT daily student newspaper, a comedian and one of the actors on "Friday Night Lights." A few years ago, we had Jody Conradt, the former award-winning University of Texas at Austin girls basketball coach. She was fantastic.

Here is a column that ran in the Leaguer shortly after the UIL State Meet.

A tail or wings.

Now I will never know which she would prefer to have.

At the UIL State Feature Writing Contest, Jody Conradt, who coached the Lady Longhorns for 31 years, was the featured speaker.

At the beginning of the contest, she told the roomful of anxious journalists that they could ask her anything. She was prepared — even for the weird questions.

In fact, just a few weeks prior to the contest, when she was at an elementary school, one little student asked her if she would prefer to have a tail or wings.

The students laughed when Coach Conradt told the story. But not a single one of them bothered to ask how she answered that question.

The students did ask other great questions, and their feature stories were quite impressive. But I am still in the dark to one question I wanted her to answer most.

A tail or wings?

And what a lead that could have made.

The Feature Writing Contest at State is an unusual beast. It is different from every other contest that we offer. At invitational meets, at district meets, at regional meets, students get a feature prompt and write a story from that paper.

At State, we shake things up. Instead of giving them a piece of paper, we give them a person. A real live person they have to interview. And then write a story. Just a little different.

Each year, I get calls from panicked advisers wondering how to tackle this new beast. I tell all of them the same thing. Your students should take good

notes and ask good questions.

It's all about the quotes and the questions.

What I haven't been telling students and advisers is that it's okay to mention the State Meet within the entry. For instance, for this feature on Jody Conradt, your nut graph (following your powerful lead) could have looked something like this:

Coach Conradt spoke about her retirement and highlights of her career to 60 high school journalists at the UIL State Feature Writing Contest Thursday, May 3.

This nut graph would give a writer a real direction. That is what seemed to be missing in so many stories.

I don't think, by any means, this was a must for your story, but it's absolutely okay to mention in the story that this is taking place at the State Meet. Why not? It's the truth.

Getting the nut graph often is the hardest part for some students. But without it, students tend to just wander through different tangents rather tell one story.

So, next year, when you take your students to State, remind them to get good quotes, ask good questions and tell them a strong nut graph is a definite must.

And if the speaker happens to talk about tails or wings, please, for my sake, ask them which one they would prefer.

Another tip to succeeding at State is to sit up close, look for a theme to develop, capture several good quotes and perhaps to describe the character if description is relevant.

The contestants are given a biographical sketch of the interviewee and then a half hour to interview that person. This is not a one-on-one interview. The interviewee will field questions from the audience, and there's no guarantee questions will follow in any logical sequence. The chances of getting a follow-up question are slim as well. The secret is to pay as close attention as possible and take down only information that will help you develop the theme of your story.

Contestants are not graded on the interview process. No record is kept of who asked how many or which questions.

Keep in mind that the feature writing contest is based on observation as well as direct quotes. Make a

mental note of the interviewee's appearance. How did he or she look? Nervous, haggard, preppy, confident? Pay attention to body language. Did she use particular gestures? Often, these small details say more about the person than you realize.

Be selective with your quotes. Don't try to write down every word. Catch an angle and develop it. In the interview, the guest will field a large number of questions. As a reporter, you must look for comments that will be beneficial in developing your angle. Again, don't try to write down every word. Listen to other persons' questions. Often, students are so wrapped up in asking their own question that they fail to listen to what other people are asking. Their line of thought may be far more provocative than your own. You may want to ask a follow-up question to another person's original query.

At one state meet, the guest speaker was Mrs. Shirley Bird Perry, coordinator of The University of Texas at Austin's centennial observance. She discussed plans for the event, why it was important, a bit of UT history and funding for the project. In addition, she discussed her background as a UIL participant.

Any of these angles would have been suitable for development, but most students preferred to toss in a quote here, another unrelated fact in there, and yet another unrelated fact somewhere else.

At the same time, few students considered the time peg. In a speech story, the circumstances and time during which the speech is made must be included in the story. For example:

"It's a special time to look backward," Mrs. Shirley Bird Perry, coordinator of the University of Texas centennial observance, said Tuesday.

Speaking to 60 high school journalism students competing in the UIL State Meet Feature Writing Contest at the Joe C. Thompson Conference Center Friday, Mrs. Perry said . . ." 🐼

Lousy feature lead, but the news peg is "Speaking to 60 high school journalism students . . ."

Speaking of leads, a few major pitfalls to avoid are:

1. The second person question "Did you ever . . ." or "Have you ever . . ." leads.
2. Weak direct quote leads.
3. Leads beginning with a person's name. Rarely is the name the most important element of the story. An action, comment or observation generally deserves lead consideration.

4. Leads beginning with the date.
5. Passive verbs.
6. Question leads.

THE WAY TOO HOT ACTOR

Another year, the subject of the State Meet contest was Jared Padalecki, the star of the television show "Supernatural." Jared had previously starred on "Gilmore Girls" and had been listed on those Hollywood Sexiest Guys lists. Needless to say, after he was introduced and gave his opening talk, most of the audience sat silently. In fact, one very smart writer, who won first place in Conference 1A, used that for her lead:



Kaitlyn Wiloth
Albany HS

Girls sat there googly-eyed with silly smirks on their faces.

Nervous journalism advisers whispered in their ears, "You know, you can't just stare at him the whole time, right?"

"Supernatural" TV star Jared Padalecki, the cause of all the commotion, patiently sat in the front of the room waiting to be interviewed.

Luckily, one brave contestant broke the silence and asked a question.

A few tips for the State Meet: Work on taking notes. Practice in front of the television. Take notes the next time a political figure delivers a speech. The next morning, compare your quotes to those that appear in the daily newspaper.

Sit at the front of the room so that you can observe mannerisms, attire and other traits that will be helpful in developing a personality profile feature.

Note how this writer filled her story with great quotes and description.

THE TOPS IN TEXAS STORY

By Alexa Hart,
Pine Tree HS

Jared Padalecki stood in the checkout line at the convenience store. The clerk asked to see identification, and the 22-year-old actor realized he was out of luck — he didn't have his driver's license on him. Conveniently, a TV Guide magazine which featured the actor in an interview hung on a rack by the counter.

The "Gilmore Girls" star pulled the magazine, flipped it to the feature and showed the clerk an interview that mentioned Jared's name and age. "I guess you really are 22," the clerk said, and completed the sales transaction.

Using a magazine as an alternate form of identification proved to be one of the more unlikely perks of being a television star. But Jared, who currently plays the lead role of Sam Winchester in "Supernatural," said that seeing his face in print is, if anything, humbling.

"It makes me feel goofy," Jared said. "You see it and think, 'Ah, I look like a dork.' Like I'm posing like Zoolander or something."

The San Antonio, Texas, native has been acting for over 10 years, assuming roles on well-known shows such as "ER" and in multiple movies including "Flight of the Phoenix," "House of Wax," "Cry Wolf" and the recent "Friday the 13th" remake.

Jared actively participated in theater in high school. He competed in State UIL One-Act Play both his freshman and sophomore years, as well as received multiple Best Actor honors at District, Area and Regional competitions.

"The first time I competed at State, I remember showing up at a college when I was 14," Jared said. "I thought it would be a one-time thing. That was my foot in the door."

Jared's mother, Sherri Padalecki, said that she always thought that her son would end up in show business.

"I think I always knew my son would be an entertainer," Padalecki said. "He was a family clown and always managed to make us laugh. He frequently fooled me, calling to tell me he was in trouble in

school and I had to come pick him up. After I finished my 'tirade' I would hear him snicker, 'Gotcha, Mom!' Now I realize all of his antics were part of his training."

A supportive family and network of friends are what Jared said he attributes to his success.

"But my parents weren't blindly supportive," Jared said. "I happened to be the guy with the lucky draw. I think it's hard for parents to be supportive of being famous."

Making sacrifices in his personal life was one of the biggest trade-offs for Jared in adjusting to life as an actor. He said that balancing his personal and professional life is one of the biggest challenges he faces.

"It's hard on all of my relationships," Jared said. "I take my friends out for a steak dinner at the beginning of each season, and at the end of dinner I tell them, 'Alright, I'll see you guys in April.' But ultimately, they understand, and they wouldn't want me to sacrifice my life and my craft for them."

The Vancouver, Canada, resident said he often misses home, and credits his Texan upbringing for many of his core values.

"Yes, I do get homesick," Jared said. "Inevitably, I come back down and everything's great. In Texas, the morals and ethics are so strong, and my upbringing has set my priorities straight."

More than just a hobby and a profession, Jared said that acting has helped him discover more about himself.

"When I'm in the role, it's a complete release," Jared said. "It helps you learn what works for you and what doesn't. I've learned a lot about myself in the last 10 years. I've found something in each of my characters I can relate to."

Despite the sacrifices in his personal life, as well as professional sacrifices he's made due to conflicting roles and binding contracts, Jared said he considers all of the setbacks to be an important experience.

"I don't really believe in failure," Jared said. "Instead of seeing things as a failure, I just consider them part of the journey I'm on."

Editorial Writing

Invitational B Meet • 2011

UIL

You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper. Remember that as an editorial writer, you should support or oppose **policy or action**; you should not sermonize.

You have **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in Central Texas, has 1,700 students enrolled in grades 9-12. For the past eight years, the high school has been on block scheduling, with four class periods each day. Because of budget cuts, the district is moving back to the traditional seven-period day for the 2011-12 school year. Students, teachers and parents have expressed concern that students will have to choose between elective and athletic classes.

To solve this problem, Superintendent Mildred Thimble is proposing to move all athletic classes out of the regular day to after school. Superintendent Thimble said this proposal also would allow coaches to teach at least one more class. The plan proposes that athletic classes start at 3:45 p.m. and continue to 5:45 p.m. when the sport is in season. During pre- and post-season, no formal classes will be held, but students can use the gym and weight room.

Reactions are mixed about the proposal. Principal Drew Ghant said he is in favor of it, if the coaches are on board. Most faculty members like the idea. Athletic Director Jackson Hiller said he would like more information, but his initial reaction is not supportive.

Superintendent Thimble plans on making a decision by March 15 so that scheduling will not be hindered. Until that date, she is encouraging students, parents and faculty to give her feedback and suggestions. The next issue of the Press will be distributed Monday, March 7.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE CHANGE

Moving athletics out of the school day does not harm anyone. It still allows athletes to train and participate in their sport. The plan also allows coaches to teach more classes, which would help alleviate the budget crunch and oversized classes. Plus, students would have more options with their schedules. Coaches may also see more athletes participating since students would not have to take a class.

THOSE OPPOSING THE CHANGE

Moving athletics out of the school day will hurt the programs, the athletes and the coaches. The programs will suffer because athletes will not have as much time with their coaches to train and practice. The athletes will suffer because they will have to take an additional class, meaning more homework and stress. The coaches will suffer because not only will they have shorter time to prepare for competitions, they also will have an additional academic class to teach.

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chose this option for their district. They have in fact, one school district had an increase in budgeting off the cuff. I told him to contact the athletes to find a palatable solution for every-

ried that my classes would shrink because students are athletes, and I didn't want the proposal stands, they won't have to."

ion was 'This stinks.' But I have been told by students. I've talked to one coach about the plan, but he said it's liveable. I don't see that extra class to worry about, but I have previously doubt that our numbers will drop in academic class. I can't be supported in one more class."

team, not less. We were able to reach that goal."

other athletes, would not be able to host athletic classes. Our team on the A field, schedule

school day for their sport. Under the new pro-

Editorial Writing

The key to this contest is to take a stand and defend it well

Editorial writing is the leadership side of journalistic writing. Editorials are the newspaper's stance on a particular situation or problem. They are used to discuss situations that may affect the readers, explain both sides, then come up with a specific solution to fix the problem. In UIL editorial writing, you are doing much the same thing.

As a UIL editorial writer, you will be asked to state the newspaper's stance on timely and relevant issues. We will give you an issue with conflicting points of view. You choose your point of view and develop the argument from the information provided. Judges will not rate your entry according to the stance you've taken. They are not looking for a "right" stance. Don't feel it is necessary to take sides with the administrator or the figures of authority. Select the point of view you feel you can best defend — and then go about defending it.

Judges will rate your entry on how well you develop your editorial, regardless of which side of the argument you defend.

Traditionally, editorials are short. If your editorial consists of six volumes, you've included too much information, and it'll count against you. If it consists of 50 words, you've omitted important information. That'll cost you, too. The contest is geared to a 300-450 word editorial, although the judges never actually count the words.

The editorial should be concise and to-the-point. It is a myth that editorials should be high-brow, overly eloquent or wordy. The purpose is to be as specific and succinct as possible. Why allow hard-to-understand words or phrases to clutter your argument?

Along these same lines, keep sentences short, paragraphs short and logic deep. If we've seen any pattern over the past decade, it has been the failure of students to see past the data to the heart of an issue. Too many students simply regurgitate information rather than processing, analyzing and scrutinizing it.

While editorials may criticize and praise, the UIL contest materials will be geared toward taking a stance on a realistic situation that might have or certainly could occur in any Texas high school. There will be no trite or clichéd editorials about holidays, school spirit, good sportsmanship, apathy or patriotism. Nor will we approach morality issues such as smoking, drinking and driving, pre-marital sex or taking drugs. Even though some would have us argue the merits of apple pie versus cherry pie, peach jelly versus grape jelly, we won't do it.

The only way to teach students to think critically is to require them to think critically.

If you're looking for a dumbed-down, minimum-effort exercise to determine basic literacy, look elsewhere.

Editorial writing is not for the faint of heart. We will ask you to think. If you don't want to do that, find another activity. Since you, as the editorial writer, represent your school newspaper, you are expected to come up with specifics — both a strong defense and solution.

For example, one prompt dealt with a bill that would require Texas third, fifth and eighth graders to pass a state assessment test before advancing to the next grade. The prompt provided reasons for and against the proposal. Several of the quotes were familiar political rhetoric:

“We must stop promoting children who have not mastered basic skills.”

“The state assessment is a flawed testing tool.”

“Some kids simply don't test well.”

What we wanted students to do was to see through the rhetoric and ask some essential questions, such as:

1. What do you do with the children who fail repeatedly?
2. Who will pay for the remedial education? Will the state bear this financial burden given that it forbid local districts to promote students who fail the assessment? Or will this be yet another of the unfunded mandates from Austin?
3. What will be the impact on classroom socialization when classes have children one or two years older than the other children?

Few students asked these questions, and with them unanswered, arguments for or against the proposal sounded like political grandstanding.

The editorial contest challenges good writers, but mostly, it challenges students who can think clearly and deeply and who are not afraid to express an opinion on a complex issue, perhaps even a controversial one and come up with a plausible solution.

Several years ago, we asked students at the State Meet to write an editorial on a bill that would have made it a hate crime to harass gay students in public schools.

The prompt was based on a piece of legislation that had recently passed in another state. Many did not agree with the concept of the prompt. We were barraged with complaints.

The editorial prompts do not promote a particular

situation — one with two sides — and ask the writer to take a stand.

The truth of the matter is, the writer does not have to believe what they write. They just have to be convincing to the judges.

Consider the following contest sheet:

Businessman demands mandatory teacher competency testing

■ **SITUATION:** A local businessman traveled to Dallas two weeks ago to a sales/marketing convention. During his stay, he read an article in The Dallas Morning News that reported that an alarming percentage of school personnel had failed a national teacher examination.

The businessman, Walter Avery, is the owner of Avery Equipment, Inc., which sells oilfield equipment. Avery returned to Leaguetown and discussed the article with school board members George Townsend and Gloria Winchell.

Avery plans to suggest to the school board that it go on record in favor of mandatory teacher competency testing, and he also plans to press for legislation to that effect.

You are writing an article for the Leaguetown Press to appear the afternoon prior to the School Board meeting that night.

■ **PROS:** According to the article Avery cited, 49 percent of the teachers, 36 percent of the applicants and 57 percent of the administrators and other groups failed the Wesman Personnel Classification Test, a standardized test given nationally to teachers.

■ **CONS:** The effectiveness of teacher competency testing is doubted by educational experts. In some cases, test results were compared to childrens' achievements in the individual teachers' classes, and high competency test scores and supervisory ratings went with low gains in student achievement.

Teachers believe that their college degrees prove their knowledge of the basics, and high scores on competency tests do not equate to effectiveness as a teacher.

■ **STATE REP. BILL HODGE**

“Teacher competency testing is controversial, but we know from past experiences that unless teachers

are competent, the students will suffer.

“The state must ensure that teachers have the capacity — as distinguished from the credentials — to teach. Teachers must demonstrate ability — and that’s where these tests come in. Of course, I’m sure my opponent in the upcoming election will misinterpret my statements as being anti-teacher, but that would only be indicative of the misguided and twisted campaign of lies and deception he has staged thus far.”

■ **WILLIAM REYNOLDS**, Texas State Teachers Association president

“First off, we are opposed to all standardized tests. They are prepared and written for middle-class Anglo students, and the tests were originally used in the South, which might lead one to believe that they are just another form of racial, cultural and linguistic discrimination.

“Second, these tests take individual out of context of his upbringing; throw the test at him and he fails it. The rest of society says, ‘I told you he was dumb.’ Thus, he has fulfilled what we call a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

■ **DR. RANDALL HAYES**, Central City College

“You cannot test the worth of a person via a standardized test. A teacher must be a motivator, a leader and an inspirational force as well as a part-time actor, preacher, doctor and parent. If you want to test a person, use objective reference tests or individual diagnostic tests. But these standardized tests out of Princeton, New Jersey, achieve nothing more than reiterating the obvious—that we’re all highly influenced by our social upbringing.”

■ **WALTER AVERY**

“I am concerned with the downward trend in student test scores. The SAT scores were released not too long ago, and they were way down. I don’t think we’re making kids any dumber today than we did 20 years ago, so it must be the teachers. That’s why I’m in favor of these tests.”

■ **BETH SHANAHAN**, TSTA secretary

“A partial answer to teacher competency is a substantial pay raise. High-level people won’t stay in a profession where low-level pay is the standard. Far too many of our best and brightest teachers have left the field simply because they cannot afford to raise a

family on a teacher’s paycheck.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The test was given in Dallas ISD as one of 11 criteria for hiring teachers. It was given to 535 first-year teachers, 894 teacher applicants and 77 other personnel, including administrators, counselors and librarians. The Dallas Morning News reported that of the first 150 applicants to take the test, about half scored lower on the math section than the nation’s average 11th grader, and a third scored below that level in English.

COMMENTS

We will tell you when the editorial is to appear. You might decide how to angle the editorial based on its potential impact on the course of events in the hypothetical contest setting.

Notice that the editorial is to appear the afternoon prior to the School Board meeting that night. This should clue you to the angle the editorial takes—urging the board to support or oppose mandatory teacher competency testing. The time element is important to highlight in the editorials. Get it in the lead, if possible.

The lead could be as simple as:

THE SCHOOL BOARD will go on record tonight in favor of or against mandatory teacher competency testing. They should see through the haze surrounding the issue and vote “no” to such testing.

or

THE SCHOOL BOARD will have the opportunity tonight to jump on the bandwagon or to admit that it’s not simply the teacher’s fault that Johnny can’t read. We urge them to choose the latter.

or

IT’S NOT JOHNNY’S fault that he can’t read. The teacher can’t read either. Tonight, the School Board can take a big step to get rid of incompetent teachers.

The lead of the editorial need not be especially bright or catchy. It should be interesting, but, more importantly, it should introduce the situation and state the staff’s stance on the issue. “Here is the issue.

Here's how we stand.”

That's the most important aspect of the editorial lead. If the student can provide a more off-beat lead which introduces the problem and provides the staff's stance, then all the better. Brevity and clarity are critical.

Let's look through the information provided and decide what is important and what isn't. We've read the entire prompt and know that most of the first paragraph is unnecessary. We do need to know that the matter was brought up by a local businessman, Walter Avery. And we need to identify Avery as owner of an oilfield supply company. But that's about all. Scratch out the rest.

In the second paragraph, you learn Avery is going to urge the board go on record in favor of the testing.

Let's suppose the editorial writer is against the plan. We have the lead above. Much like an attorney pleading his case before a judge, you must also sell your point of view to your readers. This is where you introduce into evidence any statistic, fact, past experience or other piece of data that will corroborate your point of view.

Note the lack of direct quotes in the sample editorial.

We discourage use of direct quotes. Paraphrase the information contained in the quotes or simply use them within your own argument, as the writer has done several times.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL

THE SCHOOL BOARD will go on record tonight in favor of or against mandatory teacher competency testing. They should see through the haze surrounding the issue and vote “no” to such testing.

While proponents of the plan would lead you to believe that poor instruction is the major cause of plummeting test scores, educational experts doubt the effectiveness of competency testing. The root of the problem is sociological and political. Standardized competency testing does not take into consideration social upbringing. The tests were written by and for middle- and upper-class Anglos and discriminate against middle- and lower-class minorities.

The worth of a person cannot be tested in a standardized test. A teacher must be a motivator, a leader, an inspirational force, as well as a part-time actor, preacher, doctor and parent. None are considered in the competency tests.

Furthermore, politicians have used education as a football, kicking it around in whatever direction to please the voters. As a result, pay is ridiculously low and high-level people are bailing out. A partial answer to teacher competency is a substantial pay raise.

Of course, the public wants a scapegoat for what they see as deteriorating education, and no one is going to blame the administrators or politicians. In short, it's easy to take the simplistic approach and blame the teachers.

Walter Avery, a local oilfield supply executive whose initial suggestion to two school board members sparked the discussion, said he is concerned with the downward trend in student test scores. He said he didn't think we're making students any dumber today than we did 20 years ago. Naturally, he blames the teachers.

He makes it sound simple. It's not. Recent reports of mass failing of basic skills tests by teachers should be taken with a grain of salt. They tell only half the problem.

It's time we all face up to the hard facts: Teachers are confronted with an almost impossible job. They are over-worked and underpaid. The best ones are leaving the profession. Politicians must tackle the issue with more than rhetoric and election-day prattling.

Until then, do not make the situation worse by supporting this scapegoat measure. 🍷

It's not perfect, but it follows the basic criteria provided in the judging guidelines.

The lead is concise and to the point, if not especially startling. The stance is well argued, using information from the direct quotes of authoritative sources. Opposing points of view are introduced and rebutted.

It is important that you introduce the opposing point of view.

This informs your readers you know both sides of the issue, you have examined the facts, and you have arrived at your decision after careful deliberation.

So, introduce the other point of view and offer reasons why you do not agree with it. The closing three paragraphs reiterate the staff's point of view.

Note all that's left out. Since the argument is anti-tests, virtually all of the information provided in favor is disregarded other than a few references.

Why? You are trying to present as short an argument as possible. Since you believe the Wesman test is inaccurate and biased, no reason exists to provide the statistics.

If you had taken the “pro” point of view, then you would have included the test results. They would have strongly corroborated that viewpoint.

Left out is information in the quotes from William Reynolds, local TSTA president. The information he provides is mentioned by Dr. Hayes, so why belabor the point? Again, brevity is of utmost concern.

Other points:

- **The lead refers** to the “haze surrounding the issue...” The second paragraph pinpoints this “haze” by saying, “While proponents. . . would lead you to believe that poor instruction is the major cause of plummeting test scores, educational experts doubt the effectiveness of competency testing.”

You must establish smooth transition. The key phrase so far is “competency testing.”

- **Note a slight change in direction** in paragraph four. “Furthermore” is an excellent transition word into the paragraph concerning low pay.

- **In particular**, note that we used no direct quotes. We used words, phrases and thoughts provided by various sources, but we’ve not used direct quotes because we don’t want the editorial to turn into a news article that simply piles one opinion on top of another without ever developing a true sense of the staff’s point of view.

- **The fifth paragraph** begins with another good transition phrase, “of course.” This signals another change of direction—this time, presenting the dissenting point of view. The paragraph is used to signal how proponents of the tests take simplistic approaches to the problem. Then, in the sixth and seventh paragraphs, Avery provides what is construed as a “simplistic approach.”



EDITORIAL JUDGING CRITERIA

- The introduction presents the problem or situation and provides a clear staff stance.
- The lead is interesting enough to grab the reader’s attention.
- The editorial is clear and accessible. It’s not a time to show the judge how many big words you learned for the AP test.
- The writer provides strong evidence to support the staff’s stance. The writer uses information from the direct quotes (not the direct quotes themselves) to elaborate and support the position.
- Active voice dominates. Sentences are precise and the editorial is as tight as possible. No wasted words.
- Direct quotes are avoided.
- Original solutions or suggestions are offered when warranted.
- Opposing viewpoints are presented and rebutted.
- The conclusion recaps the staff stance.
- The editorial tone is fair, mature. Over-statement, name-calling and generalizations are avoided. Remember to attack policies, not people (this is good advice for high school newspapers, too).
- Editorial is written in third person. First person plural may be used occasionally.
- Secondary consideration given to grammar, spelling and neatness.
- Avoid questions. Editorials should answer questions, not ask them.
- If you handwrite your entry, skip lines. This makes it easier for the judges to read your paper, and it makes it easier for them to write comments on the entry.

Dissecting the editorial prompt

When you get the editorial prompt, there are several parts you want to observe. First, you will be given the situation. At the end of that section, you will be told when the paper comes out and when the action will take place. Expect the action to take place within a week of the paper's publishing date, and expect to take a stand on something that is happening at that point.

You will then be given arguments for both sides. One side will be entitled "Those who support..." and the other side will be "Those who oppose...." This has been created so you won't be given any slant on which side to take. Again, you will not be judged on the side you take. You will

be judged on how well you take a side and if you produce a solid, usable, specific solution.

Following supporting arguments from the two sides, you will be given quotes.

Why do we give you quotes? We like to look at the prompt as a substitute for your interviewing skills. Some of the quotes are really quite stupid. Don't use them!

Evaluate the information given in the quotes, then take a stance and begin your editorial. Look at all the quotes, situation and additional information as your investigation of the problem. From that information you will have enough material to write a good editorial.

Editorial Writing

District 1 Meet • 2011



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper. Remember that as an editorial writer you should support or oppose **policy or action**; you should not sermonize.

You have **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 2,750 students enrolled in grades 9-12. The district has three high schools. In January, the superintendent created a committee of parents, district administrators, students and university officials to study the possibility of creating a policy that would eliminate class ranking for most students at the three high schools. State law requires all districts to notify the top 10 percent of juniors and seniors of each high school they are eligible for automatic admission to public universities. Districts must also inform students in the top 25 percent of sophomore and junior classes about the automatic admission rules.

The district uses a weighted grade point system. Students can earn a 5.0 for an A in an Advanced Placement class. All other classes start at 4.0.

Two other nearby districts eliminated class rank for most students two years ago. The schools identify the top 10 percent in no rank order. As of 2009, 58 percent of private schools stopped reporting class rank for students. Superintendent Rosemary Lewis said several parents, mostly from Southside High School — the most affluent high school in the district — want to eliminate rankings because they believe students who are in academically

rigorous programs are at a disadvantage. Lewis said she would like a recommendation from the committee by April 15 so she can inform all parents and students about a possible change. Students, parents and faculty members from the district are encouraged to discuss the issue at the next committee meeting March 31.

The next issue of the Press will be distributed Monday, March 28.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL

Students are avoiding more challenging courses because they are afraid of the impact on their grade point average. It takes less effort to get an A in a non-AP class than it does to get a B in an AP class. Rankings are an unnecessary anxiety for students because GPA is not a true reflection of a student's academic achievement. Often the rankings are separated by less than one tenth of a point, indicating that students several ranks apart are almost identical in academic achievement.

THOSE OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

The two districts that eliminated class rankings are more affluent and have only one high school. This is a rich student's problem, not a Leaguetown problem. Also, eliminating the class rank would force universities to be more subjective about the admission process. This may not be beneficial for all students, and it would certainly be more time-consuming. Some universities require class ranking, so either the school would have to rank students anyway or students could not attend those universities.

This is the situation. Notice it gives the news peg of the editorial — the question "why are we writing an editorial about this?" — and some background. It also tells you what is going to happen.

This is the time element of the editorial — what is going to happen when. This is the key to what you should demand.

Note that in these two areas you are given arguments for both sides. This will give you ammunition to defend or refute either side. Use what you want and ignore what you don't want. You can also use your own arguments although you need to make sure they are believable. If a judge questions alternative information you are using, you will probably not advance.

■ **ROSEMARY LEWIS, superintendent**

"I am not completely sold on the idea of ditching class rankings, but I think we must explore this option. My daughter graduated from Southside last year, and she was 17th in her class. She had a 4.239 GPA. The valedictorian had a 4.248 GPA. The girls were essentially the same academically, but the rankings put them a world apart. My daughter felt like she failed because she was not in the top 10 of her graduating class. I was amazed at the pressure she put on herself and the anxiety class rank caused her.

"The committee has done some great research, but they need to hear from the students and more parents. I want to do what is best for the district, the entire district."

■ **CLARA BUFFER, counselor and committee member**

"I have never been a fan of class rankings. Every year I have parents ask advice on what classes their students should take. The parents are pressuring their students to take the classes that will allow them to get the higher GPA rather than take classes the students are interested in. Regularly, students ask me which AP class is the easiest A. Students are battling for that top class rank and ignoring what really interests them. It's frustrating and sad."

■ **KAYLEIGH FOSTER, junior**

"Currently, I am ranked second in my class. I've worked really hard to be in that spot. Now, Superintendent Lewis and this committee could throw all of my hard work right out the window. Class ranking keeps students motivated. It's an important part of high school. Plus, if a school is going to rank the top 10 percent, it doesn't make much sense not to rank the rest of the school."

■ **JESUS RIOS, science teacher**

"Sure, class ranking is competitive and causes anxiety, but it prepares students for life. There is competition in the workplace, and often it does matter if you are number two. Our society is moving too much in the touchy-feely direction. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but that is not life. Life is hard, and it's competitive. Students need to get used to that."

■ **REED ROCK, admission counselor at the University of Texas at Austin**

"Until the Legislature eliminates the admission policy for the top 10 percent, our university will continue to look at class rank. No, class rank does not paint an entire picture of who a student is, especially at a competitive high school, but it does give us a good starting point. Many private schools no longer rank their students, so we are forced to look at more factors for them. Class rank is losing some of its importance, but I wouldn't recommend a public school eliminate the policy just yet."

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In 2009, the National Association of College Admission Counseling surveyed 200 public and private universities and found that 35 percent listed class rank of "considerable importance" for college admission.

Although it is suggested you do not use direct quotes, there is nothing wrong with using ideas from quotes and using those ideas to help support or refute your stance. We do not want you to use quotes because an editorial is your opinion. By using direct quotes from other people, it becomes their opinion, not yours. Use information from quotes to support what you want to support.

Sometimes this additional information has nothing you can use. Other times it may have rather important information. Read it, and make sure you use what is necessary to win your side of the editorial.

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

EDITORIAL Writing / District 1 • 2011
CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE EDITORIALS

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is about a committee who is investigating the elimination of class rankings. Do you support it or not?
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural ("we," meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the committee should..." write instead, "The committee should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editor should not be long—450 words at the most. Although it's not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the reader's attention and get them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the committee makes its recommendation.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your position.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution. Refute your opposition.
7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can use these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that the person has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with clichés or trite phrases such as "the students" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown" and you know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING

2011 DISTRICT 1 EDITORIAL • PAGE 2

Doing away with needless class rankings should have happened years ago. A superintendent-created committee is researching the possibility of eliminating class ranks from all three high schools in the district. Students, parents and faculty members are encouraged to speak about the issue at the next committee meeting on Thursday before the committee makes its recommendation.

Once rankings are eliminated, students can focus on taking classes that interest and challenge them instead of classes that give them the easiest A. When students have to worry about what effect a particular class might have on their GPA, they often choose less rigorous and uninteresting classes so they could climb one ranking higher. This proposal would eliminate that concern and allow students to take risks in their education.

Since the top 20 students are often separated by less than 1/10th of a point, class rankings do not show the true academic picture of a high school student. Even a college admissions counselor does to get a B in an AP class. The ranking does not show the rigor of a course or the workload from a particular course.

Class ranking can create a cut-throat culture in a school. Rather than helping a peer, students may choose to promote and protect themselves to maintain a higher GPA. It only takes one minor mistake, like a B in one class, to drop from a spot number two to spot number 10.

Those opposing this proposal say that the students work hard to be in the top spots and deserve a ranking to go with it. But there's little difference between the effort of the student ranked number seven and the student ranked number 17. The rankings reward the students who game the number.

A 2009 study showed that more than half of all private schools eliminated class rankings for their students. Private schools tend to be the leaders in setting the bar for education.

Parents, students and faculty members should voice their support for this proposal at Thursday's committee meeting and let the board know class rankings is unnecessary and unwanted.

Remember, we give a contest tip sheet and two sample editorials for each prompt we write. For example, on the following pages is the information provided with this prompt.

The following is the tip sheet and sample editorials for the prompt on page 64.

EDITORIAL WRITING/DISTRICT 1 • 2011 CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE EDITORIALS

The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is about a committee who is investigating the elimination of class rankings. Do you support it or not?
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural (“we,” meaning “we, the newspaper staff”). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than “We believe the committee should...,” write instead, “The committee should.”
3. Don’t waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don’t ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 400 words at the most. Although it’s not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the reader’s attention and get them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the committee makes its recommendation.
5. Once you’ve stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your stance and refute your opposition.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.
7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it’s not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.

9. Don’t clutter up the editorial with cliches or trite phrases such as “the superintendent is stupid” or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn’t necessary to say “Leaguetown Independent School District” or “Leaguetown High School.” Students know the name of the school. They don’t need to be reminded.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING

Doing away with needless class rankings should have happened years ago.

A superintendent-created committee is researching the possibility of eliminating class ranks from all three high schools in the district. Students, parents and faculty members are encouraged to speak about the issue at the next committee meeting on Thursday before the committee makes its recommendation.

Once rankings are eliminated, students can focus on taking classes that interest and challenge them instead of classes that give them the easiest A. When students have to worry about what effect a particular class might have on their GPA, they often choose less rigorous and uninteresting classes so they can climb to a higher ranking. This proposal would eliminate that concern and allow students to take risks in their education.

Since the top 20 students are often separated by less than 1/10th of a point, class rankings do not show the true academic picture of a high school student. Even a college admissions counselor from the University of Texas admitted that.

It takes less effort to get an A in a non-AP class than it does to get a B in an AP class. The ranking does not show the rigor of a course or the workload from a particular course.

Class ranking can create a cut-throat culture in a school. Rather than helping a peer, students may choose to promote and protect themselves to maintain a higher GPA. It only takes one minor mistake, like a B in one class, to drop from spot number two to spot number 10.

Those opposing this proposal say the students work hard to be in the top spots and deserve a ranking to go with it. But there’s little difference between the effort of the student ranked number seven and the student ranked number 17. The rankings reward the students who game the system.

A 2009 study showed that more than half of all private schools eliminated class rankings for their stu-

dents. Private schools tend to be the leaders in setting the bar for education.

Parents, students and faculty members should voice their support for this proposal at Thursday's committee meeting and let the board know class rankings are unnecessary and unwanted.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

Until universities ditch the question of class rankings on admission applications, the school must continue to rank students by their grade point averages.

A superintendent-created committee is researching the possibility of eliminating class ranks from all three high schools in the district. Students, parents and faculty members are encouraged to speak about the issue at the next committee meeting on Thursday before the committee makes its recommendation.

This is a terrible idea that will hurt the students and the school.

School rankings give students a reason to put more effort into their classes and do better in school. Whether we like it or not, life is about how people perform relative to everyone else, and school should prepare students for the competitive world after graduation.

State law also requires schools to rank the top 10 percent because public universities still must admit the top 10 percent. It only makes sense to continue ranking the entire class. Until the law changes and the Legislature changes the top 10 percent rule, class ranking is of utmost importance to students.

Several colleges require a class ranking. Without a ranking, students would be at a disadvantage. Plus, a University of Texas at Austin admission counselor said he would not recommend eliminating class rank at a public school. The committee needs to listen to the experts.

Supporters of this proposal say students will be able to take classes that are more challenging if they don't have to worry about rankings, but they fail to consider that competition is what drives many high-performing students. Without it, students won't have an incentive to take difficult classes.

Now is not the time to change the ranking system. Current juniors and seniors have worked hard for their rankings, and they deserve to keep them.

The committee should not recommend this proposal because ranking students still carries too much weight in Texas.

What went wrong with my editorial



You asked a lot of rhetorical questions without ever stating an opinion.

CITIZENS. Do you want to see America turn into a third-world, Communist rat-hole? Do you want to see the streets of your hometown overrun by Iraqis, whose sole intention is to turn America into a slave state?

Do you watch television and say to yourself, "I wish the U.S. was more like Serbia?"

If that's what you want, then just get rid of the U.S. Military, the finest fighting machine in the world, and that's what will happen. And you know whose fault it will be?

Could it have started when military recruiters were banned from school campuses? Think about it before we start addressing each other as "Comrade."

The wording was artificial, pompous or pretentious.

IT IS axiomatic that interminable global tensions necessitate the sustentation of a prodigious and pugnacious military. Ergo, one must acknowledge a positive correlation between exigency in the face of international rumpus and the predisposition of adolescent males, the neophytes of choice, to populate secondary academies.

The argument was trite.

FREEDOM is cherished by all Americans. It is dear to their hearts, but Americans know that freedom is hard won. We cannot take it for granted. Around the world, millions long for the freedoms that we enjoy here in the United States. But our freedom wasn't just handed to us. We had to fight for it. Blood, sweat and tears were spilled so that we may enjoy the freedoms contained in our Bill of Rights. For that reason, we need a powerful military that can kick the crap out of anyone who might challenge our peace-loving people.

An Editorial Formula

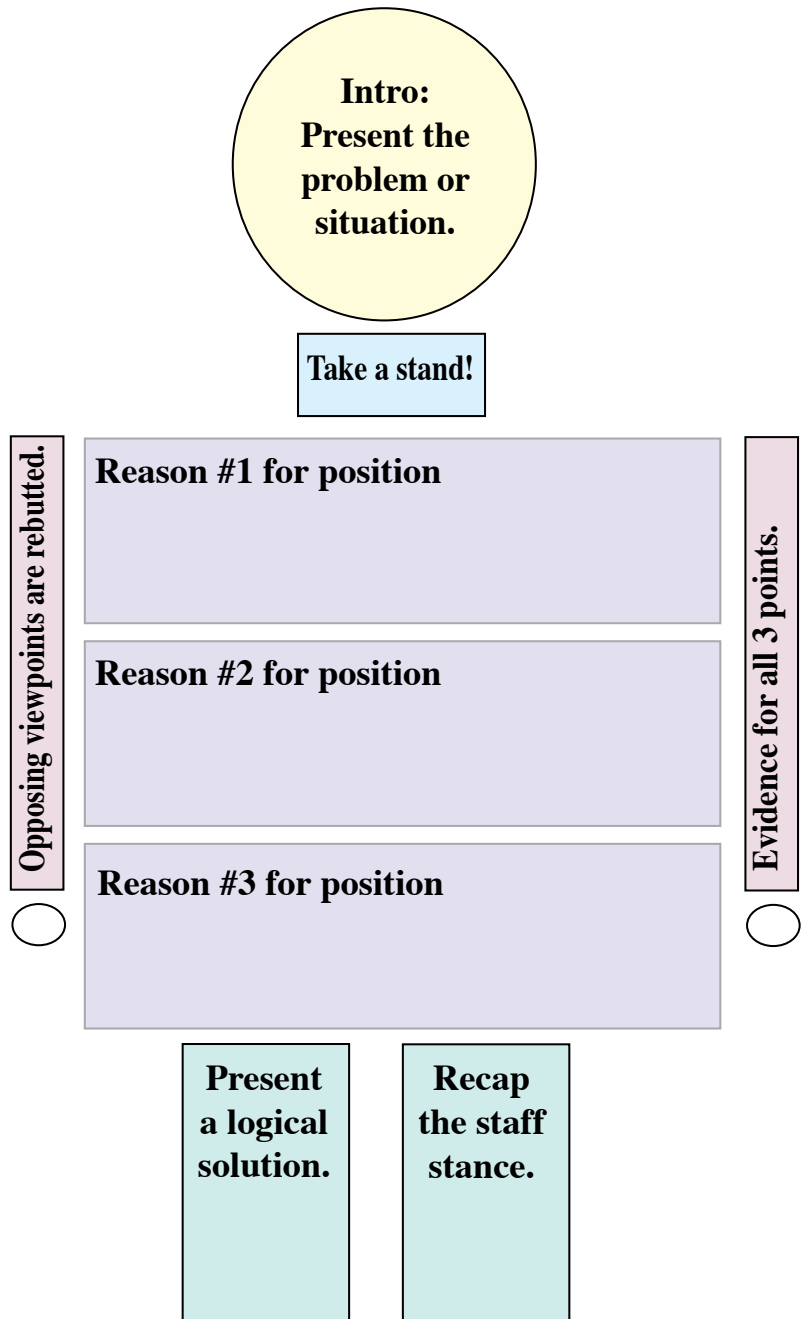
For some reason, the editorial writing contest is the most difficult contest for students. This is quite strange to us. We ask students to tell us their opinion. Students have no problems giving their opinion to their parents when they think their curfew is too early. They have no issue telling administrators why they need more than 28 minutes for lunch. But for some reason, students often have a hard time articulating a position and defending it in our contest.

Maybe it's because we didn't give you a set formula. For news and feature writing, we expect you to use the Transition/Quote formula. For editorials, we tell you to take a stand and defend your position. That allows for too much wiggle room for some students.

So to the right, you will see a formula for editorial writing. Well, not exactly a formula but a diagram. A man. Or a bald woman. You decide.

Regardless of its gender, the diagram gives students a guide for editorial writing.

Each body part represents a vital part of the editorial. We encourage students to use this formula and create a mini-outline before they begin writing their editorial. Going off on tangents is one of the biggest problems in this contest.



An outline for the prompt on the next page.

The Head - The school added Intelligent Design to its curriculum, and a week ago two families announced they are suing the district over it.

The Neck - We do not agree.

Body #1 - It violates the separation of church and state law.

Body #2 - The curriculum forces religion down the throats of some students.

Body #3 - ID lacks scientific evidence.

One Leg - School should ditch the curriculum and save the district's money and reputation.

This mini-outline will help a student stay focused on the topic. A student can flesh out the editorial with the arms and other leg.

**TWO FAMILIES SUE SCHOOL DISTRICT
OVER INTELLIGENT DESIGN CURRICULUM**

Next year in freshman biology classes, instead of only learning about evolution, students also will learn about “intelligent design,” a theory which holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by some higher power.

The decision, passed last month by a 6-3 school board vote, makes the Leaguetown school district the first in the United States to mandate the teaching of “intelligent design” in public schools. The idea of intelligent design (ID) was initiated by a small group of scientists to explain what they believe to be gaps in Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, which they say is “not adequate to explain all natural phenomena.”

The decision to teach this theory puts Leaguetown on the front line of the growing national debate over the role of religion in public schools.

A week ago, two families in Leaguetown filed a lawsuit against the school district over the decision to teach intelligent design. Represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, the parents said teaching this theory violates the separation of church and state.

The next issue of the Press will be distributed this Friday.

■ THOSE SUPPORTING THE ADDITION OF ID

Intelligent design makes no reference to the Bible, so how could it violate the separation of church and state? It only speaks of a greater force that is behind the design of humans. Also, the theory of evolution has holes in it. It doesn’t explain everything. School districts have the obligation to teach students both sides. Leaguetown High School students will learn about evolution, but now they also will learn about intelligent design. The decision to add intelligent design to the curriculum is supportive of academic freedom more than anything else. In addition, most families in Leaguetown claim to be Christian. ID supports Christian values in school.

■ THOSE OPPOSING THE ADDITION OF ID

Intelligent design is “creationism lite” masquerading as science. The U.S. Supreme Court in 1987 banned the teaching of creationism — which holds that God created the world about 6,000 years ago — in public schools on the grounds of separation of church and state. ID violates this decision because it promotes a higher power. What else could it mean?

It means a god. ID is not supported by any scientific evidence. Schools should not be so irresponsible to teach curriculum that is not supported by facts. Scientists have spent decades gathering evidence to support evolution. Admittedly, evolution has gaps, but the history of science shows that gaps in our knowledge are continuously filled. Most scientists are not supportive of ID because it lacks a scientific base.

**■ GRACE WATERS, ACLU lawyer, representing
the parents**

“When we first heard the school board was considering the intelligent design curriculum, we knew we would be busy. Two days after the vote, two parents came to us and asked for representation. The school board decision is typical for a conservative community like Leaguetown. It’s not legal, and it’s not right. It is typical.

“The decision is another attempt by conservative Christians to bring religion back into the public schools. The end goal is to delete evolution completely from the curriculum. Conservative Christians view it as a threat to their religion. The religious right has a list of topics that it wants action on. Things like abortion, abstinence, gays are higher up in the food chain of their concern, but evolution is part of the package.

“The ACLU is working hard to have the courts hear the case before school starts in the fall. I am positive we will win the case.”

■ PAUL GUTIERREZ, school board president

“I voted in favor of the new curriculum. It is clear that we are trying to get the truth out. We Christians have as much right to be involved in education as evolutionists. We’ve been asleep for two generations, and it’s time for us to come back. I don’t think we are being unfair or violating any laws. We are not abandoning the theory of evolution. We are offering an alternative theory. Intelligent design does not propose that my God created mankind. It merely mentions a higher power.

“The other board members and I studied both curriculums very closely. When you look at cell structure and you see the intricacy of the cell, you can come to the conclusion that it doesn’t happen by natural selection. There has to be intelligent design. It is unfair to our students if we do not offer them both theories. Evolution does not explain all of the questions.”

■ **JOSEPH TARRY, school board member**

"I happen to believe in both God and evolution, and I don't believe my God should be taught in public schools. My children learn about religion in church, not school.

"The law is very clear on matters of separation of church and state. We are at risk of violating those laws. Don't get me wrong. I don't have a problem with the idea of a higher power. But I do have a problem with a school district shoving this down the throats of our children at the taxpayers' expense."

■ **REBECCA HUMPHREY, senior**

"I think students should learn both theories. When I learned about evolution as a freshman, I had many questions that the teacher could not answer. I think the new curriculum would answer more of my questions. I don't know what the problem is anyway. The school board is not eliminating evolution from the curriculum."

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The ACLU lawsuit on the teaching of intelligent design is not isolated. In Cobb County, NY, parents sued a local school board for mandating that biology textbooks prominently display disclaimers stating that evolution is "not a fact." A federal court is expected to rule on the case next month.

**SAMPLE STORY/SUPPORTING
THE INCLUSION OF ID IN THE CURRICULUM**

Next year, when freshmen open their biology books, they will learn a new theory about evolution. It's called intelligent design, and it holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by a higher power.

Two families are suing the district for adding the theory to the current curriculum, saying it is the same thing as teaching creationism and is a violation of church and state. They are wrong.

The district should hold its ground and support its decision to teach intelligent design in the interest of telling students the whole truth.

Like evolution, intelligent design is a theory. It makes no reference to the Bible or any religious text, so it can't possibly violate the separation of church and state. It simply states a greater force is behind the creation of the universe.

Intelligent design may not be completely based on scientific facts, but neither is evolution. The evolu-

tion theory has holes in it and leaves questions that scientists can't seem to answer. For example, in studying the structure of the cell, the design is so intricate that it couldn't have been formed through natural selection. Other forces had to be in play.

By adding intelligent design, the district is supporting academic freedom. Students will hear both sides and be allowed to arrive at their own conclusion.

Evolution, proposing that humans evolved from apes, flies in the face of Christianity, and most families in this community are Christian. While it does not mention God, intelligent design does support Christian values in the classroom. Evolution does not.

Opponents of intelligent design claim the "higher power" is code for God. But a higher power does not equate to the God of the Bible. It simply means "higher power." It doesn't try to define it. Therefore, the curriculum does not violate the separation of church and state.

In the interest of giving students a more accurate and informed education, the district should hold its ground and keep intelligent design a part of the curriculum for the fall. It is a theory that students need to hear.

This change was meant to be.

**SAMPLE STORY/OPPOSING
THE INCLUSION OF ID IN THE CURRICULUM**

Next year when freshmen open their biology books, they may see a surprising change. Young Christian, Jewish, Muslim, agnostic, Shinto and atheist students alike will learn "intelligent design" theory as well as evolution. The theory holds that the universe is so complex, it must have been created by some higher power. That's code for God.

And that's a violation of church and state, no matter how hard some proponents of intelligent design argue it isn't.

A week ago, two families, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, filed a lawsuit against the district for teaching intelligent design (ID). The parents claim adding this theory to the curriculum is a violation of church and state.

The theory is nothing more than "creationism lite" masquerading as science. In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court banned creationism from being taught in public schools on the grounds of separation of church and state. Students can learn about this "higher power" in church or on their own time.

Perhaps the theory is better suited for a mythology class, rather than biology. Intelligent design is not supported by any scientific evidence whatsoever. It would be irresponsible of the district to force a curriculum on students that is not supported by facts.

Supporters of the change say evolution has many gaps and is still a theory itself. They say evolution can't be proven. Well, neither can gravity. Science advances based on the best available information, and the best information today supports evolution — not intelligent design. Scientists have spent decades gathering evidence to support evolution. And as scientists work toward a more solid conclusion, the gaps in evolution are continuously being filled.

In order to keep its integrity, the district should listen to the families who are suing and follow the laws of the United States of America. Intelligent design is false science. Teach it in church. But keep it out of the classroom.

The two sample editorials do a fine job of explaining the situation, taking a clear stand and defending their position.

The editorial supporting ID cites academic freedom, majority opinion and science theory. The editorial opposing ID cites scientific evidence, separation of church and state, and responsibility and integrity.

It's worth noting that both editorials use information from within the quotes to support their arguments. That is exactly why we put those quotes in the prompt for you. You can use the information and you don't have to attribute it.

Both editorials also end with clear solutions. In neither editorial does the writer waiver. The writer does address the opposition in both.

Next is the type of editorial we were **NOT** looking for, but we saw it more than once at district.

The Leaguetown School Board finally got it right and added God back into the curriculum.

In biology classes, freshmen students will learn about Intelligent Design — which holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by some higher power. God.

God deserves to be in our curriculum. He deserves to be everywhere. It is un-Christian to not teach about Him.

Morals have been waning among teenagers for the past 10 years. Teaching students about God will

help them refocus and remember how they should act and talk.

Two families apparently are suing the district about this new curriculum. They must be athiests. Who wouldn't want to learn about God?

Just because two families are whining about the new curriculum doesn't mean the district should change anything.

Let's address the good qualities first. The editorial does have a stance. It does have a solution — keep things status quo. And it does explain what intelligent design is.

But the meat of the editorial is off-focus and does not put forth a sound defense.

The prompt is not about teens and their morals. It's not about whether or not God "deserves to be everywhere." It's about whether or not the school should allow the teaching of intelligent design. An editorial will not change someone's deep-seeded moral beliefs. It is a waste of time to argue from that angle.

Here's another type of editorial that we were **NOT** looking for.

God has crept back into freshmen science classes next year.

The Christian right-wingers have gotten their claws into Leaguetown curriculum, and it hurts.

God has no place in a public school. It's bad enough that we have a moment of silence in the morning. It's prayer time. We all know that.

Intelligent Design is a theory which holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by some higher power — meaning God.

What a load of dirt.

If we want to learn about God, then we can go to church. If we don't stop this now, soon the English teachers will be assigning the Bible for their classes.

It's a slipperly slope, and the district needs to ditch the God curriculum.

Again, let's note the good qualities. The editorial does take a stand and does explain intelligent design, but it has little value after that.

The arguments are melodramatic and off topic. The prompt is not about the moment of silence or English classes.

It sounds more like this writer has a personal beef with God or the Christain right, neither of which is relevant to the editorial.

The following is the editorial prompt from the 2011 UIL State Meet. After the prompt, we show you the five different approaches from the winner's of that contest.

Board member proposes plan to grade parents

Leaguetown High School has 1,350 students enrolled in grades 9-12. At the April school board meeting, School Board President Ellie Stagel proposed a new addition to all students' report cards — grades for the parents. She suggested that teachers and administrators give parents grades of "excellent," "satisfactory" and "needs improvement" in three areas:

- A student should arrive to school on time and prepared to learn, which includes being well-fed and well-rested.
- A student should have homework completed and be prepared for tests.
- Parents should communicate regularly with teachers and administrators.

Stagel said she is not proposing any repercussions for parents. She simply would like to spur them to better parenting. Several board members questioned whether the proposal should be for all grades. Stagel said she believes parents should be graded until their child graduates from high school.

The Parent-Teacher Association supports the proposal. Elementary teachers and administrators overwhelmingly supported the proposal when they discussed it this month. Secondary teachers and administrators had more concerns than support.

Stagel requested the board study the proposal over the next week and vote on it at the May 15 board meeting. You are writing for the issue of the *Press* to be distributed Friday, May 6.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL

Parents should be held accountable for their child's education. Parent involvement is key to successfully educating students. Schools grade student and teacher performance. They also should grade parent performance.

THOSE OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

Teachers are not qualified to grade parents. They are trained to teach and evaluate students. Parents of high school students cannot control every aspect of their child's life. Teens should be held accountable

What went wrong with my editorial



You used stereotypes or labels and/or resorted to personal attacks and calling people ugly names. (You should attack policies, not people.)

SO, WHAT do we have here? A pinko trying to ban military recruiters from campus. What will be next? A ban on flat-top haircuts? These liberal fairies ought to take their heads out and realize that the world's a dangerous place. You never heard of China?

My old man fought in Vietnam for this country, and he was treated like crap when he returned. I mean, people in airports would spit on him and call him a baby-killer. Is that any way to treat someone who fought for his country?

Here's my suggestion for Jonathan Plank and other morons: go back to your interior decorating and leave military matters for men to decide.

You didn't take a stand.

SOME people think military recruiters should be banned from campus now that the Cold War is over.

For example, Jonathan Planks of the Coalition for Peace said it is hypocritical for our schools to tell students that violence is not the way to solve problems and in the same breath promote the United States' war machine.

But other people think military service is a viable career choice and an excellent source of money for college.

This is important, and you should give it some thought so that you will know what is best to do.

for their actions. Parents should be informed but not graded.

■ **ELLIE STAGEL, school board president**

"We know how critical parental involvement is for student success. We talk about it all of the time.

We hold teachers accountable. We hold students accountable. It's about time we hold the third critical piece to the puzzle accountable.

"The idea of grading parents is not new. A Florida legislator sponsored a bill this year for the entire state to grade elementary parents. I don't know if the bill will pass, but it certainly has people talking.

"When my children were in school, I understood the importance of my role. I made sure they got a good night's rest, a good breakfast and did homework each day. I communicated with their teachers on a regular basis, and it wasn't that hard. Even days when it was hard, it didn't matter. I knew that was my job. We have some parents who seem to dump their kids on the schools and then disappear. They believe it's the school's responsibility to educate their children. This is incorrect and unfair to our teachers.

"I know several board members question whether we should grade parents of middle school students and high school students. We should. Just because a child turns 13 doesn't mean parents should no longer raise their children."

■ **LARA TOVAR, school board member**

"I understand the emotions behind this proposal, but I don't support it. Teachers and administrators have no idea what some parents go through. They are not in the homes. They don't know the entire situation. How can they grade a parent? Some parents must work two jobs to survive. They may not be home in the morning to make sure their kids eat breakfast. They may have to work nights and can't check homework. Or maybe the parents don't speak English. I believe Ellie's [Stagel] heart is in the right place, but this proposal will only push teachers and parents farther apart."

■ **MISTI MAY, sophomore**

"My parents died when I was 4 years old. I've lived with my grandma for more than 10 years. She's a fantastic grandmother, but she isn't involved in my school much. For the past two years, she's been pretty sick and can't get out much. I take care of myself for the most part. I would hate for her to get a bad grade because she doesn't call my teacher back. So many high school students take care of themselves. Our parents, or grandparent in my case, should not be graded."

■ **GREG TEMPLE, English teacher**

"I would not feel comfortable giving parents

grades. Is it really the parent's responsibility to make breakfast for a 17-year-old? Many of my students come to school tired every day, but it's not because they have bad parents. Students stay up late doing homework, working jobs, playing sports, participating in extracurricular activities or talking on the phone. This proposal might work at the elementary level but not at the high school."

■ **STELLA KELLER, president of PTA**

"Every year, the PTA holds training events for parents, and every year we have fewer than 10 parents attend. I know parents are busy, but it seems like kids are the last priority for some of them. Teachers are under fire for student test scores and progress. But teachers are only a part of the solution. Parents must be involved. Plus, the parent grading won't affect student standing. It simply tells parents what the schools think of their performance. Maybe it will wake up a few parents. This is about improving student success. I can't understand why anyone would oppose it."

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If approved, Stagel's proposal would go into effect for the 2011-12 school year.

A 2009 report from the National Education Administration found that, regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school;
- graduate and go on to post-secondary education.

SUGGESTION:

Before you read further and see the State Champions, we suggest you make an outline for an editorial you would write for this prompt. If you are ambitious, write the full editorial.

Then, compare your editorial to the state winners. The winning entries are not perfect, but they are solid editorials.

Look at the similarities among the editorials and the differences. For example, every one of the winning papers has a clear stance and a well-articulated defense of the position.

2011 State Champions

Conference 1A - Autumn Osborne, Martin's Mill High School (Tops in Texas)

The school board will vote May 15 on a proposal to give parents a grade on students' report cards based on their involvement with their children's education. The grades would inform the parents if they need improvement in many areas, such as bringing a child to school on time, getting the child prepared and communicating regularly to teachers and administrators.

School board trustees should vote against the proposal because teachers do not have the responsibility of taking care of parents as well as students.

Teachers are trained to educate students, not pry into their lives. Many students have family circumstances they cannot control that teachers are not aware of. A sick or injured guardian should not be reprimanded by a grade teachers are not obligated to give because of their condition. They may not be able to call back a teacher or be sure their child was well-fed. High school students can often take care of themselves. Their parents should not receive a bad grade because they have taught their children to be self-sufficient.

Although teachers can inform parents of their responsibilities, they are not able to control them. If parents are not as responsible as they should be, it is their business, not educators'. A teacher can inspire and teach students, but not every aspect of their life can be monitored. Teachers don't always know what parents go through. A student could be tired in class because they were working on a school project or doing extracurricular activities. Informing parents is an entirely different thing from grading them.

Those supporting the proposal argue that because teachers and students are evaluated, parents should be, too. While parents are a part of their children's lives, they are not a major part of education like teachers and students are. Teachers educate the students, not the parents. Students should be the ones receiving grades, not parents who may or may not control certain circumstances. While parental involvement is a part of successfully educating students, they should not be graded due to what they cannot control.

The school board should vote against the proposal because teachers only have responsibilities

What went wrong with my editorial



You preached.

IF YOU haven't been in the military, then you don't have any business criticizing it. Unless you are willing to put your life on the line like our brave soldiers, then you have no right to complain about military recruiters on campus. Our suggestion to you is to shut up and do your homework, knowing that the freedoms you enjoy are protected by the brave men and women who proudly wear the uniforms of the United States Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force.

You didn't really think it through or you got off the topic.

HAVE YOU ever lived in a Communist country? It's not fun, believe me. They don't have any rights at all. But don't think it couldn't happen here. It could, just like that (snap your fingers now). Before we know it, the government could sweep in, rip the flags from our bleeding hands, break up our families and force us into concentration camps.

But not if we have a strong military to protect us. That's why we need to allow military recruiters on campus.

Your argument lacked credibility or you over-stated your case.

ANY DAY now, World War III could begin. Don't let the fact that the Soviet Union broke up lull you into a state of comfort. Enemies hide behind every bush and rock, and therefore we need to maintain the world's most powerful military or we'll all be speaking Iraqi or North Korean and saying the pledge of allegiance to some new leader in the Middle East or that guy over in Cuba, whose name I can't remember but who is twice as dangerous as Adolf Hitler.

to grade students and should not have the right to grade parents as well.

Conference 2A- Olivia Williams, Sunnyvale High School

To encourage better parenting practices, School Board President Ellie Stigel has proposed that, in addition to the usual grades for students on their report cards, three extra grades will be given to parents. The board will vote on the proposal May 15.

The school board should reject the proposal because it's too intrusive into a student's home life.

In some situations, the parents' lack of involvement is inescapable. They may be sick, have a hectic schedule, or just aren't around to take care of their child. The teachers are not aware of each family's circumstance, and they don't have the right to grade them.

A teacher's job is to educate his or her students. Teachers are crossing a boundary if they begin to evaluate a student's personal life. If a teacher were to try to grade parents, the system would fail because they're trained to teach and evaluate students, not parenting skills.

Parents also can't make their children do homework or eat every meal. They shouldn't be reprimanded for something out of their hands. Not only would a bad grade anger them, but it might cause conflict between the parent and the teacher.

Those in support of the proposal claim that parental support is key. Although this may be true, some families are unable to give full involvement and should not be graded on their inabilities.

The school board should decline the proposal because it's presumptuous and unnecessary in most cases.

Conference 3A- Racey Burden, Decatur High School

School Board President Ellie Stigel recently proposed a new grading category to be included on all students' report cards: grades for parents. At the May 15 school board meeting, this proposal will be voted on and it should pass. It's time for the third part of the teacher-student-parent triangle to be held accountable.

In this grading system, the parents only have to do three things to get the best grade of "excellent:"

have their students arrive on time and ready to learn, make sure their students complete their homework and are prepared for tests and communicate regularly with teachers. These seem like basic areas that parents should cover without even receiving a grade for their efforts. After all, parenting should be their top priority, but that isn't always the case, so these parent grades are necessary.

Too many parents assume that teachers will raise their children for them, so they drop their kids off at school and disappear. Teachers and students work hard to receive good performance grades, but parents aren't evaluated at all. This new proposal will spur parents to become better role models for their children and make them work harder with the teachers.

According to Stigel, the grades the parents earn will have no effect whatsoever on student grades. Even students with uninvolved parents don't need to worry about their hard work in school being compromised because these grades are only to hold the parents accountable—not their kids. Since parent involvement is so key to student achievement, parents need to see they're being held accountable, the same as their children are in school every day.

Studies from the National Education Administration show that any student with active, involved parents is more likely to earn higher grades, pass classes, socialize better with others and go to college. Parents should want their children to succeed academically and socially. If they, too, earned grades on their performances, they could see how they are helping their kids grow, or how they are holding them back from their full potential.

Those against the proposal believe it is only appropriate for lower grade levels, not high school students. But parenting should never end just because a student turns 13. Even high school students need parents' help and support, especially as the curriculum gets progressively harder and college approaches.

Students with sickly parents or parents who don't speak English should be allowed to inform the school of these problems so that teachers may take them into consideration when giving grades. Otherwise, parents, no matter how busy, need these grades to realize how important it is to make time for their kids.

Teachers and students have always been graded, and now it's time for parents to realize that they hold as important a role in their children's lives as teachers do.

Conference 4A - Allana Wooley, Marble Falls High School

A proposal to give parents grades based on student preparedness, homework completion and parent-teacher communication will be voted on during the May 15 school board meeting.

The proposal should not be passed because it would do nothing but foster negative and unproductive relationships between parents and the school system.

Supporters of the plan claim that parental assessment will get parents more involved in their child's education. This is not true. If parents are neglectful of their child's education, they likely will not pay any attention to the grade they are given anyway. If a child's grades are unimportant to a parent, so will their own grade be.

Furthermore, by giving parents a grade, the school board would be handing students a ready-made excuse. Students would slack off, knowing they could blame their parents when report cards come out. Sure, parents should always look out for their children, but their children need to learn responsibility as well.

By suggesting that the proposal will cover all grades, the school board is giving too much emphasis to parent actions. Parents do have a heavy influence on the way their children approach education. As kids age, outside forces such as friends, jobs and extracurricular activities also determine the level of dedication a student has. Parents, if singled out as the sole influence on a student's academic performance, will grow indignant and support the school even less.

Instead of arbitrarily giving parents grades, the school system should focus on having face-to-face meetings with parents and students who are having issues. This way, a real solution to the student's unique issue can be reached so that both teacher and parent are on the same page.

Community members, teachers and parents should attend the school board meeting next week to voice their dismay at the proposal.

Conference 5A - John Fuller, Bryan High School

Proposed by School Board President Ellie Stagel, a new measure that would add parent grades to student report cards will be considered at the May 15 school board meeting. The measure calls for par-



EDITORIAL Writing Tips

Keep your editorial third person.

It isn't necessary to write, "We, the editorial staff, of the Leaguetown Press, one and all, collectively and individually, do hereby declare our shared opinion that the English Department teach concise writing." Be concise and precise.

ent grades of "excellent," "satisfactory" and "needs improvement" in their children's punctuality and preparedness for the school day, as well as parental communication with the school.

Although a proposal of this nature is well-intended, it fails to correctly address the increasing problems with parental involvement in their child's education and should there for be voted down in favor of a more thorough approach.

There is little doubt that parental involvement is a key factor in a student's ability to succeed in the classroom, as the National Education Administration cites parental involvement as a spark for higher grades, regular attendance, acceptable social skills and graduation rate. Yet, grading parents on such a limited scope will do little to increase parental involvement, which is the true aim of this proposal. Instead of encouraging parents to become more engaged, this measure has the potential to anger parents and alienate them even more from the school and their child's education. Plus, if a parent is already not involved, it is more likely that they wouldn't pay as close attention to their child's report cards. Thus, the parents that this grading system targets the most would probably never even see their unsatisfactory grades.

It should also be noted that student performance in the classroom is not solely a result of a parental performance, as students with high levels of parental involvement could still perform poorly in the classroom. A student's performance in the classroom is an incredibly limited vantage point from which to grade a parent. Not only could student performance not correlate to parental involvement, but the teachers who are grading parents will not know that student's home life personally and cannot accurately assess what the true problem is.

Instead of making blind assumptions about a parent's involvement and further alienating parents with this proposal, the school board should consider reaching out to parents in a more involved and direct way. As opposed to simply adding another set of criteria to a student's report card, the administrators should work with teachers, students and parents more thoroughly through house visits and rigorous follow-through. Under the current proposal, there is no follow-up after a teacher grades a parent. With a more thorough approach, administrators and teachers would continually work with parents until their child's performance has risen appropriately. In an approach of this manner, it is more likely that the parent would become involved and that the student would make a true improvement that would last over time. Plus, teachers and administrators would gain a better picture of the student's home life and can better diagnose what problems the student may be having that would affect their performance in the classroom.

While Stigel's efforts are admirable, her approach is skewed in its execution and should be voted down in favor of a more rigorous, in-depth and accurate approach to improving a student's performance in the classroom.

The following is the editorial prompt from the 2008 UIL State Meet.

Board to decide fate of superintendent after he is caught at porn shop

Leaguetown High School, located in West Texas, has 1,000 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In April, Superintendent Geoffrey Beard went to Los Angeles for his brother's wedding. Last year, Google Maps began taking street-level photos of several California cities, including Los Angeles. Photos are released to their website throughout the day. While in Los Angeles, Dr. Beard was photographed as he entered an adult bookstore. The photo was only posted to the Google Maps website for about 20 minutes, but in that time, two Leaguetown juniors saw the photo and downloaded it. The boys emailed it to several of their friends and eventually, the local paper received it. The paper ran the photo the next day without any comment from Dr. Beard. The caption read, "Superintendent Geoffrey Beard visits an adult bookstore while on vacation in California. The photo was captured by Google Maps."

Since returning from Los Angeles, Dr. Beard has been on three local news programs explaining that he visited the shop to purchase his brother a gag gift for his bachelor party. Dr. Beard also has hired a local law firm to possibly sue the newspaper for defamation of character.

Despite Dr. Beard's explanation, two school board members say the superintendent should be fired. Dr. Beard is in his third year of a five-year contract. Several community leaders and every Leaguetown principal disagree with the two board members. The school board will discuss the situation at its next board meeting, Monday, May 12. The next issue of the Press will be distributed Friday, May 9.

■ THOSE SUPPORTING THE FIRING

Every Leaguetown ISD employee, including the superintendent, signs a contract containing a morality clause. The contract specifically states that if an employee conducts him/herself in an improper way, the district may terminate the contract. Surely visiting a pornographic store is inappropriate. Also, Dr. Beard is the leader of the district and a role model to students. This type of activity makes for a very poor role model, regardless of why he was in the store.

■ THOSE OPPOSING THE FIRING

Dr. Beard has been upfront and honest with the district and community. He did nothing illegal and should not be terminated. Since Dr. Beard has been superintendent, test scores have risen, graduation rates have increased and teacher turnover is at an all-time low. The district needs Dr. Beard. Plus, Dr. Beard deserves to have a private life. It's not as if he were frequenting gentlemen bars in Leaguetown. He went to one adult bookstore in a different state and was photographed by an aerial website.

■ DUNCAN SUTTER, Dr. Beard's lawyer

"I know Leaguetown is a conservative community, but this is a little overboard. We cannot believe people want to fire Dr. Beard because he was buying a gag gift for his brother. He has been open and honest about the entire situation, which, quite frankly, he didn't have to do. He was on vacation. He was in another state. He did nothing illegal or immoral."

■ CARLO CUCINO, junior

"Richard and I found the photo. It was just a fluke. We sent it to a few friends because I thought they would get a kick out of it. We had no idea that



EDITORIAL Writing Tips

Draw comparisons.

Examples and illustrations will make theories concrete. Comparisons and/or contrasts will give the reader a sense of balance. Think of a more familiar situation, but make sure the two issues are comparable. Don't compare a minor skirmish to World War II.

Dr. Beard would get in trouble. That is not what we intended. Dr. Beard is a great guy. He comes to all of our band contests and is supportive of our UIL academic team. He even traveled to regionals with us last year. I hope he doesn't get fired because of what we did."

■ LARRY JONES, school board member

"The leader of our district has no business going into an adult bookstore store for any reason. When Dr. Beard entered that store, he violated his contract. We have a duty to the students of Leaguetown to terminate his contract and find a good, moral leader for our schools. Our students deserve better."

■ AMY TAN, high school principal

"Our entire faculty supports Dr. Beard. This is outrageous. He is a fantastic superintendent. He's a workaholic. Not only is he making huge strides in our test scores, he also has a great presence in this district. Every single night, he attends a school function. I don't know how he does it. It would be a huge loss for the district if the board votes to terminate his contract."

■ MARY SCHWARZ, third grade teacher

"I like Dr. Beard. I do. But he crossed a line when he went into that store. It is inappropriate for the superintendent of a school district to visit such a place. You can buy gag gifts anywhere. You don't have to go to a pornographic store. Yesterday, two of my third-graders asked me what porn is. This is not a discussion that we should have with our elementary students, and the only way to send the proper message to our students is to terminate his contract. Actions have consequences. That's what I tell my students every day. We must live by our words."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Olga Sullivan, the editor of the local newspaper, defended the paper's decision to run the photo. She said the photo was news, and the public has a right to know what type of establishments the superintendent visits.

District contracts state, "Employees may be terminated for immoral behavior as defined as but not limited to: a felony conviction, inappropriate behavior with a student or inappropriate behavior in the community."

2008 State Champions

Conference 1A - Madeline Colwell, Iola High School

On Monday, May 12, the school board will discuss whether the contract of Superintendent Geoffrey Beard should be terminated due to the fact a picture was taken of him entering an adult bookstore by Google Maps. If the board votes to terminate him, they will be making a colossal error that will affect the entire school.

Since Dr. Beard has been superintendent, the overall test scores of students have risen, graduation rates have increased and teacher turnover has fallen. He is an avid supporter of the school and its students. When he is not working in his office, Dr. Beard can be found at band or UIL contests, or any scholastic event. The students are very fond of him; the two juniors responsible for exposing the photo did not intend for him to get fired. It was viewed as a joke.

True, Dr. Beard's contract says he is to be an example to his students, but he was at a private event in another state. Everyone is entitled to have a personal life. If Dr. Beard had been caught with pornographic material on school grounds, the situation would be completely different.

The local paper had no right to publish the photo of Dr. Beard without his knowledge or consent. Yes, Google Maps is a public website for all to access, but it was not their business to mar his reputation over such a trivial everyday event. It was not news; it was one man going into an adult bookstore in another state who just happened to be a superintendent. Dr. Beard has been entirely honest with the community over his actions and should not be fired over a wedding gift.

Some people feel he stepped out of moral boundaries by buying his brother a gag wedding gift in Los

Angeles; he did not. The United States is the home of the free. He was merely exercising his personal freedoms. The school does not expel students for entering stores, and the community should not be so condescending to fire Dr. Beard for it. No one personally witnessed him visit the bookstore.

The line between professional and personal life will be questioned on Monday, May 12. Dr. Beard has the right and the freedom to visit an adult bookstore if he chooses to do so. If the board votes to fire Dr. Beard, it will be a substantial loss for the school.

Conference 2A - Hanna Huff, Sanford Fritch High School

The school board must choose between two paths Monday. They will decide whether the school will embark on a path of big-brother-like snooping and invasiveness or carry on down a path of trust and respect for privacy. They should, undoubtedly, choose the latter.

Superintendent Geoffrey Beard's job is on the line due to a series of rather coincidental events. He visited an adult store in California to buy a gag gift for his brother's bachelor party. Two students then found a photo of him entering the store on the website Google Maps.

Proponents of taking action against Beard claim that he violated the morality clause and should be terminated. Beard did in fact sign a clause stating that he would not commit a felony, involve himself in inappropriate behavior with a student or in the community, and he has held true to his word.

The clause never stated that an employee could not buy a gag gift on vacation.

The board must treat all staff equally, and if they should choose to terminate an employee who has helped bring up test scores and graduation rates, they may end up having to follow all staff on vacation.

The board is made up of concerned teachers, parents and community members who have no time to waste playing paparazzi.

What has happened with Beard has been an unfortunate fluke. The board has many important topics to fret over and does not have time to spend on bickering among each other. TAKS, graduation, drop-out rates; these are real issues and things that Beard has bettered in his time as superintendent.

If the board does not see gag gift purchases as

OK for an employee, they should spend this time and energy on revising the clause to a version that everyone can agree on.

The school board should support all teachers and present a united front where students can learn in a positive environment. This is their purpose. Judgment of gag gift purchases, paparazzi outings and contemplating the relevance of flukes are not on the job description.

Conference 3A - Christopher Contreras, Lytle High School (Tops in Texas)

Superintendent Geoffrey Beard's employment will undergo review at this Monday's board meeting after a photograph captured by Google Maps revealed Beard entering an adult bookstore. Although board members are attempting to preserve the integrity of the district, it would be wrong to consider termination. Simply put, this is an overzealous approach that must not be adopted.

The incident in which Beard entered the bookstore occurred while he was on an out-of-state vacation away from the community. Even more, Beard claims that he only meant to purchase a gag gift for his brother's bachelor party. Regardless, if Beard signed a morality clause, the board must have perspective and consider that the purchased items were not for his personal use.

Furthermore, Beard's employment has had a positive effect on students. He frequents UIL contests and is a strong source of encouragement for students. Since his employment, the district has witnessed a rise in test scores, graduation rates and decreased teacher turnovers. Should the board terminate his contract, they risk a change that can substantially harm the district's success. In short, Beard has contributed to student improvement and in this case, the needs of the students outweigh conservative views.

Moreover, the local newspaper circulating the photographs discovered by the community printed these images without Beard's consent. It is a defamation of character and a false outlook into Beard's private life. The board must judge Beard according to his contributions to the school and not the propaganda.

If the board is to be proactive, they may afford an alternative. Instead of terminating Beard's employment altogether, it may issue a warning or place

Beard on probation. By doing so, the board can still send a message that the school does not condone indecency but is willing to be reasonable.

The board is following a one-size-fits-all solution that simply will not work. If the board is to continue the district's success, it must acknowledge the contributions of Beard's leadership. To terminate Beard is to place students at risk. At its next meeting, the board must vote to continue Beard's employment.

Conference 4A - Jennifer Reel, Hallsville High School

The school board will meet Monday to discuss the possible termination of Superintendent Geoffrey Beard after a photo taken of Beard entering an adult bookstore in Los Angeles was posted on Google Maps. The photo was discovered by two juniors and was printed in the local paper the next day.

If the school board respects the right for Beard to carry out his personal life, it will oppose firing him.

Beard should not be terminated for being up front and honest with the community. He did not have to explain the reason why he went into the adult bookstore to three local news programs, but he did. He claims he went to the store to purchase a gag gift for his brother's bachelor party. This is his private life. Nothing illegal took place and no student was affected by what he did. Also, several community leaders and every principal are opposed to firing Beard. This speaks volumes of the respect and appreciation Beard has gained from the community.

The district will suffer without the support Beard provides for extracurricular activities and academic success. Since Beard was instated as superintendent, test scores rose, graduation rates increased and teacher turnover fell to an all-time low. Beard has dedicated his career to bettering the school. He should not be punished for having his picture posted on an aerial website for only about 20 minutes. Beard has also hired a local law firm to possibly sue the newspaper for defamation of character. If the board does choose to fire Beard, this will be just another reason for him to sue the district.

Those in support of firing Beard feel that by visiting this adult bookstore he is breaking his contract containing a morality clause, but there is nothing immoral about purchasing a gag gift. Also, the contract defines bad behavior as inappropriate actions within the community. Beard was far from the community.

He went to an adult bookstore in a different state. It's not as if he was a patron for a local gentlemen's club.

The school board will decide Monday to let Beard finish out the remainder of his five-year contract if they want to respect the rights of administration employees.

Conference 5A - Mary Stanfield, Marcus High School

With the introduction of technology such as Google Maps, which has begun releasing street-level photographs of several cities in California, privacy is at an all-time low. Two members of the school board would push it even lower with their proposal to fire Superintendent Geoffrey Beard for a picture released on the Google Maps website and subsequently downloaded by two juniors, showing him entering an adult bookstore. The board will discuss the proposal at its Monday, May 12 meeting and must vote to uphold Beard's employment.

The incident took place in April when Beard traveled to Los Angeles for his brother's wedding. He has explained that he entered the shop to buy a gag gift for his brother's bachelor party. Beard has every right to a private life. He gave up a small amount of privacy when taking on a leadership position but certainly not all of it. He didn't read pornography around students; he didn't even go into an adult bookstore in the area. He entered one once, in a different state, to buy a gift. That is certainly not enough to justify terminating his contract.

With all the improvements he has made to the district, it would take a lot to justify firing him. In the three years he has been superintendent, test scores have risen, graduation rates have gone up and teacher turnover is at an all-time low. He attends a school function almost every night of the week. His presence in the district is illustrated by the fact that several community leaders and every high school principal support his continued employment. The district cannot afford to lose such an asset over a perfectly legal action in his private life.

Supporters of the firing argue that Beard's conduct violated the morality clause of his contract. But the morality clause mentions specifically felonies and inappropriate behavior with a student or in the community. While not limited to these areas, it is obvious that they spell out the intent of the clause. Beard did nothing illegal and nothing that should affect stu-

dents. And, because his actions took place outside the community with the reasonable expectation of privacy, he did nothing that would normally affect his status as a role model. Beard's actions were completely in keeping with the spirit of the morality clause.

The school board must vote to uphold Beard's contract. Parents and students should contact board members and express their support for the superintendent and opposition to allowing an intrusive technology to destroy our right to private lives.

COMMENTS

For every prompt we write, we also give you a tip sheet and two sample editorials. The following is the tips we suggested for this prompt.

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is two school board members are calling for the termination of the superintendent. Do you support this or not?

Sample lead and stance:

Big Brother was watching Superintendent Geoffrey Beard as he stepped into a California adult book store last month. Google Maps captured images of Dr. Beard entering the store, where he said he bought his brother a gag gift for a bachelor party. After the local newspaper ran the photo, two school board members are calling for the superintendent's termination.

That would be a huge error for the district.

2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural (we, meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the school board should..", write instead, "The school board should."

Effective use of third person:

On Monday, the board needs to recognize Dr. Beard's accomplishments in this district and get out of his private life. *(Note there is no "we think" or "we feel." It's not necessary.)*

3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point, and as a general rule, don't ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 400 words at the most. Although it's not

recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the reader's attention and get them into the story.

Logical argument with elaboration:

Plus, Dr. Beard has done nothing illegal. In fact, he's been upfront and honest about what he did. After the newspaper ran the photo and caption, which Dr. Beard says was defamatory, he went on three news programs to explain himself. In a city thousands of miles from Leaguetown, he bought a gag gift, which is neither immoral nor any school board member's business.

4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the school board votes.

5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your stance and refute your opposition.

Rebuttal:

Some say that Dr. Beard's actions set a bad example for students. Buying a gift for someone is not a bad thing. Dr. Beard is an adult. He went into an adult store. He bought a gift.

6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.

Solution:

On Monday the board needs to recognize Dr. Beard's accomplishments in this district and get out of his private life. He is a honest leader who is moving this district forward. His termination would be the worst gag gift ever for the students of Leaguetown.

7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.

8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Stay focused.

9. Don't clutter up the editorial with cliches or trite phrases such as "adult bookstores are evil," or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown High School." Students know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

Headline Writing

District 1 Meet • 2011



You are a copy editor for the Leaguestown Press, the student newspaper of Leaguestown High School. Write the headline assigned for each of the given six stories. Use the following system: all upper and lower case letters, spaces, punctuation marks and symbols count as 1. Capitalize the first letter of the first word of each headline. You may use either upstyle (capitalizing the first letter of every word) or downstyle (capitalizing the first letter of the first word and the first letter of proper nouns only thereafter). Remember that main headlines belong on the top line and secondary headlines belong under the main headline. You have 45 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put your number on your paper.

Story 1 — Write: 2-line headline with each line counting 15-21
 After a two-hour debate at the most recent school board meeting, the board voted 5-4 to ban chocolate milk from all Leaguestown schools. The ban goes into effect immediately after the current inventory of chocolate milk is sold or expires.

"If we are truly trying to have healthy cafeterias, then we cannot serve chocolate milk," Board President Tetra Smiley said. "I know the kids love it, minus included, but it's not the best choice for students."
 Superintendent Charla Gage brought the proposal to the board after several parents complained about the flavored milk.
 "We need to be consistent," Gage said. "We no longer serve fried foods or soft candy or other high sugar products, except for chocolate milk."
 Junior Yasir Abdul said he loves drinking chocolate milk with his lunch.
 "It is my only unhealthy vice," Abdul said. "The chocolate gave me the energy to make it through the day. I am going to miss it."

Story 2 — Write: 1-line headline counting 26-32
 The high school was awarded 21st Century grant programs for the 2011-2012 school year. This 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 Robinson 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-studio class, and we published a magazine for teen girls," she said.

Story 3 — Write: 3-line headline with each line counting 10-17
 Due to poor enrollment figures and tight budgets, the district will not offer driver's education courses for the 2011-12 school year. Currently, 15 students are in the morning class, which meets from 7 to 8 a.m. four days a week.

"We cut the after-school class two years ago, and we didn't hear much backlash," Principal Edwin Eifi said. "Parents teach most of our students, and the rest seem to go to the outside businesses for the class."
 Driver's education teacher Don Schuller said he is disappointed about the cut. "Enrollment is down, but it is always down in the spring," Schuller said. "In the fall, I had 24 students in my class."
 Sophomore Wanda Byana said Schuller is a great teacher.
 "My parents are too nervous and too busy to teach me," Byana said. "Schuller is very patient, especially when I am driving. It's too bad other students won't be able to have the same experience."

Write: 2-line headline with each line counting 19-25
 Almost 30 students participated in Youth in Government in Austin this past weekend. The students met with legislators, wrote fictional bills and argued to get their bills passed.
 "It was true-to-life to what the Legislature actually does," senior Thomas Rider said. "My group wrote a bill about gay rights in high school. Unfortunately, we couldn't find the votes to get it passed."
 Junior Heather Froustin said the experience improved her speaking skills and her people skills.
 "Our bill was about creating a children's health care plan for Texas," Froustin said. "I thought it would pass easily, but it took a lot of hard work from our group. The bill barely passed."
 Government teacher Tami Ramon said she was impressed with the amount of work the students achieved in only two days.
 "Our students researched topics, wrote bills and lobbied to get their bills passed," Ramon said. "It was an incredible amount of work and an incredible experience for our students."

2011 DISTRICT 1 HEADLINES - PAGE 2

Write: 1-line headline counting 12-18 and a 1-line secondary headline with each line counting 12-18
 ... he hit a half-court shot during a radio station challenge.

... his knee," boys' basketball team captain Darius Black said. The station said it would award \$10,000 to a blindfolded. The station limited the contest to ... successful," station manager Lou Decker said. "After ... not because I am not proud of my boys, but ...

Write: 1-line headline with each line counting 12-18 and a 1-line secondary headline with each line counting 12-18

... constant. ... Interscholastic League Association ... medals at state," Kud said. "I ... students have 10 minutes to solve 80 problems ... natural. ... also what makes it so fun," Kud said.

Headline Writing

A creative, quick-thinking wordsmith is the best fit for this contest

As mentioned earlier, this manual is not intended to replace a journalism textbook. There's a lot to be learned about headlines that won't be covered in these pages. In addition to this manual, read the chapter on headlines in a good journalism textbook as well as practice, practice and practice some more.

Unlike the news, feature and editorial writing contests — where the contestants must apply their knowledge of form, style and judgment to a unique contest format — the task of writing a headline in a UIL competition is much like writing a headline back home. The contest is about as similar to an actual newsroom situation as possible. That's why a good textbook on headline writing could be very useful.

Basically, this contest involves writing six headlines to six short articles in 30 minutes. That figures out to around seven and a half minutes per headline.

Become acquainted with a thesaurus. The best headline writers are good “word” people — they can come up with four or five words that are similar to a key word. You can take a thesaurus into the contest with you, but don't become too attached. With only 30 minutes, you're not going to have a lot of time to use it.

As a contestant, you will be required to write a

headline of specific style and count. The UIL contest will be written with just two kinds of headlines — a regular one-, two- or three-line headline, or a main headline with a secondary head (one or two lines). Each headline will be designated with specific counts. For example: Write a two-line headline with each line counting no less than 15 and no more than 19. Or, write a main headline that counts no less than 15 and no more than 19, and a secondary headline that counts no less than 25 and no more than 29. Each letter, space, punctuation mark or anything else will count as one.

Judges will consider how many headlines have been completed, the content of each and whether the headline fits the count.

Headlines that are *over* OR *under* count will be disqualified.

Remember that headlines serve two purposes: (1) draw the reader's attention to the story and summarize the story; (2) help the overall design of the page.

Today's competitors really have it easy. Not too long ago, students had 30 minutes to come up with six headlines and had different counts for different letters. Participants had to memorize all the letters and counts because of the short time frame.

As we've already discussed, headline writing is more artful than regular journalistic writing. A good headline writer has a good grasp of the English language. That person can look at a word and come up with four or five synonyms for that word quickly. That is important in the headline writing contest because you may have a headline where one line extends one count too long, and by changing a word without changing the meaning, you can make that headline fit. You are also looking for words that will grab people's attention.

It's easiest to write headlines when the story is written in inverted pyramid because you can find your headline in the lead of the story. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way.

When writing a headline, you first must go through the story and pick out the important information. From that information, write one or two sentences and then start eliminating unnecessary words until you find the headline that fits. Sounds easy, huh?

Let's look at an example of this:

For each story you will be given parameter. Here are the parameters of this headline — **write: 1-line main headline counting 14-20 and 1-line secondary headline counting 27-32**

THE STORY

When it comes to writing, Dudley Pfister is the man. Last year, he won the prestigious William Faulkner Award from the National Council of Teachers of English in addition to the UIL state ready writing championship.

Last week, he added another trophy to his shelf: the Texas Christian University Press Award in Poetry, which carries with it a \$1,000 cash prize. His entry surpassed more than 700 other manuscripts submitted, according to TCU Press director Robert C. Olson. His poem will be published next fall in *The Journal*, the literary magazine of TCU.

"I don't consider myself a poet," Pfister said. "I prefer writing short stories and essays, so it was a real shock to win this. I do love to write and I hope to make a career of it. Definitely, the money will come in handy next year in college."

His poem, titled "Manifest Destiny," told the story of a Chinese immigrant in the American West, circa 1880.

STEP ONE:

Find a main head. Remember the main head must do two things — (1) grab the reader's attention; (2) tell them something about the story. Let's worry about grabbing their attention since we can tell something about the story in the secondary head.

Remember we have between 14-20 letters, space, numbers, punctuation, etc. to work within the main head. So let's find some attention-grabbers. The words **Poetic Justice** goes along with an old Janet Jackson song and may grab the reader's attention, so we could use that since its count is 14. We could also use **Manifest Destiny**, the name of his poem and a history term. That count is 16, again within our limits. Then again, we could play off his name and use **Dudley do write?** This line has a 15 count and plays off his name. There is no one specific right headline. Any of these three would work.

STEP TWO:

Find the secondary head. Once we go through the story, we underlined several words and come up with the following sentence: **Senior wins \$1,000 prize in TCU poetry contest after beating out 700 other entries.**

Let's count this sentence. The count is around 82, so that's a bit too much. Let's take out some words. Is it important that he competed against 700 others? Not really — so let's take that out.

Senior wins \$1,000 in TCU poetry contest

The count is 41, so we still need to take out around 9-10 counts.

Senior wins TCU poetry contest which counts to 31. Perfect.

Sound easy? Let's do another one like this then we'll go to other stories and dissect them.

For this story, your parameters are — **write: 1-line headline counting 25-32**

THE STORY

Three 16-year-old Leaguetown students are facing state counterfeiting charges after police said the students paid for their school lunches with false bills produced in one of the boy's home.

Fake \$10, \$20 and \$100 bills were discovered by cafeteria workers last month. The workers had been

alerted to watch for counterfeit money and were using a special pen to check \$10s and \$20s. The pen leaves an amber mark when used on real bills and a black mark when used on fakes.

Police arrested two boys immediately and later arrested a friend who allegedly made the bills in his home. Police searched the home and found \$4,000 in counterfeit bills, according to Sgt. David Kipland of the Leaguetown Police Department.

A fourth boy, 17, has been arrested in connection with the alleged scheme but has not yet been charged, Sgt. Kipland said.

Notice how this story is written in inverted pyramid, and you have been requested to write a straight, one-line headline. Your head should come from the lead.

Three 16-year-old Leaguetown students are facing state counterfeiting charges after police said the students paid for their school lunches with false bills produced in one of the boys' home. – well, the count is way over 100 so we have to start cutting. Let's see what we can cut out - ~~Three 16-year-old Leaguetown students are facing state counterfeiting charges after police said the students paid for their school lunches with false bills produced in one of the boys' home.~~

Okay, after eliminating a lot of words, let's look at this sentence/headline:

Students are facing counterfeiting charges

What is this count? It is 39, so now what do we take out?

Let's change "Students" to "Teens" so it will better localize the story to our audience since these three guys are teenagers. Plus, "teens" is shorter. Let's also eliminate the passive verb "are" and just use "face."

Teens face counterfeit charges

Count? 30. Does this fit? Can we make it better? We have two counts left.

How about?

3 teens face counterfeit charges

Now it's even more specific. 32 count. Okay, we've done our second headline.

Let's talk a little about the difference between a main headline, secondary headline and regular one, two or three line headlines.

(1-line main headline with a 2-line secondary head)

It's about thyme

Garden club grows herbs, plans to sell for fundraiser

(1-line main headline with 1-line secondary head)

The inside scoop

Ben & Jerry plans 3 new flavors

In a real-world context, the main headline is set twice the size of the secondary head and is designed to grab the reader's eye. The main head can be a complete sentence — as in the case of the garden club headline — or a phrase like "The inside scoop."

When writing the main headline, look for the strongest word or word combination in an attempt to grab the reader's attention while providing some inkling of what the story is about. It would be nice if you weren't forced to relate the main head to the story. We could catch the reader's eye with a 48-point "SEX" every time. But that wouldn't be ethical. The main head must relate to the story.

The secondary headline explains the main headline. While the main head need not have a verb, the secondary headline must contain a subject and verb and make a complete thought — much like a sentence, but without a period.

To understand how these main and secondary combinations are used, study the front page of one of the state's better metropolitan newspapers. The Dallas Morning News is particularly outstanding in its use of main and secondary headlines.

Consider writing a main headline for the story of the state championship football game, won by your own leather-clad gladiators. You have several options. The main head should highlight the most important fact. That "fact" should be the essence of the event. It must be precise and clear. For example: In the story of a state championship game, you wouldn't choose

“Game” or “Football” for the main head. They’re much too vague. You probably wouldn’t choose “Victory” because it doesn’t quite capture the feeling of ultimate victory. Something along the lines of “Champions” or “State Champs” or “We’re No. 1” would work in a pinch, but they lack creativity.

We’re No. 1

Leopards claw Buttermilkville to win third straight state title

Champions

Leopards stomp Tadpoles to win AAA state crown

The headline should capture the emotion of the event, which means we have to know more than just that the team won. Was it a close game? Was it a big rivalry? Did something unusual happen during the game or on the path to victory? Luckily for you, we always give you a story to read first. So for this story, let’s say the team won the championship in an easy victory over Buttermilkville HS despite losing its coach (Justin Sweete) to cancer during the school year. The team says it won for the coach.

A Sweete Victory

Leopards stomp Buttermilkville to win AAA title for former coach

Note that the main head here does not contain a verb. The main headline does not need one.

The main head in the truly inspired headline below contains no verb. The main head is a play on the old phrase “Hope Springs Eternal.” This is headline writing as art.

Hoop Springs Maternal
40-something mothers team up for inspired shot at street basketball

Note that the secondary headline must contain a verb, and it is best that the verb be an action verb. However, the main headline works on an almost subliminal level. The reader “sees” the word or phrase without actually “reading” it. It is much like advertis-

JUDGING CRITERIA



- Within given count.
- Wording specific, accurate; unnecessary wording omitted.
- Contains subject and verb and makes a complete thought.
- Emphasis on active verbs.
- Written in present or future tense.
- Split phrases avoided.
- Does not sacrifice accuracy for creativity or cuteness.
- Main headline does not depend on secondary headline (no kickers or other type of headline, such as a hammer head, tripod or anything else, will be included in the UIL contests).
- Key words are not repeated in primary and secondary headlines.
- Grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct.

It is permissible to use upstyle or downstyle for headlines. Because all letters, numbers and punctuation marks count as one, a contestant should not be penalized for using upstyle or downstyle.

A student need not complete all six headlines to win. It is possible that four good heads might win over five mediocre heads. Or five excellent over six good heads. The final decision will be made by the judging panel.

ing in which the reader is expected to see the copy not as individual letters and words but as complete ideas. Consider the following headline:

Meat and Greet
Barbecue expected to attract crowd for freshman orientation

The main headline captures the focal point of the story. The two-line secondary head elaborates on that point.

Of course, there’s no law that says that the main

headline can't have a verb. Many do. For example:

Heat melts Mavs

James scores 42 in 100-87 win

Notice that both lines are complete thoughts. The top line gives the basic information. The bottom line elaborates that point while providing peripheral information. Avoid repeating key words or phrases from the main to the secondary head. For example:

Perry punches Obama

Governor says Obama 'was boring'

The problem? Repeating the key word "Obama" in both lines of the headline. Note, too, that we have used single quotes in the secondary head. Never use double quotes in headlines, main or secondary.

COMMON PROBLEMS

- **Read the stories carefully** and understand the facts before you begin writing. Too many contestants are disqualified each year because their headlines contain false, vague or misleading information.

Several years back, students were asked to write a headline on a story about a visiting professor from Oxford, England. He was teaching at Leaguetown High School as part of a one-year sabbatical and said he wanted to dispel the many myths Americans hold about "cheery old England." He also said he thought students would find the course to be a "bloody good class."

So, one headline contestant wrote: Professor predicts 'bloody class.' That's eye-grabbing, but wrong.

- **Avoid using names** in headlines unless the person involved is prominent enough that the name will be instantly recognized. Note in the headline at the top of the page we used two top state officials.

Again, referring to the story above, the name "Arthur Smithson" is not well-known enough to use in the headline. He was completely new to the school. If the story was about a teacher who has been at the school, then you could use the name in the headline. Students would know that name.

The headline in question read: Arthur Smithson to shatter myths about 'Old England.' Now, ole Arthur may be a peachy-keen fellow, but most folks at League-

town won't know him from Adam, so they'll probably skim right over the headline, see nothing that catches their eye, and keep moving down the page. A better headline might have been:

Visiting Briton out to shatter myths of 'cheery England'

- **Don't grab the reader's** attention at the expense of factual reporting. Again, look at the headline, 'Teacher predicts bloody class.' Certainly that turned a few heads, but only at the expense of the credibility of your publication and yourself.

- **Check your spelling.** Too many students misspell relatively simple words that are spelled correctly on the information form. Judy Babb, a former long-time Texas journalism teacher, said, "I've always told my students that there's not much worse than misspelling something in 48-point type. It just screams, 'I'm stupid.'"

- **Avoid passive verbs.** Daily newspapers frequently use passive verbs in headlines. That doesn't mean you should, too. It is a good idea to avoid them. If you have one minute left in the contest and the only headline you can come up with has a passive verb, use it. A passive headline is better than no headline at all.

In some instances, the subject is more newsworthy than the action. Thus, the use of the passive is more acceptable. For example:

Stadium is closed after latest flooding

While some people have no big philosophical problem with this headline, know that if you use a passive verb at a UIL meet, the judge is likely to draw a big circle around it like it's some sort of mortal sin. Concentrate on active verbs.

- **Be consistent with style.** If you write the first headline in upstyle, continue that style throughout your entry. Don't use upstyle for the first two heads and downstyle for the last four. Although all letters, numbers, etc. count the same, consistency breeds credibility, and isn't that what we journalists are always seeking? Be consistent.

- **Don't pad your heads** with "say nothing" phras-

es. Tossing in the year, the school initials or the phrase “at school” is a common crutch for lazy headline writers. Here’s an example of a padded head:

London native to be new exchange teacher at school

Where’s the padding? The phrase “at school.” Where do most teachers teach? This is about the same as stating, “Teacher to teach students at school.”

Other favorite padded phrases include “this year” and “at LHS.” Most people know the name of their school, and they can figure out the initials.

Two other points:

- Avoid initials in headlines. For example, this headline appeared in a college newspaper:

ACLU considers lawsuit for SFA’s YCT

E-I-E-I-O. Avoid the alphabet soup.

A news headline should summarize the story, contain as many facts as possible and be taken from the story’s lead. Incidentally, ACLU stands for the “American Civil Liberties Union,” YCT stands for “Young Conservatives of Texas” and SFA stands for “Stephen F. Austin (University).”

- Avoid abbreviations, especially abbreviations of months. Unacceptable:

Board to meet on Mar. 6

Never abbreviate March, April, May, June or July.

Council to cancel Dec. meeting

Abbreviate months only when they are accompanied by a date. Thus, a head stating “Council to cancel Dec. 6 meeting” would have been acceptable.

- Do not create your own abbreviations:

V-ball team to play soph. class

Now, let’s look over each of these headlines and find the problems:

New band director seeking to build school jazz department

- The infinitive phrase “to build” is split. First, try to avoid complex verb forms such as “seeking to build.” If it is essential that you use such a form, do not split the complex verb combination.

Falcons defeated after late Anderson rally

- Again, there’s a split prepositional phrase. The phrase is “after late Anderson rally” and should be on the same line.

Saving lives goal of course for students

- This is a padded headline. In a high school situation, most courses are offered for students. To state as much in a headline is wasteful. Every word in the headline must communicate a specific message. Don’t clutter the head with words that do nothing more than state the obvious.

“Phantom Menace” rocks, Jar Jar Binks really irritates

- This is a two-sentence, two-line head, which is begging for trouble. The two-line headline should be a single sentence rather than two. However, if it is absolutely necessary to have two independent thoughts in a two-line head, then separate them with a semi-colon. The semi-colon is used in lieu of a period. Also, the quotation marks here should be single quotes—not double quotes.

All that jazz

Assistant band director seeks talent for new jazz ensemble

- This is a main/secondary combination. You’ve probably already found the errors. “Jazz” is used in both the main and secondary heads. Since the main “All that

Judges: Listen up!

It is permissible to use upstyle, downstyle or even block lettering headlines. Students should try to be consistent but they should not be penalized for varying between the two. This “consistency rule” was established many years ago when a lowercase letter usually counted as one and a capital letter counted as one and a half. A contestant could manipulate counts by varying between upstyle and downstyle. That is not the case anymore, so it’s unnecessary to put any energy into trying to decipher between whether a letter is a capital letter or not.

Students need not complete all six headlines to win. It is possible that five good headlines might win over six mediocre ones. The final decision rests with the judges, but contestants should not be disqualified solely on the basis of failure to complete all six heads.

Regarding the count system: If a headline is too long OR too short, then the head must be disqualified. If the assigned count is 14-18 and the head counts 20, then it should be disqualified. If the assigned count is 14 -18 and the head counts 13, it should be disqualified. This is a change from the past when headlines that fell short of the count were not disqualified.

In learning to write headlines, we rely on “hard and fast” rules. However, a brief examination of any metropolitan daily newspaper shows that these rules are not as “hard and fast” as we’d like to think. It is best to judge the headline on its own merit first. Quite possibly, the contestant used an article in a head but used it effectively. Quite possibly, the contestant used a passive verb but did so not out of ignorance but because he or she felt the passive verb was appropriate. Also, a contestant may have used what seemingly is a past tense verb where in fact an understood passive verb is used.

In short, give the students the benefit of the doubt.

“jazz” is catchy, it would be best to find a substitute for the word in the secondary.

For example:

All that jazz

Assistant band director seeks talent for new musical combo

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

More than any other, the headline writing contest depends on constant practice. Use a thesaurus when writing heads for the school newspaper or yearbook.

The trick to writing headlines is having a strong vocabulary. Headline writers must have at their disposal enough synonyms to plug in and out of the headline to make it fit the count.

Knowledge of headline fundamentals can be learned. However, knocking off six heads in 30 minutes is a knack learned only through constant practice. While judges should not grade the entry solely on the number of heads completed, it’s obvious that they are going to lean heavily toward the contestant who finishes five or six.

The key: Spend five minutes per headline. Don’t get stuck on one. If you do, pass it and return if you have time. Don’t work for the brilliant headline. If it comes to you, great. Make certain your heads are stylistically and grammatically correct. Make certain all facts and spellings are correct. Be sure that if the directions ask for regular one-, two- or three-line headline or main/secondary combination, you give what it is asking for. Then, sit back and hope that your competition didn’t practice as much as you did.

Okay, let’s practice with the following headlines, taken from a few recent and a few not-so-recent contests.

■ Write a two-line headline with each line counting 19-25.

Despite an unresolved dispute between the school’s top two students, a judge has ordered the the school board to name a valedictorian.

Seniors Paul Curran and Jennifer Hatchet are

ving for the top spot in the class. Curran's grade point average is .02 of a point higher than Hatchet's through the fall semester.

Hatchet's parents have filed suit, claiming that credits from the year their daughter spent as an exchange student in Germany should also count toward her GPA. They claim those grades would push her ahead of Curran.

"It's not fair that I'm being penalized for spending a year as an exchange student," Hatchet said. "The courses I took in Germany were much more difficult than anything I've taken here, and I made the equivalent of A's in all of them."

District Judge Mark Casen has ordered the district to make every effort to resolve the dispute before seeking court intervention. The School Board will hear statements from all parties involved and attempt to decide the issue at its meeting next Monday.

"District policy has always been that we would give credit for certain courses taken abroad but that we would not count those grades since the grading systems of other countries are often so much different than ours," Assistant Superintendent Janet Truesdale said. 🗣️

COMMENTS: Keep it simple. Remember: a news story generally crunches all vital information into the lead. So concentrate on the first paragraph or two. This story is quite long yet the headline should come from the first sentence. A judge has ordered the school district to name a valedictorian. Simple as that. So don't try to make this more difficult than it is.

Judge orders district to select valedictorian

Note that we chose to use the verb "select" rather than "name" since that word is used in the story. We want to show the judge we are not echoing the first sentence of the lead word for word.

■ Write a three-line headline with each line counting 12-18.

In response to the large early enrollment numbers for summer school, Principal Heather Lemke has expanded the number of classes to include six elective courses.

"Generally, we offer only core subject classes like English and math," Lemke said. "But we've had many

students ask if they could take an elective course."

Lemke said the core classes filled easily, and she hopes for the same result for the elective courses.

Theresa Saunders, journalism teacher and publications adviser, said she was happy about the course additions, which include Journalism I and photojournalism.

"In order to be on our newspaper and yearbook staffs, students must complete one of the two entry-level classes," she said. "That is tough for many students because they don't have time in their schedule."

Saunders will teach both journalism courses. 🗣️

COMMENTS: A three-line headline needs to be one sentence. It is probably the most difficult of our headlines because usually the count is very short for each line. Don't try to shoe-horn two sentences into a three-line head. Make it a single thought. Think "noun—verb—object."

As with all headlines, read the copy carefully. Ask yourself, "If I had to tell the reader in one sentence what this story is about, what would that sentence be?" In other words, who is doing what?

Most likely, the sentence would be the lead. Of course, that's much too long for a headline. So let's pare down the words so that it'll fit into a three-line head. Remember: the headline needs a verb. Also, you want to avoid splits.

Principal adds six electives to summer school

■ Write a one-line headline counting 26-32.

Two freshmen were injured in their home Sunday after attempting to make sparklers, a type of fireworks, for a science project.

The teens were taken to Memorial Hospital with minor burns. Both were released that evening.

"I certainly do not condone my students using combustible materials for any of the science projects," science teacher Edward Sergi said. "I pre-approve all projects, and this is not the project I approved for these students."

One of the freshmen, who wished to remain anonymous, said the project had not been pre-approved.

"We started our project, making a miniature garage door opener, but it was too easy and boring," he said.

“We got the idea for sparklers on the Internet. We had no idea it would be so dangerous.”

The explosion caused a small fire on the patio of the house but caused no major damage.

“The boys were lucky,” firefighter Celia Strand said. “At least they were smart enough to wear protective goggles.” 🧢

COMMENTS: A Paul Simon song, “Maybe I think too much” comes to mind. Look for the obvious headline.

2 hurt in science project blast

This counts 31. It would work fine. One contestant wrote, “2 LHS students hurt in explosion” for her headline. This headline would work in a pinch (if time was running out), but we do not recommend using the initials of the school in a headline. The first headline also offered more specifics with “science project.”

Still, don’t try to make this difficult. The art of headline writing rests on the ability to reduce a story to a single, simple thought.

■ Write a two-line headline with each line counting 16-22.

WITH FLUCTUATING spring weather, cold and allergy symptoms are becoming prevalent. For students and teachers in the choir room, however, Kleenex boxes are going faster than ever because the old, moldy carpet in the room is aggravating allergies.

The choir’s preparation for contests involves a constant fight to keep the students well.

“This is just ridiculous,” choir director Henry Wills said. “The school is making the students sick, and our department is hurting because of it.”

Absences in the choir classes have risen by 20 percent due to the carpet’s effect. Wills encouraged his students to take care of their throats and voices by drinking water and taking Vitamin C.

Principal Donald Riley said the school could not afford to replace the carpet, but he would ask the custodians to vacuum the choir room more thoroughly. 🧹

COMMENTS: Choir students are getting sick. Why? Because of the old, moldy carpet. This is hurt-

JUDGING CRITERIA



In addition to what you have been given, here are a few more basic rules that teachers have asked us to include over the years.

The following are additional basic headlines rules for you to follow:

- use a comma for “and”
- do not begin the headline with a verb
- avoid using names unless they are easily recognizable — avoid using student names
- always use single quotes
- do not use the same word twice in a headline
- use active verbs, not passive verbs
- write in present or future tense
- avoid unfamiliar abbreviations
- do not put periods at the end of a headline

ing the choir’s preparation for contests. Now, again, we can’t work everything into the headline, so let’s glean the most important facts.

Research shows that readers consume less than 24 percent of all text on a newspaper page. Their eyes scan the page, looking for words of interest. Consequently, you must pack your headlines with as many interesting, eye-arresting words as possible.

The following headline does just that.

Moldy choir room makes students sick

■ Write a 1-line main headline with a count 12-18 and a 1-line secondary headline with a count 22-28.

WHAT’S IN a name? Something very special, apparently. Quarterback Warren Moon shares his name with the former Houston Oilers quarterback.

The sophomore played on the junior varsity team last year but is rising up the depth chart in spring training.

"I've always loved football, even before the famous Warren Moon became famous," Moon said. "I think it's a great coincidence that we share the same name. I was a pretty bad player last year, but my coach and I think I'm getting better. It's a good thing, too, because if I didn't play very well, I'd get teased a lot more." 🐾

COMMENTS: When writing the main headline, attempt a play on words. Remember, the main headline doesn't need a verb. It can be a phrase, a title, a label or an incomplete sentence. For example, in a *Rolling Stone* article about Skinheads in Los Angeles, the headline was, "The kids are all white," a play on "The kids are all right," the classic rock album by The Who. They were a popular band a long time ago. The Coldplay of their day. Look it up.

In the story above, try to come up with a play on the word "Moon." Also communicate the idea that he was improving. So the main headline turned out to be "Bad Moon Rising." It fits and is appropriate. If it's a fun story, have fun with it. If it's a serious story, then be serious.

The secondary headline must have a verb and it should not repeat information from the main headline.

Bad Moon rising

JV quarterback improves game

■ Write a 1-line main headline counting 12-18 and a 2-line secondary headline with each line counting 20-26.

HE SEES the person in front of his car too late. He finds he has no control over his movements or the car and hits the person in his path. Although it is only a simulation, the Drunk Driving Simulator on campus this week has convinced many students not to drink and drive.

"I tried it and it was so scary," senior Michelle Hernandez said. "I don't think I ever want to go through that again, either behind the wheel or riding with somebody else who is drunk."

The simulator gives a sober driver the feeling of a

If the judges can't read it, you're in big trouble

Grammar, spelling and neatness are secondary considerations in all of these contests. Face it, kids. We're old and our eyesight ain't what it used to be. So while your entry will be judged first and foremost on its journalistic merit, judges will naturally favor those papers they can read without popping an ocular nerve.

As far as grammar and spelling are concerned, if two entries are journalistically equal, the paper that contains misspelled words and grammatical errors is unlikely to win unless the judge recognizes the handwriting on your entry as the same handwriting that appeared on his Father's Day card, if you catch my drift.

So, take your time. Write legibly. Spend a few moments at the end of the contest to edit it. You can take a dictionary and a thesaurus into the contest room. Use them.

loss of control that a person driving under the influence of alcohol experiences. The simulator is programmed according to the driver's weight and the amount of alcohol that person needs to be legally drunk. It delays the steering and braking response time, which equals the slowed physical and mental response of a drunk driver.

"I couldn't control the car at all," junior Fardin Kahia said. "I didn't think it would be hard, but it was impossible."



COMMENTS: Although this headline is similar to the others, in this case the secondary head is a two-line headline.

Again, let's look for a play on words for the main headline, something that will catch the reader's eye. Consider this: "**Crash course.**" It captures both the idea of a classroom as well as automobile accidents.

The two-line secondary headline needs to be written like any other headline. Make certain it contains a noun and a verb. Make certain the noun is specific and the verb is active.

Crash course

Drunk driving hits home
with simulator program

■ Main headline with two-line secondary head. The main head should count 10-17. Each line of the secondary headline should count 16-23.

After first period on Tuesday, students were held in classes for 45 extra minutes while the FFA teacher, Jeb Budding, and his class rounded up the 20 white rabbits that escaped from his classroom.

Apparently, a student in Budding's first period class opened the cage door and forgot to close it tightly. While the class gathered supplies from Budding's truck, the rabbits hopped out of their cage and into the main building.

"As we were coming back into the building, I saw two rabbits hopping down the hallway," said junior Kylie Jones. "I freaked out and ran outside to tell Mr. Budding, and then we all started to scramble to catch the rabbits."

Buddings contacted the office, and Principal Steve Dovon held the bell while students and custodians corralled the rabbits.

"After about 20 minutes, we had all of the rabbits, except for two," Budding said. "We finally found them in a the faculty lounge under the sofa."

The FFA class is going to raise the rabbits until April when they will sell them at the county fair. "We should make a pretty penny on the rabbits, if we can get them to breed," Budding said. 🐰

COMMENTS: Main headline needs something catchy, a twist on a familiar phrase. Always look to see if you can play on the words in the story.

And the secondary headline answers all the important news questions.

Bad hare day
20 loose rabbits
delay 2nd period

■ Write a 1-line headline counting 25-32.

AT FIRST glance, Marian Johnson's third hour al-

gebra class seems like any other. But this all-girl class was convened to test research showing huge differences between boys' and girls' aptitudes in math.

Teachers and administrators are watching to see whether the girls learn math and acquire self-esteem better without the sometimes intimidating influence of boys. The difference in the class, which began in September, is already apparent.

"This group is much more supportive and more relaxed with each other than my other classes," Johnson said. "The individual grades in the class have also risen, as compared to the students' grades in previous classes." 🐰

COMMENTS: Keep it simple. Look for the noun. Who is doing what? Johnson's third hour all-girl algebra class is testing research showing differences between boys' and girls' aptitudes in math.

All-girl math class tests theory

■ Write a 1-line main headline counting 14 - 20 and a 2-line secondary headline with each line counting 22-29.

ARMED ONLY with swimsuits, shorts and tank tops, the drill team found itself in a quandary when its flight to Puerto Rico was re-routed to Chicago because of a snowstorm. The drill team was forced to cancel its spring break cruise and instead stayed for a week in Chicago, the nearest city whose airport was open.

The airline said it would refund the team members' money and fly them free of charge to Puerto Rico later this summer.

"Even though we were prepared for sunny, warm weather, it was fun to play in the snow since we never get to do that at home," drill team captain Dawn Tucker said. "But it was even more fun to buy lots of new warm clothes." 🐰

COMMENTS: Again, the main headline should grab the reader's attention. It has to jump off the page. So, look for the pun, the play on words, the slight twist of logic. Here are two examples, either of which work quite well.

Tropical to popsicle
Drill team's sunny trip

turns into snowy sidetrack

Vacation put on ice

Snowstorm forces drill team to trade beach for Windy City

■ Write a three-line headline with each line counting 11-17.

IF YOU push your food around the edges of the plate, it makes the portions look bigger. This is the kind of thing students are learning in a weight modification class. The physical education elective meets daily and offers aerobic exercise, self-esteem building and lessons in healthy eating for overweight students.

To be eligible, students must exceed the normal range of body fat by more than 10 percent. Participants have lost up to 70 pounds each, said Debra Rommel, the physical education teacher who started the program this year.

"The number of obese students is finally dropping," Rommel said. "The students are working incredibly hard, and I am incredibly proud of them."

Students are taught to log their food intake every week and examine their eating habits. They learn how to prepare nutritious foods and boost self-esteem. They also learn about flattering clothes and colors.

In exercise, team sports are de-emphasized, and the students work harder at exercising because they are not afraid of failing, Rommel said.

"Here everybody's in the same boat, so nobody makes fun of you," senior Robin Miller said. 🐼

COMMENTS: The story is a complicated one on the surface. Yet, if you read it carefully, the thrust of the story is "class helps teens overcome problems associated with obesity."

That's the fundamental message that the headline must contain.

Elective course helps obese teens lose weight

Speaking of diets, here's an all-time favorite story/headline combination.

■ Write a 1-line main headline counting 12-20 and

a 1-line secondary headline counting 25-32.

MEDIA DAY, 2009. A photographer for the local paper walked up to head football coach Jim Miller and told him, "You need to be running a few of those wind sprints with the players." Miller took the jab in good humor, but it stung.

"I knew I was much too heavy," he said. "I weighed 165 pounds when I graduated from high school, and there I was, 15 years later, weighing almost 275. So I decided then and there to get back in shape."

In the 18 months since, Miller has lost more than 100 pounds.

"It's been tough, particularly during the season when the stress is pretty high," Miller said. "I had to break a lot of bad habits, the worst being eating potato chips during film sessions."

Through dieting, weight-training and jogging, Miller lost 70 pounds in his first year.

"Losing the next 25 pounds was pretty tough, but I plan to get down to 165," he said. "My wife and kids are thrilled with me, and I have to admit that I'm pretty proud of myself. I really like the new, lighter version of myself. Now, if I could just get my time in the half-mile back under two minutes. . ." 🐼

COMMENTS: Who did what? Coach Miller lost 100 pounds. He says he likes the "new lighter version of myself."

Miller. Lighter. Anything come to mind here? A pun perhaps? (By the way, UIL is not promoting alcohol use. We're trying to write intelligent heads for real stories that may appear in your student newspaper or in a daily newspaper.)

Miller light

Football coach loses 100 pounds

The main headline grabs the reader's attention. The secondary explains the rest. It's clever. It's simple. It works.

Again, the success of all of these headlines lies in their simplicity. They communicate vital information clearly and crisply. They generally consist of a single noun, verb and object. Abandoning this structure generally causes big problems.

For example:

■ Write a 3-line headline with each line counting

18-24.

THE VARSITY baseball team will be forced to forfeit its 4-0 start in district play because UIL officials have discovered that the Lobos began practicing three days before the season opened statewide. Coach David Wells did not deny that some members of the team practiced but said the workouts were run by a single assistant coach and that players were not required to attend.

"I've been coaching a long time, and this is the worst. Seems like these days, if they can't beat you on the field, they run off to find a way to beat you on paper. No one will tell us who reported this, but I think it's sad and sick that someone is spying on us," Wells said. "We didn't go 4-0 in district because we ran a few drills after school a little early. Worst of all, I feel sorry for the kids. I'll be around for a while, but for a lot of them, this is their one and only shot at a championship." 🐾

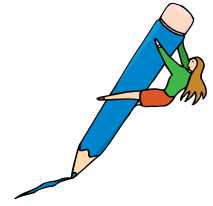
The headline below sounds like one of those newsreels from the 1940s. It contains three nouns and three verbs.

**Baseball team forfeits;
illegal practices held;
coach disappointed**

Don't do that. Get a single noun and verb. The following headline explains not only what happened but why it happened.

**Early start forces
baseball team to forfeit
first 4 district wins**

**HEADLINE
WRITING
PRINCIPLES**



- The headline should tell the whole story as fully and accurately as possible.
- Avoid involved, confused or ambiguous headlines.
- Feature stories should have feature headlines.
- The headline should suggest newness or action and should, therefore, contain stated or implied verbs.
- The active verb is stronger than the passive, but the passive is sometimes necessary. Don't be afraid to use a passive verb if it works best.
- The present or future tense should be used.
- The headline should be fresh and vivid. Avoid dull and the trite.
- Do not repeat key words in the headline.
- Find the exact word to convey a thought.
- Avoid provincial and slang expressions.
- Avoid simplified spellings such as "tho" for "though," "tourney" for "tournament" or "nite" for "night."
- Avoid "headline-ese" such as "prez" for "president" or "span" for "bridge."
- Use 'single' — not "double" — quotation marks.
- Divide thoughts with a semicolon.
- Avoid abbreviations unless they are standard, conventional and generally understood, such as NHS, FBI or IRS.
- Do not editorialize in the headline.
- Each part of the headline should stand independently. The main head should never be dependent upon a secondary head. Also, do not repeat facts or words from main to secondary headlines.

Let's look at another basic news story.

■ Write a 2-line headline with each line counting 23-29

Next year's juniors and seniors will get a new tool for their classes — Kindles, wireless reading devices. Businesswoman Gigi Telapi is donating 600 Kindles to the school in May.

"Every student should have a Kindle," Telapi said. "It's light. It's easy to use, and it will allow students to read anywhere. Plus, it makes reading a little more fun."

Principal Steven Perry said he was thrilled with Telapi's donation.

"The Kindle is going to help bring back the 'cool' factor to reading," Perry said. "Plus, the school and students will save money on purchasing novels."

English teacher Tess Sanders said she never thought she would trade her paper books for a Kindle.

"I am a die-hard book lover, but my husband bought me a Kindle for Christmas, and I absolutely love it," Sanders said. "I can't wait to use the Kindle in the classroom."

Sanders said the Kindle allows students to do more than read the book.

"Students will be able to interact with the book through links, videos and podcasts," she said. "It will be a whole new learning experience."

Juniors, seniors to receive Kindles next school year

The headline is direct and to the point. It gives the reader the vital information in a clear, concise way. Notice also that the writer used a comma for the word "and" between "juniors" and "seniors." This is a common and encouraged practice. We also want to avoid using the articles, "a, an, the."

We'll finish the headline section with a news story that asks for a one-line headline. This is as basic as it gets.

■ One-line headline counting 23-29

HAVE YOU always wanted to try scuba diving, but never had the money? Well, here's your chance. A free scuba lesson is being offered from Scuba

Center, a local water-sports business. All you have to do is sign up and show up.

"I've been on a number of dives with Scuba Center over the past four or five years, and they run a first-class operation," health and physical education instructor Wendy Brown said. "Scuba may not be for everyone, but if you've ever thought about trying it, now is the time."

For more information, call Scuba Center at 1-800-649-7384 or see Miss Brown in L-203. 🐼

The story begins with a second-person, question lead, which isn't so great. Be that as it may, the essence of the story is that a free scuba lesson is being offered by the Scuba Center.

That's what the reader will want and need to know. Don't get clever here.

Dive into scuba lessons

Way too cute and it doesn't communicate the most important fact: FREE! That's what the reader really wants to know. That's the one word that will draw the reader's eye.

Free scuba lessons available

That's better.

Save the cutesy stuff for the main/secondary combinations. And remember: the key to success in this contest is practice, practice, practice.

Good luck.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS IS the seventh revision of the original contest manual and my only revision as director of journalism. Like my predecessor, Randy Vonderheid, said about the previous revision, “We don’t need to re-invent the wheel,” so I didn’t change much of the “meat of the story.”

I did make several changes in the ways we approach the contest. I included a few new strategies for success in the UIL journalism competition.

Over the years, many teachers, students and UIL employees have had a hand in forging this manual. I would be remiss not to mention those individuals who helped Bobby, Randy and myself put this manual together. We may have forgotten a few, but as much as we can remember, thanks go to:

Marjorie Walraven, Cathy Collier, Jean Stow, Pat Gathright, Carol Narsutis, Judy Babb, Pete Craycroft, Dow Tate, Lori Oglesbee, Sandy Hall-Chiles, Rhonda Moore, the late Dr. Martin L. “Red” Gibson, the late Julia Jeffress, Leland Mallet, Suzanne Bardwell, Diane Causey, Ilona Smith, Bret McDonald, Judy Wyatt, Henry Robles, David Trussell, Tricia Regalado, Laura Smith, Bradley Froebel, Brenda Schulte and Carol Cox.

For a few of the sample stories: To students attending the 1987 Oklahoma Interscholastic Press Association summer newspaper workshop in Tulsa, Oklahoma: Wendy Birley of Tulsa Union (OK) High School, Darla Tresner of Bartlesville (OK) High School, Jeff Hampton of Charles Page High School in Sand Springs (OK) and Frances Cates of Tulsa (OK).

Most of the above mentioned people either are current journalism advisers or have been advisers. They are people who truly make the UIL experience wonderful for Texas students.

Advisers of both big and small schools work tirelessly to prepare their students for the contests each year. These advisers give up their weekends to wake up at the crack of dawn to attend practice meets and UIL meets with their students.

The advisers are not bringing in loads of cash for

these sacrifices. In fact, many receive no monetary benefits.

But teaching has never been about money.

It’s about the passion for growing successful students. And our Texas journalism coaches grow some of the best.

I am humbled and impressed at every state meet when I speak with our advisers. Teaching truly is the most important profession in our nation. Without teachers, we would not have doctors, engineers, lawyers, writers and more.

I want to thank all Texas journalism teachers for working endlessly to promote scholastic journalism.

Their efforts to teach young people the importance of clear writing and analytical thought are vital to the security of our nation—its economic well-being, its political stability and its cultural identity.

Now more than ever, we need students who can write clearly, read and think critically and solve problems. Without them, a drive down the information highway won’t amount to much.

Most importantly, we extend a deep debt of gratitude to the countless journalism teachers and publications advisers who work tirelessly to promote scholastic journalism. 🍷

JEANNE ACTON

UIL Director of Journalism
2004 -

RANDY VONDERHEID

UIL Director of Journalism
1999-2004

BOBBY HAWTHORNE

UIL Director of Journalism
1979-1999