It’s all in your Head(line)

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Revised by Jeanne Acton, UIL Journalism Director
The Headline Writing Contest:

- Six stories, six headlines
- 45 minutes (about 7 minutes a story)
- Count parameters
- About speed and creativity
**Sell the story.** A good head involves readers much like a clever ad.

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

**Be accurate.** All facts, names, numbers, whatever must be correct.
Be objective. Don’t editorialize.

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

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

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

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

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

Freshman Millie James said she participated in 21st Century grant classes at her former school in Dallas. “I took a really cool e-zine class, and we published a magazine for teen girls,” she said.
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Kinds of Headlines
Bricklayers engage in mortar combat
Backers hot for chili as U.S. official food
Principal adds six electives to summer school
Standing tall
5’-4” guard rises to challenge of leading Tigers
Driven to destruction
Police play game of cat and mouse with illegal racers
Whole new ballgame
Nolan Ryan makes smooth transition to job helping oversee state’s parks, wildlife areas
Up to date
Senior makes over dad for online auction
• Be as specific as possible in your headline. Get to the heart of the news.

(not good)
School board discusses items at heated Tuesday meeting
(better – more specific)
2 board members walk out over budget argument
Avoid semicolons. The headline should be a single sentence, not a collection of sentences.

Hurricane strikes; school swamped; pep rally cancelled

Better:
Pep rally cancelled after hurricane slams into school
• Don’t pad headlines with school initials or dates. Also, avoid initials and abbreviations in headlines.

Too vague…

2011 MHS FFA plans to hold annual rodeo
Willie Nelson to appear at FFA rodeo Saturday
• Put all parts of a verb on the same line
  avoid be verbs and linking verbs. Action. Shoot
  for present tense or future tense.

(weak)
Spongebob will
attend Mensa meeting
purely as spectator

(better)
Spongebob to attend
Mensa meeting
purely as spectator
• Put all parts of a verb on the same line
  Strive for present/future tense, action verbs

(weak)
Nichols will
not appear
in court

(better)
Nichols avoids
district court
appearance
Heat wave blisters California, Texas
No clichés.

Swimmers dive into season
Golfers swing into action
Exchange students say ‘Hasta la vista’
Math Club multiplies
Football team tackles opposition
Drama Club acts up
Military recruiters say, ‘I Want You’
Pocket lasers banned
Authorities ban laser pointers

Just in case you didn’t catch it, the repetition is the word “laser” and “ban”
Pocket lasers banned
Principal cites injuries, class disruptions

This headline provides twice as much information in the same amount of space! Yippee!
• Avoid "headline-ese" either in the form of simplified spellings or odd synonyms.

Board to meet Tuesday nite  Vball team destroys Southside in finals

Senior play to continue thru Easter
• Avoid initials or abbreviations, unless the initials are instantly recognizable. From the UT-Austin’s Daily Texan:

**ACLU considers lawsuit for SFA’s YCT**
• Avoid passive verbs in headlines.

Internet fraud is cause of worry for administrators

Better:

Internet fraud concerns administrators
• It is permissible to use implied passive verbs.

Mosquitos (are) biting into summer fun

Federal grant (is) renewed
Fire guts Fred Astaire
Dance Studio, 2 injured
• Put all parts of a verb on the same line

(weak)
Big surprise: Nader will run for president again

(better)
Big surprise: Nader to run for U.S. president again
Baseball team ready for playoff game, coach says
• Do not end a line with a preposition

No love lost between Longhorns, Sooners
• When separating two sentences in a headline, do so with a semi-colon.

Bardwell named Educator of the Year; experts call it sign of plunging standards
The main headline should never be dependent on a kicker or other secondary headline.

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

(correct)
Getting out
Obama promises to end Iraq war
• Alliteration in headlines should be used sparingly and in appropriate situations.  

Acceptable:

New Planetary Puzzlers  
A distant, oversize world causes cosmic confusion
Take ‘meowt’
to the cat show
Annual festival of felines begins today
• Unacceptable:

Cheney’s chest chink
Vice president’s thumper goes thud
The headline should reflect the mood of the story.

Band itching for practice as soon as mosquitos killed
Be careful of word use and misinterpretation.

Bears capture playoff birth
Bush, Kerry
butt heads
Panda mating fails; veterinarian takes over
Be sure to eat right before surgery
Kicking baby considered to be healthy
Crowds rushing to see
Pope trample 6 to death
Police Say Man Hid Crack in Buttocks
A few more rules …

• Avoid contractions
• Do not end a headline with a period
• Avoid names unless they are easily recognizable
• Always use single quotes in headlines
When sophomore Dominic Brown was seven years old, he built a three-foot high bike ramp at the bottom of his steep driveway. The ramp lasted one jump before his mother dismantled it.

But that one jump was all Dominic needed to get his adrenaline rushing. “I love to take risks and I love to do stunts on my bikes,” he said. “It drives my mother crazy.”

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

“This is my first time to compete at this level so I don’t expect to win, but I am hoping to place in the top 10,” Dominic said. Dominic said he is unsure whether his mother will attend the competition.

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

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

Sophomore to compete in extreme biking contest
Let's look at a story:

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

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

But it wasn’t a boy that caught her affection.
Shanda fell deeply in love with the *Twilight series of books*.
“I’ve read all of the books three times already,” she said. “I can’t get enough of them.”
To honor her love, Shanda started the Twilight Club so students could get together to discuss the books and movies and plan events. The club meets during lunch on Wednesday in Room 203.
“When I first proposed this club, my friends thought I was a little crazy,” Hall said. “But now, three months later, we have 25 members.”
Shanda said as more students read the books and see the movie, she expects her club to grow even larger.
“Almost everyone who reads the book or sees the movie loves the series,” Shanda said.
The next large event for the club is a Vampire Camp Out in April.
“We all plan to read our favorite passages by the fire,” she said. “It’s not like we believe in vampires, but we believe in the words and messages of the books.”
Junior Christine Razor said she joined the group about a month ago.
“Basically, we are a book club/movie club,” she said. “It’s just that we only discuss one particular series of books and movies.”
Book club focuses on vampire series