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WRITING AND EDITING SCHOOL NEWS

Communication skills blended with new technology will provide us with a better-informed citizenry. The start of this begins with scholastic journalism.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A veteran of more than 35 years in professional journalism, William N. Harwood has been a reporter and editor for daily and weekly newspapers, a free lance magazine writer, editor of several house organs and specialized publications, radio and television writer and was producer, scriptwriter and narrator for a number of documentary motion pictures.

He spent eight years as a secondary school journalism teacher and adviser to prize-winning student publications, and later headed the Office of Information Services at Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho.

In addition to his administrative duties at ISU, he was a lecturer in journalism for several years and for a time was adviser to the weekly student newspaper and the university yearbook.

Co-author of both the fourth and fifth editions, John Hudnall is a lecturer on the faculty of the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Hudnall invested 22 years as an adviser and journalism teacher in Missouri and Nebraska. Publications he advised were consistent national winners.

He currently serves as the executive director of the Kansas Scholastic Press Association and teaches Research and Writing at KU. He also is a member of the advisory board for the Jayhawker yearbook at Kansas.

PROLOGUE

The study of journalism and subsequent work on school publications is the most effective route for students to improve and to become more sophisticated in their writing skills. This book is devoted to that improvement.

Quality writing is a learned art form. It comes from a solid grammar foundation, strong reportorial skills and an ability to use words in a manner befitting the tone of the piece.

High school students need to be acutely aware that what they write is read not only by an instructor, but by the entire student-faculty-administrative audience and also by those who make up the local community and beyond. Because of the positive and negative feedback they receive from a competent instructor and from the members of their reading audience, writing becomes more than a classroom exercise. Students rapidly discover that what they write suddenly has meaning and power.

Quality journalism programs tend to breed idealists—adults who care about their country, about intelligent decision making, about community participation, people who value others' opinions and who value a broad view of life's possibilities.

These are exciting times to be a journalist. As we embark into the new millennium, we can view a convergence of media that sets higher standards and a broader knowledge base. Yearbook and newspaper staffs blend into one. The web staff and the magazine staff will unite. Journalism can no longer be seen as a one-focus form of media. The newspaper reporter will need to know how to do a stand-up. The Web site designer will need to understand the basic concepts behind a lead and the yearbook photographer will be called upon to scan for not only the yearbook but the Web and possibly the newspaper as well.

Communication skills blended with new technology will provide us with a better-informed citizenry. The start of this begins with scholastic journalism.

Chapter Eight

SPECIFIC STORY TYPES

Objectives of this assignment:

To become familiar with various types of writing including the elements of a speech story, governmental meetings and sports writing.

NEW TERMS TO LEARN

**squib
cover**

**sidebar
dope story**

**combination story
running story**

Characteristics Of Speech Stories

Even though features are the most common form of newspaper writing in high school newspapers, reporters will have the opportunity to cover news events and write about them for publication within a day or two. This is where reporting can be its most exciting.

Speeches are an important and productive source of material for news stories in school newspapers as well as in the commercial news media. Speeches worthy of news coverage may range from impromptu remarks made at an informal gathering to a prepared public address delivered in a formal setting. Similarly, the reporter's story may vary from a *squib* (a couple of sentences) to a lengthy, detailed article, depending upon the importance of the speaker and what he or she has to say.

There are three elements which should be included in every speech story:

- (1) THE TEXT OF THE SPEECH**
- (2) THE SPEAKER**
- (3) THE AUDIENCE**

The amount of space given to each depends upon its relative importance, but no speech story is complete without some mention of what was said, who said it and to whom.

Covering A Speech

To *cover* a speech, or any other news event, for that matter, is to gather all the information that is available and then write the story. In the case of an important address or a prominent speaker, the reporter should begin by securing as much background information as possible before the talk is given. Consult reference books or current publications if the topic is highly technical, controversial or of timely news interest. Get biographical details about a visiting speaker from the library, newspapers, magazines or your news source. Such background information will enable you to do a better job of reporting the speech, and some of the details may be incorporated into advance stories.

For all speech stories, regardless of the significance of the speaker, subject or occasion, you should obtain:

- (1) the full name, correctly spelled, of each speaker**
- (2) the person's official title or other identification**
- (3) the topic or, if there is one, the exact title of the speech**
- (4) the time and place**
- (5) the makeup of the audience**
- (6) the occasion or reason for the speaker's appearance**
- (7) the purpose of the speech**



Advanced

Consult reference books or current publications if the topic is highly technical, controversial or of timely news interest.

Some of these facts may be unimportant in a particular story; others may be merely implied, but all add to your store of potentially useful background data.

Occasionally you may be able to secure a written copy of an address in advance of its presentation. This will save a good deal of note-taking, but you still should attend in person. It is not uncommon for a speaker to depart from a prepared manuscript to insert local references or to elaborate upon statements which stimulate the audience. At times, those departures themselves can be news if a new policy is introduced or new appointments are announced. Furthermore, audience reaction frequently is worth noting in a speech story, as are the speaker's appearance and style of delivery.

Without an advance copy of the speech, you must take notes for your story as you listen. Do not attempt to take down everything the speaker has to say, however. You are not obligated to rehash the entire speech, only to select and report the parts which you feel will be of interest to your readers. A good speech has a central theme that is developed and enlarged upon in some sort of orderly pattern. Try to identify the structure used (not an easy task when the speaker tends to ramble) and take notes which will enable you to summarize the main points.

Condense long statements. Summarize and paraphrase whenever possible to minimize note-taking and to save time later in writing the story, but take care to not distort the original statements. An accurate summary of the speaker's thoughts is the most important ingredient of the speech story.

Try to get a few direct quotations, but don't concentrate upon these at the expense of losing the speaker's next thought. Choose carefully what you quote, and be sure to get the exact words. No speaker likes to be misquoted. Avoid quoting obvious or minor remarks. Listen instead for comments that emphasize the key points in the speech and statements which elicit strong reactions from the audience. Visiting speakers sometimes make references to the school or community which add little to the speech, but are worth quoting because of their appeal to local readers.

Take note of any unusual audience reactions or of incidents which happen unexpectedly. A sudden interruption of the speaker, an animal which wanders into the auditorium, a power failure, all have possibilities for adding an element of human interest to an otherwise routine story or for a short feature article which can be printed separately as a *sidebar*.

Motivational speaker inspires students

CT By Megan Aylward

Expressing messages of motivation and stressing the value of time, speaker and author Mark Scharenbroich spoke to students Nov. 15 at an all-school assembly.

Though many students thought the assembly would focus on drug and alcohol abuse, Scharenbroich relied more on romance, diversity and respect during his presentation.

Principal Tom Paulsen introduced Scharenbroich as someone who came to "talk to us about life—about the pain in life and the joys in life."

Scharenbroich first tackled romance in his "GREATEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE...(so far)" assembly presentation. "I love high school romance. I miss high school romance...you know, it's just so cutting edge. We fall in love and then out of love," he said.

"It's the romance that so perfectly captures the essence of this time in our lives," he continued.

While he feels romance plays a large role in students' high school years, he also communicated that students must make this time in their lives count.

"If you want to figure out how to



Photo courtesy of Prestige Photography

Speaker Mark Scharenbroich relates to the students in a motivational assembly.

live your life, all you have to do is watch," he said. "The young and the old will teach you to cherish that which is most significant; they aren't the things in life, they're people."

Junior Mike Halkias felt Scharenbroich relayed the message that "we must value life" because "we take things for granted so much everyday," he said.

Using analogies to explain diversity among students, Scharenbroich

compared first graders to teenagers. "It was so much fun back then because we weren't divided in the little groups by the sports we played or the concert t-shirts we wore," he said.

Student Activities Director Greg Gornik said Scharenbroich's message is a chance for "students and adults to feel good about themselves."

Scharenbroich focused on how important participation is and what a terrible waste it is to spend life always comparing.

"You're one of a kind in the world. Live it that way. And please, please,

don't take it away from anyone else. It's not your right," he said.

Pride and involvement from the students were stressed by Scharenbroich as he advised students that "if you want to make an impact on the world, now is your time to do it."

Summing up the reason students need to take advantage of all opportunities, Scharenbroich stated that "today is not for tomorrow. Today is for today."

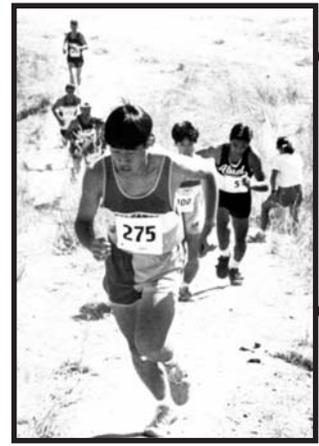
Speech coverage should focus on the key idea the speaker presents in his presentation as this example demonstrates.

The Central Times, Naperville High School, Naperville, Illinois.

Don't overlook the possibility of talking directly with the speaker if you need additional information. Most speakers are willing to answer a few questions after their talks are given. In the case of a celebrity or other prominent visitor, try to arrange a more formal interview either before or after the speech. What you gain here can be used to enliven your coverage story or provide material for a separate feature.

The Sports Section

Athletics are an important part of school — so important that even the smallest school papers customarily devote at least one full page of their limited space to sports coverage. Few school papers have enough space to permit very much departmentalization of news but, almost without exception, sports reporting is handled as a separate and distinct section of the paper. Like its counterpart in professional press, the school paper sports section frequently has its own editor and reporters who work independently from the rest of the staff and have full responsibility for collecting, writing and editing their own material.



Sports news is not always confined to the one or more pages reserved for it. Now and then a significant story, a first-ever championship, for example, will deserve front-page display. Some editors prefer to run all sports editorials in the paper's regular editorial columns, rather than on the sports page. For the most part, however, the sports section is a world of its own, self-contained and self-sufficient.

A typical page devoted to sports contains the same variety of story types found in the rest of the paper. There are:



- (1) advances on future games or upcoming seasons,
- (2) coverage of games already played,
- (3) feature stories,
- (4) sports columns and sometimes
- (5) editorials.

Advance Stories

As noted earlier, most school papers must emphasize news of the future to compensate for the infrequency with which they are published. Advance stories should be predominant in the sports section, as well as the rest of the paper, if it is to maintain a fresh and lively appearance. Some sports advances are straight news stories in standard inverted pyramid form giving the essential facts of coming athletic events, perhaps including lineups, entries or lists of competitors. Others provide background information and interpretation of the basic facts. They discuss records and strategy and compare teams and players. In some advances, sports writers even go so far as to predict the probable outcome. Often called *dope stories*, the latter types are really features that are hung on news pegs.

Whether a sports advance is written as straight news or in *dope story* form depends upon the significance of the event and the space that is available. The *dope story*, when appropriate, is a useful means of stimulating interest and enthusiasm in a coming game or a season that is about to get under way. Caution is called for, however, if the reporter elects to speculate on the outcome. Predictions should never be prompted solely by school loyalty or founded on guesswork or personal bias. The wisest approach is to call attention to what can be expected to happen, based on a comparison of team records and a logical analysis of well-researched facts, careful observation and comments from coaches and participants. Include controversial statements and outright predictions only as direct quotations from qualified sources.

Feature Stories

Only the imagination and ingenuity of its editor and reporters limit the range of feature subjects for the sports section. Besides featurized *dope stories* and season reviews, there may be personality sketches on athletes, coaches, sports officials and cheerleaders; informative articles on the school's athletic facilities; locker room and other behind the scenes pieces; interpretive stories on sports history, rules, equipment and styles of play, and a host of other possibilities.

Sports Columns

Sports columns in school papers are of various kinds, but most contain mixed facts and observations and thus fall loosely into the news-commentary category. They report and comment on unusual incidents, sports sidelights, little-known facts and interesting personalities.

High school sports coverage should place its emphasis on the high school scene rather than dull coverage of collegiate or professional sports.

Columns containing several unrelated items organized in anecdotal or departmental style are most common, but the single-subject column is used effectively on occasion. Items of a personal nature about athletes and others connected with sports, can make interesting and readable copy, and the by-lined sports column is the appropriate place for the sports writer to indulge in personal predictions.

The briefs column, containing a number of short news items, also can be adapted to the sports section. Like the round-up story (discussed later in this chapter), the sports briefs column is a useful device for handling minor sports, intramural and physical education activities.



Fact

Intramurals involves a good number of your student readers. Coverage of this area is essential on your sports pages.

Although varsity sports are the most dramatic, they are only one aspect of the school's athletic program. Well-rounded sports coverage includes news of minor sports as well as major ones, girls' sports as well as boys' and intramural, as well as interscholastic competition. The challenge faced by the sports staff is to report all of this activity in fresh, vigorous style; fit it somehow into space that never seems large enough, and display it in an attractive, inviting manner.

Writing Sports Stories

The only significant difference between sports and general news reporting is that the sports writer employs an informal, colorful style that would be frowned upon elsewhere in the newspaper. Where sports copy is concerned, many papers also relax their usual restrictions on editorializing in news stories. But the best journalistic practice, particularly for school papers, is to handle sports like any other kind of news. Treat important events as straight news in advance and coverage stories, adding background and interpretation sparingly to round out or enrich an account. If space permits, use feature stories, columns and editorials appropriately to surround the event with additional background, sidelights and comment.

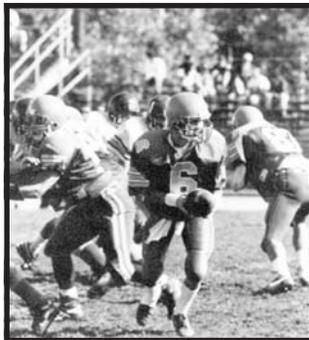


Photo Courtesy of Highland Park High School, Dallas, Texas.

Sports reporters on daily newspapers are trained specialists. Along with individualized writing styles, most of them possess extensive knowledge of the sports they *cover* and exhibit sound news judgment and a detached, impartial approach to their work. The school reporter cannot be expected to have the expertise of the professional, but should try to acquire as much technical and historical sports background as possible. Judgment also can be acquired to some degree, since it goes hand-in-hand with knowledge. Complete impartiality is not likely



Photo Courtesy of Shawnee Mission Northwest High School, Lenexa, Kansas

to be found on the school paper's sports page, for part of its purpose is to promote the school's athletic teams. Nevertheless, all stories should be accurate, honest and fair. Opponents should never be referred to in derisive terms. Neither should reporters second-guess coaches or otherwise attempt to run the team in their stories.

Unfortunately, informality of style sometimes is interpreted as license for sloppy writing and poor grammar. An effective informal style is characterized by vivid, colorful language, not by disregard for the principles of good newswriting

and good English. Sports vernacular, colloquialisms, picturesque adjectives, metaphors, similes and other figures of speech avoided or used frugally by other reporters may be employed more freely in sports stories. They should be used within a framework of proper syntax, however, and should not be carried to extremes.

As in any good news story, the body of the sports follow-up should expand upon the lead. If the lead is not a complete summary, use a bridge to pick up the remaining W's and provide a smooth transition into the body of the story. Then relate and interpret highlights of the event either in (1) order of their importance or (2) order in which they occurred. The first method, of course, is the standard inverted pyramid form used in most other types of stories. Narrating the action in chronological order, called a *running story*, is popular on sports pages as well as in other types of eyewitness reporting.

When reader interest is high, the two types of body organization may be combined into a general interpretation of the event, followed by a chronological summary of significant action. But school papers rarely can justify long running stories. Lengthy play-by-play, round-by-round and inning-by-inning accounts are becoming infrequent in the daily press as well; modern newspapers are more and more inclined to leave this type of detailed coverage to the broadcast media.

Because space usually is scarce and games often are a week or more old before they can be reported, many school papers rely heavily on box scores and other statistical summaries in sports follow-ups. This can eliminate the need for play-by-play accounts and leave space available to review highlights and analyze plays and tactics. Whenever space is

at a premium, here is a good rule to follow: Let box scores give the game results; use the body of the story to report what the fans couldn't see.

Coverage of a past game also may be incorporated into an advance on a future one. Sometimes referred to as a *combination story*, this is another effective space-saver. It also helps the sports section to continue to emphasize the future while still meeting its obligation to report the past. Essentially an advance, the so-called *combination story* features and is devoted primarily to a coming event. Then the writer simply adds a brief summary or a few highlights of the preceding contest, using appropriate transitional phrasing to avoid a tacked on appearance.

Covering Governmental Meetings

Most student reporters will at some time be required to cover school board meetings and student council meetings. Although these meetings can run long and become tedious, the reporter is there to help inform the student body on what its governmental bodies have in mind.

Just as the *Washington Post* considers itself a watchdog of government for the American populace, and your local daily a watchdog for the citizens of your community, so, too, should your school newspaper serve the watchdog role for your student readers.

Some school newspaper staffs do a most effective job of this. Some will even include weekly or monthly absences and report these directly to their readership at the conclusion of each semester or school term so the readers can be better informed as to the involvement of their duly elected leaders.

If the student governing group spends three straight one-hour meetings on the style and type of sweatshirts they should order for themselves then this should be reported to the readership.

Writing Government Stories

The structure here is the same as noted in the most basic of news stories. What is the key element of information? Which element best captures the meeting? Elected student leaders attempt to avoid criticism as much as their professional counterparts in state or federal government. If they hope to avoid criticism then the mere presence of a staff reporter should keep them focused on the needs of the people they serve. It is amazing how much gets done when the involved players know a reporter is present. Every school newspaper staff owes it to their student body to have a reporter present.

The same is true for school board meetings. These meetings are open meetings to the public. Since the school newspaper staff is a part of that public, then they too should have every right to report on the activities of the school board. Without such reporting, how can the student body be informed of pending legislation that will/can directly impact them?

The Death Story

An unavoidable aspect of life is death. It creates a natural aspect of reporting and must be handled with extreme care. Death stories should be written with particular attention to detail such as the deceased's vital statistics including birth date, age, address, date and time of death, other biographical details and time and place of the funeral.

You may want to include key elements of the eulogy but do so only through quotes from the eulogy or quotes from teachers, relatives and friends. Avoid extravagant statements of sympathy toward the deceased. These can easily become maudlin and macabre.

The element most frequently avoided in an obituary is the cause of death, but that is a key element. Avoid keeping your reader in the dark about this.

Work to avoid euphemisms as *passed away*, *went to his eternal reward*, and *left this earth*. Simply used died.

Our society is a bit squeamish about deaths resulting from AIDS or suicide. For this reason, each staff should have a predetermined policy for such occasions. Both of these forms of death are not uncommon today. By mentioning cause of death, the newspaper makes a commitment to its readership regarding current societal concerns. Some staffs choose to leave this concern up to the family.



Where to Look for More Information

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Assignments

1. From daily or school papers, clip and mount three short speech advances, each with a different type of lead beginning; speaker, subject, title, occasion, etc. Tell why you think each lead is or is not appropriate for the story. Write a new lead for each story using an alternate beginning. Tell whether you believe each rewrite is (1) more effective, (2) equally effective or (3) less effective than the original in terms of arousing interest in the speech.
2. Choose an individual who is well known for his or her accomplishments in science, medicine, government, sports or some other field. Assume that this person will speak at your school the day after the next issue of the paper comes out. Look up accurate background information and write a 150-word advance.
3. Write a combination story on the major sport that is now in season. Feature the next game to be played and include highlights or a brief summary of the last one.

4. Prepare a timely sports column of about 200 words. Use anecdotal or departmental organization and include at least five items.
5. Clip and mount a good example of each of the types of coverage story leads discussed in this chapter. Choose only well-written leads that you would recommend as models for other reporters to follow and tell why you think each is effective.
6. Class activity: Obtain a recent issue of *Vital Speeches* from the school or public library. Your teacher will select a speech and read it aloud as if it were being delivered by the author to your class. Take notes and write an appropriate coverage story. (Essays and short articles from *Reader's Digest* and other magazines also may be adapted for use as practice speeches.)
7. Class activity: Your teacher will arrange for a student enrolled in public speaking to present a speech to be covered by the journalism class. (The speech teacher also may be willing to stage a panel discussion for your class.)
8. For further class practice, your teacher may wish to play one or more of the recorded speeches that are available in most libraries, assign the class to cover a speech scheduled for radio or television broadcast or invite a guest speaker from outside the school. The resulting stories (and those from assignments four and five) should be compared and evaluated in class discussion.
9. You should be ready now to cover a speech on your own. Attend and take notes on a speech given at an assembly or elsewhere in your school or at a meeting in your community. (Your teacher may wish you to turn in your notes along with the finished story.)
10. Cover a panel discussion or a meeting at which two or more individuals speak. Use a summarizing statement to begin your lead, and approach the story in the same manner as you would if only a single speaker were involved.