

Headlines

- Serious news = serious headlines
- Make a headline for the story there, not the story you want
- Read the story as a reader. If needed, read it again. Then, think of a sentence capturing the story. Make the headline from that sentence.
- Headlines are to be taken literal (e.g. “Clinton’s speech lifts supporters in New York” is literally read as Clinton lifting her supporters)
- Always include one subject and a verb. Never use a verb headline
- Never write vague, unclear headlines
- Never use to-be verbs (e.g. Students **are enrolling** at QC is Students **enrolling** at QC)
- Never use same or similar words in lede in headline:

Union to keep up pressure on CUNY

The Professional Staff Congress vowed to keep up pressure on CUNY’s administration for a new contract.

- Headline puns are highly encouraged (e.g. After 100 years, Dracula still sucks)
- Never use these words for sport headlines:

Annihilates	Humiliates	Racks up	Triumphs
Bashes	Lashes	Stomps	Whoops
Bests	Murders	Stops	Wrecks
Bombs	Outplays	Outplays	
Chops	Outruns	Outruns	
Crushes	Pummel	Pummel	
Edges	Racks up	Triggers	
Hammers	Rallies	Trumps	

- Never use these words in hard news headlines:

Accord	Cites	Flares	Seeds	Try
Attacks	Confab	Grills	Set	Urges
Balks	Cops	Guts	Slays	Voids
Bares	Cows	Meet	Smashes	
Bars	Curb	Nails	Stirs	
Blasts	Dips	Scan	Tell	
Board	Fell	Seen	Told	

Body:

I. *General*

Essentials

- Avoid use of passive words and change sentences to active
- Avoid clichés
- Sentences starting with “Not only” must have “, but also”
- Double check subject-verb agreements
- Modifiers must be next to the modified:

~~The mayor said Friday she would resign~~

The mayor said she would resign Friday.

- Edit starting from the bottom if story follows inverted pyramid
- Sentences beginning with a number must be written as a word:
Ten years ago, I stood on this hill looking down at the city.
- If “said” becomes annoying, the following can be used:

Added	Contended	Pointed out
Admitted*	Continued	Proposed
Announced	Declared	Remarked
Answered	Deplored	Replied
Asserted	Insisted	Reported
Called	Maintained	Responded
Cited	Mentioned*	Retorted
Claimed*	Noted	Vowed
Commented	Observed	

**Need to be used if can be proved (E.g. Mentioned is defined as passing reference by source)*

- Make it clear what pronouns are being referenced
- He or she said instead of [LAST NAME] said is okay
- The past version of “lay” is “laid,” not “layed”
- Who and whom are used in the following cases
If pronoun is an object -> Whom
If pronoun is not an object -> Who
- Keep parallelism within grafs:

The union decided **to provide** members with better pay and **to offer** another vote on what policy to push for against management.

- Ideas need to be separated:
 The student decided to study in the library after they could not find an adequate building to study in.
 The library was closed when the student arrived.

Ledes

- Ledes are 20 to 30 words. Anything beyond turns off the readers
- Ledes must start with the what or who
- Prepositions in ledes are okay

II. Constructing sentences

Definitions

- The following words are strictly defined as such:

That – Used for objects	Who – Used for people
That – Used for essential clauses	Which – Used for non-essential clauses
Like – Preferred over such as	Such as – Avoided for like
Affect – To influence	Effect – To cause
Fewer – Only for plural words	Less – Only for singular words
Its – Possessive pronoun	It’s – short for “it is”
To – Used as a preposition	Too – Means also
On (Without Proper Noun) – Avoided when referring to dates	On (After Proper Noun) – Used when referring to dates
Because – If part of a specific cause/effect relationship	Since – If not part of a specific cause/effect relationship
While – Refers to something happening simultaneously	

When nouns need to be verbs

Noun	Changed To
Author	Write
Contact	Call, write or visit
Debut	Have its debut
Effort	Try
Gift	Give
Is headquartered	Has headquarters in
Host	Hold
Impact	Affect

Ink	Sign
Jet	Fly
Journal	Write a journal
Language	Express, say or write
Parent	Rear
Partner, partnership	To form a partnership with
Pastor	Lead/led a congregation
Pen	Write or sign
Premiere	Have its premiere
Script	Write
Summer	To spend the summer
Target	Aim at

Singular words vs Plural words

Plural – Both, few, many, others, several
Singular – Another, anybody, anyone, anything, each one, either, everybody, everyone, everything, little, many a, more than one, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, other, somebody, someone and somebody[Some are rarely plural, varies on sentence]

Pronoun-antecedent agreement

- Sentences with a collective noun as a business, government, association or other group must be it or its, not they, their or theirs.
- Avoid they, their and theirs when a singular antecedent implies gender:
 - ~~A reporter should check their facts.~~
 - ~~A reporter should check his facts.~~
 - ~~A reporter should check his or her facts.~~
 - Reporters should check their facts.
- Allow comma before “and” if both sentences are independent and is easily replaced with a semi-colon:

I went to the store and found a duck.

I went to the store, and a duck began walking through the aisles.

Clarity

- Never assume a reader understands everything for a story and err on the side of adding too much when describing terms.
- Repetition with words is avoided unless it is needed to clarify sentences.
- Avoid “due to the fact” and replace with “because of”

Hyphens

- Suffixes including “goer” or “wide” do not have hyphens
- Generally the following prefixes are also not hyphenated:

A	Infra	Pre	*Exceptions include: By -> By-election Post -> Post-bellum, post-mortem, post-obit Re -> When two different words would otherwise be spelled the same, hyphenated the one that means again.
Ante	Inter	Re*	
Anti	Intra	Semi	
Bi	Mid	Sub	
By*	Mini	Trans	
Dis	Multi	Ultra	
Full	Non	Un	
Hydro	Pan	Under	
Hyper	Post*	Up	

- Generally the following prefixes are hyphenated:

After*	Like*	Pro*	*Exceptions include: After -> No hyphen if used to form a noun Co -> Avoid when not referring to occupation or status Ex -> All words meaning out of Like -> Likelihood, Likeness, Likewise Off -> Offbeat, offcast, offhand, offload, offprint, offset, offshoot, offshore, offside, offspring, offstage Pro -> Avoid if not referring to support Self -> Selfish, selfless Wide -> Widespread
All	Odd	Self*	
Co*	Off*	Well	
Ex*	One	Wide*	

What to cut and not cut?

****Note:** Use the following when:

A word or phrase can easily be left out without changing the meaning of a sentence

When a word or phrase should be rewritten in a simpler, more straightforward way

The following can be cut:

Absolutely	Activity	Actually	Add insult to	Advance	Afterwards	Alleged
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			injury	(planning, reservation)		
Amazing	And/or	Area	Arguably	As a matter of fact	As of this date	Aspect
Astounding	Awful	Bad	Best	Boots on the ground	Both (unless for emphasis)	Bring (to a head, up to date)
Brutal (assault, beating, murder, rape, slaying)	Case	Case of	Certainly	Character (unless necessary)	City Of	Colorful (display, scene)
Complete (chaos, monopoly, overhaul)	Completely	Condition	Controversial (issue, person)	Definitely	Different	Effectively
Completely	End (Product, result)	Essentially	Exciting	Experience (both noun and verb)	Factor	Factor of
Fairly	Final word	First (annual, began, commenced, ever, initiated, priority, started)	Glass ceiling	Good	Greatly	Had
Has	Honestly	Important	In fact	In my opinion	In terms of	Indeed
Interesting	Kind of	Least	Level	Level playing field	Lonely (isolation, solitude)	Loyal
Luckily	Major	Most	Mutually beneficial	Obviously	Old (habit, legend, tradition, veteran)	On account of
Major	Most	Mutually beneficial	Obviously	Old (habit, legend, tradition, veteran)	On account of	Ongoing
Perfectly	Process	Question of	Quite	Really	Reportedly	Sadly
Seriously	Sort of	Special	Stated	Successfully	The area	The fact

					of	(is, that)
The field of	Thereof	Towards	Undoubtedly	Unique	Unusual	Uptight
Very	Well-known	Which are	Which is	Who are	Who is	

The following can be tightened (**bold** is preferred word): *Access Excel document titled "ConciseWordCopyEditingStyleSheet"*

More on conciseness:

- Verbs cannot turn into nouns (i.e. activate -> activation, utilize -> utilization)
- Use verbs, not noun phrases (e.g. Before the committee investigation -> Before the committee investigated)
- Contractions are okay, but should not be overused

III. Other

Numbers

- Always double check with numbers to see if they are right. Also, context is needed for some numbers:
 Fifteen percent of college students admitted to cheating on their exams. (*Out of how many? The undergraduates? Graduates?*)
- Having two figures helps:
 A six-game suspension out of 16 games is only 37.5 percent of the season. (*The latter number changes the former dramatically*)
- If a journalist does his or her own calculations, double check it to make sure

Sports Notes

- Win refers to a verb, not a noun
- Do not constantly refer to coach in the piece. Readers are already aware of it the first time

Final notes

- When In Doubt, Leave It Out
- Also when in doubt, put this into the search bar: "[Insert word or phrase here] site:bigstory.ap.org"
- Double check facts when you suspect something, even a hunch means a fact-check

- The Associated Press sometimes gets style wrong. For example, there is nothing on Islamophobia, so it is normal to use it. Also, climate change deniers are still referred to climate change deniers.

Captions*:

- Captions should be done before layout session in order for rewrites to be done if necessary
- Write based on the photo. Readers will trust a photo more than a caption.
- When there are 2+ people in the photo, you must explicitly say who they are or the photo cannot be used.
- Make the photograph understandable. Be readable. Be integrated well with other display type and Correspond to the tone of the story

**Temporarily a copy editor's job until the photo editor assumes control of all captions*