



# DON'T BE BASIC! ELEVATE YOUR STORYTELLING

YOU'RE NO NEWCOMER TO REPORTING, BUT HOW DO YOU TAKE YOUR  
CONTENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL? USE EDITING, REFLECTION AND IMITATION  
TO MAKE YOUR STORIES SING

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# PRACTICING INFORMATION GATHERING



## Activity 1

- Stand in a circle around the room and wait for instructions....



# FORMATTING A STORY -- LTQTQTK

## Activity 2

- Use the newspaper copy nearest you (partner up if needed) and find a basic news/feature story (not opinion or specialty features)
- Find the lede of the story – the first paragraph, introducing Who, What, When, Where, Why and How – write an L on top of it
  - This should reveal the most important take-away of the coverage
- Skim the story and find every direct quote – write a Q on top of it
- Look at the info between the lede and the quotes. These are transitions that provide the structure – write a T on top of them
- Check the last paragraph of the story. If it's a quote, write a K on top – the kicker quote

# FIRST DRAFTS

- Headline – write this after you know what your story is really about
- Byline
- Lede – get the 5W's & H into the first 1-2 sentences, in order of importance
  - Later you might add a feature lede, and this can become the nut g'raph (in a nutshell, what's the story)
- Best quote/significant source, addressing the big idea of the story – follows the lede/nut 'graph
- Second best quote – reserve this one as a kicker: a good summary quote, lots of emotion, to conclude the story
- QTQTQT format – Quote Transition Quote Transition format
  - Group content by topic, not by person!



# FEATURE LEDES

Step up your storytelling beyond the basic news lede with a structure that showcase the uniqueness and emotion of the feature story.

- Narrative / anecdotal – using a brief plot, tell the story of one person involved in the topic so they personify the importance of the topic; even better, save one last anecdote (probably summarizing the impact of the topic) for a callback in the end of the article
- Scene-setter – describe the “where” using the five senses to put the reader in the place before the action opens
- Blind / delayed information – describe the person / place / thing / event without direct identification, to build anticipation
- Roundup – a list of examples (especially good to use a set of three) and then introduce the topic as the thing they have in common
- Startling statement – a gripping fact that makes the reader want to stick with it and find the details
- Direct address – writing in first person (I, me, we, us, our) or second person (you, your)
- Wordplay – sound effects, typography effects, homophones and homonyms, and puns [used with restraint!]

And avoid these:

- Topic leads – lazy and boring!
- Question leads – cliché, uninventive and waste the reader’s time
- Quote leads – once in a writer’s life this is the best approach – but even then, there’s probably a better choice

# PRACTICING INFORMATION GATHERING

## Activity 2

- Use a magazine or yearbook near you
- Find one of the specialty ledes we've discussed and be ready to share to our discussion



# NEXT LEVEL TACTICS

- Read magazines, newspapers, online etc. for inspiration
- Study the professionals
- Imitate styles you like

# STYLE IMITATION

PETE LEBLANC, ANTELOPE HIGH SCHOOL

- Recognize good writing when you see it
- Dissect different types to understand parts and practices
- Use that analysis as a blueprint



# STYLE IMITATION EXAMPLES

- Professional example: Check out that internet athlete. That's him boarding the bus, a gym bag slung over one shoulder, a laptop case hanging over the other. Inside that leather case is the life he once handed over to his sport. The family he kissed goodbye that morning. The friends he can't reach from the road. The hobby that used to wait until season's end.

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- Student imitation example: Check out that gothic kid, That's him leaning against the wall, black trench coat hanging past his knees, dark-rimmed glasses perched on his nose. You know the one. The one who gets teased by jocks when he plays on a computer. The one who will make millions at a dot.com company but will always have emotional scars.



# STYLE IMITATION EXAMPLES

**"Ride this train to Roseburg, Oregon," says Johnny Cash** in his gravelly intro to "Lumberjack," the third track of his 1960 concept album, *Ride This Train*. Over the blare of a rail whistle, Cash continues: "Now there's a town for you — and you talk about rough."

Rough this southern Oregon town still can be, and unashamedly redneck with flotillas of pick-up trucks routinely lifted high enough for drivers to slam dunk a basketball merely by reaching out the window. Gun sellers outnumber bookstores at least 10 to 1 (and that's a used bookstore).

So imagine my surprise finding a sake and record bar. Japanese rice wine and new vinyl albums here?

Yes! Long and slim, lined with framed music photography and album racks jam-packed with collectors' wet dreams, Reverie Record Shop is a corridor drawing the wanderer away from SE Jackson St. and, at the rear, sake (the fridge stocks a dozen varieties), coffee, craft beer on tap, easy chairs and an ever-spinning, lamp-lit, VPI Aries turntable.

Newcomers may wonder if this is a serious business or money-laundering exercise. It's legit and in the black, declare owners Michelle and Albert, refugees from LA.

"All you have out here are bars," says Albert. "Like

bars. And not everybody's into bars." Albert means the ubiquitous dive bars, Roseburg police-log perennials like the Idle Hour, the Scoreboard, and Rumors. "And there was no dedicated record store here in Roseburg, so we decided to merge the two," with coffee thrown in, Italian style: strong and straight with no bullshit syrups.

"The idea really came from the Japanese *kissa* bars," he says. "After World War II, it was not easy to find hi-fi systems, so these *kissa* bars started where people could go listen to jazz on good systems with good speakers. Things changed in the '70s when vinyl was more accessible, but these bars have a pretty big spot in Japanese culture."

Is the sake out of a respect for tradition? Not exactly. "I love wine," Michelle says, "but it gives me migraines. Doesn't matter if I drink a glass or a bottle — major migraines. We started diving into sake to check it out: no migraines."

So they threw together all the stuff they like — booze, coffee, and music (on vinyl, "the way God intended," says Albert) — and found that plenty enough folks wanted a *kissa*.

Matt Thompson

## SOUNDCHECK



### Give Me A Kissa

A record store and sake bar, inspired by Japan



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# PRACTICING INFORMATION GATHERING

## Activity 3

- Write a revamp of the lede and one other section of the story, personalizing it to something your school does (you can make up some information as long as it's something that could happen)



# STYLE IMITATION EXAMPLES

Cheerleaders marched to beat of the drums, smiling and shaking their hips to the rhythm, as students crowded into the Main Gym, scouring the tightly-packed class sections for an empty seat. It was time to celebrate the return of the Bonfire.

"Last year, we didn't really have an option when they changed the fields to turf," Spirit Club co-sponsor Kiera O'Boyle said. "We didn't really expect [the change] so that's why we changed it to the Cougar Kickoff last year. We had [students] who really stepped up [for] Bonfire to come back."

Last year, Spirit Club was forced to cancel the Bonfire after new turf fields were installed on the old bonfire site. The only clear alternative was the parking lot.

"We had to figure out some type of barrier between the asphalt and fire," senior Kaitlin Pauli said.

It started with a proposal that Pauli presented to local businesses

who agreed to donate sand to protect the asphalt from the flames, as well as the wood. The proposal was presented to be approved by building administrators; the process took about three months.

"Tradition is important; it really helps to shape the school culture," principal Lisa Gruman said. "We hope it's one where everyone feels like they have a home or a space. We want everybody to feel like they're connected to Northwest. Bonfire is another way to foster that."

As students crowded around the fire, the yellow-orange flames licked at the humid air, sharply contrasting with the darkening sky.

As the band broke into "Hey Baby," the pompoms of the cheerleaders and dance team members pulsed with the beat. Student-athletes gathered beside the makeshift stage, waiting to be recognized, and the crowd of students cheered.

"My favorite part was when we were out on the risers, and I looked out at everyone having fun with the band and the cheerleaders by the big bonfire," Pauli said. "I was very happy that it all came together and people were having fun."

While the students were having their final pictures taken and conversation died down, so did the crackling flame. The bright white headlights of the Shawnee Fire department's fire trucks lit up 67th street and cut through the twilight.

Associate principal Connie Springfield's voice echoed as she yelled to students to get behind the cones that surrounded the sandpit while firefighters drowned the last burning embers.

"If you want to bring something back, it's a lot more work than it looks," Pauli said. "But I learned that if you really want something, you need to put your mind to it [to] get it done."

STORY BY KAYLA NICKLE





# CREATIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES

- Rhythm and repetition: engage your reader with a little bit of creativity
  - Triplets: we love to hear things in sets of three
  - Anaphora: repetition at the beginning of the sentence or phrase
  - Epiphora: repetition at the end of the sentence or phrase
- Economy of language: write tight and make every word do the hard work
  - If there is a stronger single word that conveys the meaning of a phrase, use it – but don't just use big words to sound fancy, if a shorter word can do the same thing



# EDITING AND REVISING

...because nothing hurts your publication's reputation like poor writing

- YOU are the first and most important editor of your story, because you are the expert
- Run spell check and grammar check in whatever program you used to write it
- Reread the whole story and revise anything that doesn't make sense
- Confirm spelling for all names and confirm all facts to match your notes
- Check AP style and local style basics, especially punctuation around quotes
- Get someone else to read it – a peer, an editor, whatever system your publication uses
- Make the suggested revisions and repeat these steps
- Consider other editing tools, i.e. Murrow AI <https://journalisticlearning.org/ethical-ai-coaches/>

# DETAILS TO LOOK FOR

- Repetition and redundancy – overused words, rephrasing quotes in the transitions without adding context
- Verbs in passive voice – no “being” verbs or helpers; anything where the action of the sentence is being done to the subject vs. the subject doing the action
  - Avoid will be [doing], was, sat, walked, posed
- Adjectives that express the writer’s opinion
- Adverbs that are unnecessary – instead of the –ly word, use a stronger verb
- Words that aren’t words at all – text-talk, i.e. gonna, gotta, kinda, coulda / could of
  - Even when the spoken word SOIUNDS like one of these colloquial pronunciations, write the actual words the person is trying to say