

October 17, 2022

The 17 posts we have already published in this series make up the basics you need to get you started in journalism in a time of dramatic change and remarkable opportunity.

Hopefully, you will have read and studied them all in the order published and use these bulletins largely as ongoing revision items. So, from here on, it's largely re-reading and absorbing what we have built into the posts and then practise, practise and practise. As already pointed out, there is nothing in what we have written that is beyond the comprehension of a mid-term secondary student.

Commit the key points to memory, practise writing and comparing your efforts with those of practising journalists – firstly by using the examples we have provided. Beyond that, get a family member or friend to open a daily newspaper for you, and tell you in one sentence what the front page story is about. "A man was savagely beaten in Sydney last night" or "We're going to have massive train disruptions next week" – or whatever.

Start asking the questions you need to get the detail to write a comprehensive report. Then compare it with the story in the paper. Keep it up and you'll be surprised at how your style and that of working journalists merge in a relatively short time.

Get into the habit of telling your audience briefly – whether you are writing for a huge group or simply communicating with friends - what they want to know as quickly as you can and trust them to decide whether they need to know more.

If they do, they will read on or ask you to continue, having the advantage of knowing in advance where you are heading. If they don't, you will have saved everybody time and increased the chance they will make the effort to at least look at anything you produce in future.

And just before we sign off, let's just take a few minutes to briefly recount some of the key points we have worked through together in these posts.

1. Always start every story – including technical reports - with the strongest, most eye-catching statement you can make. Keep your sentences short and get the action into the first half of the first sentence.

2. Aim for one thought, one sentence. Don't combine multiple ideas into your sentences. It slows the pace of your story and you may confuse your readers – especially if they are reading on the run, as is often the case with online and other electronic news mediums.

3. Don't overwrite. Some stories or references are meant to be short. Again, this applies particularly to breaking stories or exciting developments on electronic news services or communications between management and staff, and you and your followers on social media, ranging from pay increases to production problems and even items of general public interest.

4. Examine what you have produced very carefully. Is everything in the correct sequence? Would it read better if you shuffled some of the sentences? Why not try it? If there's no improvement, go with your original. If it looks better another way, use the revised version.

Always remember: What, who, why, where, when and how.

They're the centrepiece of every attention-grabbing news report or information post and you must address every one of them, every time.

Leading communicators in a raft of fields are now learning their importance in a world where people are becoming increasingly time-poor when it comes to prioritising their reading.

Your readers, whether they've barely made it through primary school or hold a PhD in nuclear physics - like that little boy at Mt Buffalo - really want to know as quickly as you can tell them: what happened; who did it happen to; why did it happen; where did it happen; when did it happen and how did it happen.

The order in which you answer will change from story to story; and sometimes you will not be able to fully answer all the questions. But you must either answer or tell your reader you don't know.

As a writer who wants to be read: maximise your chance of success by defining and getting to know your target audience well.

Find what it wants – including when and where it wants to get its news and information.

Produce whatever you are writing in the way you know will appeal most to that audience.

Remember though, there are rules and essentials and you must work with and within their guidelines.

The essentials of effective news journalism and professional communication have, if anything, become even more critical in today's marketplace.

. The first essential, of course, is accuracy. It outranks every other component in quality information gathering and presentation.

As journalists, media content creators and reliable communicators, we should always ensure the material we produce is accurate in every detail. (If in doubt, check or leave out!). Every name, address, age, occupation - check them all – and especially their spelling. (Did he say his name was Jones? Get him to spell it for you. It might just be Johnes, or Joanes – or he might even have meant Janes.)

The second most important thing is speed. A report of an impending hurricane reaching its audience after it has passed is unlikely to be well received.

The third is fairness. To be credible, a report must be fair and balanced. Your aim is to grow your following and your reputation!

The fourth is the ability to write clearly and simply, in an informative and entertaining way.

Fifth; an item of great interest in Meekatharra, West Australia, may not be exciting to somebody living in Paramatta, NSW. Again, think about your target audience with everything you do.

Becoming an effective writer at a professional level is certainly not beyond anybody with a working knowledge of early high school English. That, after all, is the maximum level at which we need to write if we are to be understood by the widest audience we want to reach.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to show you how to write and communicate as a journalist. We hope it will help you find an effective way of getting your message to others through a long and rewarding career in whatever field you choose.

Any Questions?

We expect you will have questions relating to some of the material we have published. Email us at peterstrachan532@outlook.com and we will answer through future updates to this bulletin as time permits.