

**Decide how you want to approach the event before you start writing.** An event may have triggered you to write this piece, but the event itself is never the story. The story isn't a politician's speaking engagement: it's the key info revealed in the speech, the surprising record turnout, the large number of young people in attendance, the kickoff of the politician's election campaign, the fact that this high-profile candidate is in a small town in New Brunswick, etc. Decide what you want to say about the topic—what focus, theme, or angle interests you or your reader?—and lead with that. Everything else will follow. (If there isn't a hard news lead, start with an interesting anecdote.)

**Organize your info in an interesting way.** Don't organize it chronologically, or in the order in which you discovered it. Remember, too, that this is not an academic essay: you don't need to provide background info first and gradually lead up to your point.

For example, if a new study is released, start with the most interesting finding from that study, and explain why it matters to people (in other words, identify the human interest in the story). Once you've grabbed the reader's attention and shown them why they should care, then you can add details like the names of the researchers, the universities they're affiliated with, the number of participants in the study, etc.

**Answer all of the questions that you raise in your story.** Try to answer the questions in the order in which the reader would ask them. (e.g. Who died? When? Where? Why?) If you can't answer a question, don't raise it. If there are obvious reasons why you can't provide an answer, explain them to the reader (e.g. cause of death is unknown).

**Use only the most important quotations.** Quotations should be relevant. Omit or paraphrase the boring parts that don't relate to your story. This may lead you to quote only part of what was said in a sentence: that's okay, as long as you don't end up misrepresenting the original speech by leaving out important bits. Your strongest, most relevant quotations should appear early on, in the second paragraph or so. Although you shouldn't begin a story with a quote, you can end an article with one.

**Show, don't tell.** Let the facts speak for themselves, and let the reader pass judgment on those facts. Rather than say a politician is wrong or is lying, include his views, but present facts that may contract or disprove his views alongside them.

**Avoid jargon and euphemisms.** Jargon is technical language or slang that is only used by people in certain professions (e.g. "deliverables" in business-speak). Your goal as a journalist is to use language that is accessible to a wide readership; in doing so, you should avoid this type of insider language.

Euphemisms are polite but indirect ways of referring to something unpleasant (e.g. "passed away" instead of "died"; "let go" instead of "fired"). Your goal is to be direct, so avoid these niceties, too.

**Use specific nouns and active verbs.** Choose specific rather than vague nouns (e.g. use "shooting" instead crime). Use active verbs ("X shot Y"), unless the doer of the action is unknown ("Y was shot").

**Avoid adjectives and adverbs.** They add to your word count and are less direct than a single verb or noun. (e.g. Use "ran" instead of "quickly hurried.")

**Avoid repetition.** For example, if you include a name like the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, you don't have to say it's located in Nova Scotia.

**Tighten your sentences.** Look for ways to pare back or combine sentences. Compare the two examples below:

Loose: Since 2007, only 5 council members who attained seats were women. In the same period of time, 41 of the elected members who were voted onto council were men.

Tight: Of the 46 councilors elected since 2007, only 5 have been women.