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NEW WRITER'S HANDBOOK

OPINION WRITING

A good opinion piece has few restrictions in style or content so it is difficult to present a blueprint of the ideal. However, most good ones have some features in common:

1. They are concise. Rarely will you find one which rambles, wanders off onto only peripherally related tangents and is otherwise stuffed with unnecessary verbage.
2. They have a news peg. The editorial concerns a current news even to "tie" it to.
3. They have an introductory theme statement. This makes the subject clear from the start and ties in the opinion with the news peg.
4. They are filled with facts. Facts buttress an argument and position better than unsupported opinion. Make your case with facts.
5. The facts are presented persuasively. There should be no abrupt leaps of faith, implausible positions or unexplained conclusions. The argument to convince the reader must proceed smoothly, logically--fast enough to keep the reader involved but not so fast you lose them.
6. Rebuttal arguments are raised. The good editorial writer will think long and hard about which arguments are likely to be raised in rebuttal, and try to answer and neutralize them in advance.
7. The editorial has a firm conclusion. Don't beg the question, waffle or be limp-wristed. If the conclusion is wishy-washy, then there is no reason to run it. The content of the position used in the conclusion should also be stated early in the article and reiterated at the end.
8. The good editorial sticks to its theme. Editorials that stray into digressive subjects or material that is only tenuously connected to the theme are likely to be unpersuasive and confusing.
9. Convincing editorials are cool and rational. They avoid polemics and inflammatory language and conscientiously shun cliches. The purpose is to convince readers the opinion is right, not to push them into a corner from which there is no graceful retreat save over the dead body of your opinion.

Editorial-Opinion Checklist

1. Concise
2. News peg
3. Introductory theme statement
4. Persuasive presentation of fads
5. Rebuttal arguments
6. Firm conclusion
7. Adherence to theme
8. Cool and rational
9. Avoid cliches

This year nearly one half of our defense budget—more than $81 billion—will not be spent on American defense at all. It will be spent to defend our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in Europe. That is, it will be presented as a gift to countries rich and powerful enough to defend themselves.

Stop and think for a moment about the helpless Europe we are defending from the Russian juggernaut. NATO's European member countries exceed the Soviet Union in combined population and industrial capacity. The total gross national product of European NATO countries is nearly *twice* that of the Warsaw Pact nations. *Twice. Two* times. NATO countries have the wealth, knowledge, and manpower to look after themselves.

Yet they don't. Why should they? We supply them with defense for next-to-nothing. Europeans, though they live within shouting distance of the Soviet menace, spend little more than half as much for defense, on a per-capita basis, as we geographically isolated Americans. But they'd be fools to spend any more, since we are willing to do the spending for them.

The alternative is to withdraw our soldiers and money from NATO and to return the burden of defending Europe to the Europeans, the ones who enjoy its benefits.

When NATO was created in 1949, Europe lay in ruin. As a reasonable (and generous) temporary measure, the U.S. committed six divisions to European defense, pending the continent's economic recovery.

Now, 31 years later, the "temporary" force has swelled to 350,000 American soldiers—19 divisions. We spend $57 billion a year, a third of the Pentagon's budget, on our forces physically stationed in Europe. If you include the cost of U.S.-stationed troops designated for NATO duty, and then throw in NATO's share of weapon-procurement costs and Pentagon overhead, the cost balloons to $81.1 billion, the Pentagon says. In fact the NATO flavor runs through our entire armed forces structure, with Defense Secretary Harold Brown recently acknowledging that the U.S. Army is geared primarily for ground war in Europe.

At the very time American presence in Europe is becoming increasingly costly and less necessary, however, there is a congressional movement to *increase* U.S. subsidies to NATO. If it succeeds, we might spend as much as $1.5 trillion—$150 billion a year—on NATO in the next decade.

This illogical movement reflects, in part, the fact that American presence in NATO has never been particularly logical. For instance, though few would question some loan of troops to post-war Europe, logically there was little reason to be concerned for the continent's security. Europe was a shambles but then so was the Soviet Union. Exhausted by the war, which inflicted much more severe damage on Russia than Europe, the Soviets posed no threat to anyone, except by their atomic weapons, against which troops are useless.

Even former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, bitterly anti-communist, was aware of this fact. In the year of NATO's birth, he said, "I do not know any responsible high official, military or civilian, in this government or any government, who believes the Soviet government plans conquest by open military aggression."

That a Soviet threat played no role in NATO's inception was affirmed by General Hugh B. Hester, a top U.S. administrator in Germany immediately after the war. NATO was organized, he wrote, "to prevent by whatever means any left-wing front from coming to power in areas under Western military control." This goal obviously was unrelated to stopping a mass Soviet invasion.

A few congressmen and senators opposed a U.S.-financed NATO at the time, and among them Ohio's Senator Robert A. Taft displayed the gift of prophecy. A NATO alliance with large-scale U.S. presence, the pro-military Taft warned, would be seen by the Russians as a direct assault on their security. This would force the Russians into an arms race, Taft said, and divide the world into two hostile camps. This race will be especially difficult to end, Taft noted in 1951, because once we send Europe troops at our expense, we will be constantly asked for more.

This is not to suggest that Europe is in no danger from the Soviet Union. But that danger is nowhere near as great as many assume, and nothing that European NATO cannot handle on its own, if it is willing to apply its size and resources at a reasonable level.

Modern military developments, chiefly the cheap anti-tank missile, favor the defender over the attacker. Strategists believe that a successful modern attacker needs a three-to-one advantage over a defender. Not even the martial Soviet society could produce superiority of such magnitude, if European NATO applied its wealth to its defense.

Moreover, the Warsaw Pact is not the cohesive, rigidly disciplined bloc we usually picture. Could Russia really count on Eastern European troops to bear the brunt of sacrifice in a campaign against NATO? If war broke out today, do you think the Polish army would be eager to die in service to the Kremlin?

Yet even if you believe the Soviet threat to Europe is immediate and grave, there is no reason to assume, as Pentagon NATO planners do, that the economic power relationship between Europe and the U.S. has not changed since World War II. Europe is no longer a rubble-strewn heap, but a competitive economic giant, one that is prospering at our expense.

Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara once said that increasing military expenditures can actually erode security, rather than strengthening it, by reducing the resources available for other essential investments. That seemingly abstract point is well-illustrated in our subsidization of NATO. While American productivity declines, and our economy lags in comparison to Western Europe and Japan, the Pentagon has a stranglehold on technical research. It commandeers nearly one half of American scientists and engineers, keeping the best minds out of the civilian economy. The products of Pentagon research are then presented free of charge to our NATO allies—while *they* assign their best thinkers to improving their economies, the better to steal business from their benefactors.

Similarly, our vast defense subsidies to Europe are a primary cause of U.S. inflation. Meanwhile, West Germany and Japan in particular avoid inflation by spending a mere fraction of what we spend on defense.

Why won't the U.S. withdraw its subsidies (not its membership, just its subsidies) from NATO? One reason is that the Pentagon and its suppliers are quite content with the arrangement. The Pentagon has a strong stake in expanding its budget by preserving its European presence. The maintenance of a large garrison in Europe offers openings for thousands of U.S. career officers. Likewise, arms suppliers are happy to have the U.S. finance NATO, since they know this guarantees the purchase of U.S., rather than European, weapons. Where the money for those weapons comes from is not the manufacturers' concern.

The result, General James M. Gavin noted in 1967, is that "the very existence" of American forces in NATO "acts in a manner inimical to the long-term military interests of Europe." By this he meant that Europe has become lazy, all too happy to wallow in our subsidies and remain inherently weak. Announcing the withdrawal of American troops and subsidies from NATO would awaken Europeans to their need to be responsible for themselves, and perhaps give impetus to the continent's political and military integration, enhancing its overall security.

An independent, European-financed NATO would also alter the global balance of power in a positive fashion. It would create a third superpower, ending the precarious bipolar balance of terror in which every development can be viewed as a U.S.-Soviet showdown. It would also seriously complicate Russia's strategies. Since Western response to events would become much more difficult to predict or manage, Russia would be less likely to embark on its little adventures. Finally, the balance of power would be improved because America would get most of its $81.1-billion-a-year back. We could use the money either to make the U.S. stronger economically, or to improve our defenses designed to counter the Soviets directly.

As often happens in defense affairs, the most lucid summary of the situation comes not from some think-tank analyst, but from the most successful military establishmentarian of our times, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. When he was supreme commander of all NATO forces, Eisenhower noted that "the large-scale permanent commitment of American troops to relatively fixed positions outside the continental limits would be costly beyond military return." Luckily for the Pentagon and our spoiled allies, Eisenhower isn't around today. ■

news peg + facts
transition
facts
introductory theme
opinion + some facts
opinion
facts
fact + some opinion
opinion + facts
facts
rebuttal argument raised
fact + opinion
opinion
opinion
opinion + a few facts
mostly facts
opinion
opinion + facts
facts + opinion + conclusion
conclusion
closing statement

editorial and opinion writing

Yet another handy way to lead into a story is with a personal example, or "case history."

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. — Almost every morning, Stephen Freeman ambles out of his grubby little second-floor office here.

He makes his way down to the street by way of a narrow stairway befitting a tenement, cuts through an alley and walks the few yards to Eli Greene's Saloon and Cafe.

BOSTON — Call her Jane Morris. A Boston elementary school teacher, she read the statistics on violence in the family and was skeptical of the alarming numbers:

— Every 18 seconds, a woman in the United States is battered in her home, according to FBI estimates.

— In Boston, 70 percent of the assault victims seen in the Boston City Hospital emergency room were attacked by their mates.

— More than half of all married women in the United States are battered wives.

For Ms. Morris, who had just returned from her dream honeymoon in Hawaii, the figures didn't seem real — until several months later.

Beginning with the story of a real person lends a human dimension to your story. People are interested in what happens to other people, and leads of this sort have a natural reader interest.

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Pat Feeney stutters.

So did Socrates, Demosthenes, Thomas Jefferson and Charles Darwin, although they are not remembered for their speech dysfunction.

Remember, people read features not because they are interested in some piece of hard news, but because they want to, and making them want to places a harder burden on you as a writer. A good reporter who digs out information, but writes it poorly can survive and people will read him/her for information content. They will not be so forgiving with feature stories.

These three categories of feature leads: description, narrative and case history are the best and easiest ones for new writers to lean on. Another common but misused lead is the "cute lead." Many beginning writers think that cute lead is synonymous with feature lead. It is not. In fact, cute leads more often synonymous with cliche and corny. This first lead, about a federal agency which is recycling its old papers without having taken bids for the service (and violating some obsure federal law in the process) is not a cliche and works well. The second one is cute and not quite trite, though it borders on it. The last two are leads built around such nauseating cliches that an editor almost has a right to execute the writer and call it a mercy killing--the mercy being shown to the reader.

It's a federal offense from start to finish, and it's happening in Portland's federal courthouse right under the noses of judges and magistrates.

Mississippi is whale country, and that's no fish story

"Thar' she blows!" echoes across the blue Pacific, the exultant shout of a new breed of whaler.

There's gold in them thar ... cow pastures? Yep. Texas-size nuggets measurin' 'bout *sooo* big.

STRUCTURE

We've seen above a variety of ways to begin a feature/magazine story. And as with most projects, beginnings are the toughest parts. But you still have a story to write, so where do you go from here? Once you've written your lead, you need a transition to the explanation/theme section which tells a reader what the story is all about. Then you may add quotes if this is a piece dealing primarily with people--a personality profile or the like, or perhaps you need to add some background facts to give the reader perspective, and then go into quotes and more facts. Ideally, a feature relies on multiple sources even those profiling a single person--ask his/her friends and enemies for perspective. Single-source stories are usually superficial.

FEATURE STORY CHECKLIST

1. Strong lead.
2. Transitions.
3. Explanation/theme section.
4. Quotes.
5. Background.
6. Multiple sources.

Keeping this list in mind, let's take a look at one of the stories we've already seen, and examine how the writer structured it.

By MARIA RICCARDI
Field News Service

BOSTON — Call her Jane Morris. A Boston elementary school teacher, she read the statistics on violence in the family and was skeptical of the alarming numbers:

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— In Boston, 70 percent of the assault victims seen in the Boston City Hospital emergency room were attacked by their mates.

— More than half of all married women in the United States are battered wives.

For Ms. Morris, who had just returned from her dream honeymoon in Hawaii, the figures didn't seem real — until several months later.

One evening, when dinner wasn't ready on time, her husband and former high school sweetheart kicked her down the cellar stairs. She lost six teeth and both her arms were broken.

Ms. Morris was stronger than many women living in an abusive situation. She left her husband immediately.

"I lived through the nightmare alone. I had no one to go to," she said. "That's why I promised myself I'd help women who have been victims of abuse on the streets and in their homes."

Each night, Ms. Morris turns on a green light in her window, making her apartment one of 125 "Greenlight Safehouses" in her community, Dorchester. The program, started in that neighborhood a year and a half ago, gives temporary shelter to women who have been beaten, raped or stalked.

Concerned women in other Boston neighborhoods also have organized safehouse programs. "Women need to be the ones to do something about the violence and fear," said Susan McClellan of the Allston-Brighton network, which has 30 safehouses. "If the police won't give us the adequate help, we'll do it ourselves."

The women who open their homes as safehouses are given training in first aid, emergency services, crisis intervention and the legal system. Training programs vary in each neighborhood because the groups are autonomous, said Cara Spletz, a coordinator in the Jamaica Plain network, which has about 100 safehouses.

"Every caring woman is qualified," said another Jamaica Plain member, who did not want her name used because she has been harassed by men in her neigborhood. "The few hours in training is a small price to pay if you can someday save a life," she said.

Before a woman places a green light in her window, she must decide the extent of her commitment to the program. Members emphasize that there are no strict requirements. The women offer as much as they are comfortable doing.

"It's really an individual thing," McClellan said. "Some women don't turn on their lights when they're alone. Some decide their house will just be immediate refuge, while others choose to take the woman in overnight and support her through the legal process."

Women's groups throughout Boston have praised the efforts of the greenlight network. "They have increased the awareness for safety," said Beth Broderson, president of the Boston chapter of the National Organization for Women. "They are rejecting the notion that women should stay off the streets. Women should be able to go out in their own neighborhoods and feel safe in doing so."

A counselor at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center believes the greenlight system helps deter crime and violence. "Rape and wife battering are usually not dealt with until after a tragedy. Greenlight is one way of preventing these horrors," she said. "A man has got to think twice about attacking a woman in a place where he knows the neighbors won't stand for it."

Police officials also view the program as an important force in preventing violence against women. "Anything the public can do to protect itself is a good idea," said officer John Sacco with the Boston Police Department. "We can't be everywhere at once. People should look out for each other."

Despite the potential and praise of the program, the safehouses are rarely used, according to program organizers. In Jamaica Plain, no one has sought help at the greenlight homes. The Allston-Brighton group has assisted one woman, while Dorchester reports helping 12, mostly battered wives.

Linda Zwickert of the Dorchester group believes many women still do not know the significance of the green lights. There should be more lights, she said, at least one safehouse on every block for the program to be more effective.

The Somerville network is currently conducting door-to-door outreach since it now covers only one-sixth of the city, said coordinator Nancy Marshall. As in the other communities, the program was formed because of the increase in reported rapes.

"It's frightening to think of what is really happening out there when only one out of 10 rapes are brought to the attention of the police," Ms. Marshall said.

FBI statistics indicate that one out of three American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Minority women are three times more likely to be raped, murdered or assaulted than white women, according to the 1978 report. The incidence of child molestation and child rape has also increased, Ms. Marshall said.

case history
background
return to case history
All this can be considered the lead
Quote
explanation / Theme
background
quote
further amplification, facts
quotes
transition
Quotes
facts/quotes
facts/quotes
facts/evaluation
quotes
background

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

A good news story is new, it's clear, concise, well-organized and complete--in other words a good story is good writing. Below are some tips on how your writing can be better. You'll notice them in practice when you read solid newspapers like the LA Times, Washington Post, etc. The best way to improve your writing--other than writing a lot--is to read a lot of news stories.

(1) Inverted pyramid. This is the style for most "hard news" pieces. The most important facts go first, and so forth, with the least important facts at the end. Unlike feature stories and fiction, there doesn't have to be ending, a conclusion or wrap-up for hard news. You must start at the beginning (with the most important facts) write until you get to the end and then stop.

(2) Completeness. Completeness means making sure you've got who, what, when, where, why and how. If you've any doubts, ask yourself these six questions and see if they're answered. Completeness also means checking with more than one source; it means giving the reader background--don't refer to some past action by SLC or the campus cops without a short synopsis of what the action was and what it meant.

(3) Accuracy. Spelling--is it Smith or Smythe? Lewis or Louis? Was it January 3 or 7? Is it punctuated correctly? Have you looked up words in the dictionary that you're unsure of? The minor errors can call the credibility of the entire story into question. People think--and rightly so--"If they don't take care with the small things, how much care did they take with the big ones?"

(4) Attribution. Where did you get your facts? Attributing them not only covers your rear, but lends credibility to the story. For instance, don't write: "Student Reg Fees will be increased 6,000 percent next quarter." It's "Student Reg Fees will be increased by 6,000 percent next quarter, said Simon Legree, UC Comptroller at a press conference at Pauley Pavillion Thursday."

(5) K.I.S.S. This means, Keep It Short Stupid. This means sentences, paragraphs, stories, words. Look at Hemingway's style, which was learned from journalism. It's short, punchy and has impact--your's should too. Aim for sentences of 15 to 17 words, and a lead of no more than 25 or 30. Running over is okay on occasion, but your average should be within those ranges. The shorter, the better. Take the time. Don't overuse your thesaurus. Keep it simple. For instance, when someone says something, use "said." Not exclaimed, cajoled, wheedled, leered, etc.

(6) Write with active verbs. Avoid relying on adjectives and adverbs, use a descriptive verb rather than a string of modifiers. Don't use the passive voice when you can avoid it.

what makes a good news story?

(7) Define in understandable symbols. If someone tells you that ASUCLA food prices will rise by 12 percent, translate that into "an average nickle increase of the price of mongongo nut souffle crepes in the Coffee House." Something that can be easily grasped. Also, when presenting statistics like budget increases, give a comparison, if the GSA budget is increased by $50 million then state that it is an increase to $175 million. Give the background that the budget had increased over the past ten years from $4.73 in 1969 to its present level and give the likely reason for the increase (threat of nuclear terrorism by GSA) or decrease (Prop. 13.)

(8) Define technical terms. We read an obituary the other day in the LA Times where someone died of "amyotrophic lateral sclerosis." What in hell was that? Likewise, things like "Keynesian economics" and other non-everyday terms need to be explained.

(9) Feature stories. When you're really stuck for a structure for a story, fall back on the Wall Street Journal's DEE system they use for their non-financial type features. DEE stands for Description, Explaination, Evaluation. See attached article for better explaination of DEE.

(10) Inspiration. When you're stuck for inspiration, read. Read stories with a similar topic as yours and see how the writer handled it. Don't be afraid to copy style.

(11) Quotes. These breathe life and color and credibility into a story. Space them throughout the story as they seem to fit. But don't rely on a poor quote when a good paraphrase will do. And don't monkey with quotes. Put quotes only if that's the exact way it was said.

INTERVIEWING

The most important thing to have at the end of an interview is good notes. They are frequently your only resource when you go to write the story. It may be impossible to write down every word, but get the most important things word for word: dates, figures, summary statements, etc. They must be accurate.

Be prepared. Read everything you can get your hands on about the subject before you go into an interview. Go through old Bruins, talk to people who might be an authority; if it's a subject that might be covered in the encyclopedia or in some other book, journal or magazine in the library, read it before. This will let your subject know you're serious, save time. If you're doing a personality profile on a professor or someone, get a copy of his resume from his secretary as well as a list of the publications, books, etc., he's written. Read at least some of them, be familiar with the subjects and titles of the others. The writings may give you an insight into the subject that you can pursue at the interview.

Jot down prospective questions beforehand. This gives you a starting point and orderly progression. Don't, however, stick to it rigidly if a more interesting, surprising, revealing trend develops. Just make sure you've asked them all by the end of the interview.

Dress appropriately. Set the interviewee at ease and they're more likely to give you information. If you're interviewing Chancellor Young, you'll not want to dress like a refugee from the Inglewood Rescue Mission.

Establish a rapport. Small talk when the interviewee wants, none if they're ramrod business-like. Remember that people are often nervous dealing with the media. What you interpret as hostility may just be fear. For small talk, pickup on surroundings--pictures, trophies, plants, etc. Notetaking may make those whom you interview nervous. It helps to maintain as much eye contact as possible; try to make the interview conversational, and friendly.

One trick to make people more comfortable: take notes, or pretend to take them, all through the interview; even when they're not saying anything interesting. That way, they won't get nervous when they say something and you suddenly begin scribbling furiously.

Tape recording is usually impractical for daily reporting, since it's very time-consuming. However, for personality profiles, a taped record of colorful quotes are invaluable. One technique for making taped interviews less time-consuming is to take notes as you normally would, and when you have an interesting quote, note the quote briefly and then write down the number on the tape recorder indicator so you can return to it easily. Make sure you reset the counter to zero before starting the interview. The story, then, can be written basically from notes, with an occasional reference to the tape. Ethics demand that you tell someone they're being taped, and don't do it if they object--that's their right. Some prefer to be taped; they feel they'll be quoted more accurately.

how to conduct an interview

Get an answer to your questions. Be persistant, and don't let people "waffle": evade, change the subject, or seem to give an answer without actually doing it. Ask the question over until they either give you an answer, or you feel justified in making the statement, "after repeated questioning, Elmore Fenster refused to answer." However, be sure you and your source understand one another. What seems like evasion may be rambling, or that someone misunderstood your question.

Ask for clarification. If someone makes reference to something you don't understand (and you've done your homework beforehand as you should) ask them to explain it. Ask them to repeat.

Don't be intimidated. Be assertive, but keep your cool. (If someone gets bent and starts yelling, it'll have to be them, and it'll make good copy.) If a person says they won't talk to you, but only to your editor, tell them that your editor has assigned you to the story. If they insist, refer them to your editor, and make sure you tell your editor what happened. If a person refuses to speak to you about a story you're doing, approach them by appealing to their own self interest: "Well, I've got to write the story, and I have the other side, and I want to be fair and include your comments on it."

If they still refuse : "Well, the story is going to run and I'm going to have to write that you refused to comment."

On the record. You can print everything someone tells you unless they've stated clearly before the interview, or before the particular segment they've requested anonimity on. Find out if you can attribute the information to "a Murphy Hall Administrator," or some other indirect attribution.

The identity of a source is the closest thing journalism has to a holy grail. Don't screw it up. If you've promised anonimity, you must keep it.

Get the person alone. Don't interview more than one person at a time. Try and get them away from distractions, telephones, people constantly interrupting.

Ask that "Oh yeah, one more question...." after you've closed your notebook, and put your pen away and are preparing to leave. Sometimes their guard is let down, and you get the most revealing answers.

Be sure you get a phone number where they can be reached in case you need to check facts.

Don't take everything for gospel, especially if they comment on a controversial fact or on another person. Completeness and a sense of fair play demands you get the other side. Proper research beforehand will let you know when the subject's on shaky ground.

To a reader, the first sentence or paragraph of a story can be an invitation to read on, or to turn to something more interesting--the beginning, or 'lead', is the most important part of the story. A lead should catch a reader's attention by telling him the most important thing in the story in an interesting way.

Your lead should be:

Brief. Aim for 20 words; 30 is getting a bit long. If you hit 40, start over and break it up into two sentences or eliminate words.

Interesting. What is the most important element? Is the who is involved? What happened? When it happened? Why it happened or How it happened? Choose the most important of the five W's and use that in the lead.

Look for the unusual. What would you do if you were a police reporter and got a report of two trucks colliding on the freeway, one carrying salad oil, and the other, carrots?

Avoid:
- Question leads.
- Quote leads.
- "According to..." leads.

These are basically lazy leads, and for the most part they don't attract readers. There,are of course, exceptions.

Good quote leads: "I'd never work for Henry Kissinger: He's a liar and a cheat!"

or "If Kennedy runs, I'll whip his ass!"

Good question leads: "What do you say to a naked lady?"

or "How do you explain to a mother that you just killed her only son? This was the dilemma faced by Los Angeles Policeman Rodney 'Magnum' Killkwik Wednesday..."

More on Brevity. Don't try to put all the five W's and the H into the lead unless they happen to fit naturally. Select the important ones. The rest can follow in the next sentences or grafs--they just clutter it up. For instance: "Eric Von Bier, Lowenbrau Professor of Malt Brewing Methods in the chemical engineering department" could be shortened to "A UCLA professor" or "A chemical engineering professor."

Avoid "no-news" leads. Never write: "The city council met Wednesday night." This doesn't tell you anything. What did they do? What did they say? What happened? Try instead: "The city council voted Wednesday to install parking meters on five major thoroughfares," or whatever it is they actually did.

Do Not begin your story with the word "The...." if you can help it. It's boring.

LIBEL

Libel is published defamation, as opposed to slander, which is spoken. There are three tests for libel:

(1) Defamation: Harm has been done to the reputation of a person, business, corporation, product, etc. The harm can be monetary or to the "good name."

(2) Identification: If a person, company or product can be identified--even if you don't mention the name--you have identification. "The well-known producer of 'Bowling for Bananas' is a faggot," is libel. Even though you didn't mention the name, the person is easily identified.

"All used car salesmen are crooks," is not sufficient identification for a used car salesman to sue you. But "The players of the Ohio State Football team are all on the take," is sufficient for you to catch about 75 libel suits.

(3) Publication. Simply stated if it isn't printed, it isn't libel. However, be aware that some courts have extended libel to personal letters, if they are read by more than the writer and the intended party. This may apply to unpublished stories, widely read in the newsroom.

DEFENSES

(1) The truth. If it's true and you can prove it, no problem. However, be aware that publishing something that is not newsworthy may be the basis of a privacy suit even if it is true. In some states, divorce decrees and such fall into this category.

(2) Judicial, legislative, public and official proceedings and the contents of most public records, are--for the most part--absolutely protected. You can quote them without fear of a libel suit. However, the remarks of a public official might not be "privileged," or protected from libel suits. Recent Supreme Court rulings (which have continued the tradition of the Nixon-dominated court toward eroding press freedoms,) have made it easier for people libeled by Congressmen, Senator's, etc., to sue for libel.

(3) Public figures. This, too, has been eroded by the Burger Court. The concept is this: People who voluntarily thrust themselves into the public eye have a diminished right to sue for libel, and a diminished right to privacy. In order for a public figure to win a libel suit, it used to be necessary to prove that (1) The material was false, (2) That the reporter was maliced toward the person and (3) The reporter disregarded prevailing standards of journalistic accuracy.

With the recent Supreme Court rulings, even attorneys who specialize in libel law are unsure of what the status is. Ask your editor or the media adviser if you're unsure.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

(1) State of mind. One particularly onerous ruling by the Supreme Court this year allows a person bringing a libel suit to ask the reporter's

"state of mind." This means that if you make an off-hand remark in the newsroom like: "Well, the bastard's dug his own grave this time," that might be considered proof of malice in your state of mind. So be careful what you say in the newsroom.

(2) Fair comment and criticism. People who review food, movies, records, books, works of art, architecture, television shows, and their exhibitors have a qualified privilege from libel suits, provided the subjects are legitimate objects of criticism, and the review is fairly and honestly made.

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Be aware of words, images and situations which suggest that all or most members of a racial or ethnic group are the same. Stereotypes may lead to assumptions that are unsupportable and offensive. They cloud the fact that all attributes may be found in all groups and individuals. For instance, a writer unconsciously may assume that all minority employees or community members are "poor" or "deprived" when actually many are well off and highly educated, just as in the population at large.

To test for stereotypes, identify with one of the following groups and experience how these stereotypical words and phrases apply personally and to family or friends. Keep them in mind when writing and editing.

Anglo-Saxon - controlled, poised, softspoken, prim, proper, aloof, cold, slender, fair, even-featured, muscular, snout-nosed, weathered, snobbish, stuffy, sanctimonious, reactionary, selfish, egotistical, educated, law-abiding, industrious, enslaving, rational, conservative, pious, condescending, loud, arrogant, superior, biased against other ethnic groups.

Mediterranean/Jewish, Italian, Greek - gregarious, argumentative, intense, dark, swarthy, stocky, squat, voluptuous, overripe, hot-tempered, lazy, unmotivated, religious, superstitious, passionate, philosophical, artistic, cultured, male-dominant, clannish, untrustworthy, criminal, blue-collar, menial, oriented to trades or shopkeeping, greedy, smart, pushy, manipulative, unethical in business.

Asian - smiling, serene, shy, reserved, short, stocky, myopic, delicate, passive, stolid, docile, subservient, submissive, menial, artistic, mystical, inscrutable, philosophical, sagacious, exotic (even to the second or later generations), quick, dexterous, expert in martial arts and technology, industrious, sinister, sly, evil, cunning, clannish, imitating.

Black - happy-go-lucky, clowning, grinning, childlike, soulful, sullen, hostile, wary, powerful, tall, lithe, flashy, super-sexually endowed, shuffling, dirty, rhythmic, athletic, blue-collar, untrustworthy, aggressive, angry, violent, dangerous, militant, lazy, unmotivated, strong (women), irresponsible (men), hustling, poor, deprived, ungrateful, swindling, dependent on society.

Chicano - fiery, boisterous, grinning, non plussed, sleepy, voluptuous, colorful, short, stocky, heavy, greasy, volatile, hot-tempered, hot-blooded, macho (men), subservient, menial, passionate, skilled at crafts, blue-collar, crafty, deceptive, lazy, unintelligent, clannish, uneducated, religious, humble, servile, poor, squalid.

Native North American - proud, silent, reserved, dignified, stoic, tall, thin, strong, clannish, courageous, impenetrable, skilled at crafts, artistic, uncivilized, backward, savage, heathen, pagan, warlike, alcoholic.

Homosexuals - tragic, unhappy, suicidal, unsatisfied, neurotic, role-bound, separatist, anti-social.

Gay Men - sensitive, shy, introspective, effeminate, passive, weak, bitchy, gossipy, selfish, promiscous, unstable, hedonistic, stylish, dramatic, creative.

Lesbians - 'femme' shy, helpless, quiet, 'butch' aggressive, alcoholic, tough, competent, cold, ruthless.

Avoid using qualifiers that reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes. A qualifier is information added that suggests an exception to the rule. Another example: An account of a company event read, "The intelligent black students were guests as part of an orientation program..." Under what circumstances would someone write, "The intelligent white students..."?

To determine whether or not a qualifier has been used, try this test: Imagine the sentence with the word "white" in place of "black" or substitute an Anglo surname for a Chicano or Asian one. Bias is subtle. The more deeply it has been assimilated, the more difficult it is to uncover.

racist and sexist language

Does this sentence...	...contain this hidden stereotype?
A well-groomed black student, John Jones works as a part-time clerk.	Blacks are poorly groomed.
Bob Herendez, an exceptionally energetic and conscientious worker...	Chicanos are lazy, unmotivated.
The articulate black professor...	Blacks lack intelligence, verbal skills.
No retiring, quiet job for her. Betty Wong has chosen a dynamic career as supervisor of...	Asians are shy, docile (also female non-assertive stereotype).
Jose Rodriquez, a steady and even-tempered worker...	Mexicans are volatile, unpredictable.

Avoid racial identification except when it is essential to communication. Why identify by race? Few situations require it. For example, announcing the appointment of the company's first black executive vice president might be appropriate in some circumstances, but don't continue to refer to race in subsequent bulletins or articles unless such information is an important part of the message. Race need not be the hidden subject of every piece that happens to include reference to a person of minority heritage.

If this identification is inappropriate...	...is this phrasing any different?
Katherine Clark announced the new product at a press conference today. Clarke, a white...	Helen Percy announced the new product at a press conference today. Percy, the first black to head a product division...
Judy, an outgoing white woman...	Mary, an outgoing black woman...

Be aware of the possible negative implications of color-symbolic words. Choose language and usage that do not offend people or reinforce bias. In some instances the words "black" and "yellow" have, as the language evolved, become associated with the undesirable or negative. While some implications are less openly disparaging, others are extremely offensive to some people. For example, a "black reputation" or "yellow coward."

Be aware of language that, to some, has questionable racial or ethnic connotations. Following are commonly used words or phrases that have evolved from a Eurocentric, mostly white culture and have been identified by the Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators as having offensive connotations.

Language	Possible Connotation
culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged	Implies superiority of one culture over another. In fact, people so labeled are often bicultural and bilingual.
minority	Accurate in North America but ignores the fact that people of color comprise the majority of the world's population. "Third World" (referring to those nations aligned to neither the U.S. and Western European sphere nor the Communist Bloc) is receiving increased usage, in spite of the political overtone. "Minority" will probably remain in common usage, but the communicator may want to consider alternatives.
militant vs activist	Labels such as these may reveal personal or social bias. A black involved in a social protest is called a militant (suggests violence) while a white counterpart is an activist (an ideological and political identification).

Language	Possible Connotation
pioneer battle or cavalry charge vs Indian massacre	A culturally biased phrase. The point of view is Eurocentric and implies heroism of Europeans moving west into Indian lands. Native North Americans' view of history is that of the defense of their homelands.

Example: The heroic battle at Fort River Run was followed by a massacre raid by the Sioux Indians.
Alternative: Following the cavalry victory at River Run, the Sioux Indians retaliated with a raid on the fort.

SUMMARY

1. Be aware of words, images and situations which suggest that all or most members of a racial or ethnic group are the same.
2. Avoid using qualifiers that reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes.
3. Avoid racial identification except when it is essential to communication.
4. Avoid using ethnic cliches.
5. Be aware of possible negative implications of color-symbolic words. Choose language and usage that do not offend people or reinforce bias.
6. Be aware of language that, to some, has questionable racial or ethnic connotations.
7. Avoid patronizing and tokenism with regard to any racial or ethnic group.
8. Review media to see if all groups are fairly represented.

Include all people in general references by substituting asexual words and phrases for man-words.

NO	YES
mankind	people, humanity, human beings, human race
man-made	synthetic, artificial, constructed, manufactured, of human origin.
manpower	human resources, human energy, workers, workforce.
man-sized	husky, sizable, large, requiring exceptional ability.
man-hours	hours, total hours, staff-hours, working hours.
founding fathers	pioneers, colonists, patriots, forebears.
gentlemen's agreement	informal agreement or contract.
businessman/businesswoman	business executive, manager, entrepreneur.
chairman/chairwoman	presiding officer, the chair, head, leader coordinator, moderator, chairperson.
workman	laborer, employee, staff member.
foreman	supervisor, manager.
repairman/handyman	maintenance person, or be more specific: plumber, electrician, carpenter.
cameraman	camera operator, technician, photographer.
delivery boy	delivery person, courier.
salesman	salesperson, sales clerk, sales representative.

Use parallel language when referring to people by sex. Females over the age of 18 are women, not girls, unless men are referred to as boys. Similarly, women are "ladies" only when men are "gentlemen."

NO	YES
the ladies and the men	the women and the men; the ladies and the gentlemen; the girls and the boys.
man and wife	husband and wife.

Grant equal respect to women and men. Do not trivialize or stereotype either sex or describe men by mental attributes or professional position and, at the same time, describe women by physical attributes. Appearance, charm, intuition or physical strength are usually irrelevant to communication and should not be referred to unless the subject warrants.

NO	YES
John Simon is a competent executive and his wife Ann is a charming brunette.	The Simons make an attractive couple. John is a handsome blond and Ann is a striking brunette.
OR	OR
Ann Simon is a successful designer and her husband John is a handsome blond.	Ann and John Simon are highly respected in their fields. She is a successful designer and he is a competent executive.

Use generic titles or descriptions for both women and men. Titles such as "manager" and "secretary" should be applied to both men and women and nongeneric titles such as "woman manager" or "male secretary" should be avoided. Substitute neuter forms, such as author, aviator and Jew," for such female-gender or diminutive words as "authoress, aviatrix and Jewess." Never stereotype projects as "woman's work" or as "a job for a man" or, the opposite: making persons in non-traditional roles feel like oddities ("She handled the forklift as well as a man" or "He takes care of the children as well as any man could.").

SUMMARY

1. Include all people in general references by substituting asexual words and phrases for man-words.
2. Refer to women and men equally and make references consistent.
3. Avoid using "man" or "woman" as a suffix or prefix in job titles.
4. Use parallel language when referring to people by sex.
5. Grant equal respect to women and men.
6. Use generic titles or descriptions for both women and men.
7. Base communication on pertinent qualities, not on sex.

Treat persons with handicaps with respect. Certain words are offensive to those with handicaps and many of them continue to appear out of ignorance, not malicious intent. The communicator's best insurance against offending is to check with the persons involved to find out what terms they prefer. Following are some words generally recognized as negative--and some options.

NO	YES
crippled	impaired, limited, disabled, or be specific, i.e., paraplegic.
deaf and dumb, deaf mute	deaf, hearing and/or speech impaired.
crazy, insane, dull, half-witted, retarded.	mentally ill, developmentally disadvantaged, disabled or limited, or be specific, i.e., emotionally disturbed, slow learner.
fits, spells	seizures, epilepsy.

Some words, such as "retarded" and "spastic," correctly describe certain conditions and, when used in the proper context, are acceptable ("Community leaders joined in the march to raise funds to benefit retarded citizens."). Such words, however, should not be used lightly ("He was a real spastic in his work habits.")

Separate the person from the handicap. Avoid labels that emphasize the limitation, not the person as a whole. Avoid mentioning a handicap when it is not pertinent.

NO	YES
Mary, an epileptic, had no trouble doing her job.	Mary, who has epilepsy, had no trouble doing her job.
The handicapped parents met to exchange ideas.	The parents, each with some handicap, met to exchange ideas.
The deaf accountant spotted the error.	The accountant spotted the error.