

# WRITING

---

## BASIC RULES OF WRITING

Before you can begin telling your story, there are three things you must understand:

1. What do you know about your writers?
2. What do you know about your readers?
3. What do you know about your product, the yearbook?

The team of writers/editors/designers/photographers has to establish a relationship with the reader, interacting through the medium of the

yearbook. How they do that for your yearbook readers will depend upon the students at your school.

Although most yearbook staffs write most of their own articles, it is always a good idea to partner up with the English

Department in your school. You will find out who the best writers are and create links with other students. This will help in building a great yearbook culture at your school, and develop a reliable source of proofers for correction time.

### DESIGN AT A GLANCE! YOUR STORY

- Is your text interesting and compelling or just the same old information?
- Did you highlight the defining moments?
- Did you check for grammar and spelling?
- Are all the facts (5W's) and names accurate?

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Short sentences, with simple sentence structure; keep verbs close to subjects.
- Shorter paragraphs don't scare the readers; most paragraphs should be under 40 words.
- Use the language of your reader. Write the way you talk, without slang and using good grammar.

## BE SPECIFIC

- No vague words like: "many", "a few", "several", or "a lot".
- Use real information, not: "The team had a good season", but instead try "the team had a 7-2 season"
- No need for school name or "this year" anywhere – it's understood that's what the book is about.

## BE A JOURNALIST

- Write in the third person "he", "she", or "they" keeps "you" out of your reporting.
- Write in the past tense. The year will be over when the book arrives.
- Captions are always in the present, as a photo is a moment frozen in time.
- Do not editorialize. Report on the year and don't push your opinion on the readers.
- Check your facts and attribute your quotes correctly.
- Tell both sides of a story. Balance is important, you are not editorializing.

Journalists need to master the art of how to talk with one person at a time to gather facts, details and quotations to create informative, entertaining, and memorable stories.

---

## **INTERVIEWING**

### **BE PREPARED**

Good interviewers show up prepared. They have done their background research and planned their questions carefully. If you don't already know a person, build trust before you get started. Begin questions with Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Ask direct and leading questions. Don't ask "yes" or "no" questions.

### **KNOW YOUR GOAL**

Good interviewers have clear goals for what they want and need out of the interview.

What obstacle does, or will the individual face, that may be difficult to overcome?

What achievement, talent, practice, or experience did the individual draw on to overcome the obstacle head-on?

### **DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**

Each story is unique and different from other stories because of the details. That's why interviewers want to meet the person at the place that is the context for the story, whether it's the locker room, the drama room, or the physics lab. That way they can do reporting before, during and after an interview. Such places are rich in descriptive detail, which they observe and write down in their reporter's notebook.

### **TAKE GOOD NOTES**

Encourage the interviewers to screen the information they are getting as they talk with the subject, and write down everything you can about the conversation. They need to pay particular attention to record concrete details – numbers, dates, statistics, key words, distinctive phrases and direct quotations. Once the interview is over, have them sit down and write everything else they observed or heard that they didn't have time to write down during the interview. It is very important to be accurate. The smallest error can cause embarrassment. Make sure the interviewer can contact the subject to fact check after the interview. Don't use a tape recorder unless the story is for broadcast

### **BE SENSITIVE**

If there is a sensitive or emotional issue that is at the heart of the story, it should come late in the interview. Leave time to recover from such moments and collect additional information.

### **BE CURIOUS**

Good interviewers ask questions that interest them because these will most likely also interest the reader.

### **BE PROVOCATIVE**

In that spirit, the interviewer must ask some provocative questions and photograph the special moments in the lives of the people at your school.

Like a movie, your school has a cast of characters who are your students, teachers, custodians, food service workers, secretaries, principals, coaches, parents, community leaders and perhaps others.

---

---

## ORGANIZING YOUR STORY

Good writing can't happen without good reporting and interviewing. Once you have gathered all the information you will need from the field, creating a narrative story structure is the next step.

All you need now is a great story, great material that surprises and delights the reader while grabbing and holding the reader's attention, and great words presented stylishly.

### CAPTIONS

When someone looks at a picture, they'll look at the caption for the specifics (name, place, context), but every caption should also intrigue in a way that makes them look back at the picture because they just learned something they didn't know before they read the caption. If the picture and caption work well together, they'll look at the headline

and then the story. If you don't start with your best material, you'll lose them before they get into the story, sidebar elements, or even other photographs. Reward readers by revealing new insights and information with every few paragraphs. When they finish the spread, they'll know they're smarter than the average bear, because they know the inside story.

#### DESIGN AT A GLANCE! CAPTIONS: USE YOUR MIND

- **Mini Headline:** Your lead-in is a mini-headline that grabs the reader's attention and directs you from the caption to the photo.
- **Basic Info:** An introductory sentence that indicates who and what is occurring in the photo. It uses present tense.
- **Necessary Details:** You need a past tense sentence that adds information that isn't obvious in the photo. The outcome or consequence of the action in the photo is usually found here.
- **Direct Quote:** Quotes capture the thoughts of those who were attending the event as they happen. The quote should be by someone in the photo. The quote can sometimes come before the necessary details.

### HEADLINES, SUBHEADS, AND SIDEBARS

Magazine headlines are designed to move you to action; that is, to pick it up and buy it. However, because most yearbooks are pre-sold, yearbook headlines can be toned down. The headline introduces the opening metaphor or premise of the story. If the headline is clever and witty, a reader might expect the story and spread to offer up more of the same. A second headline called a subhead is usually written in sentence form and performs the heavy lifting by introducing the opening action of the storyline. The subhead usually follows the main headline in smaller type.

#### DESIGN AT A GLANCE! HEADLINES

- Does the headline identify the spread that you are working on?
- Is the headline specific to your theme and the content on the page?
- Is the headline written in present tense?
- Have unnecessary words been eliminated (the, an, a, and)?
- Has an action verb been used?