



# COPY WRITING CHEAT SHEET

always remember, you're a storyteller above all else.

use the **copy cheat sheet** to make your story even more compelling!

story and sample headline

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date and time

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location

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what's the story?

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quotes & sources

(1)

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(2)

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(3)

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nut graf draft (nutshell + paragraph = nut graf)

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## checklist

- A compelling "nut graf";** the first paragraph needs to tell your reader why they should care to read it. If they aren't hooked, the story needs a new angle or a new lead. Think nutshell + paragraph = nut graf!
- Keep sentences short and structure simple.** People often get lost in long sentences and don't read them. Use strong verbs and strong nouns while dropping the excess.
- Be specific and accurate** when reporting events. Detailing that your football team won by a score of 28-3 matters more than saying they just won the game. Also, stay away from vague terms like "many", "a lot", "several", "some" or "a few".
- Follow your staff Style Guide.** Your Editors should have set out the rules for listing names, grades, titles and figures as well as the rules for punctuation and capitalization. If you don't have one, follow the [Associated Press Guidelines](#).
- Write in the Third Person.** Although few exceptions exist, you should always be using "He," "she," "it" and "they" as pronouns.
- Write using Active Voice.** Writing compelling copy requires the use of active voice. Active voice is when the subject of a sentence is doing the action, while passive voice is when the subject of a sentence is being acted upon.
- Shorter paragraphs are more inviting.** People don't read long, drawn out paragraphs. Keep it to one thought per paragraph; one quote per paragraph. In some cases, a paragraph can be one sentence.

## words to avoid

- this year
- name of school
- most
- few
- everybody
- be verb + "ing" verb
- there was / is
- it is
- am - is - are
- were - was - was
- being - been - be
- adverbs

- Use Quotes and DO NOT Editorialize.** Quotes and sources are the most important part of the story. Have at least three sources per story. Never make an opinion statement that cannot be attributed to a specific source.

## WATER WATER EVERYWHERE: VIRGINIA-SNIDER FLOOD

Words | Alicia Smiley - SMU

Water, the provider of life, feeds the fountains, sprinkles the sidewalk, and in the early morning hours of Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, floods the basement of Virginia-Snider (VS).

"On Friday, I went to bed at around 11-to-12, and I'm a heavy sleeper," first-year Leia Hannum said. "Around three in the morning, my roommate woke me up, and there was about three inches of water on the floor coming out of the wall. My suitemates were running around yelling, 'Unplug the fridge! Get the rugs!' - it was chaos. It was our priority to get all electronics and valuables out, and around five in the morning, a girl who lived on the first floor offered for us to stay in her room."

The following night, residents of the ground floor of VS were housed around campus; some students were put up in The Lumen hotel while trying to find a more permanent solution.

"On Saturday, I stayed the night at The Lumen with my parents since they were in town for the SMU-Navy football game," Hannum said. "On Sunday, SMU moved us into the old PIKE house, which was supposed to be our living space until repairs were done. It was very bad - it was gritty, grimy and humid since the A/C wasn't working. There were cockroaches in the bathroom, which a group of us took a video of to send to our parents. Our parents started calling each other and the school, trying to get it fixed. I'll give SMU credit for quickly responding; the next day, we were moved to Morrison-McGinnis. It was a super stressful time. We felt like hitchhikers with all our stuff, having to pick up our lives and move twice in the span of one weekend."

Repairs, including replacing the carpet, took about one week.

"I have a memory of my dad outside my room after the storm, looking at the drainage system, and he pretty much figured out what caused the flood," Hannum said. "Over the summer, Virginia-Snider got a new roof, and the rain washed down the construction materials, clogging the drain, so that if you were laying down to look through the drain, you could see all of the roof scraps."

After repairs were completed, the VS ground floor residents were offered the opportunity to move back.

"We were like, 'No way, Jose,'" Hannum said. "We definitely were going to stay in Morrison-McGinnis. The silver lining of all of this is that my roommate Madeline and I have an amazing running joke with our suitemates. Because the flooding started on Sept. 21, we're constantly referencing the Earth, Wind & Fire song "September," since the first line goes: DO YOU REMEMBER THE 21ST NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER?"

Nut-Grat

Quote #1

Style Guide

Specific details

Third Person

Short paragraph

Short and simple sentence

Quote #2

Specific details

Quote #3

Third Person

Short paragraph

Quote #4

### what makes it awesome?

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