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# **The Write Stuff: Basics for Building Your Message Through Written Communication**

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# Types of written pieces:

- News
- Feature
- Column/opinion



# News



A news story is factual information that you want to share with others, and it often has a timeliness factor.



# A news story should answer these six basic questions:

- **Who**-Who is the story about? (this can be a group or individual)
- **What**-What is the story about?
- **When**-When did this happen
- **Where**-Where did the event occur?
- **Why**-Why did this happen?
- **How**-How did this happen?



# The lead

A lead is the first paragraph of any news story. It's also the most important. It must accomplish several things:

- Give readers the main point of the story
- Get readers interested in reading more
- Accomplish these in as few words as possible

Leads should be no longer than 35-40 words. Readers want their news delivered quickly, and a short lead does that.



# Inverted Pyramid

The most important information is at the top.



# Features



A feature is a story that is more detailed, more human interest; it's usually longer than a news article and not necessarily timely. It could run anytime of the year. It's information you don't need to know, but want to know.





# Feature ideas

Oldest-Is a longtime employee retiring and reflecting back on his or her career?

Newest-Is your facility undergoing a renovation?

Unique-Are there any siblings in your chapter that work with one another or at competing facilities?

Feel good-Follow up with those who have benefited from your chapters philanthropy or scholarships. Is there a special club member that volunteers at your facility?

Outside the ropes-Hobbies, families, talents or honors.



# Opinion pieces:

- Includes president's columns, editorials, superintendent's corner, blogs.
- They can be serious, funny, stream of consciousness or asking others to take action, but they all reflect the writer's views.
- They also have leads, again designed to draw readers in, but they may also sum up the piece too.



# What not to do in an opinion piece

**Don't** talk about the weather-unless the column is about weather

**Don't** present information as fact, cite sources

**Don't** assume everyone shares your opinion. Show why you are “right.”

**Don't** involve politics - unless the column is about politics

**Don't** ramble, present a clear message

**Don't** go back to high school-stay away from inside jokes



# Editing tips

- Read it out loud and also silently.
- Edit, then edit again.
- Read it backwards to focus on the spelling of words.
- Spell check is your best friend and worst enemy.
- Have others read it.
- Not just typos, check names, check dates, check facts.
- Sleep on it.



# Active voice vs. passive voice

Active voice is more concise and easier to read.

*Active: The crew mowed the back nine.*

*Passive: The back nine was mowed by the crew.*

*Active: Bob took a soil sample.*

*Passive: The soil sample was taken by Bob.*

*Active: The chapter raised money for research.*

*Passive: Money was raised by the chapter for research.*



# Less is more

- Be concise – it's OK to say rain and not a precipitation event.
- Stay focused.
- Avoid technical jargon and write for the lowest common denominator.



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Questions?