

## **Writing news stories or press releases; taking pictures; interviews**

Here are some simple tips for writing a story for your parish magazine; for submission to The See (the Diocesan magazine) or to your local newspaper.

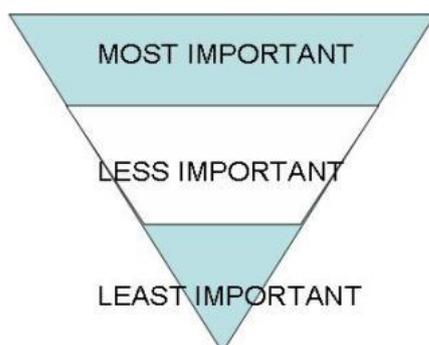
This file also contains tips for taking pictures and conducting interviews.

### **When writing a straightforward news story or press release remember ...**

- It's principally for information purposes
- It is usually quite short ...
- It gets to the point first before expanding
- It may have an emotional impact
- The writer does not give his/her opinion

### **Give it structure**

- Good structure and flow helps the reader to understand the story better
- Most news stories follow a basic pattern of:
  - Intro/summary
  - Expansion of summary with additional clarification/background info or details
  - Quotes from one or two relevant people
  - Action points/next steps – how the story is expected to unfold or what the reader can do as a result (e.g. web link, download, contact details)
- In essence you are aiming for the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing ...



- In other words ...
  - Get straight to the point
  - Grab the reader – encourage them to read on
  - Elaborate on the initial information
  - Then tie up any loose ends

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### **Tell the main point of the story in the 'intro' (initial paragraphs)**

- When writing for news (as opposed to longer feature articles or interviews) the reader should be able to understand the gist of your story from the opening lines
- Try to answer the questions 'who, what, when, where, why' (usually supplemented by 'how') in the first couple of paragraphs
- Answering the '5 Ws and How' will provide the reader quick identification of all the main facts
- This is particularly important when writing for the web as you often need to entice a reader with a short excerpt before they click through to the full story

### **Use factual and objective language**

- The best news reports offer the facts of what happened and avoid too many unsubstantiated or emotive descriptions
- It's fine to say something is the biggest or the first if you can provide evidence to support your claim but often not so good to report something as 'unique' (rarely the case) or 'amazing' or 'enjoyable' as these are personal opinions
- Save these more subjective descriptions or opinions for quotations ...
- And please check your spelling – especially names! Ideally get someone to proof your writing before sending it to ensure any mistakes are corrected in time.

### **Quotations**

- Direct quotations from relevant spokespeople are a good way to get across more subjective messages or opinions about the event/story in question
- They also add colour and credibility to the story because they offer a first-hand comment or account from someone who was there or is/will be involved
- Try to make the most of quotations to say something is powerful/provocative or memorable which adds to the story rather than using clichéd or predictable phrases

### **What else?**

- If you don't know something for certain, don't be tempted to fill in the gaps!
- Write abbreviations in full first time, unless they are very well known (eg NHS)
- Don't overuse exclamation marks!!
- Avoid repetition of any kind

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## Pictures

- Well-chosen pictures help tell your story, particularly online
- Shots including people are generally more engaging than objects or landscapes but choose something eye-catching and relevant to your story
- Where possible avoid straight lines of people or 'handshake' shots
- Think creatively about the backdrop and what the image can add to the message you're trying to convey
- Want more advice? [Here is a file](#) with 40 great tips for taking good photographs.

Finally, a few helpful points if **you are doing an interview with someone ...**

- The purpose of an interview is to ...
  - Gain understanding
  - Collect relevant facts (to help you write the story)
  - Obtain quotes
  - Balance views (where necessary)
- Prepare beforehand
- Write down your questions if it helps
- Keep things as natural as possible
- Don't let the interviewee control the interview!
- Don't just stick to your prepared questions. Be open and listen to the answers to be ready to follow-up on any interesting points made.
- Be confident when speaking to your interviewee and put them at ease.

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