**MEDIA WRITING BASICS for your news story**

**Use this as a checklist before you give to an editor.**

***OVERALL GUIDANCE***

* **Keep paragraphs short:** News articles rarely have more than two or three sentences per paragraph. In small columns, big paragraphs look daunting to readers. Put lots of paragraph breaks in your articles.
* **Leeds/leads** should be one sentence to three sentences covering the 5W’s
* **Anything underlined:**  Microsoft Word point to something wrong: blue solid = wrong word usage, an extra space, wordiness, the passive voice, pronoun error; dotted blue = a suggestion to make your writing stronger; red = an error
* **AP style**: The basics below, but if you aren’t sure, look it up in Resources on the blog:
  + Write out numbers under 10; use numerals for 10 and above
  + Always use numerals without *st*, *nd*, *rd* or *th* in dates*.* Example July 4 NOT July 4th
  + Be specific with time and dates. *Yesterday at Riverside*… is not useful
  + Capitalize titles, formal names and proper nouns, and italicize titles: **P**rincipal **John Bruneau** will decide on **W**ednesday if the movie, *Shawshank Redemption* can be shown in the **E**nglish classroom.

***QUOTES***

* **ALWAYS** start a new paragraph with the start of each quote.
* **ALWAYS** write quotes this way:
  + “I told her to get out of my office right now,” said Barbara Davis, the Vice President of business affairs. “Maybe I should have been more diplomatic. But she really irritated me with her attitude.”
  + **ALSO CORRECT:** Barbara Davis, the Vice President of business affairs, said the situation was quite tense. **← Transition** “I told her to get out of my office right now,” she said. “Maybe I should have been more diplomatic. But she really irritated me with her attitude.”
  + Put the attribution after the first sentence. No need to attribute again in same paragraph
  + Commas are inside the quotes, not outside. WRONG: “... attribution”.
  + Other ways to quote people are acceptable, but this style will never be wrong.
  + **TRANSITION SENTENCES:** Between two quotes from different people, you must include some type of transition, so that the reader understands the second quote is someone different. The second example above (in which Barbara Davis is mentioned first) illustrates a transition sentence.
* **Do Not** use courtesy titles. EXCEPTION: Inside quoted material.
  + No “Dr.” “Mr.” or “Mrs.”
  + Example: Principal **John Bruneau** commented that he thought the movie was too violent. (not Mr. John Bruneau)
* **ALWAYS** use said with a direct quote: not noted, not says, not claims, not exclaimed – just “said” and it’ll never be wrong. Also, some words are “loaded” – they carry a subtle bias. “Claims,” for instance, implies that you don’t really believe what’s being said.
* You can use according to when you are paraphrasing
* **Quotes** should be purposeful, engaging and revealing: quotes that do nothing more than introduce factual, routine information that’s easily paraphrased will drag down a story.
* When quoting “everyday people” include information about them:
  + Where they’re from
  + If they’re a student, what grade?
  + Full name for first reference; last name only for subsequent references
    - Grade 10 Riverside student, **Colin Smith**, believes the movie should be shown in class. “Its rating was R in 1994, but those ratings have changed; recent release rates the movie as PG,” said Smith.
* **Feature story**: make sure you have a hook, then your LEAD

**GOOD WRITING STUFF**

* **PASSIVE WRITING:** Try to keep the “doer” or the subject at the front of the sentence. If you find yourself using to form of the verb *To Be* (is, are, was, were etc.), you are probably using the passive voice
  + **BAD:** The man was arrested and charged with murder by the police.
  + **GOOD:** The police arrested and charged the man with murder.
* **DEAD CONSTRUCTS:** Avoid them. e.g., “There are” or “It is.” Dead constructs are OK sometimes but can usually be rewritten. Again, use of the verb *To Be* (is, are, was, were) weaken the writing
  + **BAD:** There are several differences between British and American comedies.
  + **GOOD:** British and American comedies differ in several ways.
* **ATTRIBUTE:** As much as possible—particularly any information that could be questioned. It helps the reader know the information can be trusted. Explain to your reader where you got your information. You also have the option of hyperlinking your sources right in the body of your writing. Example:
  + According to an [October 17 CBC article](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/sunshine-coast-state-of-emergency-1.6619595) by Karen Larsen, climate change is the reason that BC is struggling with drought issues and water conservation.
* When possible, put attribution at the end of the sentence, so it doesn’t clunk up your writing.
  + **Avoid:** According to the police department, the gunman entered the bank from the employee entrance.
  + **Preferred:**  The gunman entered the bank from the employee entrance, according to the police department.
* **HEADLINES:** Should be active tense, engaging, accurate – six to eight words
* Make sure you edit for common grammatical errors: **run-ons, comma-splices,** spelling, wrong pronoun usage, active voice, parallel structure. Etc.