

News writing and reporting vocabulary 101

based on Tim Harrower's Inside Reporting, with additions and editing by Bob see Glossary at the back of the text for more.

Attribution: A phrase that tells readers the source of a quote or information used in the story. The practice of identifying all sources in a story.

Beat reporters: News reporters who cover one specific topic, such as politics, crime, education and sports.

Broadsheet: Large-format newspaper, usually 14 by 22 inches.

Buried: Information that should come earlier in a story, or a story that is placed deep inside the newspaper.

Byline: The reporter's name, sometimes followed by credentials

Centerpiece (or lead story): The top story of the day, chosen by editors because of its newsworthiness or reader appeal. It's placed in the most prominent position in the paper, with the biggest headline. It can be a feature story.

Circulation: The number of readers, or the department that distributes the paper.

City editor: Leads the "city desk" team of editors who assign and edit local stories. Other "desks" often include sports, state, national, features, lifestyles, Sunday, etc., sometimes related to physical sections of a paper.

Classifieds: Small-print advertisements of cars for sale, job openings, and so on.

Columns: The vertical divisions of a newspaper page, measured in inches. Also personal opinion articles, often run on the page opposite the editorial page. (The "op-edit" page.) Some columnists double as reporters. Some are syndicated in many papers.

Composing: Area in the production department where workers prepare pages for printing, turning them into negatives.

Confirmation: Verifying information with more than one source.

Conflict: One of the elements that make something news. Whether it is person vs. person or people vs. nature.

Copy desk chief: Oversees the editing, and often the layout, of all stories.

Copy editor: Edits text of stories, writes headlines and cutlines and designs pages.

Cut: To edit a story by eliminating words or paragraphs. Also an old word for a photograph placed on a newspaper page.

Cutline: Information that often appears below the photo identifying the action or people in the picture. (The photo credit – who took or provided the picture – may be at the end of the cutline or in smaller type along the edge of the photo.)

Dateline: Gives the location of a story that happened outside the paper's normal coverage area. Also may give the day or time the story was filed.

Deadline: The time by which a story must be completed; different departments or editions of a paper may have their own deadlines.

Deck: A subheadline, written by copy editors, that supplements information in the main headline. Usually in smaller type than the main head, but larger than the story type.

Desk: See "city editor" above.

Edition: A version of the paper with some content not found in other editions. Papers often print more than one edition, one for street sales and others for delivery to subscribers in different parts of the circulation area.

Editor: Runs the newsroom. Has the final say in story selection and news philosophy.

Editorial: The usually unsigned opinion articles approved by a paper's editorial board as the opinion of "the paper," and the page they appear on. Confusingly, the word "editorial" is sometimes used to mean all the non-advertising content of a paper – news as well as opinion, and all the people who produce it. The three main areas of a newspaper organization could be called "advertising," "circulation" and "editorial."

Feature writers and reviewers: Write lifestyle and entertainment stories. Critics write movie, TV, book, concert and music reviews. Some news reporters double as reviewers.

Flag: The paper's nameplate; the name of the paper, often set in special type. Some call it a "masthead," others reserve that word for the list of editors.

Follow-up (or folo): A story that continues, or follows up on, a recent story.

General assignment reporters (or GAs): Cover a wide range of stories.

Graf: Short for "paragraph." (as opposed to "graphs" of quantitative information)

Headline: The large type that summarizes the story.

Hole (“news hole” or space): Area reserved in the paper for a story of a certain size, as in “I’m saving a 4-inch hole.”

Immediacy (or timeliness): An element of news. Events that have just happened are crucial to making a news story worth writing, especially when the reporter is competing with other media.

Impact: An element of news: the effect a story will have on people’s lives or pocketbooks. The bigger the impact, the bigger the story

Infographic: A chart or graph that visually displays key facts from a story.

Jump line: Used when a Page 1 story continues on an inside page. Editors label the story with a key word and run the jump line to tell readers where the story continues.

Lead (or lede): The beginning of a story. Usually one or two sentences. (Also used to mean a news tip, or the main idea of a story.)

Liftout (or pull) quote: A quotation from the story that’s repeated in a box to give it special graphic emphasis.

Logo: A small, specially designed title, often with art, that’s used for labeling special stories or a series.

Managing editor: Oversees the day-to-day operation of the newsroom; resolves staffing issues.

Mug shot: A close-up photo of someone’s face (whether it’s from the police or not).

News judgment: The ability to determine which stories are most interesting and important to readers.

Novelty: An element of news. Odd, surprising and unusual events often make news. Readers enjoy news that’s intriguing and unexpected.

Online editor: Works with other editors and reporters to develop material for the newspaper’s Web site.

Photo credit: A line giving the name of the photographer who took the photo.

Plate making: Process in which the production crew converts negatives to plates that are mounted on the press.

Production manager: Oversees the staff and equipment that print the newspaper.

Prominence: An element of news. Readers are curious or more interested if the story contains a well-known leader or celebrity.

Proximity: An element of news. Events close to home matter more to readers than events elsewhere.

Publisher: The ultimate boss of a newspaper; presides over all departments to ensure profitability.

Generally leaves daily news content decisions to editor and managing editor.

Quote: Someone’s exact words, enclosed by quote marks.

Refer: Information embedded in a story that alerts readers that another story on the topic appears elsewhere in the paper. (Sometimes pronounced “reefer”; no smoking implied.)

Display ads: Larger advertisements that run below and beside news stories.

Sources: People or documents that provide reporters with information.

Spiked: A story that editors decide not to publish.

Tabloid: Usually about half the size of a broadsheet. The term is also referred to the sensational approach to news taken by some newspapers printed in that format.

Tagline: Contact information for the reporter that allows readers to provide feedback.

Teaser (or promo or skybox): An item at the top of Page 1 designed to grab readers’ attention so that they’ll buy the paper.

Thumbsucker: Story that is long, possibly too long for many readers.

Wire story: A story written by a reporter working for a news service.