

## Breaking News Writing Guidelines for WJEA's News Writing Write-Off Contest



The writing style for breaking news typically follows the ***inverted pyramid*** structure with a ***summary lede*** that includes the who, what, where and when.

Not sure what that is? Here's an overview from a Poynter Institute writing coach: <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/chip-on-your-shoulder/12754/writing-from-the-top-down-pros-and-cons-of-the-inverted-pyramid/>

School newspapers are unlikely to contain actual breaking news, so a feature-writing approach tends to work best. School news websites, however, *should* contain breaking news. If something “breaking” occurs (snow day, sports or activity victories, lockdown, new principal announced, schedules changed, etc.) student journalists should post it ASAP, and the inverted pyramid is the standard way to reach busy readers. A summary lede can even be abbreviated and sent as a 140-character tweet before or when the full story is posted.

You'll see the inverted pyramid structure with summary ledes all over news websites at top-ranked collegiate journalism schools. Here's a recent top story from the Penn State Collegian (<http://www.collegian.psu.edu/>):

Former university administrators Graham Spanier, Tim Curley and Gary Schultz filed a memorandum to dismiss their charges regarding their possible involvement in the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse case, according to court documents filed on Tuesday.

You'll also find it all over professional news websites. Here's a recent top story on CNN.com:

(CNN) -- A chemical fire involving sulfuric acid forced the evacuation of an entire Iowa town Thursday, emergency management officials said.

The roughly 2,000 people in Northwood, near the Minnesota state line, were told to head to a community center about 6 miles south of town, according to an emergency message from the Worth County Emergency Management agency.

Note that the CNN summary lede of this story does contain the 4 w's, but it doesn't contain too many specific details, which can overwhelm readers. The idea is to convey the basics first, then get more specific as the story goes on.

Other tips for the body of the story:

- Keep paragraphs very short.
- Use expressive quotes, if available, and properly punctuate and attribute them.
- Tell readers where you are getting your information (attribute info to sources).
- Follow AP Style. Use the WJEA AP Style “cheat sheet” as a starting point.