Science Writing 101

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Brain-training for a new 'ball game'

Writing for a 'popular' audience is a very different style to writing academically. Mastering it calls for:

- Practice, practice, practice
- Read, read, read

What's in the toolbox?

Different writing styles to model your work on. Note the length, structure, tone, voice, and attribution of facts

- News
- Feature
- Press release



Images by Eric Miller, from The Hungry Season



- Blog
- Opinion piece
- Letter to the editor

Planning your article

- Know your audience
- Know your medium
- *Keep it conversational*
- Lose the jargon
- Write in the 'active' voice
- Structure your information: 'so what?', the 'angle' & the '5 Ws and an H'





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Dealing with the media

- Speak slowly
- *Repeat numbers*
- Spell names, give titles
- Three 'take home' messages
- 'Sound bites'
- Start your point with the interviewer's question
- Dressing for the camera
- Hone your skills
- Pause, think, answer
- Fact checking: do-s and don't-s
- Understand and respect deadlines

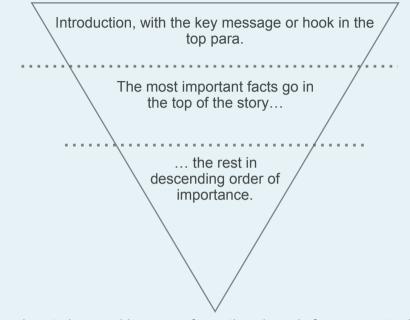


Image from City Desired by Sydelle Willow Smith

Image by Michael Groenewald



FIGURE 2: THE INVERTED PYRAMID FOR HARD NEWS



The inverted pyramid comes from the days before computer-based publishing in journalism, when there simply wasn't time to do lengthy rewrites of articles that were too long to fit onto the day's page layout. It was more efficient to write articles where the sub could just cut the bottom few paragraphs off the story without losing its meaning.

FIGURE 3: FEATURE AND NARRATIVE

BEGINNING

The anecdotal *introduction* is highly descriptive, usually involves a character or place, and captures a scene as if viewing it through the

NUT GRAPH

The 'nut graph': a paragraph saying what this story is about,

MIDDLE

The *body* of the story.

This is the nitty gritty of the research or idea you are trying to convey. It contains the **5** *Ws* and the *H*.

This could be five paragraphs long, or 5 000 words, depending on space constraints or the purpose of the story.

Narrative long-form writing needs more word space to build scene, character, and plot.

END

The **conclusion** or '**kicker**' is often also an anecdote, and refers back to the scene, person or story that appears in the introduction.