COM 3210 (Copy Editing)

Supplemental Notes: Editing News Stories

Below are some basic steps for editing a typical news story. Be sure to use clear questions and explanations to address content and other writing problems.

1. **Scan the story.** Read through the story once. Then again. Check the items below.

2. **Check the lead.** If it is weak, mark it and indicate the problem. Is the kind of lead correct for the subject matter?

3. **Body.** In the body of the story, does the writer discuss the most important fact highlighted in lead?

4. **Support.** Are facts supported with a balance of **quotes** with **attributions** from appropriate sources? Is there enough **background** information presented? Enough **elaboration**?

5. **Statements of opinion.** These need to be attributed to someone by quoting. Opinion without attribution needs to be deleted.

6. **Direct quotes and attributions.** Make sure quotes are **meaningful** and not just presenting factual information. Use only “said” in news stories. Place before the name for long attributions. Place after the name or pronoun for short attributions. For 2-sentence quotes, introduce the attribution **after** the first sentence:

   (1-sentence quote) “Blah, blah, blah,” said John Smith, a freshman majoring in accounting.
   (2-sentence quote) “Blah, blah, blah,” Smith said. “More blah, blah, blah. And so on. And so on.”

7. **Indirect quotations.** You will build articles with a combination of direct and indirect quotes that summarizes some information from sources. The best way to write indirect quotations is to **present the attribution first**, then report what the source said. Here’s an example:

   **I. M. Quotable, assistant director of the Ministry of Using Words, said** that when using quotes that are more than two sentences long, you should put in the attribution after the first sentence in the quote. After that, you can present the other sentences in the quote, he said.

8. **Names, positions and titles.** Make sure that they are correct. Refer to a directory!

9. **Second references.** Full name and title the first time a person is mentioned. Last name for the rest of the story.

10. **Transition sentences.** Make sure these don’t repeat the same information that is in quotes.

11. **Facts and numbers.** Make sure that all are correct and in the correct style.

12. **Dates and times.** Use AP style or your publication’s stylebook as appropriate. Examples: Jan. 29, 6 p.m.

13. **Short Sentences.** Sentences should average 20 words — some more than 20 words, some fewer than 20 words.

14. **Spelling and Punctuation.** Use the proper copyediting mark for misspelled words.

15. **Conclusion of Story.** Story should end with statement of fact, future action or 2-sentence quote.