

Student handout 7.1

How to write an article

Basic structure of an article

1. Headline

Every article needs a headline. It fulfils an important function: it should not overwhelm the reader, but should catch his or her attention and arouse his interest to read on.

Newspaper readers skim the pages quickly to select the articles that interest them and therefore headlines need to catch the reader's eye. Keep headlines short, use large and bold print and separate headlines from the following text.

2. Introductory lines

The introductory lines will usually be the first paragraph of your article (newspaper producers call this the "lead"). As a rule, it is marked in bold print.

The lead gives the reader the most important information. In an informative lead text, the reader finds answers to the key questions.

In features and other texts that are emotional rather than factual, the first lines will often vividly describe a scene. Here, the reader's interest in reading on is not aroused by factual information, but by stylistic means.

3. Use of language and style

Careful and elaborate use of language is perhaps even more important for a good article than the correct use of journalistic form or style. If we view a newspaper as a house, then the different forms of journalistic writing and presentation might be the furniture, but words would be the bricks with which the house has been built.

While we can somehow get along without furniture, we could not live in a house without bricks. Emotionally written articles, with the "human touch", are very popular in newspapers. But be careful, too much salt will spoil the soup (one can have too much of a good thing)!

That brings us to the sentence. Keep your sentences short and simple. Readers will have difficulty understanding sentences with more than 14 words. And sentences with 25 words or more are simply incomprehensible. Under all circumstances, avoid a complex sentence structure containing lots of commas and separate clauses. Make it a habit to read every sentence immediately after you have written it. Is it clear and easy to understand? Are there any unnecessary words?

Spelling mistakes do not only make a bad impression, but also annoy the reader, because they distract his or her attention from the message. Before you deliver your article, revise it – and this means check it for correctness and completeness of information (this amounts to checking the truth and accuracy of the information), language mistakes, style and comprehensibility.