

**JOURNALISM**

**WRITING**

**COMMANDMENTS**

**\*WHETHER IT'S NEWS OR PUBLIC RELATIONS,  
CONTENT PRODUCED FOR MASS DISTRIBUTION  
FOLLOWS RULES RARELY USED ELSEWHERE.**

**RYAN GUNTERMAN, MJE**

**INDIANA HS PRESS ASSOCIATION DIRECTOR**

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*USE THIRD PERSON 99% OF THE TIME. YOU SHOULD NOT WRITE WORDS SUCH AS “YOU, YOUR, I, ME, MINE, WE, OUR” IN YOUR WORK UNLESS IT’S A DIRECT QUOTE.**

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

**\*SPELL OUT ONE THROUGH NINE EXCEPT FOR AGES, TIMES, DATES, UNITS OF MEASUREMENT AND BEGINNING OF SENTENCES. USE FIGURES FOR 10 OR ABOVE.**

***\*REFERENCE "NUMERALS" IN AP STYLEBOOK FOR SPECIFIC GUIDELINES.***

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*USE FULL NAME ONLY ON FIRST REFERENCE,  
LAST NAME AFTER. USE FULL NAMES IF  
MULTIPLE SOURCES HAVE SAME LAST NAME.

*PRESIDENT KERRY PRATHER UNVEILED A  
PLAN FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY. PRATHER  
MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT FRIDAY.*

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*USE “SAID” WITH QUOTES, TYPICALLY AFTER  
NAME UNLESS PERSON HAS A LONG TITLE.

PUNCTUATION GOES INSIDE QUOTATION MARK.

*“WE’RE THE BEST SCHOOL,” GUNTERMAN SAID.*

*“I AGREE,” SAID TERRI ROBERTS, DIRECTOR OF  
THE CENTER FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.*

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*QUOTES ARE STAND-ALONE PARAGRAPHS.

*DAVID ROSS WAS NOT HAPPY WITH HIS  
BULLPEN AFTER LOSING YET ANOTHER LEAD.*

*“WE’RE GARBAGE RIGHT NOW,” HE SAID.*

*CUBS RELIEVERS HAVE BLOWN SIX SAVES  
AND HOLD THE LEAGUE’S WORST ERA.*

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*ONLY USE DRAMATIC QUOTES. IF NOTHING  
DRAMATIC IS SAID, DON'T USE IT.

*“IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU WERE WALKING  
ON EGGSHELLS. YOU COULDN'T TAKE A STEP  
WITHOUT CRUNCHING GERMAN COCKROACHES,”  
THE DETECTIVE SAID.*

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*CAPITALIZE FORMAL TITLES DIRECTLY BEFORE A NAME. JOB DESCRIPTIONS, FIELD POSITIONS AND INFORMAL TITLES (SUCH AS A STUDENT'S YEAR IN SCHOOL) ARE LOWERCASE.**

***\*REFERENCE "TITLES" IN AP STYLEBOOK FOR SPECIFIC GUIDELINES.***



# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*DON'T USE NAME OF SCHOOL UNLESS STORY  
INVOLVES MULTIPLE SCHOOLS.**

***BAD: FRANKLIN COLLEGE SENIOR ERICA IRISH***

***GOOD: SENIOR ERICA IRISH***

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*STATES SHOULD BE SPELLED OUT WHEN USED  
IN THE BODY OF A STORY, WHETHER STANDING  
ALONE OR IN CONJUNCTION WITH A CITY, TOWN,  
VILLAGE OR MILITARY BASE.**

***BAD: FRANKLIN, IN***

***GOOD: FRANKLIN, INDIANA***

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*NO COMMA BEFORE CONJUNCTION IN SIMPLE SERIES UNLESS NEEDED FOR CLARIFICATION.

*NOT NEEDED: THE FLAG IS RED, WHITE AND BLUE.*

*NEEDED: RACHAEL RAY FINDS INSPIRATION IN COOKING, HER FAMILY, AND HER DOG*

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*CAPITALIZE WORDS IN A TITLE EXCEPT ARTICLES (A, AN, THE); PREPOSITIONS OF THREE OR FEWER LETTERS (FOR, OF, ON, ETC.); AND CONJUNCTIONS OF THREE OR FEWER LETTERS (AND, BUT, OR, SO, ETC.) UNLESS ANY OF THOSE START OR END THE TITLE.  
PUT QUOTATION MARKS AROUND TITLES.**

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*USE THE ABBREVIATIONS AVE., BLVD. AND ST. ONLY WITH A NUMBERED ADDRESS. SPELL OUT AND CAPITALIZE WITHOUT NUMBER. ALL SIMILAR WORDS (ALLEY, DRIVE, ROAD, ETC.) ARE ALWAYS SPELLED OUT.**

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*USE FIGURES AND \$ SIGN EXCEPT IN CASUAL REFERENCES OR WITHOUT A FIGURE. USE UP TO TWO DECIMAL PLACES WHEN > \$1 MILLION.

*THE BOOK COST \$4.*

*HE PROPOSED A \$300 BILLION BUDGET.*

*HE IS WORTH \$4.35 MILLION.*

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*CLICHES ARE LAZY. JARGON IS CONFUSING.  
JUST DON'T. PLEASE. DON'T WORDS THAT  
MEAN NOTHING AND ADD NOTHING.**

# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*BE DETAILED AND SET THE SCENE.

*TATTERED CURTAINS, YELLOW WITH CIGARETTE  
SMOKE, DANGLING FROM BENT METAL RODS.  
CARDBOARD AND OLD COMFORTERS STUFFED INTO  
BROKEN, GRIMY WINDOWS. TRASH BLANKETING  
THE STAINED COUCH, THE STICKY COUNTERS.*



# JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS

\*DON'T USE 20 WORDS IF 10 CAN TELL THE STORY. YOUR FIRST DRAFT IS A START, NOT AN END. READ ALOUD. TAKE OUT EXTRA WORDS. DELETE OR PARAPHRASE BORING QUOTES.

*“TIGHT, BRIGHT AND TO THE POINT.”*

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*MAKE SURE YOUR WORK HAS AN EASY-  
TO-FOLLOW FLOW TO IT. DON'T GIVE YOUR  
AUDIENCE A REASON TO STOP CONSUMING THE  
CONTENT YOU WORKED SO HARD TO PRODUCE.**

**EXAMPLE: LQTQ FORMAT**

# TRANSITION/QUOTE FORMULA: LQTQ

Graphic: Journalism Education Association

## LEAD:

The most interesting and important information. Include most of the 5Ws & H. In news, focus on what's newest or what's coming up. In news and features, try to hook your readers to keep reading.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Important information not found in the lead. Provides a transition or set-up to the first quote.

## DIRECT QUOTE:

Connects to the additional information, or sometimes follows directly out of the lead. Use more than one sentence. Attribute after the first sentence of the quote.

## TRANSITION:

Next important fact or additional information, linking the quote above to the next. Use transition words to help the story flow. Transitions can be a fact, an indirect quote or a partial quote. Make sure you attribute all info!

## DIRECT QUOTE:

Connects to the first transition. Use more than one sentence. Attribute after the first sentence of the quote. Do not repeat the transition in the quote! The quote should elaborate on the transition, providing opinion, emotion or details.

## TRANSITION:

Next important fact or additional information, linking the quote above to the next. Use transition words to help the story flow. Transitions can be a fact, an indirect quote or a partial quote. Make sure you attribute all info!

## DIRECT QUOTE:

Connects to the second transition. Use more than one sentence. Do not repeat the transition in the quote! The quote should elaborate on the transition, providing opinion, emotion or details.

...and so on, until the story is done.

- EACH BOX IS A NEW PARAGRAPH
- INFORMATION FLOWS FROM MOST IMPORTANT TO LEAST IMPORTANT
- QUOTES ADD OPINION, EMOTION, DETAIL
- USE TRANSITIONS TO ADD FACTS, DETAILS
- AVOID SUMMARIZING STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS FOR FINAL PARAGRAPH
- SAVE A QUOTE FOR FOR FINAL PARAGRAPH ("KICKER QUOTE")

Linked

Linked

Linked

# **JOURNALISM WRITING COMMANDMENTS**

**\*NEVER STOP WRITING. YOUR NEXT STORY  
WILL BE BETTER THAN THE PREVIOUS ONE,  
EVERY SINGLE TIME. WRITERS LIVE BY  
TRIAL AND ERROR.**

**JOURNALISM**

**WRITING**

**COMMANDMENTS**

**\*QUESTIONS:**

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**\*PRESENTATION:**

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