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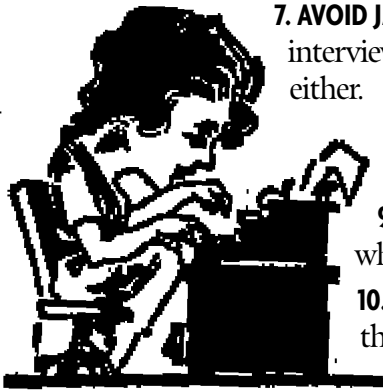
WAYS TO
IMPROVE
YOUR
NEWSPAPER



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Writing

- 1. BE INTERESTING.** Boring writing is killing our newspapers. Good stories make readers want to read today's newspaper, then they'll look forward to tomorrow's.
- 2. MAKE NEWS STORIES SIMPLE.** Tortured, convoluted writing might impress your colleagues in the creative writing group, but it won't have the same impact on your readers.
- 3. KEEP STORIES AS SHORT AS POSSIBLE.** How long is long enough for a lead story? Tell the story as easily as possible without unnecessary embellishment. Give it a beginning, a middle and an end. Then stop.
- 4. FEATURES CAN BE LONGER, BUT NEVER TOO LONG.** A feature is not a news story into which you have inserted every last banal comment from your notebook or tape recorder. The only defense for a long story is reader interest. If it's 40 inches long and interesting, they'll enjoy it; if it's rambling and incoherent, they won't. How do your features rate? Read them!
- 5. WRITE GOOD OPENING PARAGRAPHS THAT LET THE READER KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING.** Write the way you talk to a friend. Deliver the facts clearly and make the story intriguing and captivating.
- 6. PUT A NUTGRAPH, OR EXPLANATORY PARAGRAPH,** high up in the article to tell readers what the story is about and why they should read it.



7. AVOID JARGON OR OFFICIALESE. If you don't understand what the person you've just interviewed is talking about, you can bet your next paycheck your readers won't either.

8. READ YOUR STORY AFTER WRITING IT. Aloud preferably. If you have to pause for breath in the middle of sentences, they're too long.

9. ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO READ IT. Listen to their criticisms and make changes whenever necessary.

10. READ IT AFTER IT'S PRINTED. Spot errors in style and technique and correct them before writing your next story.

11. AVOID CLICHES. "It was everyone's worst nightmare ..." is precisely that!

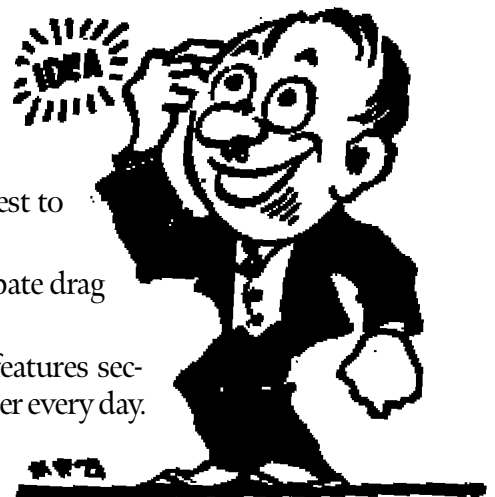
Editing

- 12. SEEK A FULL RANGE OF STORIES FOR THE NEWSPAPER EVERY DAY.** Don't bore readers with a newspaper full of committee reports.
- 13. LOOK FOR HUMAN INTEREST STORIES, BUT MAKE SURE THEY ARE WORTH THE SPACE.** Nothing is worse than feature pages filled with irrelevant rubbish — even if it is local — that makes your readers yawn.
- 14. ADD HUMOR TO THE MIX.** Readers like to laugh, even if your publisher doesn't.
- 15. SEEK READER INVOLVEMENT.** If you have a story that affects readers' lives, publish their opinions in the story. Ask their opinions for a follow-up. Publish their letters. Show that you care about them.
- 16. READ EACH STORY BEFORE YOU DECIDE HOW MUCH SPACE IT WILL OCCUPY ON THE PAGE.** Don't run anything at length if it doesn't deserve the space.
- 17. EDIT OUT REPETITION AND VERBOSITY EVEN IF IT MAKES THE STORY TOO SHORT FOR THE HOLE ASSIGNED.** Two short, interesting stories are better than one long, tedious one.
- 18. UNDERSTAND THE STORY.** If you don't, ask the writer what he or she means. If the writer's not available, spike the story or save it for another day.

- 19. REWRITE WHERE NECESSARY.** If the story needs additional information, ask the reporter get it. Polish bad grammar. Make the writer look good.
- 20. LONG STORIES ARE EASIER TO READ IF THEY ARE BROKEN INTO TWO OR MORE SMALLER ONES.** They look better on the page, and readers like them.
- 21. MAKE SURE THAT BRIEFS ARE SHORT.** A seven-inch story may help to fill a l-o-o-o-n-g, empty column quickly, but it's not a brief. It's lazy.
- 22. PUT ONE OF YOUR BEST EDITORS ON THE "BRIEFS BEAT."** Encourage that editor to develop a bright and distinctive style for these important items.
- 23. WRITE STRONG, INFORMATIVE HEADLINES** that give the reader a clear idea of what the story is about.
- 24. MAKE SUBHEADS CAPTIVATING.** Avoid repeating detail from the headline or the first paragraph of the story. Subheads should entice the reader into the text.
- 25. RUN CONTESTS AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE.** Give readers the opportunity to win contests. Especially children — they're tomorrow's readers.

Editorial pages

- 26. LONG BORING STORIES SHOULD NOT BE RELEGATED TO THE EDITORIAL OR OP ED PAGES.** Items on the editorial pages should be as interesting and as relevant as every other story on every other page of the newspaper.
- 27. EDITORIAL WRITERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO WRITE CLEARLY.** Avoid pious waffle. Get to the point quickly, make it forcibly and then get out. Use a larger point size than the normal body text to add emphasis.
- 28. COLUMNISTS ON THE EDITORIAL PAGE SHOULD BE WORTH THEIR SPACE.** A local columnist with something worthwhile to say is always better than a national columnist waffling about crime on Denver streets — unless, of course, you live in Denver.
- 29. EDITORIAL CARTOONS SHOULD BE WELL DRAWN AND RELEVANT.** Wit, subtlety and irony are usually better than viciousness. Unless the subject is a crooked politician.
- 30. DEVELOP A GOOD DAILY LETTERS PAGE.** Get ordinary people to write. Encourage readers to write about a variety of subjects. Make it a must-read page.
- 31. EDIT LETTERS TO THEIR NATURAL LENGTH** in the same way as you (ought to) edit your stories. Because someone took the trouble to write 30 inches of meandering drivel doesn't mean you are obligated to print every droning word. Edit to the nub of the letter. Show the edited letter to the writer or read it to him or her before publication.
- 32. DON'T PRINT EVERY LETTER YOU GET.** Use the best ones, save the average ones for the big letters day of the week and consign the rest to the waste bin. That's called editing.
- 33. ENCOURAGE READERS TO RESPOND TO LETTERS.** But don't let a debate drag on beyond its natural life span.
- 34. USE LETTERS IN OTHER AREAS OF THE PAPER.** Like the sports or features sections. Get readers to respond to stuff that appears in the newspaper every day. If you run an interesting, provocative feature, solicit your customers' responses. Pay \$5 — or more — for the best letter(s).



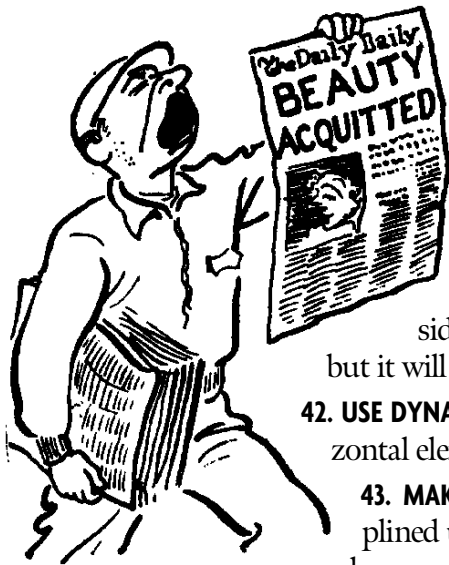
Design

35. MAKE THE PAGE LOOK INTERESTING. Use pictures, graphics, headlines and text in as compelling a way as possible.

36. MAKE THE PAGE FLOW. The English language is read from top to bottom and from left to right. Always. Don't design pages that break that logic.

37. THE NAMEPLATE SHOULD BE CLEAR AND DISTINCTIVE, NEAT AND TIDY. It is your trademark. Be proud of it. Don't change it without good reason.

38. USE BIG PHOTOS TO ATTRACT INTEREST. USE SMALL ONES FOR DETAIL. And don't be afraid to use big photos on inside pages as well as on section fronts. Pages full of gray text look boring and are hard to read. Readers prefer brighter, less daunting pages.



39. BE CAREFUL HOW YOU USE MUG SHOTS. Don't scatter small pictures around the page to liven up a dull page. If the page looks boring, little pictures won't help. Do it again.

40. USE SCALE AND PROPORTION AS A SIGNALLING DEVICE to let readers know which are the main stories on the page and which are subsidiary. Big stories should look BIG!

41. DITTO WITH STORY LENGTHS. Common sense suggests that a story at the top of the front page should be longer than subsidiary items. A page full of nine-inch stories may be easy to produce, but it will be more boring than one containing stories of different lengths.

42. USE DYNAMIC LAYOUT PATTERNS that include contrasting vertical and horizontal elements to grab and hold the reader's attention.

43. MAKE SPACING CONSISTENT THROUGHOUT THE NEWSPAPER. Well-disciplined use of white space in and around heads, between columns, inside boxes and beneath page headers will make the newspaper look more professional. And, more important, it'll make it easier to read.

44. USE DISTINCTIVE STANDING HEADS for regular features and columns.

45. TAKE AS MUCH CARE OF INSIDE PAGES AS YOU DO OF THE FRONT PAGE. Edit well, write good headlines, use pictures and graphics creatively.

46. AVOID JUMPING STORIES FROM THE FRONT PAGE. Running lots and lots of stories on the front and jumping them inside may be result in an exciting page, but it will play havoc with the inside pages. (The same is true for section fronts.) Editing stories tightly is always a better option.

47. USE SKYBOXES TO ATTRACT READERS to interesting stories inside the newspaper.

48. DON'T USE SKYBOXES if you habitually bill stories that aren't worth reading.

49. USE STRONG SIGNALS ON SECTION FRONTS. If a section contains other types of stories than those indicated by the title on the front page, bill them strongly and clearly so the reader knows they are there.

A newspaper shouldn't be like a maze.

50. USE COLUMNS OF BRIEFS AS AN IMPORTANT PAGE ELEMENT. Short stories demand less of readers than long ones and entice them into to the rest of the page.

51. CHECK PRODUCTION WORK. Make sure it is neat and tidy.

Photography

- 52. ENCOURAGE PHOTOGRAPHERS TO LOOK FOR OFFBEAT, OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY SHOTS.** When you get them, use them well, and give the photographer credit.
- 53. AVOID STATIC, POSED SHOTS ON THE FRONT PAGE.** Don't use them on the front page just because they're in color. Demand an outstanding front page picture every day. And ensure that it isn't one everybody saw 10 times on TV last night. Avoid static, posed shots. Always.
- 54. CROP PICTURES CAREFULLY FOR DRAMA AND EXCITEMENT.** Don't leave a space on the layout and then mutilate the picture to fit the hole. For maximum impact, edit the picture first, then build the page around it.
- 55. EDIT PHOTOGRAPHS DYNAMICALLY.** Some pictures demand to be treated in unconventional ways. A deep two column will create a surprise element. But don't do it every day, otherwise it won't be a surprise!
- 56. DON'T USE A BAD PICTURE BECAUSE YOU ARE AFRAID OF OFFENDING THE PHOTOGRAPHER OR THE SUBJECT.** If it's not worth using, scrap it. But let the photographer know why.
- 57. CAPTIONS ARE USUALLY READ BEFORE STORIES, SO MAKE SURE THEY ARE COMPLETE.** Get all the names. And spell them correctly.
- 58. CAPTIONS FOR STAND-ALONE PICTURES SHOULD TELL THE WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHERE AND WHEN — AND HOW — OF THE STORY.** Don't omit necessary information. If you don't have it, get it.
- 59. DON'T OVERSTATE THE OBVIOUS.** Give fresh information that aids understanding or adds information.
- 60. LEGS OF CAPTIONS SET IN MULTI-COLUMNS FOR WIDE PICTURES SHOULD LINE UP.** It may take longer to write the extra information to make the lines square up, but it is worth the effort.
- 61. HUMOROUS CAPTIONS** should be just that: humorous.
- 62. DON'T PUT WORDS INTO PEOPLE'S MOUTHS OR WORSE — ANIMALS' MOUTHS.** Avoid the phrase "seems to be saying (thinking) . . ."
- 63. COUNT FACES.** Check the photo to make sure everyone's there who is named in the caption.



Typography

- 64. USE TYPEFACES THAT ARE RIGHT FOR YOUR NEWSPAPER.** If you like the type used by another newspaper, print samples on your own press before using it in your newspaper. Type that prints beautifully on one press may look dreadful on another.
- 65. MAKE SURE THE BODY TYPE IS THE OPTIMUM SIZE FOR YOUR NEWSPAPER.** Larger typefaces are popular these days, but be aware of the fact that 10 point in one font can be bigger than 12 point in another. Print samples and check reader reaction before making a commitment.
- 66. GET THE LEADING RIGHT.** Too much space between lines of text will make your stories run longer than necessary, and the pages will look gray. Too little interline spacing will make the type dark and hard to read.

67. SOME TYPEFACES ARE TOO WIDE FOR TEXT SETTING IN LARGER SIZES. This can be improved by reducing the set width and/or adjusting the tracking. Once again, test before you commit.

68. USE A HEADLINE FACE WITH CHARACTER. There are so many typefaces on the market that it seems pointless to stick with Helvetica.

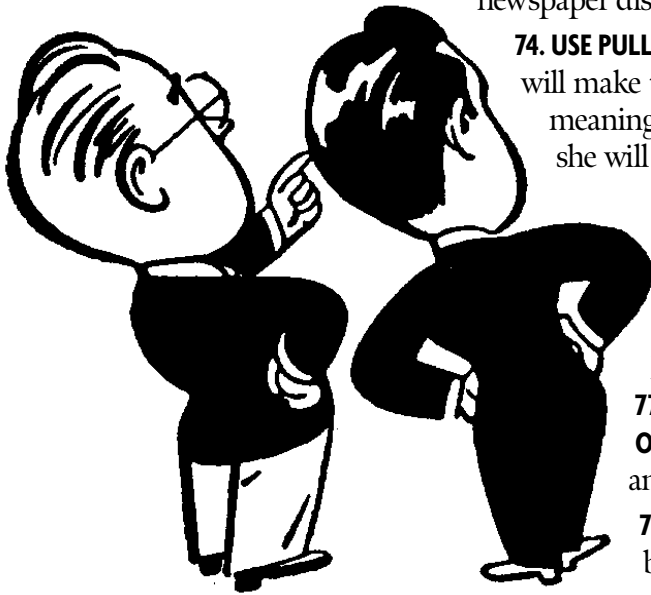
69. THE BEST HEADLINE FACES ARE SLIGHTLY CONDENSED to give headline writers a better character count.

70. HEADLINE WRITERS should be encouraged to leave space at the end of each line to introduce white space to the page.

71. GIVE HEADLINES ENOUGH SPACE TO TELL THE STORY. Four lines of 60 point across two columns is not too much space for a front page lead if it allows the editor write a head every reader will notice.

72. VARY THE SIZE OF HEADLINES on the page from very big to very small.

73. FIND A CONTRASTING TYPE STYLE that you can use to draw readers' attention to different types of stories, such as news features, backgrounders or humor. But be selective and consistent; don't let your newspaper display a mishmash of conflicting typestyles.



74. USE PULL-QUOTES WISELY. Repeat interesting information that will make the reader want to read the story. If the pullquote is meaningless, the reader won't know what is going on. He or she will probably think you're crazy.

75. IF THERE IS NO INTERESTING QUOTE IN THE STORY, paraphrase an important detail in the pullquote space.

76. IF YOU CAN'T FIND A QUOTE or detail worth pulling out, the story is probably not worth running.

77. DON'T INSERT PULLQUOTES JUST TO FILL IN SPACE LEFT ON THE LAYOUT. That's lazy. Re-edit the page and add another story.

78. DON'T DISTORT OR EMBELLISH TYPE so that it becomes unreadable.

79. DON'T USE SPINDLY SERIF TYPE IN CHARTS AND GRAPHICS, especially if they've got color over them. Use a sans serif face such as Helvetica or Franklin Gothic.

Graphics

80. USE GRAPHICS WISELY. If you can do them well, use them. If they look like the work of a five-year-old, don't.

81. DON'T USE A GRAPHIC THAT FILLS 20 INCHES OF SPACE IF THE DETAIL CAN BE TOLD AND UNDERSTOOD IN AN INCH OF TYPE. Use them to explain complicated detail that would otherwise be hard to understand.

82. DON'T DO GREAT GRAPHICS AND THEN MAKE THEM IMPOSSIBLE TO READ by drenching them in gaudy, unreadable colors.

83. DON'T USE COLOR IN GRAPHICS IF YOU HAVE REGISTRATION PROBLEMS ON YOUR PRESS. The best graphic in the world is useless if no one can read it.

84. ILLUSTRATIONS ADD IMPACT TO FEATURE FRONTS, especially when the story describes abstract detail that is hard to show photographically. But make sure the illustrations are professional. Poor drawings make the page — and the newspaper — look amateurish.

Redesign

- 85. DON'T REDESIGN WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE CONTENT.** Readers will forget design changes much quicker than content adjustment.
- 86. EXAMINE EVERY ELEMENT OF THE NEWSPAPER,** including advertising and flow of content, before making changes to the format.
- 87. INVOLVE EVERYONE IN THE REDESIGN PROCESS,** but limit the decision-making committee to no more than three people. And make sure that one person — the publisher — makes the final decisions.
- 88. DO READER RESEARCH,** even if it is only a perfunctory disaster check. Readers will often spot simple things that you have overlooked.
- 89. BE CRITICAL OF EVERY PROTOTYPE.** You can assume that it looks good, or you wouldn't have printed it, would you? Criticism will make it better, praise won't.
- 90. USE REAL STORIES IN THE PROTOTYPE** so you get a good idea of how long articles will be when the paper is relaunched. Dummy type is fine for the first draft, but copies used for reader research should contain real material.
- 91. TELL READERS WHY AND HOW YOU ARE REVISING THE LOOK OF YOUR NEWSPAPER** before the changeover. Attract new readers by advertising in other media.
- 92. DON'T RELAUNCH TOO QUICKLY** or if you're not ready. Your readers won't appreciate it if a second redesign is needed three months later.

Other stuff

- 93. DISPLAY EACH DAY'S FRONT PAGE IN THE NEWSROOM** under a sign saying, "Would I buy this?" Ask yourself that question 99 times a day.
- 94. MAKE SURE YOUR PRESS IS PRINTING AS WELL AS POSSIBLE.** There is no excuse for poor color reproduction in newspapers except for a few that are printed on old letterpress machines (and if those newspapers can't print color properly, they shouldn't try).
- 95. READ YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER DAILY.** If you think it's boring, you're right.
- 96. HOLD A WEEKLY POST MORTEM.** Include staff from other departments. Include readers. Listen to their opinions. They're the ones who buy the product.
- 97. LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NEWSPAPER.** It's a living thing. Change is natural. Don't be afraid to experiment. But don't make the same mistake twice.
- 98. BE EXCITED.** Enjoy your work. Bored journalists produce boring stories. Bored editors produce boring newspapers. Bored readers stop buying them.
- 99. HAVE FUN.** It's infectious. It will show on your pages.

