

CHAPTER 12

THE BODY OF THE NEWS STORY

REVERT to the previous chapter and reread the notes about the girl and the boy who won the state club health contest. We have already seen how the lead for this story might be written. Now comes the question, how does the reporter handle the body of his story?

It must be understood from the beginning that there are no fast rules for the organization of the body of a news story and that the skillful and original writer will always find new ways to make his story effective, adapting his plan to the particular occasion and purpose.

However, there are several rather distinct types of arrangement for news stories. Three of them apply especially to the straight news story; two others fit certain other purposes.

The three straight news story arrangements include the *inverted pyramid* arrangement, *chronological* arrangement, and the *suspended interest* arrangement.

A fourth arrangement is a well-defined type used only in technical and research journals. It has been recognized as a definite form for many years.

A fifth type has been developed through the years for presenting routine news in a convenient way.

The latter two types will be considered in separate chapters.

The inverted pyramid arrangement: Just as most stories dealing with "straight" news employ a summary lead, so the bodies of such stories are usually built in the form of an inverted pyramid. That is, the more important news material is placed early in the story and less important material later, the whole story following a line of decreasing interest.

This arrangement is distinctively a journalistic form. It has no parallel in any other kind of writing. It does have its parallel, however, in the verbal narrative of the news monger, who, as we have seen, instinctively follows this plan because it is the natural

method for conveying news information in the way best to satisfy the curiosity of the hearer. It has from the newspaper point of view two advantages, one of them implied in what has just been said:

1. It makes it possible for the reader to get the most out of a story in a minimum of time. He glances at the lead. That gives him the feature of the story and a brief but complete summary. Then, if he reads on, and if the story is arranged in the form of an inverted pyramid, he is able to get the most important details—in the order of their importance—without having to read through the entire story. It not only saves his time, but it also answers his craving to get the news *at once*; it is part of the effort that pervades the newspaper to give the reader the information he wants *as soon as possible*.

2. It facilitates the making of the paper. A reporter writes a story or a story comes in over the wire. It goes to the copy desk to be edited. Suppose the story as turned in is 500 words long. Suppose the copy editor thinks the story is only worth a quarter of a column instead of half a column. It has to be cut. If the story is written in the inverted form, with the more important news elements arranged in the order of their importance, it is a comparatively simple matter to cut the story from 500 words to 250. If, on the other hand, it were written in fictional form, the article would probably have to be entirely rewritten in order to compress it to half its original length.

Again, suppose that the story in its original form, 500 words long, has got by the copy desk, has been sent to the composing room and has been put into type. When it comes time to make up the paper a rush of late news has made it necessary to compress some of the less important earlier stories. In the light of this development our 500-word story must be cut to 250 words. If it is written in the inverted pyramid form, it will probably be possible to effect this cut by lopping off a few of the paragraphs at the end of the story. They are the less essential parts and can be sacrificed without doing vital injury to the article. If the story were not so arranged, it would have to be rewritten and then reset, a process which would take valuable time and would often be impossible of accomplishment in the rush of newspaper making.

Again, perhaps our story in its original form has been run in one edition of the paper. But for a subsequent edition, the story being of less value because it is getting old, it is desirable to cut it down. This can be easily done, as in the case cited above, if the story is written in the inverted pyramid form.

Still another reason for this writing method is that many news stories will also be put on press association wires. A story may be worth a column in New York City, half a column in Chicago, a fourth of a column in Denver and only a "stick"—about an inch or two—in Seattle. Also, the larger city dailies will use a long story, medium-sized cities will want less, while the small dailies can use only a brief story. One writing of the story in pyramidal form in the first place will produce a story that can be edited readily for these various papers without any further rewriting.

For these reasons most straight news stories are so arranged. The writer scans his material and outlines his story. He may make an outline on paper, and this is a good plan especially for the novice, or he may lay the story out in his head. He picks his lead material and then weighs the news value of the other details of his material. He proceeds to write the story, putting those details which have the greatest weight as news early in the article and those with less weight later. Reporters will differ as to just which details are worth the most, but they will all follow the same general scheme for any particular story.

Here is the way a Des Moines newspaper handled the material presented in the preceding chapter about the boy and girl state 4-H club health champions:

IOWA'S HEALTHIEST BOY AND GIRL

Alberta Hoppe, 15-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Hoppe, living near Cedar Rapids, is Iowa's healthiest girl, and Van Kinney, 17 years old, a junior at Bloomfield High School, is the healthiest boy.

The judges announced their decision at the state fair late Thursday after examining 70 Iowa 4-H club girls from as many counties of the state, and 20 boys from all over Iowa.

Alberta scored 98.92 per cent. The judges found little wrong with her physical makeup. She is 5 feet 5½ inches

tall, weighs 125 pounds, and has light brown bobbed hair. She declared she uses no powder or paint and cares little for the young men.

Kinney, who is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Kinney of Davis County, scored 97.2 per cent. He is 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighs 141.5 pounds. He performs work usual upon the farm. He admitted that he smokes an occasional cigaret.

Both winners will receive a free trip to the 4-H club congress at the International Livestock Exposition in Chicago, where they will compete with boy and girl winners from the other states in the union.

The story consists of five paragraphs. Why are they arranged in this order?

The second paragraph completes the summary and gives the number of boys and girls in the contest, a fact that is essential to any estimate on the part of the reader of the importance of Alberta's and Van's victory.

The third paragraph gives Alberta's score and details about physical makeup. This material is given before similar material about the boy because she made a higher score than he did—and then, she's a girl.

The next paragraph takes up parallel material about the other winner, Van Kinney.

The last paragraph is older material, no doubt published previously in advance stories about the state contest.

Now suppose that for one reason or another it were necessary to cut this story. The last paragraph could be dispensed with without doing any serious injury to the completeness of the account.

It would even be possible to cut off the fourth and third paragraphs and leave the first two alone. While we should miss in this way some interesting details, we should get from the first two paragraphs the essential news facts of the story. And both these cuts could be made without changing a word or setting a single slug of type.

Chronological arrangement: Occasionally a story can best be told by arranging the material in the order of the occurrence of the events—a chronological order.

An entire story, however, is seldom cast in this form. More usually a combination of the inverted pyramid arrangement and the chronological is used. A strictly chronological arrangement would start with the first event of the series to be described and follow through a time sequence until the story was completed. This is not often advisable in a news story because, as we have seen, the lead, at least, will want to deal with the *results* of the series of events rather than the initial details, which are usually of less importance.

The chronological arrangement does have these advantages: It permits a natural following of the events as they occurred and so

avoids the confusion entailed in jumping about among the facts; and it permits the writer to work up to a dramatic or logical climax.

Very often speech reports and interviews, when they are of some length, are handled with a combination of the inverted pyramid and chronological forms. The lead and a few following paragraphs deal with the outstanding statements of the speaker or the person interviewed, and then the writer goes back and picks up a chronological account of what was said.

Another type of story which makes use of chronological form, following a summary news lead, is one that newspaper men often call a "running" story. This is one that is written as the story progresses. The story may have to go to press before the event is finished or else immediately afterward.

A story of a football game is a familiar example of this. The reporter, sitting in the press box, writes a play-by-play story as it happens. As each paragraph is written, it is wired or phoned to the newspaper office. As it comes in there, it is set up in type, dumped into a galley, proofed, and put on the makeup table. Meanwhile a headline is set up—or often two headlines—one for a win, one for a loss. As the game ends, the reporter writes the lead for the story. In the office this is put into type last, stuck into the form at the top of the story. In a few minutes it is on the presses. Often by the time the spectators at the game have left the stadium and are off the campus, the newsboys meet them with an extra containing this running story of the game. Afterward, the reporter writes another story of the game in pyramid style, which is used in later editions.

This same type of story is sometimes used for baseball games, with an inning-by-inning account. It may be used for fire stories and sensational trials which are still happening as the story is written. Sometimes, too, this method is used for trials and crime stories just to make them more dramatic, as for instance when testimony of witnesses is reported verbatim.

Suspended interest arrangement: What was said in the previous chapter about the suspended interest lead applies also to the suspended interest arrangement of the body of the story. Stories

so organized—in a way to lead up to a climax and the divulging of the chief news facts at the end of the story—are usually short and of a feature story nature rather than straight news. For example:

POP! \$5 IN CORN WINS FORTUNE

Cleveland, Ohio—This story originates in Wakeman, a little town of 500 population, that appears only as a small dot on the larger maps of Ohio.

It's a story of a \$5 investment in seed corn that developed into a \$100,000 a year business.

A humble farm woman invested the \$5 from her butter and egg money.

Her son, Charles S. Clark, Sr., now 77, took the money and developed a business which earned him the title of "seed corn king of the world."

To understand what this means, it may be well to cite a few figures from the 1936 record of Clark's firm which promises to be equalled or surpassed this year.

In 1936 the firm shipped to all parts of the United States, Canada and Europe, 3,500,000 pounds of seed corn. Of this gigantic total, 2,174,000 pounds were sweet corn—intended for the "corn-on-the-cob" trade. The remainder was divided into 176 varieties of field corn and popcorn.

In the warehouse of the company 111 varieties of sweet corn are stored. During the shipping season as many as 17 carloads of sweet corn are sent at one time to seed firms in all parts of the country. An airplane is used to deliver seeds or to check on the requirements of a customer at some distant point.

Quite a business, isn't it?

But the real story lies in Clark himself.

Back in 1876—59 years ago—Clark felt the urge to make money. Though only a boy of 18, he was anxious to see the \$1,700 mortgage on the Clark homestead wiped off.

So he decided to come to Cleveland and look over the possibilities of work in a large city. But his mother, a most wise and patient woman, had other ideas. Would it not be better, she reasoned, for her son to take the \$5 she had saved from butter and eggs and start a seed business of his own?

Charles was somewhat dubious but he decided to give the idea a trial. Taking the \$5, he went to Cleveland and spent all but 15 cents of the money in purchasing two different kinds of seed corn. The 15 cents was used for postage stamps to solicit orders from seed firms.

By return mail, young Charles received orders for seed corn from firms in Iowa and Pennsylvania and cleared a profit of \$8. He shelled the corn by hand and dried the seeds in an old hog house. His first product resulted in repeat orders from 21 concerns, his original customers, and many are still buyers from the Clark company. Today it pays out thousands of dollars to farmers throughout Northern Ohio who are growers for the Clark company.

As the corn story illustrates, the suspended interest method of telling news is one that can often be used for news of the type that is carried on farm pages of a newspaper or in farm magazines, household magazines, or in any trade or engineering paper. However, it is also used frequently in daily newspapers for what is commonly known as the human interest story. Such news is generally intended for entertainment and not often for conveying news of a happening. Often items of no great consequence, and yet with unique features, can be made into good stories if written

in this way. The suspended interest form is seldom used for a story in which the news is of prime importance.

The following story will illustrate the type:

NOBODY KNEW

Eugene, Ore., Nov. 11 (INS)—“Those of you who know what the national debt is, please raise your hands.”

The speaker was Dr. Robert Leeper, professor in psychology at the University of Oregon, addressing members of his class.

Not a single hand was raised.

“Those of you who know what the

national income is, please raise your hands.”

Still no hands.

“Is it possible that out of this class of university students, the cream of the crop and future leaders of the country, not one knows the answers to these simple questions?” he growled.

Silence reigned complete in the classroom.

“Well,” he said, “neither do I.”

Other types of story arrangement: Now and then a story, usually of the human interest sort, is written in a form so unconventional that it cannot be classified under any one of the heads that have been discussed. Sometimes the story is handled in the form of a scenario or as a one-act play. Again, it may be told in verse. Sometimes it takes the form of a letter to the city editor from the reporter sent out to cover the story.

Special kinds of routine news are handled in set forms. So important are these from the standpoint of technical journalism that they are discussed at length in a later chapter.

Further Examples: Some other examples of this type of building a news story in the inverted pyramid type of structure will show how this type adapts itself to stories from the fields of agriculture, home economics, and engineering, as they have appeared in newspapers.

GAIN SOUGHT IN BEET CROP

Waverly, Iowa.—Farmers of Bremer and eastern Butler county are invited to attend a “Sugar Beet” meeting in the Waverly community building Friday evening, Nov. 21.

Farmers from north central Iowa who have grown beets will be on hand to talk and to answer questions, and complete information will be given on plans for reopening the Waverly Sugar Co. plant in 1942. Work on repairs, estimated to cost \$75,000, will be started soon.

Two fieldmen who will solicit farmers

to sign contracts are to arrive this week. Eight thousand acres are sought. (*Waterloo, Iowa, Courier*)

SHOVEL LIFTS 40 TONS

Macon, Mo., (UP)—A power shovel so huge that it can pick up forty tons of earth and rock in one scoop is being used at the Bee-Veer strip mine near here. The shovel weighs 1,500 tons, towers as high as a fourteen-story building and is rated as one of the largest in the world.

Yet for all its size, the machine works with ease, swinging its forty-ton load a

distance of 300 feet, releasing it and then returning to its normal position in forty-five seconds.

The shovel is electrically operated and is used to strip the earth from shallow deposits of coal. After the large shovel has uncovered the coal vein, smaller shovels move in and load the coal into trucks.

Three men are needed to operate the shovel. One works in the control room, another works underneath the shovel and a third is kept busy oiling the complicated machinery. (*New York Times*)

FARM AWARD WON

BY YOUNG ATHLETE

East Lansing, Mich., May 1.—(AP)—Dorwin Williams, 17 years old, a sturdy Dansville High School boy equally adept on the farm, in the class room and on the athletic field, today held the "Star Farmer" degree, highest award of the Future Farmers of America.

Williams, who graduates next month after earning \$443 from dairy, bean and sheep projects while attending school, was honored before 2,500 rural youth assembled for the Future Farmers' annual meeting.

The new boy champion farmer owns three dairy cattle, 20 registered sheep and is producing seven acres of wheat. Ranking tenth scholastically in a class of 35, Williams played football, base ball and basket ball in high school. He is president of his Sunday school class.

George Fogle, of Okemos, was elected president of the Future Farmers. (*Detroit News*)

PLANT PESTS PERIL VALLEY

San Jose, July 3.—Discovery of a pest which is a potential menace of Santa Clara Valley orchards was revealed today by L. R. Cody, county agricultural commissioner.

The pest, known as the European earwig, destructive to orchard and plant life, was discovered on the old circus grounds on South First Street.

Steps to prevent spread of the infestation have been taken. Dry grass has been burned off the field, which has been baited and dusted with poison.

First appearing at Sunnyvale three years ago, the pest has been found in

Mountain View, Sunnyvale and San Martin, but was not reported in San Jose until this week.

Of reddish brown color, an inch long, the earwig roams at night, living on plant shoots and leaves. In orchards it attacks both leaves and fruit. (*San Francisco Examiner*)

COUNTY TO FIGHT WEEDS

Perkins county will soon be the second in the state to have a county wide weed control district. Following a recent hearing there in which farmers and land owners were given opportunity to express their views, the board of commissioners approved organization on a county wide basis to fight bindweed and other noxious weeds. An estimated 450,000 acres of farm land will be affected. Cuming county organized the first county district in Nebraska this spring.

W. L. Klatt, state weed supervisor, also reports receipt of petitions calling for the organization of districts including four townships in Box Butte county, and about two and a half townships in Jefferson county. Plymouth, Gibson and part of Cub Creek precincts are in the Jefferson county area. (*Lincoln, Neb., Journal*)

GLAZED CHINTZ IS POPULAR

Stillwater, Okla. — (Special) — Next time you go near a tennis court or the junior-senior prom and see what looks like Mrs. Jones' best chintz draperies adorning some sweet young thing, don't stare.

She's not a fugitive from a sun-parlor. It's merely that glazed chintz is No. 1 tune on the Cotton Fashion Hit Parade this spring.

All cottons are in high favor right now because of shortages of other materials, but chintz is topping them all for styles ranging from playsuits to dance frocks, according to Miss Blanche Cade, of the household arts staff at Oklahoma A. and M. college.

Bold patterns in gay, morale-building colors are one of the main features of this chintz. Another reason why it is being gobbled off dry-goods counters is its washability. Most designs come out of the wash-tub as shiny and sparkling as ever.

Also ranking high in favor with Dame Fashion's devotees are ginghams, seersuckers, prints, and various novelty

weaves made of cotton. Plaids and bright colors are biggest news for all of these. They are being used for sun-up to sun-down and after costumes for all ages.

Reason for cotton proving so very popular this spring, besides material shortages in other fibers, is its ease of care, believes Miss Cade. (*Agricultural News Service, Oklahoma A. & M. College*)

TO PROTECT TRACKS FROM OCEAN

In a never-ending fight to protect its trackage and rights-of-way from the elements, the Southern Pacific company is spending \$60,000 on a project underway at the ocean-side foot of Ortega hill, just north of Summerland.

The project is giving employment to 35 men who are working in two shifts. Southern Pacific engineers hope the project will be completed in four months.

A wall of rip-rap, nearly a half-mile long is being constructed to keep the heavy seas from pounding the roadbed. The tides and the heavy swells have eaten into its foundations until a wall is necessary to save the road.

The first section of the wall, 1,000 feet long, was completed sometime ago but, under pounding of heavy seas and shifting

sands, this wall was damaged to such an extent that repairs had to be made at once, according to company engineers. In addition to repairing the first section, the crews have started work on the second and final section of the 1,000 feet.

Engineers, however, are not satisfied that the 2,000-foot wall will finish the project. They explain that there is evidence the wall may have to be extended to almost a mile in length before the track protection there is solved. This would run the cost to several hundred thousand dollars.

The project near Summerland is similar to one on the Southern Pacific's right-of-way five miles south of Surf along the Honda section of the coast. Here the company is spending \$44,000 in its efforts to protect its roadbed from the sea.

And the project near Surf, according to engineers, may be only a start. It has been estimated that if all of the roadbed threatened by the ocean tides and storms is protected, the project will cost \$600,000.

Shifting sands along the Honda coast also are giving the crews trouble. Large boulders which were dumped into the sea there have been swallowed up. In 1906 a seawall was constructed along the Honda coast, but little of it remains today. (*Santa Barbara News-Press*)

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Find stories in daily newspapers illustrative of the different kinds of body arrangement discussed as applying to newspapers. Analyze the material in each story and see whether or not you would advocate any rearrangement.
2. Find stories in class, trade, or technical magazines which illustrate the different types of body arrangement. Write a brief comment on these with regard to whether they are as well written or not, as compared to daily newspaper stories.
3. Find a news story that is poorly written. Clip it and turn it in, along with the story rewritten to make it more effective.
4. Write a series of stories employing different kinds of body arrangement. Students who have already been assigned to beats should make use of these different forms in handling the news they gather and write.
5. Find and read a recent technical paper or report, preferably in your major field. Rewrite it in good pyramid form news style, putting the big news into a summary lead.