

# How Tos

## How to conduct better interviews

- Read all you can about your subject and know as much background as possible before setting up an interview
- Set up an interview or have a weekly time spot to visit a beat person
- Prepare all questions in advance
- Ask open ended questions – not questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no
- Ask questions in a chronological order
- If you are unsure of exact dates – always ask
- Write down (in short hand) everything that is said while maintaining eye contact and “yes” “really” “oh”
- Number your pages for less confusion
- Make your interviewee feel comfortable and confident in your ability as a reporter
- Don't hesitate to ask them to repeat something because you “want to get this down correctly”
- Ask the interviewee if there is anyone else who might know something on this subject and how to contact him/her
- Don't rely too much on a tape recorder, but don't be afraid of one either
- Avoid “off the record” statements
- Be prepared to skip your own line of questions to follow the path of the interview
- Let your subject tell his/her own story – don't have programmed questions to get the response you want
- Get your subject away from a place that might be distracting
- Ask for any photos they might have that you can publish
- Ask “tough” questions last and tastefully
- Take along ample supplies – pen, notebook, recorder, question
- Do not offer for the subject to read your final copy of the story, but honor his/her wishes if they request
- Don't be awed by your subject because of his/her social status (school board members, administrators, mayor). Prove to them your sense of professionalism and your time is valuable as is theirs.
  - (Thomas Charles Fensch, Professor of Journalism, UT)

## How to cover a beat

- Find out the names, titles, positions, importance, history, schedules and patterns of everyone involved in the area you are covering.
- Find out who is important in making decisions in this group
- Obtain a calendar of events
- Observe the group in action – get photographs
- Talk to various members of the group
- If a teacher is in charge of the group, set up a regular appointment to check whether something new is going on in the group. If the teacher tells you something, write it down. Go back again and again for information, do not be passive.
- Always be professional
- Do not accept “no, nothing's happening” as an answer. Find out for yourself. Make sure you have observed and talked to numerous members of the group. Find out why there is nothing going on.
- After finding out some information, immediately write it on an info sheet for the club file. Write down Club File, and then the following: Your name, your beat, date submitted, contact for more information (providing address or telephone number if necessary), a brief description of the event, person or news to be covered, and any relevant information about the date, time, place, etc.
- If someone seems to be a good source for a particular type of information, jot down their name, address and phone number and put them into the club file.
- Sports beat – get up dates scores and interviews.
- Follow the tip through the system. Did we write about it? Why or why not? If it is important, put it in again. Make sure you find out whether it has been covered.
- Take the story to a personal level. Interview one member of the club/organization/team and find a different angle. Because of the time element of our publication, our readers would be more interested in a “human interest” story than past stats and future events.
- Write a brief for the newspaper and web.

## How to write a story for The Rider

- Generate an idea. Brainstorming sessions will take place before each issue. Your goal as a reporter is to find a story that is interesting and informative to the student body.
- Interview! Acquire at least two sources for information on your story. Be sure to set up an appointment and go to the interview prepared.
- Immediately after the interview, jot down a generic outline or rough draft of the story. The information is fresh on your mind and you might need to ask further questions once you begin writing. (Use notebook paper or the computer for this process.)

- Type your notes, outline, quotes and other materials.
- Save your work on your designated computer with the file name
- "yourlastname\_titleofstory\_Issue#" (mallett\_newdresscode\_3)
- Always type the date at the top of your story each time you correct it or work on it. This will allow you to know the correct file. For example: (notice - do not erase the date before.)
  - 8-21-10
  - 8-26-10
- Place the end sign (###) where you want the official copy to end.
- Once you have properly saved your story, you may print it out and have an editor \proof read it or save it to the server under the file "Stories."
- The editor will then make corrections and hand back your hard copy or leave notes on your document.
- Make any corrections needed. Send back to the editor. (Be sure you are adding the date to the top of the story.)
- Create a Headline at the top of the story.
- Create Quickreads for the story. You'll need to interview and find a design for your quickread.
- The editor will then make any final corrections and move the file to the server folder
- Begin next story

### **How to prepare copy for all publications**

- Check to make sure the names of students and faculty are spelled correctly. Consult the directory of student and faculty names available in the "resource center" of the journalism room.
  - Verify facts with at least two sources
  - Omit wordiness, clichés, jargon
  - Write in third person- Avoid You, We, Us, I (Except in a special feature or in quotes.
  - Summary Leads are most often more effective for hard news, straight news, and sports. Novelty leads are most often used for features and editorials
  - Keep lead paragraphs short – 20-36 words
  - Keep other paragraphs short – one to three sentences (note- Quotes are in their own paragraph)
  - Begin hard news leads with the most important element (Who, What, Why) The When or Where is seldom the hard news of a lead.
  - Avoid leads beginning with articles (a, an, the)
  - Avoid past leads – always use the future or "result of" element in the lead
- Do not use opinions in news

### How to write captions and cutlines

- Check the spelling of all names
- Never use “pose for a picture,” “smile at the camera,” “is shown,” “pictured,” or “looked on” – Make your verbs explain what is actually happening in the photo
- Every picture must have a caption
- If captions are grouped, keep all captions in one paragraph
- Captions should be referenced in a logical order (left to right – top to bottom)
- Do not use all caps, exclamation points, clichés, slang (kool, thanx).
- Keep all captions professional
- Captions should be in complete sentences
- Proof read, have a friend proof read
- When listing names and titles, use a comma to separate name and title and a semicolon to separate name from name (example->)
  - *Julie Holgin, President; Mary Martin, Secretary; John Giles, Banquet coordinator; and Mr. Mallett, advisor*
- Use commas to show direction in the picture (example ->)
  - *John, top left, show us how to . . .*
- Check the facts to make sure you are accurate
- Always use present tense

### How to write better captions

- Avoid stating the obvious “John Giles Swings at the ball during a home game.”
- Always identify all the people in the photo – including the name of the opposing sports team and dates when possible
- Don’t let the caption or cutline repeat info in the headline
- Avoid judgmental statements “An unhappy student watches the game.”
- Tell what happened before and after the picture was taken
- Don’t assume. Ask questions in your effort to inform and be specific. You might have to contact the people in the picture
- Avoid being humorous or poking fun at people in the picture (avoid inside jokes)
- Descriptions could be helpful (example ->) “John, holding the French fry, started the food fight.”
- Quotes are always effective and interesting
- Remember what you write down goes in history!

### How to write more vivid

- Keep it active. It is more effective to write; "An auto crash killed two men" rather than the passive form "Two men were killed in an auto crash."
- Skip all jargon and clichés!
- Avoid non-specific words (many, a lot, some, few, several, etc.)
- Trim the sentences to make them easy to understand. Try speaking them aloud.
- Know your audience – Do not write over their head – or make them feel dumb. Use everyday language and vocabulary.
- Use direct quotes for color, pace, emphasis or explanation
- simple attributions for quotes – (he said, Mallett said)
- Be wary of too much punctuation. Keep it simple.
- Do not telegraph your humor. If it is funny or witty, the reader will understand it without your help (using parentheses, dashes, italic, bold)
- Remember the first five words are the most important. Make sure they are the most important and interesting.
- Avoid too many adjectives and adverbs. Don't lose your meaning in explanation.
- Use vivid verbs. Avoid 'to be' verbs at all cost. Boring verbs = bored reader
- Keep paragraphs short. One to three sentences are usually enough. Create a new paragraph whenever your topic changes or you use a quote.
- Make sure paragraphs flow from one to another:
- Repeat words from previous paragraph
- Find synonyms for words in previous paragraph
- Refer back to an idea from previous paragraphs
- Use traditional words to tie them together
- Know where to find the dictionary and thesaurus and use them often
- Avoid the use of the same word
- Always look for grammar problems. If you are unsure rewrite the sentence to make it correct.
- Never use a \$2 word when a nickel will do better.
- Be human. Relate your writing to people.
- Show your reader you enjoy writing and you are good at it.
- Never accept a first draft – or even a second. Always rewrite for improvements.
- Respect the reader. He/She is usually a smart person (or he/she wouldn't be reading your stuff anyway!)

### How to avoid bad writing (AVOID LIST)

- Place verbs before nouns (Make the sentence passive)
- Write out a number higher than 9
  - 0-9 always write the number >10 use the numeral
- Misspell separate or surprise
- Use it's when you mean its
  - It's = It is                      Its = Shows possession
- Use that as a personal pronoun
  - THAT = Things (the lawn, chair, house, )                      WHO = Person
- Use the school name
- "The band, squad, or team will have their practice"
  - A club is singular
- Use first or second person in a news story
- Misuse commas
- Remember in a list you don't need a comma before the and.
- Be abstract: Don't say "The principal enjoys music." Tell me she enjoys Beethoven or Rap.
- Use a lot or many or anything else vague
- Believe in Hooked on Phonics! Learn to spell or the way to the dictionary
- Don't use the same word over and over – also know where the thesaurus is located
- "When asked"
- Use big words only you and your English teacher know
- Do not be afraid to learn and be daring
- Use this style guide and staff manual

## AVOID "TO BE" VERBS

### The Black List

is  
are  
was  
were  
be  
being  
been  
am

### To be: or rid to be, that is the answer

Great writers avoid to be verbs. Get ready to learn how to improve your writing skills, and get the Tylenol 'cause it's not easy.

#1- Ask the question "What are they doing?"

Will this be better than before?  
How will this improve?

He will be hungry after lunch.  
He needs to eat after lunch.

#2- Bring in the *actor*.

There are few eligible to play.  
Few *players* earned eligibility.

There are not any good articles.  
*Writers* produce fewer good articles.

#3- Let an idea act.

The car is not running.  
The car died.

Mark can be a problem.  
Mark's actions showed his negativity.

#4- Plug in a Linking Verb.

Mallett was adamant in his lesson.  
Mallett remained adamant in his lesson.  
Forget what a linking verb is?

Appears, becomes, continues, sounds, feels,  
tastes, grows, proves, remains, seems, . . .

#5- Use intransitive verbs.

(Shows location or motion of a person or thing)

The team is divided by color.      The people are going home.  
The team splits by color.      The people leave for home.

Need more intransitive verbs?

stands, serves, moves, enters, leaves, remains, stays, lies,  
proceeds, trudges, walks, runs, near, far

#6- Fake it!

The event was before our deadline.  
The event preceded the deadline.

The judge is the smartest.  
The judge emerges the smartest.

### Word Bank to rid 'to be'

achieved	adopt	breaking	bring	bury	carry	deal
declare	destroy	drawn	edit	exclude	include	fake
fasten	focus	force	rid	getting	glaze	hang
inflict	kick	link	join	motivate	oppose	overuse
penned	plod	qualify	record	reread	squeeze	swat
try	view	win	wish	want	Appears	becomes
continues	sounds	feels	tastes	grows	proves	remains