

Journalism

Basics of newswriting

Communicating with an audience

Just the facts

- ❖ News stories must be objective, truthful and fair. (Can't pull material from memory, or quote your friends, or pronounce how things ought to be. Save that for the opinion page.)
- ❖ Articles must be factual and based on the best facts you can find.
- ❖ Maintain integrity of facts. (Don't use facts to fit an agenda. Arrange facts skillfully.)
- ❖ Remember, the facts tell the story, so stick with that and let readers draw their own conclusions.

*"The facts, Ma'am.
Just the facts."*



So where do opinions go?

- ❖ Opinions belong in two places in a newspaper or news site: Pages dedicated to opinion and analysis.
- ❖ That not the front page ... or the sports page.
- ❖ Opinions belong on an editorial or opinion page dedicated to commentary and analysis.
- ❖ Opinions can also land on entertainment pages (Movie, music, book reviews, etc.)

- ❖ Good journalism combines facts and color.
- ❖ What do I mean by color?
- ❖ Let's look:
- ❖ Fishing was prohibited at Craighead Forest Lake last week because a rare bacteria was found in the water.
- ❖ Craighead County health officials declared the lake off-limits because of the dangers posed by ingestion of the bacteria, which could cause serious illness or death to people and their pets.
- ❖ Restrictions include fishing, eating fish from the lake and coming into direct contact with the water. The lake will be closed to the public for at least two weeks.

WHO
WHAT
WHEN
WHERE
WHY

Are the 5 W's just about facts?

- ❖ Of course the 5 W's are what we aim to include in our news stories, but they can also affect how we write the story.
- ❖ News articles, by nature, take an angle on the 5 W's. (If you're writing a story about...)
- ❖ When would a story take a "When" angle? How about a "What" angle, or a "Where" angle?

The inverted pyramid

- ❖ The inverted pyramid format summarizes the most important facts at the very start of the story.

This is the lead; it summarizes the story's most important facts

This paragraph adds more details and important info

This paragraph adds even more details

This adds more details

Less important details

You get the point

- ❖ The inverted pyramid is the copy editor's favorite writing style. Why?
- ❖ It certainly has its advantages: It condenses information efficiently so readers can grasp facts quickly.
- ❖ It allows editors to trim stories from the bottom to fit in a designated space. Why do they trim from the bottom?
- ❖ While copy editor's love inverted pyramid, experienced reporters intentionally avoid it. Why?
- ❖ Writing coach Don Fry called it "the worst form ever invented by the human race for explaining anything in words."

Writing strong leads (or ledes)

- ❖ The lead (or lede) is the essence of journalism: It's telling an audience in once sentence (usually) what is going on.
- ❖ Strong ledes are typically one paragraph (one sentence), and they usually have fewer than 30 words. Short, concise and to the point.

- ❖ Ledes are short to benefit the reader. Typical newspaper readers are on an 8th grade reading level. (Remember, most of our grandparents didn't finish school because of war, work, etc.)
- ❖ Long, drawn-out sentences are confusing. If I finish a sentence and have to go back and read it again to figure out what I just read, then **THE SENTENCE IS TOO LONG!**
- ❖ But there's no such thing as a lede being too short:

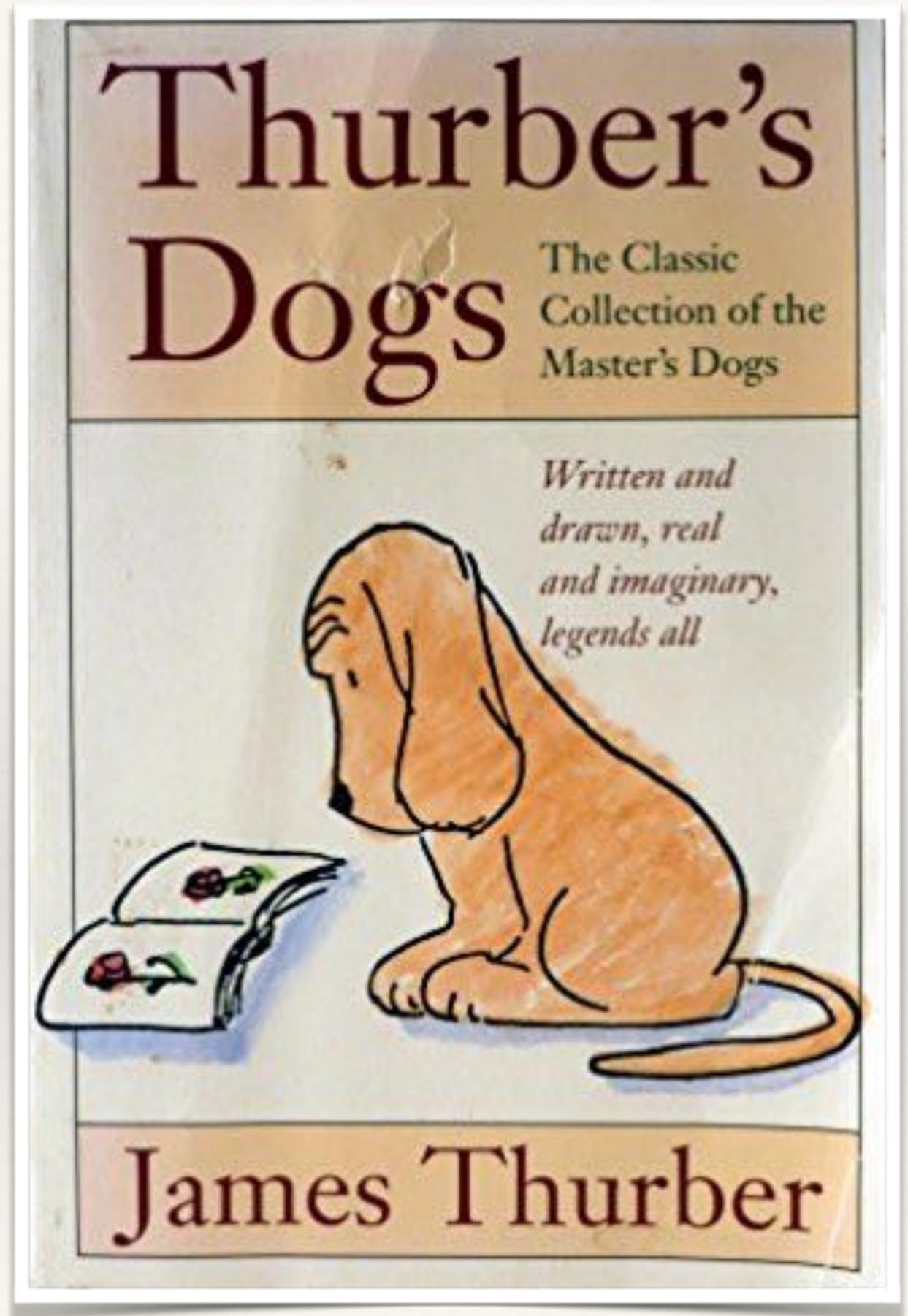
My favorite lede

James Thurber was a popular cartoonist and humor columnist in the mid-1900s, but he started out as a newspaper reporter.

He once took a lashing from an editor for writing long, drawn-out ledes that were boring. He then had to cover a murder, and here's how he wrote the story:

Dead.

That's what the man was when they found him with a knife in his back at 4 p.m. in front of Riley's saloon at the corner of 52nd and 12th streets.



The summary lede

- ❖ The staple, go-to, standard lede.
- ❖ The Pentagon ordered 1,500 additional troops to Iraq to provide security in advance of the upcoming election, military officials said Wednesday. —The Associated Press

The delayed identification lede

- ❖ Another standard, commonly used lede.
- ❖ A Jonesboro man escaped injury Saturday after falling off the bleachers at the Jonesboro High School football stadium.
- ❖ The next paragraph would provide other important information, mainly the person's name and the result of the fall.

The immediate identification lede

- ❖ Very popular, especially when writing about celebrities and politicians.
- ❖ President Donald Trump continued his criticism of NFL players Tuesday after dozens of athletes protested during the playing of the national anthem.

Narrative, anecdotal ledes

- ❖ These ledes are used for softer, feature articles that unfold slowly. These ledes are effective at drawing readers into a story. Typically, anecdotal ledes are a short story within the story and set the stage for a broader tale.
- ❖ About five years ago, architect Mark Seder was reading the morning paper and watching his son riding at a local skate park. As he kept looking up from the paper to his son, something dawned on him.

Scene-Setter ledes

- ❖ In 1941, Time magazine published a story on America's reaction to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
- ❖ It was a Sunday morning, clear and sunny. Many a citizen was idly listening to the radio when the flash came that the Japanese had attacked Hawaii.

Direct address ledes

- ❖ If you've ever...
- ❖ One way you can...
- ❖ Stop what you're doing and...
- ❖ If you can tell, these are my least favorite ledes. I think they're lazy and show a lack of creativity. We're telling stories, not selling rubber paint that fix a boat that's been sawed in two.

The startling statement lede

- ❖ It draws readers in by using a profound statement or statistic.
- ❖ More than half of marriages end in divorce.
- ❖ One in six Americans claim to have seen evidence of alien life.

Roundup ledes

- ❖ Instead of focusing on one thing, person or event, roundup ledes use lists to impress readers and pique their curiosity:
- ❖ Sherlock Holmes did it. So did Albert Einstein, Bing Crosby, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, President Gerald Ford and Popeye the Sailor. They all discovered the secret to looking smooth, suave and utterly sophisticated.

Let's try our luck at lede writing

- ❖ Write examples of summary, narrative and roundup ledes using the following information:
- ❖ Who: Former President Bill Clinton
- ❖ What: visited the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum
- ❖ When: Thursday
- ❖ Where: Little Rock
- ❖ Why: to sign copies of his new book.
- ❖ Additional info: Thousands waited in line for hours to get a chance to meet the native Arkansan. One fan, Jonesboro native Patty Theodoropolis, cried when she got to hug Clinton while her friend took a selfie. The fan's other idols are Tom Petty, Harper Lee and Jackie Robinson.

My quick ledes

- ❖ Summary lede — Arkansas native and Former President Bill Clinton visited the library and museum bearing his name Thursday to sign copies of his new book, “I can’t believe she lost.”
- ❖ Narrative lede — When Patty Theodoropolis awoke Thursday, she couldn’t have imagined she would be hugging a former president only a few hours later.
- ❖ Roundup lede — Jackie Robinson, Tom Petty, Harper Lee and former President Bill Clinton. They all have one thing in common: Jonesboro native Patty Theodoropolis idolizes them, and Thursday she checked one of those names off her list of people she wanted to meet.