

# Newswriting Style in Online Media

Digesting Crises in Europe (DICE):  
Deconstructing and Constructing Media Texts in Dialogue -  
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# Introduction

## **Newswriting is a challenging task:**

- ✓ To convey information, very often complex.
- ✓ To tell a story by providing facts in a clear and concise manner using simple language.
- ✓ To communicate effectively to a mass audience.
- ✓ To present factual information succinctly and in an impartial or objective manner.
- ✓ Newswriting often is constrained by the space and time available.
- ✓ To separate fact and opinion.

# PREWRITING

## - Identifying the Central Point

All the relevant info => To write a central point.  
A central point for a news story is a one- or two-sentence summary of what the story is about and why it is newsworthy.

## - Story Outlines

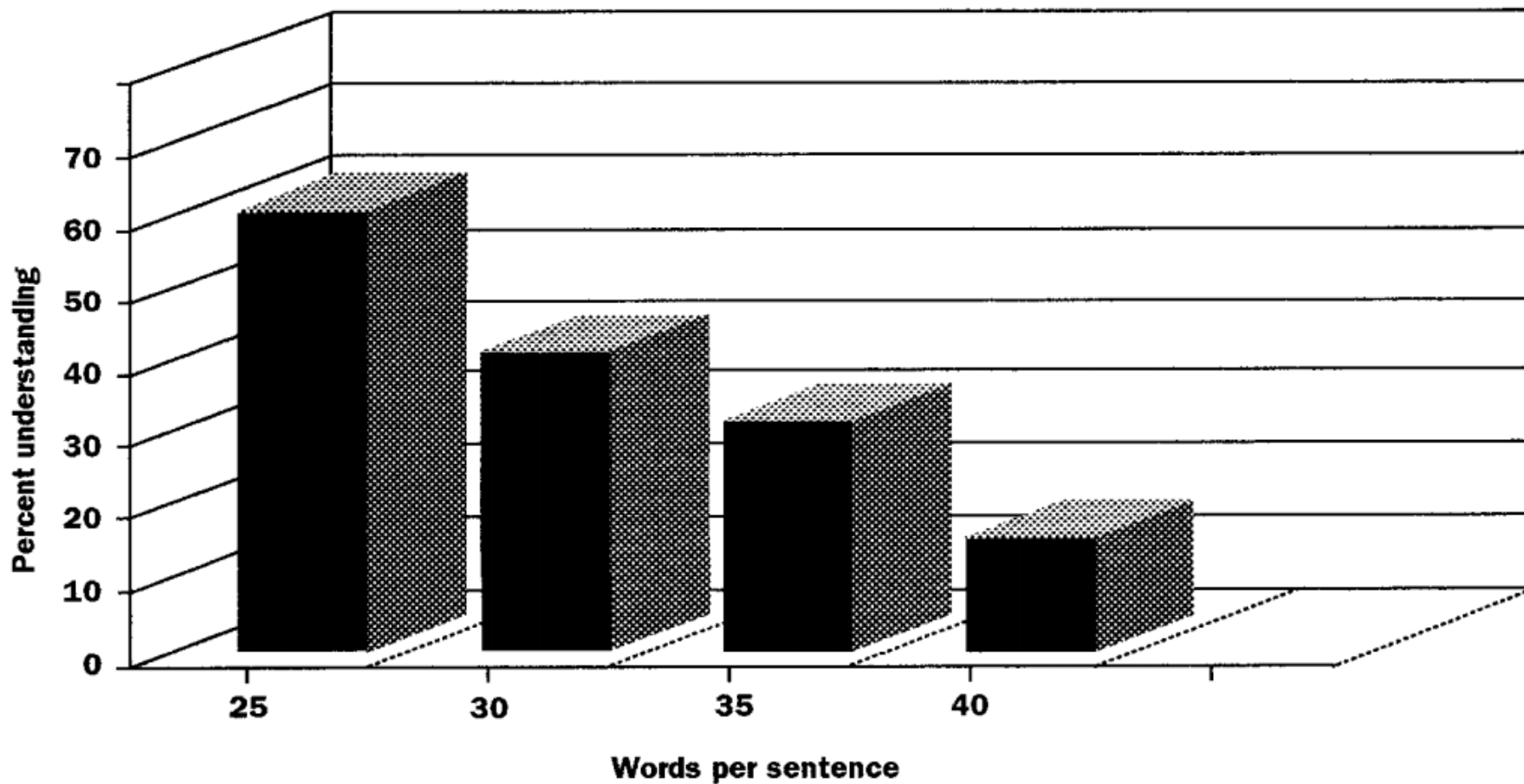
Unexpected information may emerge that forces them to rethink the central point of the story.  
Therefore, always review the notes and other materials that have been gathered.

# SIMPLIFY WORDS, SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

- George Orwell “Politics and the English Language” - complained that too often writers replace simple verbs and appropriate nouns with complicated phrases.
- To simplify stories, avoid long, unfamiliar words.
- Use “about” rather than “approximately,” “build” rather than “construct,” “call” rather than “summon” and “home” rather than “residence.”
- Also use short sentences and short paragraphs. Research has shown that 75% of readers were able to understand sentences containing an average of 20 words.

# READABILITY

## Understanding Stories



# Eliminate Unnecessary Words

- To eliminate unnecessary words yet retain enough detail to make stories informative.
- Some words are almost always unnecessary: “that,” “then,” “currently,” “now” and “presently,” for example. Because the verb tense and some nouns tell when an action occurred—in the past, present or future.
- At the present time he is planning to leave for New York at 3 p.m. in the afternoon next Thursday.  
REVISED: He plans to leave for New York at 3 p.m. next Thursday.

# Eliminate Unnecessary Words

Deaths are extremely rare, with only one fatality occurring in every 663,000 cases.

REVISED: One death occurs in every 663,000 cases.

**Are you ready for a quiz? Do not rewrite the following redundant sentences; simply cross out the unnecessary words.**

1. She was in a quick hurry and warned that, in the future, she will seek out textbooks that are sexist and demand that they be totally banned.
2. As it now stands, three separate members of the committee said they will try to prevent the city from closing down the park during the winter months.
3. His convertible was totally destroyed and, in order to obtain the money necessary to buy a new car, he now plans to ask a personal friend for a loan to help him along.

# REMAIN OBJECTIVE

Reporters are neutral observers, not advocates or participants.

One way to keep opinions out of stories is by avoiding loaded words, such as “demagogue,” “extremist,” “radical,” “racist,” “segregationist” and “zealot.”

Many times, these loaded words state the obvious: that an argument was “heated,” a rape “violent” or a death “unfortunate.”

Eliminate opinions in sentences simply by deleting a single adjective or adverb: “*alert* witness,” “*famous* author,” “*gala* reception,” “*thoughtful* reply.”



# Avoid Stereotypical “Isms” (racism, sexism, ageism)

- Stereotyping occurs when offensive, condescending or patronizing terms or phrases are used in describing other individuals, especially women, racial or religious minorities, the elderly or the disabled.
- Mention a person’s race, religion or ethnic background only when the fact is clearly relevant to a story.
- Avoid occupational terms that exclude women: “fireman,” “mailman,” “policeman” and “workman,” for example. Use substitutes “firefighter,” “mail carrier” or “postal worker,” “police officer” and “worker.” Similarly, use the words “reporter” and “journalist” instead of “newsman.”
- Also avoid using the words “female” and “woman” in places where you would not use the words “male” or “man” (for example: “woman doctor” or “female general”).

- Similarly, use unisex substitutes for words such as “authoress” (author), “actress” (actor), “aviatrix” (aviator) and “coed” (student).
- **SEXIST:** Mrs. Anthony Pedersen participated in the event.  
**REVISED:** Elizabeth Pedersen participated in the event.
- Avoid using the pronouns “he,” “his” and “him” while referring to an average person.
- A contractor must always consult his blueprints when building a house.  
**REVISED:** A contractor must always consult the blueprints when building a house.

- Stereotypes of the elderly suggest older people are all lonely, inactive, unproductive, poor, passive, weak and sick.
- Avoid using terms such as “geezer” or “old fogey” when describing the elderly.
- The terms “disabled” and “challenged” have replaced “handicapped.” More acceptable is “person with a disability,” “person who is blind” and so forth. Such phrasing emphasizes the individual before the condition.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine that your city's new mayor, elected today, had never met his father and did not even know his identity. He was raised by his mother, who never married. Would you report that fact while describing the new mayor? Why?
2. You are interviewing a source for a story, and the source uses an offensive stereotypical term about senior citizens. Would you print the word? Why?
3. Suppose a bank in your city today named a woman its president, and she was the first woman to head a bank in your city. Should your local daily publish a story about her promotion that emphasized she was the first woman to hold such a position? Why? Would you publish similar stories when the first women are named to head a local college, a local hospital and a local police department?
4. For one week, examine every story published on the front page of your local daily newspaper. Look for sentences or phrases that are not objective. Why is the sentence or phrase not objective? How would you rewrite it?
5. Think of your favorite television programs. How do the shows portray men? Women? Minorities? The elderly? Do the portrayals foster or break stereotypical images? Why?
6. For one week, examine every story published on the front page of your local daily newspaper. Circle words and phrases that you could replace with simpler ones. Do the simpler words and phrases change the meaning of the story? Why or why not?

# Additional reading

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