

J202

Culver

Tip Sheet: Broadcast Writing

Week 9

Elements of Effective Broadcast Writing

- simple words
- short sentences
- descriptive words
- active, strong verbs
- concise
- many sentences with 20 or fewer syllables
- one thought per sentence or at most, two
- subject-verb-object structure
- conversational tone
- rhythm and cadence
- short lead
- present-tense lead
- for some stories, a lead-in or cue-in that “warms up” the listener
- simplified names and titles
- soundbites instead of spoken quotations
- objective copy, subjective bites (relay factual information in what you write and emphasize emotion, interpretation and opinion in bites from sources)
- title before name
- title and name as attribution before quote, soundbite or paraphrase
- transition into soundbite that introduces bite’s main idea but doesn’t not repeat it
- pronouncers for difficult words or unknown names
- no passive voice
- no unfamiliar names or numbers in lead
- no words that are hard to pronounce or understand
- no unknown abbreviations
- no strained contractions

Print lead (New York Times):

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif., Oct. 26 — Firestorms roared through parched forests and scrubland across Southern California on Sunday, jumping into residential areas and shrouding hundreds of square miles in pungent yellow-gray smoke.

Tens of thousands of residents were forced to flee 10 rapidly spreading blazes from Simi Valley in Ventura County in the north to San Bernardino in the east and almost to the Mexican border in the south. Thousands of federal, state and local firefighters sought to contain the fires, with little success. State fire officials estimated Sunday afternoon that the fires covered more than 300,000 acres, with the area growing hourly. The fires have claimed at least 13 lives, including two people in San Diego County who were burned in their car as they fled, the police said.

Broadcast lead (CNN):

Firestorms continue to ravage Southern California this morning.

At least 14 are dead and tens of thousands are fleeing from 10 separate blazes. One Simi Valley resident says simply, nothing is left. (cut to emotional interview on scene)