

Duffy's news writing basics

Keep paragraphs short: News articles rarely have more than 2 or 3 sentences per paragraph. In small columns, big paragraphs look daunting to readers – very gray. Put lots of paragraph breaks in your articles.

Quotes ALWAYS start a new paragraph: Editors may remove these paragraph breaks to save space, but that's their job, not yours.

ALWAYS write quotes this way:

- “My journalism instructor told me to write quotes like this,” she said. “He insists this is the proper way to do it.”

Other ways to quote people are acceptable, but this style will never be wrong.

Punctuation ALWAYS goes inside the quotation marks.

- She wrote the play “Dearly Beloved.”

ALWAYS write “Jones said,” not “said Jones.”

- So, this is correct: Jones, the vice president for business affairs, said.

But, it's better to introduce long titles like that before the quote.

- Vernon Jones, the vice president for business affairs, said he could support the plan.
- “I think that compromise might be the best way to go,” Jones said.

ALWAYS use said: not noted, not says, not claims, not exclaimed – just “said” and it'll never be wrong

Never use courtesy titles: Not Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones or Dr. Jones – just Jones, Jones or Jones

Spell out numbers less than 10. Avoid starting sentences with a number.

Cities and states: Check the AP book for when to include states along with cities

Attribute at the end of the sentence so you don't clunk up your sentences.

- Avoid: According to the police department, the gunman entered the bank from the employee entrance.
- Instead: The gunman entered the bank from the employee entrance, according to the police department.

Quotes should be real, engaging and meaningful: Quotes that do nothing more than introduce factual, routine information easily paraphrased drag down a story.