

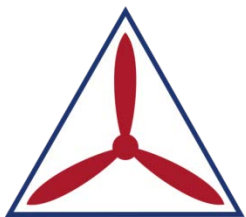
# Civil Air Patrol

**Media Writing is Not That Hard**  
**Lt Col Andrew Oppmann, SER Public Affairs**

[www.sercap.us](http://www.sercap.us)



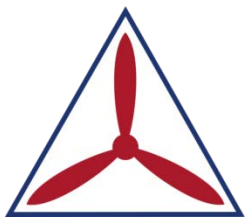
*Presented to*  
**2018 Southeast Region Conference**



# Media Writing is Not That Hard



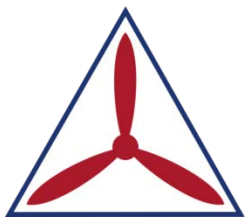
- **A fast overview of the basics of newswriting:**
  - 5Ws and 1H
  - News values
  - Inverted Pyramid writing style
  - Basics of Associated Press style
- **Giving credit where credit is due (sources):**
  - Dr. Ken Blake, Middle Tennessee State University
  - Gannett's First Five Graphs training program
  - Paul McGrath, Houston Chronicle
  - The Balance, a Dotdash Company
  - Georgia Tech, Institute Communications
  - Purdue University's OWL



# Media Writing is Not That Hard



- ➔ **Effective media writing is about keeping it simple**
  - ➔ Short words
  - ➔ Short sentences
  - ➔ Get to the point quickly
  - ➔ Use as few words as possible
- ➔ **It's really only about writing five (maybe six or seven, if needed) short sentences**
  - ➔ One thought per paragraph, one sentence per paragraph
  - ➔ Getting one or two great quotes
  - ➔ Tell the reader why this is worth reading



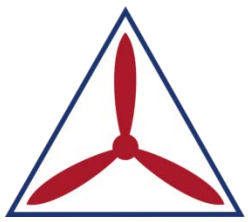
# Media Writing is Not That Hard



## ➔ How short is a short sentence?

- ➔ Best practice is for the lead, or first paragraph, to be between 25 and 40 words (with extra credit if you can write it shorter).
- ➔ Most paragraphs in media writing are a single sentence.
- ➔ The longer the story, say after the fifth or sixth paragraph, it's OK to go a bit longer in sentences (maximum of 50 words) or even two sentences in a paragraph (but don't go crazy).

## ➔ Remember the 5Ws and 1H



# 5 Ws and 1 H



➔ If you only remember one thing from today's presentation, remember this:

➔ **The 5Ws**

➔ Who

➔ What

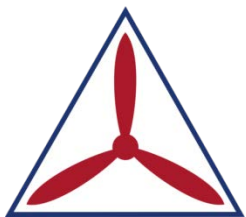
➔ When

➔ Where

➔ Why

➔ **The 1 H**

➔ How

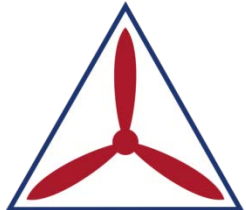


# Who, What, When, Where & Why (and How)



- ➔ If you can't identify what makes your story unique and interesting, chances are nobody else will either.
- ➔ **Who** is driving the story? Who is it about? Who is affected? Who benefits? Who loses?
- ➔ **What** has happened? What are the consequences? What does this mean for the reader?
- ➔ **Where** is this taking place (building, neighborhood, city, country)?
- ➔ **When** did it happen (time of day, day, month, year)? When was the last update? When can you expect to learn more? When will the effects be felt?
- ➔ **Why** did this event take place? Why is this important in the big picture? Why should readers care?
- ➔ **How** did this happen? How will this happen?





# Who, What, When, Where & Why (and How)



Capt. Sybrian Castleman, Civil Air Patrol News

Published 10:25 p.m. CT Sept. 16, 2017



(Photo: CAP Photo by Maj. Christina English)



PUNTA GORDA, Florida -- Civil Air Patrol's Florida Wing finished this week moving its aircraft from Tallahassee to Punta Gorda and Orlando to be better positioned for additional Hurricane Irma relief missions.

Also, CAP members from Alabama and Mississippi on Irma duty in Florida began returning home

Saturday.

**WHO?** Civil Air Patrol's Florida Wing

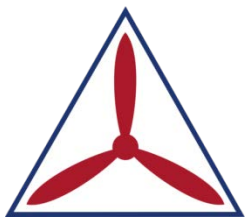
**WHAT?** Finished... moving its aircraft

**WHEN?** This week

**WHERE?** From Tallahassee to Punta Gorda

**WHY?** To be better positioned for... additional missions

**IS THERE A HOW?** Not really...



# Who, What, When, Where & Why (and How)



The screenshot shows a news article on the Montgomery Advertiser website. The article is titled "The last of six members of Civil Air Patrol's Southeast Region relief team returned Thursday after assisting the organization's Puerto Rico Wing with Hurricane Irma missions over the U.S. Virgin Islands." The article includes a photo of a coastal area with buildings and a caption that reads "(Photo: Civil Air Patrol News)". The article also features social media sharing options for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email, as well as a "COMMENT" button. The article text is partially visible, showing the beginning of a paragraph: "There's massive destruction on St. Thomas and St..."

**WHO?** The last six members...

**WHAT?** returned

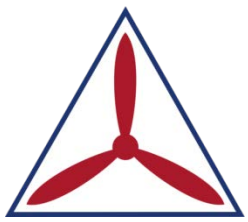
**WHEN?** Thursday

**WHERE?** over the U.S. Virgin Islands

**WHY?** after assisting the organization's Puerto Rico Wing

**IS THERE A HOW?** Not really...

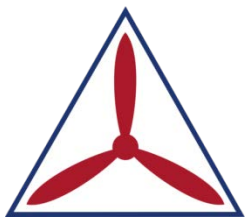




## Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



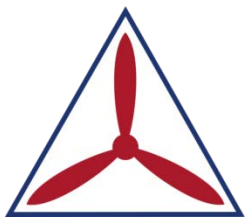
➔ **Rule #1:** A straight news lead should be a single paragraph consisting of a single sentence and should summarize, at minimum, the most newsworthy "what," "where" and "when" of the story.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



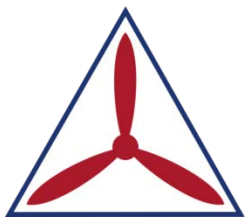
- ➔ **"Fire destroyed a house on Main Street early Monday morning."**
- ➔ The lead is a single-sentence paragraph. Note, please, that a lead should be written in ordinary English.
- ➔ It contains 10 words -- far fewer than the 25-to-40 guideline (that's good!). Notice that the word count includes even little words like "a" and "on."
- ➔ It summarizes the main "what" of the story, which is that fire destroyed a house.
- ➔ It also provides the "where" of the story with the phrase "on Main Street."
- ➔ Finally, it gives the "when" of the story with the phrase "early Monday morning."



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



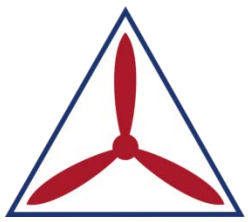
✈ **Rule #2:** The lead's first verb should express the main "what" of the story and should be placed among the lead's first seven words.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



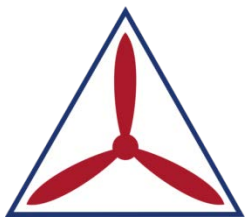
- ➔ **"Fire destroyed a house on Main Street early Monday morning."**
- ➔ The verb "destroyed" expresses the main "what" of the story.
- ➔ "Destroyed" is the lead's second word -- a position that puts "destroyed" well in front of "Street," the lead's seventh word.
- ➔ Again, notice that the word count includes even little words like "a" and "on."
- ➔ There are no other verbs in front of "destroyed," so "destroyed" is the lead's first verb.
- ➔ Following this rule will force you to quickly tell readers what the story is about.



## Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



➔ **Rule #3:** The lead's first verb -- the same one that expresses the main "what" of the story -- should be active voice, not passive voice.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



➔ **ACTIVE: "Fire destroyed a house on Main Street early Monday morning."**

➔ A verb is active voice if the verb's subject did, is doing, or will do something.

➔ "Destroyed" is the verb.

➔ "Fire" is the verb's subject.

➔ "Fire" did something. It destroyed.

➔ **PASSIVE: "A house was destroyed by fire on Main Street early Monday morning."**

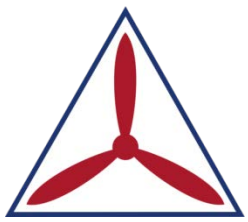
➔ A verb is passive voice if the verb's subject had, is having, or will have something done *to* it.

➔ "Was" is the verb.

➔ "House" is the verb's subject.

➔ "House" had something done *to* it. It "was destroyed."

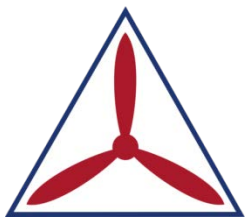




## Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



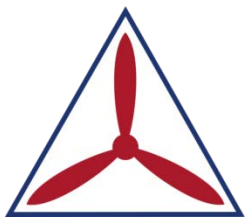
➔ **Rule #4:** If there's a "who" involved in the story, the lead should give some indication of who the "who" is.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



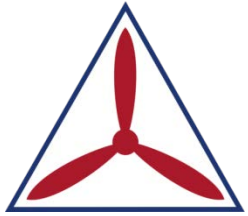
- ➔ **First example: "An elderly Anytown man died Monday when an early morning fire raged through his Main Street home."**
  - ➔ The "who" is "an elderly Anytown man."
  - ➔ In this case, the "who" probably isn't someone whose name readers would recognize.
  - ➔ As a result, the "who" angle of the lead focuses on what things about the "who" might make the "who" important to the reader. In this case, it's the fact that the man was older and lived in Anytown.
  - ➔ That's called writing a "blind lead." The man's name will be given later in the story.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



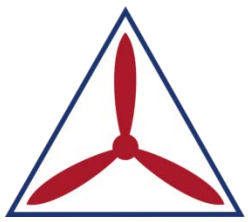
- ➔ **Second example: "Anytown Mayor Joe Smith died Monday when an early morning fire raged through his Main Street home."**
- ➔ **Smith is the local mayor, and most readers probably will recognize his name.**
- ➔ **As a result, the lead gives his name.**



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



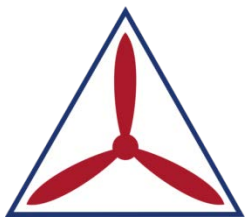
➔ **Rule #5:** The lead should summarize the "why" and "how" of the story, but only if there's room.



# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



- "An elderly Murfreesboro man died early Monday morning when fire sparked by faulty wiring raged through his Main Street home."
- "... fire ... raged through his Main Street home ..." explains *why* the man died.
- "... sparked by faulty wiring ..." explains *how* the blaze began.

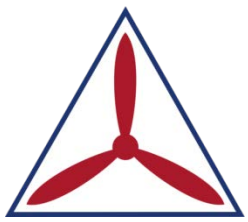


## Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



- **Rule #6:** If what's in the lead needs to be attributed, place the attribution at the end of the lead\*
- \*Unless it doesn't feel right...

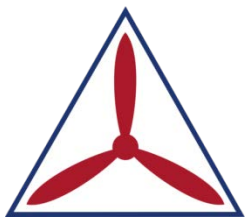




# Dr. Blake's Six Rules for Writing a Lead



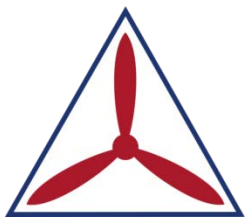
- ➔ **Example: "Faulty wiring most likely sparked the blaze that claimed the life of an elderly Anytown man last week, the city's arson investigator concluded Monday."**
- ➔ Attribution is simply a reference indicating the source of some bit of information.
  - ➔ In this case, the attribution is the phrase, "the city's arson investigator concluded Monday."
- ➔ Generally, attribute assertions that represent anything other than objective, indisputable information.
  - ➔ Here, there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the man is dead, that his house was destroyed, that it all happened early Monday morning, and that he house was on Main Street.
  - ➔ But the arson investigator's assertion that faulty wiring caused the blaze represents the investigator's opinion (based, of course, upon his training and expertise - but an opinion nonetheless).
  - ➔ Therefore, the assertion needs to be attributed to the investigator so readers can decide how credible the assertion is.



# The First Five Graphs



- ✈ To report and write news stories so readers understand in the first five paragraphs what the news is and what it means to them.
- ✈ Focus on these four key elements:
  - ✈ The News
  - ✈ The Impact
  - ✈ The Human Dimension
  - ✈ The Context



# The News

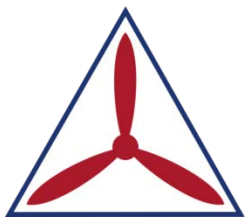


## ➔ What is it?

- ➔ The newest information
- ➔ Basic facts: who, what, when, where, why and how
- ➔ Most relevant information

## ➔ It answers:

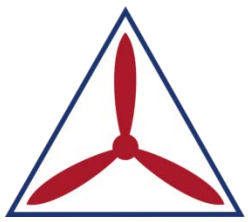
- ➔ What happened and why did it happen?
- ➔ What's the REAL story?
- ➔ What's the reaction?



# The Impact



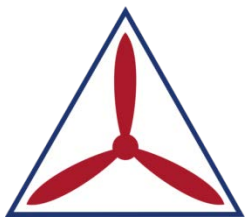
- ➔ **Answers these questions:**
  - ➔ What does situation mean?
  - ➔ What should reader do?
  - ➔ What's the fallout?
  - ➔ What does this information change?
  - ➔ Who is affected?
  - ➔ Who benefits; who suffers?
  - ➔ Why is this interesting?



# The Context



- **General perspective that frames background on the news**
  - Historical perspective
  - The relationship to things around the news
  - A frame of reference
- **Answers these questions:**
  - What's normal? What's surprising?
  - What does the news mean to a reader?

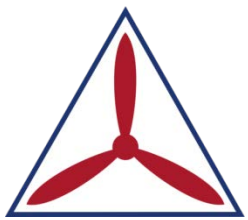


# The Human Dimension



- ➔ **Human voice that takes the story from abstract to reality**
  - ➔ Amplifying/illustrating impact
  - ➔ Personal details that contribute to understanding the story
- ➔ **Compelling elements of:**
  - ➔ tension, drama, conflict,
  - ➔ hope, irony, triumph, humor, astonishment, horror,
  - ➔ outrage, anger, surprise, suspense
- ➔ **Color and texture**





# Paying Attention to the First Five Graphs



**NEWS:  
SINGLE  
SENTENCE;  
28 WORDS**

**NUTGRAPH:  
ANSWERS  
QUESTIONS  
POSED BY THE  
LEAD**

**HUMAN  
DIMENSION:  
QUOTE**

**IMPACT:  
DETAIL AND  
PERSPECTIVE**

**CONTEXT:  
WHY IS THIS  
IMPORTANT?**



(Photo: Submitted)

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Civil Air Patrol's commanding general on Saturday asked his volunteer members in Florida to stay safe and stand ready to respond after Hurricane Irma makes landfall on the peninsula Sunday.

Maj. Gen. Mark Smith, who assumed command of the 58,000-member volunteer civilian auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force on Sept. 2, said he was proud of how his organization was handling the challenges of providing disaster relief not only for Irma, but also Hurricane Harvey's aftermath.

**More:** [Civil Air Patrol's Southeast Region commanders gear up for disaster relief response](#)

"Back-to-back natural disasters, first Hurricane Harvey and now Hurricane Irma, test all of us," Smith said. "But they also provide opportunities for CAP members to show their mettle."

As of Friday, CAP delivered more than 300,000 aerial images over Texas and Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, with 30-plus aircraft in service and the support of volunteer members from 34 states, Smith said.

STORY FROM PUBLIX

**Start the season off with these 6 summer recipes**



With Sunday's landfall imminent in Florida, Smith said he confident CAP members were poised to respond when requested in the mainland -- and were already flying missions in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to document Irma's aftermath.

"We stand ready to serve our communities, states and nation," Smith said.

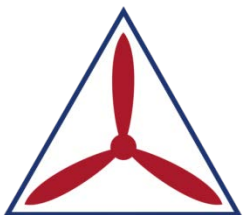
**NEWS**

**NUT**

**HUMAN**

**IMPACT**

**CONTEXT**



# Paying Attention to the First Five Graphs



**Civil Air Patrol**  
U.S. Air Force Auxiliary

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36112, May 04, 2018

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## Tenn. Wing Hosts Advanced Training

**WHO?** About 50 Civil Air Patrol members from five wings

**WHAT?** Gathered

**WHEN?** From April 28-29

**WHERE?** at Tennessee Wing headquarters

**WHY?** For Training to hone emergency response skills...

**Lt. Col. Morgan Torp-Pederson**

Public Affairs Officer

Tennessee Wing

About 50 Civil Air Patrol members from five wings gathered at Tennessee Wing Headquarters from April 28-29 for training to hone emergency response skills for disaster relief and search and rescue operations.

The training was focused on a tool developed by CAP and the National Guard – the Domestic Operations Awareness and Assessment Response Tool, or DAART. It's a system that allows wireless delivery of video or photo images from aircraft or ground teams in the field.

Members from the Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee and North Carolina wings attended the class at McGhee Tyson Airport in Alcoa. The training included classroom instruction and practice using the system in both aircraft and ground vehicles.

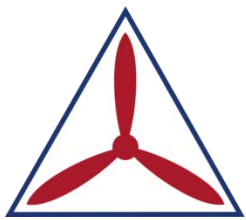
"The number of members who came out for the DAART training was very encouraging," said Col. Barry Melton, Southeast Region commander. "DAART is an emerging imagery technology for CAP, and it's very important that our members are given the opportunity to become proficient."

NEWS

IMPACT

CONTEXT

HUMAN

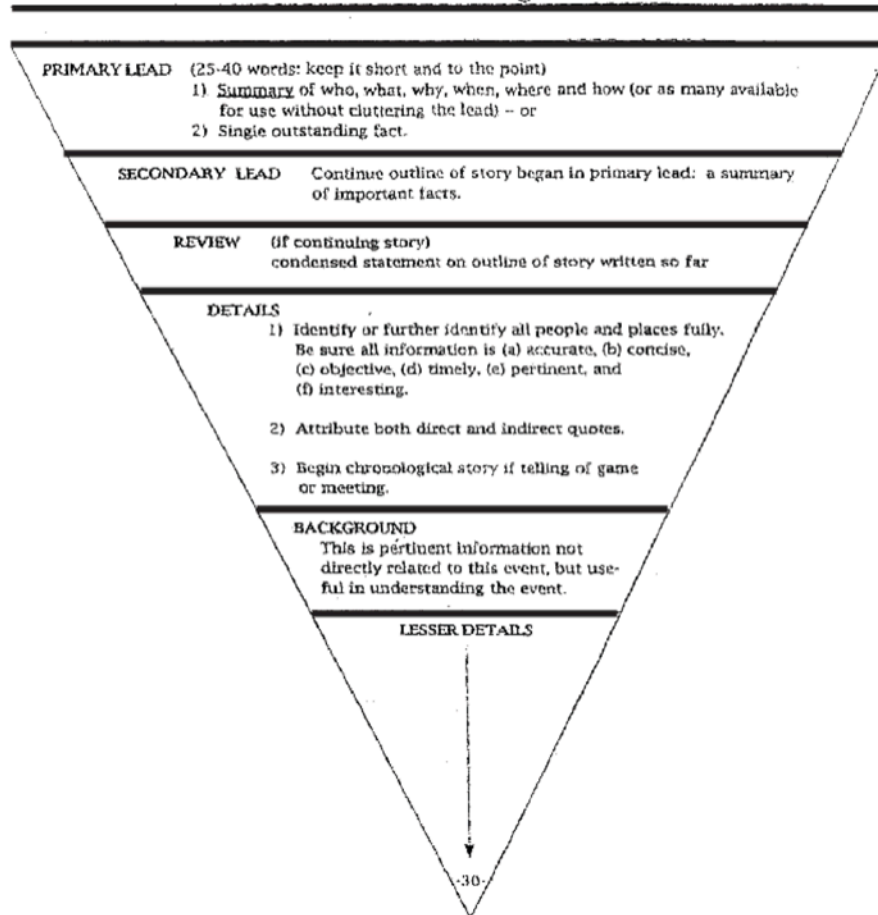


# Learn the Inverted Pyramid

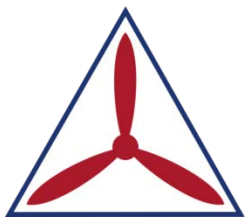


## INVERTED PYRAMID

Tell the news at a glance.



- ✈ News writing is not like writing a theme for English class.
  - ✈ There's no thesis sentence.
  - ✈ There's no conclusion.
  - ✈ News writing is about the only form of writing in which you start with the climax.
- ✈ The inverted pyramid is designed to help reporters put information in logical order.
  - ✈ It forces the writer to rank, in order of importance, the information to be presented.
- ✈ The inverted pyramid style has been around for more than 100 years and is still going strong.



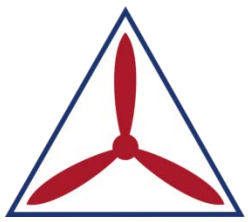
# Learn the Inverted Pyramid



**Assemble these paragraphs into an inverted pyramid story.**

**Simply arrange by the appropriate letter:**

- A. David Bailey, homeland security division chief for the Nashville Fire Department, said nine workers from the mailroom where the letter was processed were quarantined until tests could determine whether the powder was toxic.
- B. The mailroom is in the State Insurance Building.
- C. Gov. Bill Haslam's office said the letter came from a prison inmate but provided no other details. The substance was sent to the Tennessee Department of Health Services for testing.
- D. Bailey said none of the workers became ill.
- E. Authorities evacuated a state office building on Wednesday after a suspicious powder was found in a letter sent to the governor's office.



# My answers



E: Authorities evacuated a state office building on Wednesday after a suspicious powder was found in a letter sent to the governor's office.

A: David Bailey, homeland security division chief for the Nashville Fire Department, said nine workers from the mailroom where the letter was processed were quarantined until tests could determine whether the powder was toxic.

C: Gov. Bill Haslam's office said the letter came from a prison inmate but provided no other details. The substance was sent to the Tennessee Department of Health Services for testing.

D: Bailey said none of the workers became ill.

B: The mailroom is in the State Insurance Building.

# Civil Air Patrol



**Questions and Answers**