

Ronald R. Rodgers
Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism
University of Florida

First-Day Introductions

Too often, first-day class introductions when the students are required to introduce themselves fail for lack of loquaciousness on the students' part. I want my students – in editing especially – to know each other with a little more depth and dimension than name and place of birth because we spend so much time working together collaboratively during the semester.

To achieve that, I spend an hour or two with my class roster before class and Google each of my students. Doing so has revealed interests, goals and life experiences that would rarely be revealed if it were left to the students to introduce themselves. (See the handful of examples below.) This can include work and volunteer experiences, activities they are interested in, awards they have received, skills and abilities, leadership positions they have held, etc. Indeed, I spend some time at the beginning of the first class doing the introductions myself. And most of the time I find photos that help me identify my students. And with those whom I can find nothing about – and believe it or not this is more common than I believed before I began this – we can use the previous introductions to prompt these hidden students to say more about themselves than they normally would.

The introduction also has some pedagogical goals besides introducing students to one another. For one, it can often be startling to students how much I could find out about them. And by that we can extrapolate to the fact that as journalists they should hone their own search skills – especially search narrowing – and their abilities at evaluating information on the Web. It also can prompt discussions about different ethnicities. It also can forewarn them about what kind of material they load to the Web.

And finally, I have found this technique can give me a much better picture of who my students are, what their goals are, and their level of interest in and commitment to becoming journalists.

By John McClelland
Associate Professor Emeritus
Department of Communication
Roosevelt University, Chicago

Captions: Stepchildren of the Newsroom*

(* The phrase "stepchild of the newsroom" first came to my attention in Ken Kobre's book, "Photojournalism: The Professionals' Approach." The concept was widely known, but unnamed, by many whose pre-academic careers including reporting, photography, copy editing and newsroom leadership. Community editors, for example, have difficulty getting staff to even try doing captions.)

Here's what some experts at a national journalism think-tank had to say about it:

"In most newsrooms, even the most routine story goes through several editors, while photos and graphics may be plugged into pages at the last moment." —*Monica Moses, Poynter*

"The picture speaks, but the caption tells. Effective editors use both." —*Jacky Hicks, Poynter*

"A poorly executed caption can destroy the message of a photo or the story package of which it is part." —*Kenneth Irby, Poynter*

Caption criteria and tips

Several sources say a news caption should answer those of the 5Ws and H that are not apparent in the picture.

Context matters. Caption text can reinforce, or undercut, both the information and the emotion of a photo. Why is this photo historical? Caption far below*

The *Associated Press Stylebook* caption guide could apply anywhere. It says describe the action, identify the participants, give the when-where, in one present-tense active-verb sentence. A second sentence can set up background, tell a later outcome, or otherwise flesh out the package. Here is an excerpt from AP standards: "We do not ask people to pose for photos unless we are making a portrait and *then we clearly state that in the caption. We explain in the caption the circumstances under which photographs are made.*" (emphasis added)



Several newspaper shops have guidance similar to this:

- Remember that captions, like headlines, are the most widely read parts of most publications.
- NEVER write a caption unless you are looking at the picture —as cropped and sized.
- Account for every identifiable person; count them on your fingers, or on paper, if necessary.
- Know what the accompanying story says. Make sure names are spelled correctly, consistently.

- Get a second set of eyes on the picture-and-caption if possible even if inconvenient.
- Don't make the viewer-reader guess.

Some editors avoid mixing present- and past-tense wording in a sentence. Some use all past-tense.

This tip list is based loosely on one webcast by Kenneth Irby at the Poynter Institute:

- Check the facts. Be accurate!
- Avoid stating the obvious.
- Identify the main people in the photograph.
- Don't just recapitulate the head or deck or summary.
- Avoid making judgments (or leapt-to conclusions)
- Don't assume. Ask questions... be specific.
- Avoid lame terms like "is shown, is pictured, and looks on."
- Beware unfounded humor, double meanings, cuteness in bad taste....
- Use quotes, conversational language.

<http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/1753/hot-tips-for-writing-captions>

*Another principle of captioning, deliberately violated here, is: "Make the caption and its relationship to the picture easy to find and follow." The June 22, 2011, speech by President Obama was about Afghanistan, but the AP still photographer at right, Pablo Martinez Monsivais, was the first ever to be allowed in the room during an actual live presidential TV speech. Until a fuss, originating May 2 in Reuters photographer Jason Reed's blog, the White House followed the little-known historical practice of re-enacting parts of the speech for previously noisy still cameras. Wire-service captions might state re-enactment, but widely published captions generally did not. Now, a pool shooter with blimp-silenced gear and radio-transmission gets to sit in. The **New York Times** website used one of his photos while the speech was under way. Photo by White House staff photographer Pete Souza, formerly of the **Chicago Tribune**.

Jill Van Wyke

Assistant Professor

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Drake University

Edit with Post-its

Note: This idea is adapted from my Drake colleague, assistant professor David Remund, who originated this in a PR writing class.

This exercise could be used to help students find a focus for their writing, tighten leads, write concise headlines and cutlines, identify a key point in their reading, or any other task that requires them to distill an idea to its essential elements.

It's a "quick-and-dirty" exercise, easy to drop into a class one day with little planning or preparation. This works best if students start the exercise not knowing anything about its purpose or direction. Give them plenty of time to work through each step.

1. Start by having students free-write on an 8½ x 11 (or even larger) sheet of paper. Encourage them to be messy: jot down phrases or single words, sketch, doodle, scribble, draw diagrams, draw arrows. You want to encourage creative thinking. (Colored markers or pencils seems to help.) Depending on the class, task or assignment, you could ask them to free-write:

- about a magazine article idea they want to pitch;
- about how to write the opening of a story they've already reported;
- about the main point in a piece of scholarly or media writing;
- about what they think is the most important information in a news story;
- about what they see in a photograph as they prepare to write a caption.

Give them several minutes; if they slow down, encourage them to keep writing. The point at this stage is generative thinking and writing.

2. Give them a new sheet of 8 ½ x 11 paper. Ask them to distill their scribbles, jots, diagrams, etc., into reasonably coherent sentences, filling the paper if they need to.

3. Give them half a sheet of 8 ½ x 11 paper. Ask them to boil down their sentences to fit. (Yes, at this point, many will catch on and begin writing smaller. That's OK.)

4. Give them a few 3x3 Post-it notes. (This is where it gets difficult for many of them; they may need a few tries.) Ask them to make their point (or write their lead, or define their story's focus) in only as many words as can fit on the Post-it.

5. Aannndddd... (you see where this is going, don't you?) Give them a few 2x1½ Post-its and write their story focus, lead, main point from the reading, or headline or cutline on it. (Again, it may take a few tries.) What emerges should be nuggets that students can then polish into a story focus, a lead, a thesis statement, or a headline or cutline.

Summary:

The physicality of the shrinking paper size seems to sharpen students' thinking. It helps them visualize the thinking-writing-revising process, moving it from abstract theory to concrete practice. It's a more graphic and visceral way to help students distill their thinking and write concisely than merely providing them word counts or page counts.

Jill Van Wyke
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Drake University

Note: This idea originates from “The Layers of Magazine Editing,” by Michael Robert Evans of Indiana University. I’ve adapted it for the classroom.

My students struggle with story organization, whether it’s their own or a story they’re editing. The struggle becomes more acute the longer the story is. Yet they must learn to see the entire manuscript as a whole, not merely as a collection of paragraphs or sentences.

This is a hands-on, tactile exercise to be used in an editing or a writing class. It does take a fair amount of prep time and can fill a class period. It works well when students work in pairs or trios. (And it won’t work at all if there is a breeze in the room.)

For an editing class, I like to do this exercise first with a well-organized newspaper or magazine article students will be interested in but aren’t likely to have read. It shouldn’t be too complicated a topic, or too long or too short.

Print out enough copies of the article for each group, and tape the sheets of paper together (bottom of page 1 to top of page 2; bottom of page 2 to top of page 3) so you have one long ribbon of text. Cut up the text into individual paragraphs, mix up the paragraphs’ order, stack them, and place them in an envelope. (Evans suggests throwing the stack of paragraphs into the air and letting them fall to the ground, but that can get messy and confusing with several groups in one room!)

Give each group an envelope containing all the now out-of-order paragraphs. Tell them to read each paragraph and write a topic label on each. Any paragraphs that share the same topic label go in the same stack.

Once students have sorted all the paragraphs, they should have several stacks, each its own topic or theme. There will also usually be a number of “strays,” paragraphs that don’t seem to fit in any stack. Ask students if any of the “strays” would work as a lead or a conclusion. If not, ask them if it belongs in the story at all. If it doesn’t belong, place it in a “discard” pile for now.

Now ask students to re-read the paragraphs in one themed stack and arrange them in order. Do the same thing for the other stacks.

Next, ask students to arrange the themes or topics in order. Assemble the paragraphs in order in a “Grand Pile.” Compare the students’ order to the order in the original article. Where does their order disagree with the original? Which is better? Do they see where the paragraphs in the discard pile might fit? Or should the writer have omitted them? Can they identify the writer’s transitions?

I like to start with a well-organized article so students can see how a writer builds the internal structure. You can then bring in a poorly organized article and do the exercise

again, with the goal to help the writer organize the piece, rather than merely identify the structure.

In a writing class, you can vary this exercise by having students bring an early draft of their own article, cut up in paragraphs, to class. They can collaborate on doing the exercise with their own and others' articles. Once students have finished this, they're positioned nicely for a class session on writing smooth transitions.

Summary:

This again is a tactile, concrete way to learn what can be an abstract step in the writing process. The physical act of literally rearranging paragraphs to enhance story organization seems to give students a sense of confidence and control that eludes them when staring at the screen.

Michael Longinow

Chair, Department of Journalism and Integrated Media
School of Arts & Sciences
Biola University

One of the ironies of teaching and instruction in schools and departments of journalism and mass communication is that students, too often, don't take their career preparation seriously enough until it's too late.

We created a course called Media Career Readiness to help with this problem (under the premise that suggestions in any curriculum will always be ignored.) The class is a 200-level class aimed at preparing underclassmen for internships and eventual jobs. In the section I taught recently, it was stacked with juniors and seniors who couldn't be bothered to take it earlier.

In this course, students are required (twice) to seek out a media location for a mock job interview within reasonable driving distance of our campus (Los Angeles/Orange County.) The location had to be media-related and connected to their concentration in our major (print/online writing, visual journalism, broadcast journalism or public relations/integrated media). Students turned in a packet a week ahead of time that contained a targeted resume, cover letter, site-based research, and a self-assessment showing their qualified to intern or be hired at this location.

Students were taught in advance the importance of this targeted resume and cover letter. they were also taught the skills necessary for confident presentation of who they are as well as what they can do. And they were taught that perfection in the resume and cover letter (mechanically) are not just a nice idea — they're a non-negotiable.

To reinforce this notion, if there was one mechanical error in the cover letter or resume, they received a zero on that portion of the packet and the packet was a mandatory rewrite (meaning they could earn only 85% of the possible points for it — if there were no further errors.)

The assignment was a huge wake-up call for the class. More than half the students had mandatory rewrites on their packets due to typos. About a quarter of the class panicked when the editor or media supervisor they were after didn't answer phone messages or return emails. But after some prodding, all in the class landed their two sets of mock job interviews and got the kind of feedback that made the second packet/mock job interview assignment a better experience.

Feedback ranged from "nice handshake" to sitting up straighter and holding eye contact to using more creative fonts and graphics on the resume (for some public relations positions.)

By the final presentation, when all got 8-10 minutes to walk through their journey, everyone in the class had gained confidence in surveying the tough job market in media careers. The market hadn't changed; they had. And suddenly they sensed that the theory they'd been learning wasn't just theory. And they knew a little bit better who they were as persons and as pre-professionals. One of the class members was a senior who said in the

final presentation that she now understood what the big deal was with working hard in her classes. She also heard from mock job interviewers that she had more going for her in media skills than she knew. I noted, a few weeks after graduation, that she'd been hired by a San Francisco media firm to do photos and video — two areas she'd excelled in her senior year but hadn't really believed were strengths until this class.

Jan Leach

Assistant Professor
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Kent State University

DIY GRAMMAR

For “Do It Yourself Grammar,” each student presents a grammar lesson to the class. The lesson must include the grammar rule written as a handout for each student, correct and incorrect examples of the grammar rule in use (preferably a media example) and an activity for the class.

Students pick their grammar topics at random. I write two dozen different grammar issues on slips of paper and each person “fishes” one out of a box. These topics might include pronoun-antecedent agreement or transitive-intransitive verb forms or subjunctive-indicative mood. Or, topics might be on punctuation marks or on problems with usage such as affect-effect, lay-lie, who-whom.

Students prepare the lesson for presentation to the class. They are to explain the rule and why it’s important, how it’s misused and give examples. They can use any references except those we use in class -- *When Words Collide* and the AP Stylebook. They must cite reference(s) on the handout. The presentation can be a quick lecture, a PowerPoint, a slideshow, video, animation, etc. Be creative.

Once the lesson is presented, students must involve the class in an activity to help them practice and reinforce the grammar lesson. This can be as simple as a worksheet or as complicated as a contest. Again, be creative and have fun. Some examples of activities from recent classes include: “Mad Libs” games made up using only certain parts of speech such as adjectives or pronouns, word searches, students wearing “label” words or punctuation marks moved around in “live sentences,” poster contests, deadline competitions and many more. Most students bring prizes for winners if the activity involves competition.

The DIY Grammar Assignment is graded this way:

■ Lesson/rule	10
■ Examples	5
■ <u>Activity</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	25 points

Paul Steinle

Journalism professor emeritus
Southern Oregon University

“J-Epiphanies” and *Who Needs Newspapers*

Consider using the "J-Epiphanies" collected on the www.whoneedsnewspapers.org website.

There are about 100 one- to three-minute video anecdotes from editors and publishers all across the USA about the "lessons they learned" practicing journalism.

It's a provocative way to start a class and there are many key (and heartfelt) lessons taught.

Information features of the WNN report

www.whoneedsnewspapers.org

The Who Needs Newspapers (WNN) website has been compiled to inform three target audiences about the current status of local newspapers in the USA by providing them fresh information about current practices compiled from operating newspaper organizations across all 50 states.

Those audiences are: (a.) students and the academic journalism community, (b.) newspaper industry practitioners at all levels, and (c.) the general news consuming public.

This document itemizes the factual materials collected in the WNN Website.

I. WNN Interviews (In-depth, online QuickTime video interviews)

- a. Publishers (& some owner/publishers)
 - i. Introduction and Contribution
 1. Publishers discuss what their newspaper contributes to their community.
 2. Publishers discuss what might be the effects on their community, if it were to lose its newspaper.
 - ii. Strategic Changes
 1. Publishers list the key strategic operating changes at their newspaper in recent years as the news marketplace has entered the digital era and gross newspaper advertising revenues have declined.
 2. Publishers cite the most successful changes.
 3. Publishers cite the least successful changes.
 - iii. Adaptation & the Future
 1. Publishers evaluate their newspaper's adaptation to change.
 2. Publishers explain the changes they expect at their newspapers in the next 3-5 years.

3. Publishers discuss the impact of digital news delivery on their newspapers.
 4. Publishers evaluate their success, to date, earning revenue from digital news products
 - iv. Special sections (varies by newspaper)
 1. Publishers address a variety of issues: digital revenues, selling digital advertising, and monetizing digital products
 - v. Prospects & Preparation
 1. Publishers evaluate the prospects for newspaper jobs at their newspapers and elsewhere, and they cite the qualifications needed to be competitive for hiring.
- b. Editors (executive & managing)
- i. Introduction and Contribution
 1. Editors explain what inspired them to become journalists.
 2. Editors discuss what their newspaper contributes to their community.
 3. Editors discuss what might be the effects on their community, if it were to lose its newspaper.
 - ii. Ethics & Content
 1. Editors explain whether their newspapers have a written code of ethics and explain how they manage ethical issues.
 2. Editors discuss managing ethical issues in their online editions.
 3. Editors discuss how their newspaper manages anonymous reader ea-mails on their websites
 - iii. Strategic Changes
 1. Editors list the key operating changes in their newsrooms in recent years as the news marketplace has entered the digital era and gross newspaper advertising revenues have declined.
 2. Editors cite the most successful changes.
 3. Editors cite the least successful changes.
 - iv. Adaptation & the Future
 1. Editors evaluate their newspaper's adaptation to change.
 2. Editors describe what it is like to be a newspaper reporter in this era.
 3. Editors explain the changes they expect at their newspapers in the next 3-5 years.
 - v. Prospects & Preparation
 1. Editors evaluate the prospects for newspaper jobs at their newspapers and elsewhere, and they cite the qualifications student journalists need to be competitive for hiring.
- c. Online news managers (or online sales managers)

- i. Introduction and Contribution
 1. Online managers explain what inspired them to enter the newspaper business (most are journalists, but others come from diverse backgrounds).
 2. Online managers describe how they acquired the skills that prepared them for their jobs.
 3. Online managers discuss what their newspaper contributes to their community.
 4. Online managers discuss what might be the effects on a community losing its newspaper.
- ii. Skills
 1. Online managers explain what skills are necessary for their current positions.
 2. Online managers predict what skills will be needed for the jobs in the next 3-5 years.
- iii. Adaptation & the Future
 1. Online managers evaluate their newspaper's adaptation to change.
 2. Online managers predict how their newspapers' digital delivery of news may change in the next few years.
 3. Online managers discuss the prospects for all digital newspapers – no print.

II. WNN Backgrounders

- a. In-depth personnel and other key operating data about each newspaper including:
 - i. Number of personnel overall.
 - ii. Annual consumption of newsprint.
 - iii. Percentage breakdown of revenue sources.
 - iv. Number of newsroom personnel.
 - v. Size and allocation of news staff.
 - vi. Catalog of key digital news software.
 - vii. Catalog of news platforms.

III. WNN Enterprise stories

- a. A collection of five or more recent enterprise stories from each newspaper, which demonstrate the high quality of reporting produced by each newspaper and which may serve as examples for students seeking models for newspaper reporting.

IV. WNN "J-Epiphany" (Journalist's Epiphanies)

- a. Publishers, editors and online news managers provide short anecdotes about a moment in each of their careers – an epiphany -- when "the power and purpose of journalism" became clear to them.

- V. WNN Links to news sites.**
 - a. Hot hyperlinks to each newspaper's active website.

- VI. WNN "The story of the newspaper"**
 - a. Each newspaper designates a person to provide a brief, informal oral summary of a newspaper's history, citing the key turnings points in its development.

- VII. WNN Bonus Interviews**
 - a. The Bonus Interviews, conducted with selected newspaper industry observers, provides access to the knowledge and assessments of experts who follow the newspaper industry closely and can provide timely insight into its current climate, practices and financial status.

- VIII. Implicit overall impact of WNN newspaper interviews**
 - a. Listening to a cross-section of WNN newspaper interviews provides viewers an opportunity to understand the key issues affecting the newspaper industry at this time, to evaluate industry participants' understanding of these issues and to assess the intelligence and motives of key leaders in the newspaper industry.

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