WHAT JOURNALISM CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT GOOD EDITING

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CONTENT AND STRUCTURE
WHAT IS THIS?
Two basic building blocks:
- What is this about?
- What’s the “nut” graf?
WHAT IS THIS?

▷ What’s this about?
  ▷ Identify the topic
WHAT IS THIS?

- What is this about?
  - Write the summary, tweet, headline
  - No more than 15 words
Prepositions and postpositions, together called adpositions (or broadly, in English, simply prepositions), are a class of words used to express spatial or temporal relations (in, under, towards, before) or mark various semantic roles (of, for).

A preposition or postposition typically combines with a noun or pronoun, or more generally a noun phrase, this being called its complement, or sometimes object. A preposition comes before its complement; a postposition comes after its complement. English generally has prepositions rather than postpositions – words such as in, under and of precede their objects, such as in England, under the table, of Jane – although there are a few exceptions including "ago" and "notwithstanding", as in "three days ago" and "financial limitations notwithstanding". Some languages that use a different word order, have postpositions instead, or have both types. The phrase formed by a preposition or postposition together with its complement is called a prepositional phrase (or postpositional phrase, adpositional phrase, etc.) – such phrases usually play an adverbial role in a sentence.

A less common type of adposition is the circumposition, which consists of two parts that appear on each side of the complement. Other terms sometimes used for particular types of adposition include ambiposition, inposition and interposition. Some linguists use the word preposition in place of adposition regardless of the applicable word order.
A preposition is a word (usually a short word) that shows the relationship between two other nearby words.
WHAT IS THIS?

► The “nut” graf
When you know “what this is about” and have a “nut graf,” making sure the piece is on target becomes a lot easier.
WHAT IS THIS?

- Identify the structure
  - When you know what it’s supposed to look like, it’s easier to see where it fails.
WHAT IS THIS?

Identify the structure

- Common forms for informational writing
  - Boxes/kebab
WHAT IS THIS?

Identify the structure

- Common forms for informational writing
  - Time
WHAT IS THIS?

Identify the structure

- Template based?
- How flexible is it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• State the aim or the goal</th>
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<th>• List the materials that are required</th>
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<th>• Steps involved in chronological order</th>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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<th>• Conclusion (was the goal achieved)</th>
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WHAT IS THIS?

Identify the structure

- Fiction

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WHAT IS THIS?

- The inverted pyramid
- Used for news
- Still appears at top of most informational pieces
WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY

- The basic questions in journalism
  - One is primary in each sentence/paragraph/section
HOW IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED?

- Direct information is better than indirect
- If indirect is used, be sure it’s deliberate, and be sure it works
HOW IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED?

- Active versus passive

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HOW IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED?

- Identify the tone
  - Is it appropriate for the audience?
  - Is it appropriate for the publication?
HOW IS THE INFORMATION PRESENTED?

- Identify the tone
  - Think of news, feature, column, sports, style, food sections, all with different tones, but with one overall tone for the publication
When tone goes bad

A gang of five robbers, evidently oblivious of the finer points of kohlrabi and fresh poblano peppers, invaded Fairway Fruits and Vegetables, one of the culinary citadels on Manhattan's Upper West Side, just before midnight closing time Sunday night. They made 40 terrified employees lie in the sawdust, forced a manager at gunpoint to open two safes and snatched up $10,000.

But it was not just a piece of carrot cake. Two police officers on community patrol happened to look into the normally bustling produce market on Broadway, between 74th and 75th Streets, and saw an unfamiliar sight: lights blazing and no one around amid the shelves of eggplant and jicama, figs, zucchini and Brie.

As the officers called for reinforcements and approached the entrance, a white car sped away from the curb -- in it, three thugs escaping with the loot. Somehow, a fourth slipped away too, perhaps in the rush of prone employees who took heart at the sight of the officers, sprang up and made a dash for freedom.

But the fifth robber, armed with a submachine gun, went the wrong way, down into a storage basement all de sac, where he encountered a dozen workers hiding and quaking behind sacks of produce. Trapped, he dropped his weapon and tried to mingle with the innocent when the officers ordered everyone to come out with their hands up -- but he was quickly pointed out and seized.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

▶ If your mother says she loves you, check it out
  ▶ Ask your author
  ▶ Ask yourself
MANAGING THE TIME
MANAGING THE TIME

- Triage editing
  - Your time is finite
    - What MUST you do?
    - What CAN you do?
    - What do you WANT to do?
MANAGING THE TIME

- Triage editing
  - What MUST you do?
    - Know before you go
      - Balance platform, audience, publication, content
MANAGING THE TIME

▶ Triage editing
  ▶ What CAN you do?
  ▶ Choose to do a few things WELL
MANAGING THE TIME

► Triage editing
  ▶ What do you WANT to do?
  ▶ Take yourself out of the equation
MANAGING THE TIME

Triage editing

- Let the little stuff go
- What’s worse: a dangling modifier or an unclear sentence?
MANAGING THE TIME

Use tools, but wisely

- Grammarly, PerfectIt, Lingofy/Tansa, Spellcheck, etc.
- What do you use and when?
MANAGING THE TIME

- Use tools, but wisely
  - Macros
WHEN TO BREAK ‘RULES’

► Where does the “rule” come from?
► Why does it exist?
WHEN TO BREAK ‘RULES’

▸ How difficult is it to make the content follow the rule?

▸ Are there special circumstances?
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

Graham’s Hierarchy of Disagreement

- Refuting the Central Point
  - Explicitly refutes the central point
- Refutation
  - Finds the mistake and explains why it’s mistaken; uses quotes
- Counterargument
  - Contradicts and then backs up contradiction with reasoning and/or supporting evidence
- Contradiction
  - States the opposing case with little or no supporting evidence
- Responding to Tone
  - Criticizes to the tone of the writing without attacking the substance of the argument
- Ad Hominem
  - Attacks the characteristics or authority of the writer without addressing the substance of the argument
- Name-Calling
  - Sounds something like this: you are an ass hat
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

Graham's Hierarchy of Disagreement

- Refuting the Central Point
- Refutation
- Counterargument

- explicitly refutes the central point
- finds the mistake and explains why it's mistaken; uses quotes
- contradicts and then backs up contradiction with reasoning and/or supporting evidence
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

The Three Cardinal Rules of Editing

- First, do no harm
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

The Three Cardinal Rules of Editing

- If you can’t explain it in plain language, you can’t change it.
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

The Three Cardinal Rules of Editing

- No surprises
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

The Three* Cardinal Rules of Editing

- In a tie, the writer wins

- *OK, 3½ rules
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

- Make it about the content, not you or the writer
- Praise, then start the torture editing
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

- Think critically about why you need to make the change
HANDLING WRITERS AND THEIR EGOS

- Make suggestions, not diktats
- Parry, but don’t thrust back
Emotions are fine, if they’re not defensive
Thank the writer, even through gritted teeth
WHAT ARE YOUR STORIES?