

# WRITE RIGHT

This is a quick reference guide to writing for yearbook. Go to [LearnYBK.com](http://LearnYBK.com) and check out the Writing and Reporting section of How to Yearbook for more. Much more.

## WRITING REMINDERS

**Past tense, please:** By the time readers get the book, everything is in the past.

**Just the facts:** Use nouns and verbs. Find facts. Don't slide down the slippery slope of adjectives and adverbs. Instead of writing, "it was cold," write "it was 22 degrees and snowing."

**Show, don't tell:** Your job is to use other people's words to tell the story. Don't tell it yourself. Describe with facts, not analysis.

**Your opinion doesn't matter:** Again, the point of journalistic writing is to let others' voices shine through. Don't insert your point of view. Let the quotes tell the story, so you don't need to.

**Cut the fluff:** Once a story is drafted, go back through and look for ways to shorten it. Cut unnecessary words and phrases, eliminate adjectives, replace generalities with specifics.

## PIECES AND PARTS

**Lead/Lead-in:** Even alternative copy needs a snappy start. The best leads are short and attention-grabbing. Please, don't start with a question. Focus on using active, vibrant verbs and telling the story with facts. Less is more. Keep that first sentence under 30 words if you can.

**Quotes:** Good interviewers get good quotes. If a quote starts with "my favorite thing about \_\_\_\_," ask "why" questions. If the conversation leads to "teamwork and dedication," ask for specific moments that highlight that sentiment.

**Attribution:** Comma, quote, name said. It's that easy. Punctuation first, then quote marks then name/he/she said. Not the other way around. We are not addressing the queen. Alternate between putting attribution at the end of quotes and nesting it in the middle of two-part quotes.

**Transitions:** Between the quotes, add information that helps move the story along. This is a great way to add more facts and details you observed about the person or event. It's also a place where you can paraphrase the words from a second source or lead into a quote from a new person.

**Tie it up:** Unlike a conclusion for an essay, a journalistic story should simply end at the natural end. It's great if you can add a final quote that brings your story to a close, but be careful not to force it.

## PRO TIPS

- ▶ After an interview, take a minute to go over your notes. While everything is fresh in your mind, you'll be able to fill in any missing words or phrases in quotes.
- ▶ Even if you're recording, it's not a bad idea to jot down notes about the interview subject or event.
- ▶ The lead's the hardest part. If you have writer's block, skip it and come back.
- ▶ Make sure your story is focused on a specific angle and is not an overview. Keep asking yourself, "Why should we care?"
- ▶ Don't generalize. If you find yourself using the words "all, many, some or most," quit it! Choose a person and get a quote to get the same idea across.
- ▶ Organize the ideas into beginning, middle and end, especially if your interview wasn't that organized, which most good conversations aren't.
- ▶ The first draft is never the final draft. Write it, let it rest and read it again. Work with other staffers on revising each other's stories.