

Headline Writing

Building Your Article · By Simon Townsend · 2 min read

You're NOT writing headlines in the best way. Here's how to write a headline:

- Don't for a moment imagine the publication will use YOUR headline. Your headline will almost certainly be changed by an editor, sub-editor or layout editor who prefers HIS idea for a headline.
- The main purpose of putting a headline on your story is to SUM UP what your story is all about so that at one glance your editor knows.
- So write almost a sentence, right across the top of your first page, like this:

102-year-old woman still loves to fish, hunt and ride horses at a gallop

You must put a headline on EVERY article you write. But as I say, the job of creating headlines is the job of editors and sub-editors. So why must YOU create a headline that will be changed? Because in skim-reading your hardcopy, the person making the decision whether to buy it, needs to know - instantly - what the story is all about. Therefore your heading should spell it out. Don't write just:

Shark Attack !!!

Princess Mary Speaks !!!

Russell Crowe'S 13 Homes !!!

Write long, 15-word headings:

Man Who Survived Shark Attack Learns To Live With No Legs And Is Not Bitter

Mary, The People'S Princess, Tells Of Her Passion To Have Eight Children

Russell Crowe, Tired Of Owning 13 Homes, Can'T Remember Where They Are

1. You must accept that the headline that you put on your story is unlikely to be used. The editor or sub-editor who sub-edits your story will put on a headline that he prefers, or, is more in line with the publication's guidelines to headline-writing.
2. Don't write: Tom Cruise speaks out Write about 15 words:

Tom Cruise on marriage, divorce, Katie Holmes, unfaithfulness

Scientology, aliens and War of the Worlds

1. Don't put quotation marks like these "???" at the beginning and the end of your headline. No publication uses them in headlines, and it makes you look foolish, as if you've never noticed.
2. Do not use the system used widely in America, of putting an initial capital on almost every word. In Australia and most of the western world it's not done this way, the way The New York Times does it, like this, with a capital letter to start almost every word:

Netanyahu Quits Sharon's Cabinet to Protest Gaza Pullout

Russia Celebrates Safe Return of Trapped Submarine Crew

We would write these headlines so:

Netanyahu quits Sharon's cabinet to protest Gaza pullout

Russia celebrates safe return of trapped submarine crew

1. DON'T ever please, put a full stop at the end of a headline. A headline is NOT a sentence. A headline is usually ungrammatical, as the job of a headline is to convey information about the story below in just a few words.
2. ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS put your byline immediately after your headline.

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