

Journalism 101: How to write an article



How to structure an article, what
information to include, and how
to engage your audience

© Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling (2025)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC-BY NC).

This document was written by:

Authors: News Decoder.

With special thanks to Enock Wanderema, Ruth Jepkemoi Singen, and Juan Pablo Arellano for their expertise throughout, and to all pilot school educators and students for their invaluable feedback.

The Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling is a collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA), News Decoder and the Young Educators European Association (YEEA).

The purpose of these educational materials is to help young people understand the climate crisis on a systems level through engaging with the topics and foster agency through the skills and techniques of journalism.

This project is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. The European Union cannot be held responsible for them.

For further information on the use of this resource, please email andreea.platea@tehra.org or maria.krasinski@news-decoder.com.

We cannot be held liable for how these materials are used in practice.

These educational resources have been developed to the best of our knowledge, using reliable and widely-recognized sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, we cannot guarantee that the materials are free from errors or omissions. Climate change is a field of knowledge that continues to evolve, and teachers and learners are encouraged to consult up-to-date scientific sources (e.g. IPCC, IPBES or national agencies) to complement and enrich these activities.

Published: 24th October 2025



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



News Decoder

TEHRA
The Environment and Human Rights Academy

TABLE OF CONTENTS



LEARN: HOW TO WRITE AN ARTICLE

1. The lead	2
2. The Nut Graph	5
3. Bringing in Your Sources	6
4. The Body	8



Once you've gathered all the information – from your interviews and your research – it's time to put it on paper. This can be the hardest part!

No matter the format (podcast, video, or written article), all stories should have a core structure that includes the following components:

1. Lead
2. Nut graph
3. Sources
4. Body
5. Conclusion

The structure can be thought of like a skeleton: it's the frame that the story hangs on. Internalizing these elements of story structure will make it relatively easy for you to produce stories: knowing what information your story needs to include, your task is to gather the information and slot it into place.

Sample stories

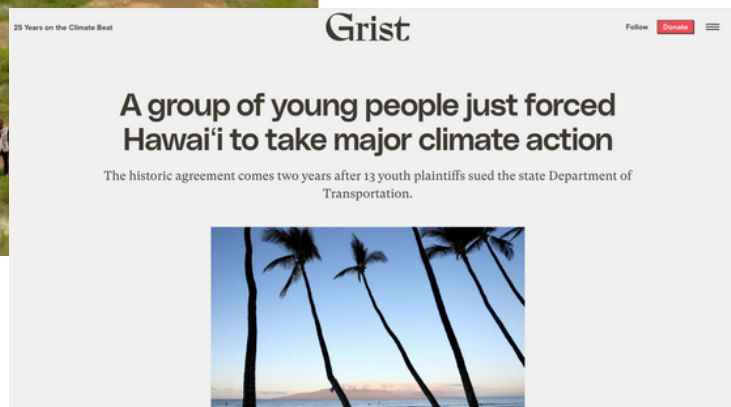
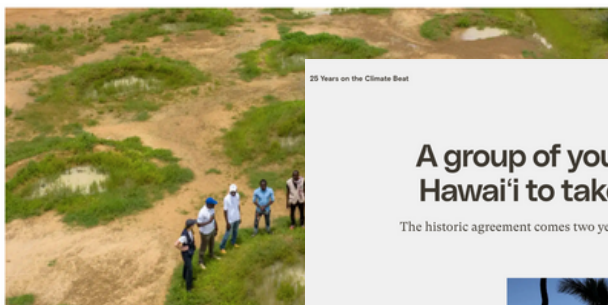
In the lessons that follow, we'll explore each story component in more detail. To do so, we'll refer repeatedly to a story on *News Decoder* entitled [Growing Food on Arid Land](#) and an article in *Grist* entitled [A group of young people just forced Hawai'i to take major climate action](#).

To begin, please skim both articles in their entirety, as this will help you gain a better appreciation for the story's structural components and their importance as we proceed through the subsequent lessons.

Growing food on arid land

by Susanne Courtney | 4 Apr 2024 | Africa, Environment

Little grew in the Sahel region of North Africa, until the World Food Program helped people revive a traditional farming practice and resuscitate the land.





1. The Lead

The lead — sometimes known as the “intro” — is the first paragraph of any story. The lead is crucial because it must convince your audience to “commit” to your piece and continue reading, watching or listening.

To draw your audience into the story, the lead must do two things:

1. Communicate your story topic's relevance to a broad audience; and
2. Engage your audience.

This should make intuitive sense. Think about an article, video or podcast that you recently pulled up. Did you lose interest? If so, why? Did you keep going? If so, why?

In this mini-module that follow, we'll explore these two ideas in more detail.

1.1 *Your topic's relevance*

It may go without saying, but your story's introduction needs to communicate what your story is about and make clear that this topic is relevant to a broad audience — not simply your family and friends.

Consider the lead in the article from Grist:

The government of Hawai'i and a group of young people have reached a historic settlement that requires the state to decarbonize its transportation network. The agreement is the first of its kind in the nation and comes two years after 13 Hawaiian youth sued the state Department of Transportation for failing to protect their “constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.”



This article's first two sentences communicate a lot of information. They tell us that a group of young people can make a difference at government-level. It communicates that the story's topic is about climate change and the transportation sector, which is relevant to an audience outside of Hawai'i.

Notice that the lead in this story is not very long, which is appropriate, because the whole story is not very long. The longer the story, the longer the lead can be. If you're producing a written story for News Decoder, your lead should not be more than a few short paragraphs (or in the case of video or audio, 30 to 60 seconds).



1.2 *Engage your audience*

To engage your audience, it's important to lead with timely information that immediately engages the audience. This may sound obvious, but new authors struggle with this more often than you might think.

Begin with an anecdote or quote

One strategy for developing your lead is to look through the notes from your research and interviews to find an anecdote or quote that captures the essence of what your story is about. Anecdotes or quotes can be a great way to start a story because they are personal and draw the audience into an individual's lived experience.

If you pay attention to stories in the media, you'll start to notice that their articles, videos and podcasts often begin with anecdotes or quotes. For example, consider this lead from the News Decoder article, which manages to include an anecdote and a lot of relevant information:

Early into his tenure as executive director of the World Food Programme, David Beasley visited a site in Niger where a lack of water makes the soil harder than concrete. Little could grow there.

But Beasley's eyes almost popped out of his head. He saw rich green lands transformed by introducing a long-abandoned traditional Sahel planting method called 'half-moons.' These effectively trap and filter water to refill drought-affected water tables and resuscitate soil where nothing has grown for years.



Consider the anecdotal lead of another article on News Decoder entitled When we Release a River.

A voice echoed through the canyon.

"Fire in the hole, fire in the hole, fire in the hole!"

Then a reverberating boom. An unstoppable mass of frothing brown water burst from a pipe at the base of the old mossy Copco 1 Dam in Northern California on 24 January 2024. It is one of four dams being removed on the Klamath River in the world's biggest dam removal project.

Even though it provides a bit of information in the last sentence, the story makes you want to read on, right?



Lead with who, what, when, where and why

If you don't have a good anecdote or quote to use, try writing a sentence that answers the fundamental questions of who, what, when, where and why.

For example, take another look at the first and second paragraph of the Grist story:

The settlement, announced last Thursday, requires the department to develop a plan and zero out greenhouse gas emissions from all transportation sectors by 2045. The agency is also required to create a new unit tasked with climate change mitigation, align budgetary investments with its clean energy goals, and plant at least 1,000 trees a year to increase carbon absorption from the atmosphere.

These first two paragraphs answers these fundamental questions:

- Who does this story relate to? Teenagers and young adults.
- What has happened? The government has committed to decarbonizing its transportation network.
- When did this happen? The lead doesn't state the date of the settlement in the lead, but it makes it clear that it's new.
- Where did this agreement take place? In Hawai'i.
- Why is this happening? Because young people feel like the government is not protecting their rights to a clean environment.



2. The Nut Graph

The nut graph is the equivalent of the thesis in an academic essay. It answers the question: "So what?"

The nut graph encapsulates why your story is important. It establishes a clear link between the story's lead – the hook – and the broader issue to which the lead relates.

In short, the lead says, "Here is some new information," while the nut graph says, "This is why this new information is important."

The nut graph should be positioned as the third or fourth paragraph in a story. It's important to note here that a paragraph in a journalistic article is much shorter than a paragraph in an essay or novel. Usually, a paragraph in an article is between one and three sentences.

The nut graph might point to what is likely to happen next, something that will alter the readers' lives or a trend that will change the future.

:Go back to the article in Grist and notice the second paragraph.

The settlement, announced last Thursday, requires the department to develop a plan and zero out greenhouse gas emissions from all transportation sectors by 2045. The agency is also required to create a new unit tasked with climate change mitigation, align budgetary investments with its clean energy goals, and plant at least 1,000 trees a year to increase carbon absorption from the atmosphere.

This explains why the lead is important.



Below is another example of a nut graph from an article by News Decoder titled "When Young Girls Pay the Cost of Climate Change".

Jaffarabad, Balochistan: When floodwaters swept through Shaista's village in 2022, they didn't just take her family's home and farmland, they also took away her childhood. Just 14 years old, Shaista was married off to a man twice her age in exchange for a small dowry.

Her father, a daily wage laborer, said it was the most painful decision he has ever made.

"I didn't want to do it," he said, his eyes fixed on the cracked earth where his fields used to be. "But I have four other children to feed and no land to farm. We lost everything."

Stories like Shaista's are becoming increasingly common across Balochistan, Pakistan's poorest province. In 2022, devastating floods there driven by record-breaking monsoon rains and accelerated glacial melt linked to climate change, displaced over 1.5 million people.



3. Bringing in your sources

This is where all your interviews and data gathering comes in.

Sources help your audience understand where you, the author, obtained your information for the story. Sources are essential for making your story authoritative and accurate.

Sources are no different than the bibliography in an academic essay or a non-fiction book. They direct readers to the research and identity of the individuals you interviewed. Unlike in essays or books, in media stories, your sources are embedded throughout the story to back up each factual statement or quote. They are not included at the end of the story.

Here it is worth repeating that your sources should be authoritative, primary sources: that is, they should be reference books, reports or data published by reputable organizations and institutions (such as universities, book publishers or NGOs), and they should refer to interviews you conducted directly. You should avoid using other newspaper articles or Wikipedia as your sources.



3.1 When to source

You should source all factual statements — unless they are commonly accepted facts (i.e. the world is round; France is a member of the European Union) — and you should make clear where you obtained the information. You might do so by hyperlinking to a report that you use as a source, or indicate the name of a journal and the date that an article was published in that journal.

If the source is someone you interviewed, you should explain the context in which the person's statement was made. For example, you might say:

- "... Dr. Smith said in a statement."
- "... Ms. Brown told reporters in answer to questions."
- "... he said in a telephone interview."

3.2 Using quotations

Quotes are one type of source, and they are an excellent way of making your story interesting because people like reading or hearing comments by other people.

The best quotes sparkle with interest, offering opinion and illustration. Quotes should never deliver dull or obvious information or impenetrable jargon.



For example, take this quote from the Grist story:

“It’s historic that the state government has come to the table and negotiated such a detailed set of commitments,” said Leinā‘ala L. Ley, a senior associate attorney at Earthjustice, one of the environmental law firms representing the youth plaintiffs. “The fact that the state has ... put its own creativity, energy, and commitment behind the settlement means that we’re going to be able to move that much quicker in making real-time changes that are going to actually have an impact.”

According to a [press release](#) from the office of Hawai‘i Governor Josh Green, the settlement represents the state’s “commitment ... to plan and implement transformative changes,” as well as an opportunity to work collaboratively, instead of combatively, with youth plaintiffs, “to address concerns regarding constitutional issues arising from climate change.”

Or consider this attribution from the News Decoder article:

“In its mature state, this will look like forest lines with horticulture,” Bonometti said.

Working with multiple local and international partners, including all levels of government, the communities are at the centre of the WFP initiative.

Bonometti attributes much of the success to community ownership. The communities decide which lands to target for rehabilitation. WFP and partners provide technical support to farmers and promote and build markets through cash transfers for households to purchase basic needs. Crops are purchased from the farmers to provide school meals, helping to combat malnutrition, and ensuring families send both boys and girls to school.

If you conduct interviews for your story, your sources must be identified by name, as they are in these two articles.



4. The Body

After being drawn into a story by its lead and nut graph, the reader will expect that the rest of the story credibly “proves” that the lead and nut graph are true.

The body of the story appears in the fourth paragraph and beyond. It is ordered according to its importance, it injects additional facts and supporting evidence and it offers hints of what the audience can expect in the future.

4.1 Create an inverted pyramid

The “inverted pyramid” style of writing delivers information in order of its importance:

Think of it this way: the top three or four paragraphs should be capable of standing alone to tell the tale, even if all the supporting information were cut out because of space constraints.

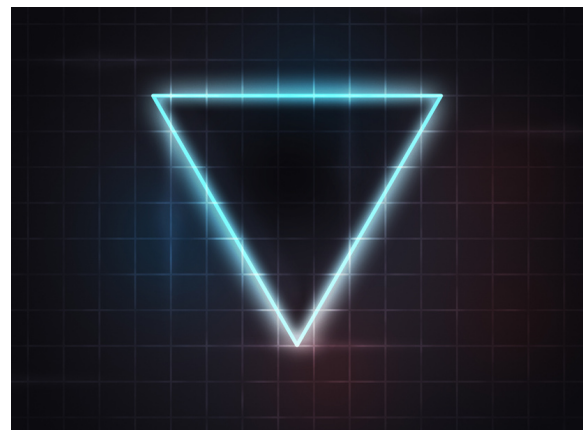
Indeed, newspapers devised the “inverted pyramid” style for this very purpose: during wartime, when newsprint was scarce and expensive, this style forced journalists to place the most important information at the top to allow editors to cut their writing from the bottom easily to fit page constraints.

You may not be under physical space constraints, but in today's era of online media, readers have a million other stories competing for their attention. By conveying your most important information first, you can ensure your audience sees what you most want them to know.

Inverted pyramid writing is the polar opposite of essay writing. In essays, writers open with a problem statement, discuss options and explanations and only reach a conclusion at the end.

The inverted pyramid offers the conclusion/news first and delivers the explanation and background later.

This ensures that readers understand why they should keep reading on. So while the “less important” information comes later, you should still aim to keep your audience engaged and wanting to read on.





4.2 Weave in background

Stories need to be well backgrounded. Background information helps the audience make sense of current events and situate them in their historical context.

Ideally, background information will be woven into the story, rather than dumped on readers all at once.

As you can see from these two examples, background information is very important for helping your audience better understand the issues to which your story relates, and making the case that your story has broad significance.

For example, consider this background information in the News Decoder story:

Trapped in a downward spiral of land degradation and poverty, hunger was a constant for the people of the Sahel.

Poverty and hunger bred conflict. Young boys and girls would join terrorist organizations that promised food and social empowerment. A lack of water was at the heart of these problems.

“Water is the Number One issue,” Beasley said.

4.3 Conclusion

Many new authors make the mistake of trying to end their story with grand conclusions. This isn't necessary, and often runs the risk of overreaching — that is, drawing broader conclusions than your story actually supports.

Instead, keep your conclusion short and sweet, and try to have it as a key takeaway or thought that your reader can be left with. Consider it as the dessert to the meal!

