

The Varsity's
Handy Pocket Reference for Reporters

Learning these 10 basic guidelines and following them in all your *Varsity* articles will save lots of time, improve your eye for good writing, and make us love you. And ensure you a long and happy life and a jet plane. And a pony. *Consider that.*

— The Copy Editors and News Editor

- 1. Write in the past tense.**
- 2. Always use the active voice.** (Ex: I killed your cat. *Not:* Your cat was killed, by me.)
- 3. When you submit your story, include possible headlines and subheads** (HEDs and DEKs in newspaper lingo). Supplying ideas for these is *strongly* suggested.
- 4. Avoid redundancy** and unnecessary words. Seriously, don't restate anything. Use short words and sentences. Agonize over each appearance of the word "that." Do not *ever* use semicolons. Avoid the verb "to be" whenever you can.
- 5. Don't be redundant with acronyms:** On first reference, give the full name, capitalized, without including the acronym. Use the acronym in subsequent references.
- 6. The news reporter is not judgmental** and makes no subjective statements, especially about how others felt or what others' intentions were. (Ex: Unfortunately for democracy, U of T president David Naylor happily announced yesterday that U of T has been sold to Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez. Students are enraged. = *exceptionally poor reporting.*)
- 7. Call sources days in advance to request interviews**, whenever possible, and do so during business hours (9 to 5, Mon-Fri) unless it's a cell phone. Call a prospective source *at least* three times, *leave voicemail*, and email at least once!
- 8. Phrases and words never to use, ever:** The fact that. Etc., eg., i.e. Just because...doesn't mean.... Really. Very. Interestingly. Thus, Thusly. It begs the question. I couldn't help but wonder, I wondered, I thought, and all variants on the same.
- 9. Read over your story before submitting it.** Obvious misspellings and items we've listed here are things we shouldn't have to spend time correcting. Consider reading it aloud—it can help you tighten up a piece and spot mistakes or inconsistencies.
- 10. Adhere strictly to deadlines. There's a good reason we call them that.**

Varsity Style Advanced Class

For the keen reporter, we've put together an upper-level primer of more subtle points.

The lead paragraph

Highlights the most interesting part of the story, without summing up everything.

A few rules for quotes

- Quotations have an introductory sentence or short paragraph that gives context without paraphrasing.
- Quotes occupy their own paragraph and should contain full sentences. Partial quotes can seem to put words in someone's mouth.
- Quotes go in double quotation (“ ”) marks. Quotes inside of quotes get single quotation marks. (Ex: "They said 'scram' and kicked us out," said Angry Tim.)

Italicized

- Titles of books, publications, movies, video games, shows, and other works.
- Foreign words, genus and species names

Not italicized

- Chapters, track/article names, or other components of a work get quotation marks.
- Website URLs
- Course names

Capitalized

- Proper nouns and full titles (Dean of English John Smith), *but* avoid using these titles whenever possible (prefer John Smith, the dean of English).
- Government titles of federal cabinet rank or higher (President Bush, *but* U of T president David Naylor).
- The English language, not brand names, dictates the rules of capitalization. It's Ipod, Ebay, Adidas, Youtube, and Flickr. Internet is capped. Google is as a noun *but* googled, as a verb, is not.

For numbers, dates, and times

- Spell out one to nine. Unless starting a sentence, 10 and up use numerals.
- Avoid starting a sentence with a number.
- Spell out ordinals (first, second, third and so on).
- Use commas: 1,000.
- 7 p.m., *but* 7:02 p.m. (note the periods in p.m. and a.m.).
- Decade names are '80s, '90s, and so on (*not* 90's).
- Never use ordinals (-th, -nd, -rd...) in dates.
- When referring to a specific *date* of a specific month, abbreviate all months except March, April, May, June, and July—Remember the six-letter rule! (Ex: Feb. 15, *but* March 15. February 2005, *but* Feb. 8, 2005).